

Adès Conducts Sibelius, Saariaho and His Own 'America'

Sunday, November 8, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Thomas Adès, conductor · Anna Dennis, soprano · London Symphony Chorus, choir

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>The Oceanides, Op. 73</i>	10'
2	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105</i>	22'
3	SAARIAHO 1952–2023 <i>Oltra mar</i>	22'
4	ADÈS b.1971 <i>America: A Prophecy</i>	22'
TOTAL MUSIC		76'

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

The Oceanides, Op. 73

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the two contrasting ideas Sibelius wove together: a playful, rippling figure (the dancing sea nymphs, in shimmering woodwinds and strings) and a broader, more majestic theme (the power of the ocean itself). The piece is built less on melody than on atmosphere and the gradual building of waves of sound.

Follow the great arc of the music as it swells. Sibelius builds, with tremendous cumulative power, toward a shattering climax, the crash of an enormous wave, crowned by timpani and full orchestra. Then listen for the calm that follows, the waters subsiding into a few quiet, mysterious final chords. In barely ten minutes he conjures the whole living presence of the sea, from glinting surface to crushing depth.

10 minutes

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

22 minutes

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The key is to follow the music as a single, unbroken, ever-changing stream. There are no movement breaks, so let it carry you. Listen, near the start, for a rising scale in the strings that leads into the work's first great moment: the entrance of the solo trombone with a broad, noble, hymn-like theme in C major that emerges majestically from the orchestra. This trombone theme is the symphony's lodestar. Listen for its two further returns, each at a crucial structural point, the last bringing the work to its powerful close.

Between these pillars, notice how Sibelius moves seamlessly between slow, sustained music and faster, scherzo-like or agitated passages, the tempo subtly shifting, themes constantly being reshaped. There is a remarkable sense of everything being connected, growing from the same source. Listen for the cold, clear orchestral colours and the feeling of vast space, and for the hard-won arrival of the final C major cadence, a resolution that feels both triumphant and valedictory.

Kaija Saariaho

1952–2023

22 minutes

Oltra mar

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Approach *Oltra mar* as an immersive soundscape rather than a narrative. Listen for Saariaho's extraordinary orchestral and choral colours: shimmering, watery textures, with the chorus often used as a sustained, luminous wash of sound rather than for crisp word-setting. The music moves in slow waves, swelling and subsiding like the sea that is its central image.

Follow the contrasts between the seven sections as the music turns from love to time to death, with the sea returning between them, and listen for how Saariaho conjures vast spaces and a sense of the eternal through layered, gradually shifting sonorities. This is contemporary music of great sensuous beauty. Give yourself over to its atmosphere, its play of light and shadow, and the slow tidal motion that carries it from beginning to end.

Thomas Adès

b. 1971

America: A Prophecy

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the central opposition that drives the piece: the solo soprano, the voice of the Mayan prophecy lamenting the foretold destruction, set against the chorus, which delivers the harsh, militaristic texts of the European conquerors. The two forces inhabit different sound-worlds, and their collision is the work's subject.

Adès is a master orchestrator, so listen for the vivid, often menacing colours: ominous low sonorities, sharp percussion, music that conveys foreboding and catastrophe. The vocal writing for the soprano is intense and exposed, by turns keening and incantatory. This is not comfortable music. It is a 'prophecy' of doom, deliberately disquieting, building a sense of inexorable fate. Let its starkness land, and notice how, after the shimmering seas of Sibelius and Saariaho, the concert ends not in consolation but in dark, prophetic warning.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-11-08-ades>

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