

Season Opening: Pappano's Mahler 2 and Fujikura's Amber Alchemy

Sunday, October 18, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Maria Bengtsson, soprano · Noa Beinart, con-
tralto · London Symphony Chorus, choir

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	FUJIKURA b. 1977 <i>Amber Alchemy (UK premiere)</i>	10'
2	MAHLER 1860–1911 <i>Symphony No. 2 in C minor ('Resurrection')</i>	85'
TOTAL MUSIC		95'

Dai Fujikura

10 minutes

b. 1977
Amber Alchemy (UK premiere)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for lines rather than for one big tune. Fujikura’s material is melodic, but no single melody is in charge. Try following one strand, a violin figure or a woodwind line, and notice how it gets drawn into a thicket of other voices moving in their own directions. That busy, many-voiced texture is the hive.

Then listen for the moments when everything comes together. Fujikura describes separate lines that sometimes suddenly co-ordinate, so that the whole orchestra seems to become a single organism. He hopes listeners will carry away the feeling of “a complicated world somehow becoming harmonious without losing all its individual life”. These moments of alignment are the payoff of the piece. They are the musical equivalent of thousands of individual actions adding up to something larger.

Listen too for colour: the shimmer, flutter and tremble that run through Fujikura's orchestral writing, and the warm, glowing sound the title's "amber" suggests. Because the piece is so new, nobody in the hall has a settled idea of how it goes. That is part of the pleasure. You are hearing it at the very start of its life, played by the orchestra it was written for.

Gustav Mahler

85 minutes

1860–1911

Symphony No. 2 in C minor ('Resurrection')

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement (Allegro maestoso). The symphony opens with a violent tremolo in the violins and violas and a savage, snarling figure in the cellos and double basses. This is a funeral march on the grandest scale, and in Mahler's own words it asks the big question about life and death. Listen for the contrast between the grim marching music and a gentle, consoling second theme, high in the violins, that keeps trying to offer comfort. The movement builds to shattering climaxes and ends with a sudden, brutal descending run.

Second movement (Andante moderato). After that, an old Austrian Ländler, a gentle country dance, arrives like a memory of happier days. Listen for the charming, lilting strings, and later for a passage where the strings play pizzicato under a singing cello line.

Third movement (Scherzo). This is an orchestral version of Mahler's own Wunderhorn song about St Anthony preaching to the fishes: the fishes listen politely to the sermon and then swim off exactly as they were. The music flows in an endless, slightly sardonic stream of semiquavers, starting with two timpani strokes. Mahler heard it as life seen from a distance, busy and senseless. Near the end comes a terrifying outburst that he called a "cry of despair".

Fourth movement (Urlicht, "Primal Light"). Out of the silence, the alto sings a simple Wunderhorn song, "O Röschen rot!" ("O little red rose"), with a hushed brass chorale. Humanity lies in great need and pain, and longs to return to God. After forty minutes of instrumental music, listen for how the plain human voice changes everything.

Fifth movement (Finale). The finale erupts with the same scream of despair heard in the scherzo, and then unfolds as a vast drama. Listen for the offstage horns calling from far away, like voices in a desert. Then a great march of the dead breaks out, with percussion crescendos and ever more urgent brass. It collapses into the “great summons”: offstage brass calls answered by a solitary flute and piccolo, like a bird singing over an empty world. Then comes the most magical moment of all: the chorus enters almost inaudibly, unaccompanied, singing “Aufersteh’n, ja aufersteh’n” (“Rise again, yes, you will rise again”). From there the voices grow, with the soprano soaring above the chorus. The music builds, with organ and full brass and the offstage players brought into the hall, to an overwhelming final climax of bells, organ and full chorus. It is one of the great endings in music.



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