

Rattle: Gerhard, Strauss's Four Last Songs and Mahler's Fourth

Thursday, May 21, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Sir Simon Rattle, conductor · Lucy Crowe, soprano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	GERHARD 1896–1970 <i>Symphony No. 3, 'Collages'</i>	20'
2	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Four Last Songs</i>	25'
3	MAHLER 1860–1911 <i>Symphony No. 4 in G major</i>	60'
TOTAL MUSIC		105'

Roberto Gerhard

1896–1970

Symphony No. 3, 'Collages'

20 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Approach this with open ears, ready for something genuinely experimental. Listen for the ‘collage’ technique itself: blocks of contrasting sound placed side by side and layered, rather than melodies that grow and develop: sudden shifts of texture, colour and mood, like cutting between images.

Listen especially for the electronic tape: passages where strange, synthetic or processed sounds emerge alongside or against the orchestra, adding an eerie, futuristic dimension (extraordinary for a work of 1960). Listen for Gerhard’s brilliant and unconventional orchestration (glittering percussion, vivid instrumental colours, dramatic contrasts of dense and sparse textures) and for the sense of vast space and light that reflects his sunrise-from-an-aeroplane inspiration. There are moments of violence and high drama, and others of mystery and stillness. Don’t search for conventional tunes or structure; instead, let

the sequence of vivid sonic images wash over you, and experience a striking, atmospheric work by one of the twentieth century's unjustly neglected originals.

Richard Strauss

25 minutes

1864–1949

Four Last Songs

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The four songs trace a journey from spring to sunset. Listen first to **'Frühling' ('Spring')**, the most ardent, the voice blossoming, like nature itself, into warmth and colour. Then **'September'**, in which summer fades: listen for the gentle melancholy and the exquisite closing horn solo (a personal touch: Strauss's father was a famous horn player) as the garden dies into autumn.

'Beim Schlafengehen' ('When Falling Asleep') is the emotional heart: listen for the heavenly orchestral interlude, in which a solo violin rises and soars before the voice returns, one of the most transcendent passages Strauss ever wrote, evoking the soul taking flight in sleep. Finally, **'Im Abendrot' ('At Sunset')**, setting Eichendorff's poem about an old couple watching the sun go down after a long life together. Listen for the radiant orchestral sunset, and, at the words 'Is this perhaps death?', for the magical, hushed quotation Strauss makes of his own tone poem *Death and Transfiguration* from sixty years earlier, followed by the song of two larks (trilling flutes) as the music dissolves into serene, accepting peace. Lucy Crowe's soprano carries this glowing farewell.

Gustav Mahler

60 minutes

1860–1911

Symphony No. 4 in G major

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen at the very start for the jingling sleigh-bells and chirping flutes that open the first movement, an instant evocation of a child's wintry, magical world. The movement is genial and song-like, but full of Mahlerian surprises: sudden shifts of mood, ironic touches and moments of shadow amid the sunshine.

The second movement is a scherzo with a sinister edge: listen for the solo violin, deliberately tuned up a tone to sound harsh and uncanny. This is 'Freund Hein' (Death) playing his fiddle, leading a spooky, lopsided dance. The third movement (Ruhevoll, 'peacefully') is the symphony's sublime heart: a set of variations of deep serenity and tenderness. Listen for its long, hymn-like calm, and for the astonishing moment near the end when the gates of heaven seem to burst open in a blazing fortissimo, with a foretaste of the finale's tune. Then comes the finale: the soprano enters to sing 'The Heavenly Life,' a child's delighted catalogue of heaven's pleasures. Listen for its innocent, folk-like charm (and the recurring sleigh-bells), the contrast between earthly and heavenly music, and the way it all fades, at the close, into a hushed, glowing serenity: heaven, at last, in sound. Lucy Crowe is the soprano soloist; note Mahler's instruction that she sing with a childlike, joyful expression, without parody.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/Iso-2026-05-21-rattle>

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