

Pappano's Tchaikovsky Fifth, with a Kendall Premiere

Thursday, October 29, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Fleur Barron, mezzo-soprano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	LIADOV 1855–1914 <i>The Enchanted Lake, Op. 62</i>	8'
2	KENDALL b. 1984 <i>I have discovered the secret of death (world premiere)</i>	15'
3	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64</i>	48'
TOTAL MUSIC		71'

Anatoly Liadov

1855–1914

The Enchanted Lake, Op. 62

THE COMPOSER

Anatoly Liadov (1855–1914) was a Russian composer and teacher from the circle around Rimsky-Korsakov, with whom he studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory. He went on to teach there himself, and his pupils included Prokofiev and Myaskovsky. A miniaturist of exquisite refinement, he is remembered above all for a handful of short, atmospheric orchestral tone poems on Russian fairy-tale subjects (*The Enchanted Lake*, *Baba-Yaga*, *Kikimora*) and for his arrangements of Russian folk songs. He also had a reputation for idleness. The story goes that he was so slow to start a ballet Diaghilev had proposed that the impresario turned instead to the young Stravinsky, who wrote *The Firebird*, though there is no evidence that Liadov ever accepted the commission. A perfectionist who worked on a small scale, he left a modest output, but his finest pieces are jewels of orchestral colour.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Enchanted Lake is Liadov's most beloved orchestral miniature: a few minutes of pure atmosphere, subtitled a 'fairy-tale scene'. First performed in St Petersburg in 1909, it is unusual among Russian fairy-tale pieces in having no story and no real melody. There is no Baba-Yaga flying past, no hero, no narrative event. Instead Liadov

8 minutes

paints a kind of musical still life: a mysterious, motionless lake in an enchanted forest, its surface shimmering, stars reflected in the water. “How beautiful the lake is,” he wrote, “how pure and with stars and mysteries in its depths!” What mattered most to him was the absence of people and their joys and sorrows.

The whole effect comes not from theme and development but from orchestral colour and texture alone: divided, quivering strings for the rippling water; flute, celesta and harp for the glints of starlight; soft, slowly shifting harmonies that never quite settle. It sits on the border of symbolism and impressionism, a Russian cousin of Debussy’s sound-world, and it makes a magical, hushed opening to the concert before the world premiere and the high drama of Tchaikovsky.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Don’t wait for a tune. There isn’t really one, and that’s the point. Instead, listen for texture and colour: the shimmering, undulating strings that suggest the surface of the water, and the delicate touches of flute, harp and celesta that sparkle like starlight or moonlight on the lake. Listen for the slowly changing harmonies that drift and shift without ever arriving anywhere definite, sustaining a mood of stillness and enchantment.

The piece is quiet almost throughout, building only to a gentle swell before subsiding again into mystery. Let it cast its spell: it is a few minutes of orchestral magic, a window onto a silent, bewitched landscape, and a reminder of what a master of orchestration can conjure from the gentlest means.

Hannah Kendall

15 minutes

b. 1984

I have discovered the secret of death (world premiere)

THE COMPOSER

Hannah Kendall (born 1984 in London, of Guyanese heritage and now based in New York) is one of the most acclaimed British composers of her generation. She studied at the University of Exeter and the Royal College of Music, and completed a doctorate at Columbia University with Georg Friedrich Haas and George E. Lewis. Her music is intricate and allusive, and often engages with Black history and identity. It has been widely performed: her orchestral piece *The Spark Catchers* was premiered at the BBC Proms in 2017, her chamber opera *The Knife of Dawn* dramatises the imprisonment of the Guyanese poet-activist Martin Carter, and her ‘shouting forever into the receiver’ won

an Ivor Novello Award. She is known for delicate, layered textures, the use of unusual sound sources (wind-up music boxes, harmonicas), and a deeply thoughtful engagement with history and memory.

ABOUT THE WORK

This concert includes a world premiere: a new work for mezzo-soprano and orchestra by Hannah Kendall, commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra and given here for the very first time with Fleur Barron as soloist. Its arresting title, ‘I have discovered the secret of death’, signals the kind of poetic, history-haunted subject matter that runs through Kendall’s work, which often meditates on memory, identity and the legacies of the past.

Kendall is celebrated for music of great delicacy and originality: intricate, layered textures, surprising sonorities, and a quality of allusion and resonance rather than blunt statement. As a brand-new piece, it comes to its first audience without preconceptions. On the evidence of her other work, we can expect music that rewards close attention, that engages the voice in a searching, text-driven way, and that uses the orchestra with subtlety and imagination. The score even adds a toy piano and small auxiliary instruments to the full orchestra. Placed between Liadov’s enchanted stillness and Tchaikovsky’s fateful drama, it represents the living art of the symphony orchestra, with the LSO bringing a significant new voice to the stage.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Come to this premiere with open ears: there is no recording, no familiar shape to anticipate. Listen for how Kendall sets the solo mezzo-soprano voice against the orchestra, the relationship between words and instruments, and the way the text (and that haunting title) shapes the music’s mood and pacing. Kendall’s textures tend to be finely layered and atmospheric rather than grand and declamatory, so listen for detail and colour, for unexpected sonorities and the play of light and shadow in the orchestration. Above all, let Fleur Barron’s voice be your guide through the new terrain, and listen as a distinctive composer adds a new piece to the repertoire before your ears.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–1893

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

THE COMPOSER

Tchaikovsky was Russia's first truly international composer and, in his own lifetime, one of the most beloved figures in European music. Born in 1840 in Votkinsk, he trained as a civil servant before turning to music in his early twenties, studying composition at the newly founded St. Petersburg Conservatory. He began teaching harmony at the newly opened Moscow Conservatory in 1866, and over the following twenty-five years produced six symphonies, three ballets (*Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*), a string of operas, numerous concertos, and a wealth of chamber and song repertoire that has never left the international stage.

Tchaikovsky was a man of intense feeling, much of it conflicted. Homosexual in an unforgiving Russian society, often paralysed by depression and self-doubt, he poured the full weight of his emotional life into his music. He died in St. Petersburg in 1893, days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony. The official cause was cholera, though the precise circumstances of his death have been debated ever since.

ABOUT THE WORK

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, composed in the summer of 1888, is one of his greatest and best-loved works: a gripping drama of Fate that travels from brooding darkness to blazing triumph. The Fourth had its Fate fanfare too, but here Tchaikovsky goes further. A recurring 'motto' theme returns in all four movements, transformed each time, binding the whole work into a single psychological narrative. In a notebook jotting he described the symphony's subject as 'total submission before Fate, or, what is the same thing, the inscrutable designs of Providence.'

The journey is from minor to major, from foreboding to victory. The motto theme is first heard, grave and funereal, in the clarinets at the very opening; by the finale it has become a triumphant major-key march. Tchaikovsky, ever his own harshest critic, came to doubt the symphony. He feared it was too colourful, too massive and insincere, and wrote of 'something so repellent' in its excess, though after conducting it on tour in 1889 he grew fond of it again. Audiences have never shared his doubts. The Fifth is one of the most thrilling and emotionally direct of all symphonies, and its big tunes (above all the great horn solo of the slow movement) are among the most beloved in the repertoire.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Fix the Fate motto in your ear at the very start: a solemn, dark melody low in the clarinets over funereal strings. This theme is the key to the whole symphony, so listen for its return, transformed, in every movement.

The second movement (*Andante cantabile*) contains one of the most famous melodies Tchaikovsky ever wrote: a long, yearning solo for the horn, of heart-melting beauty, which grows into an impassioned love song until, twice, the Fate motto bursts in violently to shatter the mood. The third movement is not a scherzo but an elegant, slightly melancholy waltz (Tchaikovsky the ballet composer at work), with the Fate theme stealing in quietly at the very end as a reminder. Then the finale: the motto returns, now grand and in the major, in a slow introduction, before a tempestuous *Allegro* breaks out. Listen for how the music battles through to a blazing restatement of the Fate theme as a victorious march, Fate not defeated but embraced and transformed. Whether you find that ending overwhelming or, as Tchaikovsky feared, a touch excessive, it is unfailingly exciting in performance.

Tonight's artists

Fleur Barron *mezzo-soprano*

Giving the world premiere of a new orchestral song-work demands a singer of intelligence, flexibility and fearlessness: someone equally comfortable with unfamiliar contemporary idioms and with projecting text and meaning to an audience hearing the music for the first time. Fleur Barron, a Grammy-winning mezzo deeply committed to new music (and a noted Saariaho and Mahler interpreter), is perfectly suited to bring Hannah Kendall's new piece to life.

Fleur Barron is a Singaporean-British mezzo-soprano, born in Northern Ireland to a Singaporean mother and a British father, who grew up in Hong Kong and later New York. She shared the 2025 Grammy for Best Opera Recording for Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* with the San Francisco Symphony under Esa-Pekka Salonen, in which she sang the title role. She has become one of the most sought-after mezzos of her generation, equally at home in opera, concert and recital. She is particularly associated with Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and *Kindertotenlieder*, which she has performed with conductors including Daniel Harding and Semyon Bychkov, and she is a committed performer of new music, which makes her an ideal interpreter for a world premiere such as this.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia**

Orlando Figes, Picador 2003

A cultural history of Russia that sets Tchaikovsky and the fairy-tale world of Liadov's *The Enchanted Lake* in the society that shaped them.

ACCESSIBLE **Tchaikovsky: The Man and His Music**

David Brown, Faber and Faber 2007

A one-volume life of Tchaikovsky by a leading specialist, with an account of the Fifth Symphony.

DEEPER **Tchaikovsky**

Roland John Wiley, Oxford University Press 2009

A scholarly life-and-works study that discusses the Fifth Symphony in the context of Tchaikovsky's whole output.

SOURCES

1. Tchaikovsky, Kendall and Liadov, 29 Oct 26, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.iso.co.uk/whats-on/tchaikovsky-kendall-and-liadov-29-oct-26/>
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3. The Enchanted Lake, Op.62 (Lyadov, Anatoly), IMSLP. [https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Enchanted_Lake,_Op.62_\(Lyadov,_Anatoly\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Enchanted_Lake,_Op.62_(Lyadov,_Anatoly))
4. Leaving it to the Imagination: Anatoly Lyadov: The Enchanted Lake, Op. 62, Interlude. <https://interlude.hk/leaving-it-to-the-imagination-anatoly-lyadov-the-enchanted-lake-op-62/>
5. Anatoly Lyadov, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatoly_Lyadov
6. Works, Hannah Kendall. <https://www.hannahkendall.co.uk/works>
7. Hannah Kendall, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannah_Kendall
8. Bio, Fleur Barron. <https://www.fleurbarron.com/about>
9. Fleur Barron, Étude Arts. <https://etudearts.com/artists/fleur-barron/>
10. Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammy_Award_for_Best_Opera_Recording
11. Symphony No. 5 (Tchaikovsky), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_\(Tchaikovsky\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_(Tchaikovsky))
12. Symphony No. 5 in E minor, op. 64, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/piotr-tchaikovsky-symphony-no-5-in-e-minor-op-64/>
13. Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780312421953>
14. Tchaikovsky: The Man and His Music, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780571231959>
15. Tchaikovsky, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780195368925>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/iso-2026-10-29-pappano>

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