

Adès's In Seven Days with Chamayou, and Sibelius's Fifth

Thursday, November 5, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Thomas Adès, conductor · Bertrand Chamayou, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	NØRGÅRD 1932–2025 <i>Dream Play</i>	10'
2	ADÈS b. 1971 <i>In Seven Days, for piano and orchestra</i>	33'
3	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82</i>	30'
TOTAL MUSIC		73'

Per Nørgård

1932–2025

Dream Play

THE COMPOSER

Per Nørgård (1932–2025) was a Danish composer and theorist, widely regarded as the most important Danish composer since Carl Nielsen. Born in Gentofte, near Copenhagen, he began studying privately with Vagn Holmboe at seventeen, then at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, and with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. His early music continued the Nordic tradition of Sibelius and Nielsen. In 1959 he discovered his 'infinity series', a self-similar melodic principle that shaped works such as *Voyage into the Golden Screen* (1968) and the choral *Third Symphony* (1972–75). Around 1980 his style changed sharply under the influence of the Swiss artist Adolf Wölfli. He wrote eight symphonies, operas including *Gilgamesh*, concertos, chamber and choral music, and taught for three decades at the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus. He received the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize in 2016.

ABOUT THE WORK

Per Nørgård wrote *Dream Play* in 1975 and revised it in 1980. It belongs to one of the most fertile stretches of his career. For about a decade from the late 1960s he built his music on what he called the infinity series, a melodic rule of his own devising that generates an endless, self-similar line: take every third, fifth or fifteenth note of

10 minutes

the series and a new melody appears, and all of them fit together harmonically because they share the same source. The big work of those years was his Third Symphony for choir and orchestra (1972–75). Dream Play came straight out of it, alongside the orchestral piece Twilight and the opera Siddharta, and it shares the Third Symphony's glowing, overtone-rich sound.

The piece is short, about ten minutes, and scored for a chamber orchestra: pairs of flutes, clarinets, horns, trumpets and trombones, single oboe and bassoon, percussion, piano and celesta, and strings. Nørgård's own note for it is unusually playful. He describes it as 'a tournament of the dream', in which the participants may stand up to one another, but only in order to take pleasure in their differences, not to crush one another. 'Here, for example, a David and a Goliath can meet to the great pleasure of both parties,' he wrote. 'And now and then the participants stop showing off to one another, and instead abandon themselves to the fondest embraces.'

The Danish scholar Ivan Hansen, writing for a Dacapo recording of the work, described it as Nørgård exploring the infinity series' garden of melodies, rhythms and timbres 'in a magical, dancing, romantic way', with a faintly oriental colour. Formally, both he and the composer point the listener to the same thing: the succeeding passages can be heard as a series of variations.

It makes a natural opener for this programme. As a young man Nørgård was fascinated by Sibelius, and his early music carries on the Nordic line of Sibelius and Carl Nielsen, so Dream Play sits comfortably ahead of the Fifth Symphony.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Think of the piece as a set of variations rather than a story. Listen for the way melodies seem to grow out of one another, sometimes overlapping at different speeds, which is the infinity series at work: the same line heard at several tempos at once. The piano, celesta and percussion add a bell-like glitter to the texture.

Then follow Nørgård's 'tournament'. Some passages set strongly contrasting characters against each other, a big brassy idea beside something small and delicate, the David and the Goliath of his note. Other passages melt into warm, consonant harmony, the 'fondest embraces'. The music is never aggressive for long; conflict here is a game.

Thomas Adès

b. 1971

In Seven Days, for piano and orchestra

THE COMPOSER

Thomas Adès, born in London in 1971, is among the most celebrated composers of his generation, a triple threat who is also a formidable pianist and conductor. He studied piano and composition, read music at King's College, Cambridge, and emerged in the 1990s with a series of works whose technical command and vivid imagination made an immediate impression. His breakthrough came young: the orchestral work *Asyla* (1997), written for Simon Rattle and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, won the Grawemeyer Award in 2000, making Adès its youngest-ever recipient. His operas have been particularly admired: *Powder Her Face* (1995), with its scandalous subject and dazzling score; *The Tempest* (2004), after Shakespeare; and *The Exterminating Angel* (2016), after Buñuel. The last two have both been staged at the Royal Opera House and the Metropolitan Opera. Adès's music is marked by glittering, intricate orchestration, a fascination with dance rhythms and mechanical processes, harmonies that hover between tonality and dissonance, and a wit that can turn suddenly to menace or grief. He was artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival from 1999 to 2008 and later the Boston Symphony Orchestra's first artistic partner, conducting both his own music and a wide repertoire, and he is often placed in the English line that runs through Britten.

ABOUT THE WORK

In Seven Days is a piano concerto by Thomas Adès, though it was not conceived as a conventional one. Its full title is *In Seven Days: Concerto for Piano with Moving Image*, and it was written as a kind of video ballet in collaboration with the artist Tal Rosner, then Adès's partner. The Southbank Centre and the Los Angeles Philharmonic commissioned it jointly, and it was first performed at the Royal Festival Hall on 28 April 2008, with Nicolas Hodges as soloist and Adès conducting the London Sinfonietta. The US premiere followed in Los Angeles a month later. Rosner's video, projected on six screens at the premiere, used footage and photographs of the two commissioning buildings, the Royal Festival Hall and Walt Disney Concert Hall, and their surroundings. The film is optional, and the music has since had a life of its own in the concert hall.

The subject is the Creation, as told in the Book of Genesis, and the work runs continuously through seven sections, one for each day:

1. Chaos, Light, Darkness
2. Separation of the Waters into Sea and Sky
3. Land, Grass, Trees
4. Stars, Sun, Moon

5. Fugue: Creatures of the Sea and Sky
6. Fugue: Creatures of the Land
7. Contemplation

Adès's note explains the design. The whole piece is a set of variations, shaped to match the two-part structure of the Genesis story: the first three days (light, sky and sea, land) are mirrored by the next three, which fill each of those realms with sun and stars, with birds and fish, and with land animals. Only on the seventh day is the theme presented in its simplest form. So the work runs backwards against the usual variation form, arriving at its plain theme at the end rather than stating it at the start.

Critics took to it quickly. Anthony Tommasini of The New York Times heard music 'at once reverent and playful', and the Observer's reviewer, quoted by Adès's publisher, felt that the edgy, often ironic vitality of his earlier scores had relaxed into 'a new fluidity and lyricism'. Adès has conducted the work with the LSO before, and here he is joined by Bertrand Chamayou, a French pianist with a long record of working closely with living composers.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is chaos: a churning, formless mass from which clearer shapes slowly emerge. Listen for the moment light breaks through. From there, try to track the variations. Each 'day' has its own character and colour, and the piano is less a star soloist in front of the orchestra than a restless, glittering thread running through the texture, full of spiralling, cascading figures.

The fifth and sixth days are fugues, which is a good place to listen for Adès's humour. Tommasini described twittering flutes and a 'crazed piccolo' for the creatures of the sky, and lumbering basses and low brass for the creatures of the land.

Then comes Contemplation. After all that activity, the theme appears in its simplest form, slowly, and the music thins out towards silence, as though the work of creation is done.

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82

THE COMPOSER

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) is Finland's greatest composer and one of the supreme symphonists of the twentieth century. His music, above all the seven symphonies and tone poems such as *Finlandia* and *Tapiola*, became inseparable from Finland's emerging national identity during its struggle against Russian domination, and he was revered as a national hero in his own lifetime. His style evolved from late-Romantic richness toward an increasingly concentrated, organic and original conception of symphonic form, in which themes seem to grow and fuse like living things, shot through with the cold light and vast spaces of the Nordic landscape. Famously, after completing the Seventh Symphony, the incidental music to *The Tempest* and the tone poem *Tapiola* in the mid-1920s, he fell almost completely silent for the last thirty years of his life: the 'silence of Järvenpää'.

ABOUT THE WORK

Sibelius took five years to get his Fifth Symphony right. His fiftieth birthday, 8 December 1915, was treated as a national celebration in Finland, and he conducted the first version of the symphony in Helsinki that evening. It was a huge success, but he was not satisfied. A revised version followed a year later in Turku, and the final version, the one almost always played today, was not heard until 24 November 1919, again in Helsinki with Sibelius conducting.

The years of work are well documented in his diary. In the autumn of 1914, with the First World War under way, he wrote to his friend Axel Carpelan that he could already make out 'the mountain that I shall ascend'. In April 1915, working on the symphony, he wrote the famous line that it was 'as if God the Father had thrown down pieces of a mosaic from the floor of heaven and asked me to work out the pattern.' A few days later, on 21 April, he watched sixteen swans rise from the lake below his house. 'One of the great experiences of my life! God, how beautiful,' he wrote, and in the same diary entry he noted down the theme that became the great swinging melody of the finale.

The biggest change between versions was structural. In 1915 the symphony had four movements. For the final version Sibelius fused the first two, a broad opening and a quick scherzo, into a single movement joined by a gradual acceleration, so that the join is almost impossible to hear. He tightened the finale too, cutting some loosely connected episodes and smoothing out dissonant passages that looked back to the bleak Fourth Symphony.

Scholars have argued for decades about how to analyse that first movement, whether it is a sonata form with a scherzo inside it or something new. The practical answer for a listener is that Sibelius lets his themes grow and transform so continuously that the usual signposts dissolve. The result is one of his most openly affirmative works, and alongside the Second Symphony, the most popular of his seven.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony opens with a soft horn call over a timpani roll, and much of what follows grows from it. Woodwinds answer with a twittering, ‘warbling’ figure. Listen to the first movement as one long arc: the tempo creeps upwards so smoothly that you may not notice the moment it becomes a scherzo, until trumpets are ringing out and the whole orchestra is racing towards a sudden end.

The middle movement is a gentle set of variations on a simple, rocking tune first heard in the flutes over pizzicato strings. It is an interlude, relaxed and pastoral, though the swan theme flickers in the background for a moment.

The finale starts with a rush of strings. Then the horns begin the ‘swan hymn’, a slow, swinging pattern of two notes, while woodwinds sing a melody above it. That idea returns later, rising and gathering weight until it arrives in full majesty. Then listen for the ending, one of Sibelius’s most original ideas and absent from the first version: six great chords, each separated by silence.

Tonight's artists

Bertrand Chamayou *piano*

Chamayou's label biography names Thomas Adès among the composers he has worked with closely, so tonight the soloist in *In Seven Days* plays under the composer's own baton.

Bertrand Chamayou is a French pianist, born in Toulouse. He studied at the conservatoire there and then, encouraged by Jean-François Heisser, at the Paris Conservatoire, and completed his training in London with Maria Curcio. He is closely associated with French music: his recording of Ravel's complete works for solo piano (Erato, 2016) was widely praised, and his album of Saint-Saëns's Second and Fifth Piano Concertos with the Orchestre National de France won the Gramophone Recording of the Year award in 2019. He has won France's Victoires de la Musique Classique several times. He is also a committed performer of contemporary music, and a regular chamber partner of musicians including Sol Gabetta and Antoine Tamestit.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Thomas Adès: Full of Noises: Conversations with Tom Service**

Thomas Adès, Tom Service, Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2013

Thomas Adès in conversation with Tom Service about how he composes, the best way into the mind behind *In Seven Days*.

ACCESSIBLE **Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland**

Glenda Dawn Goss, University of Chicago Press 2009

A life of Sibelius that links his music to Finland's history and landscape, and covers the war years in which he wrote and revised the Fifth Symphony.

DEEPER **Sibelius: Symphony No. 5**

James Hepokoski, Cambridge University Press 1993

A handbook devoted to Sibelius's Fifth Symphony: its revisions, its form and how it works.

SOURCES

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2. Drømmespil (Dream Play), Wise Music Classical. <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/21631/>
3. Nørgård: Orchestral Works (Violin Concerto No. 2, Dream Play, Voyage into the Golden Screen), Dacapo Records. <https://dacapo-records.dk/en/recordings/norgard-orchestral-works>

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5. Per Nørgård, Wise Music Classical. <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/composer/1141/Per-N%C3%B8rg%C3%A5rd/>
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8. 'In Seven Days' a Multimedia Piano Concerto, Faber Music. <https://www.fabermusic.com/news/in-seven-days-a-multimedia-piano-concerto-300>
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10. Fifth symphony (1915-1919), Jean Sibelius (Sibelius.fi). https://www.sibelius.klubi.fi/english/musiikki/ork_sinf_05.htm
11. Sibelius: a Guide to the Symphonies, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/sibelius-a-guide-to-the-symphonies/>
12. Bertrand Chamayou, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_Chamayou
13. Bertrand Chamayou, Warner Classics. <https://www.warnerclassics.com/artist/bertrand-chamayou>
14. Thomas Adès: Full of Noises: Conversations with Tom Service, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780374534011>
15. Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780226005478>
16. Sibelius: Symphony No. 5, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521409582>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-11-05-ades>

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