

LSO Futures: Elim Chan Conducts Adams and Three New Works

Thursday, June 17, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican
Elim Chan, conductor · James Fountain, trumpet

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	ADAMS b. 1947 <i>The Chairman Dances</i>	12'
2	ARAFAH <i>MISWIRED</i>	5'
3	JÄRVENTAUSTA b. 1995 <i>Trumpet Concerto</i>	25'
4	JEONG <i>Apparition from a World Grown Alien</i>	10'
5	ADAMS b. 1947 <i>Doctor Atomic Symphony</i>	25'
TOTAL MUSIC		77'

John Adams

b. 1947

The Chairman Dances

THE COMPOSER

John Adams (born 1947) is among the most frequently performed living composers, and one of the defining American musical voices of his era. Emerging in the 1970s and 1980s in the wake of minimalism, he forged from its pulsing, repetitive language a richer, more dramatic and harmonically expansive style entirely his own. He first reached a wide public with works like *Harmonielehre* and *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, and went on to write a series of landmark operas drawn from contemporary history (*Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *Doctor Atomic*) that redefined what opera could address. A conductor as well as a composer, deeply versed in the orchestra, he has produced a steady stream of major orchestral scores. His music combines rhythmic drive and brilliant, sensuous orchestration with a distinctly American openness, wit and grandeur.

12 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

John Adams wrote *The Chairman Dances* in 1985, and it is the piece on this programme that most people will already know. Its subtitle is 'Foxtrot for Orchestra', and the word 'dances' in the title is a verb: the Chairman is Mao Zedong, and he is the one dancing.

The piece belongs to the story of Nixon in China, Adams's first opera, though it is not taken from it. In 1985 Adams owed the Milwaukee Symphony a commission that was long overdue. He had already read the scenario for the last act of the opera, written by the director Peter Sellars and the librettist Alice Goodman, and by his own account he could not wait to start on it. So the commission became a trial run. He later called the result an 'out-take' of Act III, and was firm that it is neither an excerpt nor a fantasy on the opera's themes. The Milwaukee Symphony gave the first performance under Lukas Foss on 31 January 1986. The opera itself did not reach the stage, in Houston, until October 1987.

The scenario printed with the score is short and strange. Chiang Ch'ing, Madame Mao, gatecrashes the banquet given for the American president. She gets in the way of the waiters, hangs paper lanterns round the hall, changes into a cheongsam slit to the hip and signals the orchestra to play. Mao, who is present only as a portrait on the wall, climbs down from the frame, and the two of them foxtrot, back in Yenan as young revolutionaries, 'dancing to the gramophone'.

Adams knew what he had. He described the image of a youthful Mao dancing with a former film actress as 'slightly ridiculous but irresistible', and said that the music was a parody of what he imagined Chinese film music of the 1930s to sound like. That is why it could not go into the opera, whose style and scoring are different. A few of its tunes do return there, in the final act, when the Nixons and the Maos think back to when they were young.

This concert opens with it and ends with the Doctor Atomic Symphony. The two pieces, written more than twenty years apart, show the two ways in which Adams has brought his operas into the concert hall: once by accident, before the opera existed, and once by design, after it.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Adams describes the form as three parts, A-B-A, with 'a persistent, chugging pulse in the basses' in the outer sections. That pulse drives the opening, and the tunes ride above it. The percussion section is large for a piece of this length. The score lists,

among much else, sandpaper blocks, castanets, a hi-hat and a pedal bass drum, with harp and piano besides: something of the kit of a dance band has been added to the symphony orchestra.

The middle section slows down and, in Adams's words, romance makes an appearance. Here the foxtrot arrives in earnest. Adams calls his themes 'sometimes slinky and sentimental, at other times bravura and bounding', and both kinds are on show.

Then the motor starts again. The piece ends not with a climax but by running out of power: the sound, as descriptions of the score have it, of a gramophone winding down.

Laila Arafah

5 minutes

MISWIRED

THE COMPOSER

Laila Arafah is a composer based in London. She studies composition at the Royal Academy of Music. In 2024/25 she was one of the six composers on the London Symphony Orchestra's Helen Hamlyn Panufnik Composers' Scheme, and the orchestra subsequently commissioned an orchestral piece from her. Her other commissions have come from the London Contemporary Music Festival, Explore Ensemble, the Carducci Quartet, the London Mozart Players, the Roadrunner Trio in Amsterdam and Quatuor Bozzini in Canada. She describes her music as concerned with time, with resonance and decay, and with forms that grow out of interruption.

ABOUT THE WORK

MISWIRED is the shortest piece of the evening, about five minutes, and one of its two commissions from the LSO Helen Hamlyn Panufnik Composers' Scheme. The scheme, which the orchestra devised with Lady Panufnik in memory of her husband, the composer Sir Andrzej Panufnik, takes six composers at the start of their careers each year. Each writes a three-minute piece for the orchestra, guided by the composers Colin Matthews and Christian Mason, and hears it rehearsed in a public workshop. Two of the six are then commissioned to write something longer for a Barbican concert.

Laila Arafah was a member of the 2024/25 group, and was still an undergraduate at the Royal Academy of Music when the commission was announced. The festival at Grafenegg in Austria, which has also invited her, notes that she was nineteen when the orchestra commissioned her. The LSO said at the time that the two chosen composers would either develop their workshop pieces or write something new,

and that the results would be tried out with the orchestra before being given in concert at the Barbican in the 2026/27 season. This is that concert.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Nothing has yet been published about the music itself, and the title, printed in capitals, comes without explanation. What can be said is what Arafah's own descriptions of her work point to. The LSO's announcement speaks of her interest in temporality, in in-between states, and in resonance and decay: how a sound hangs in the air and dies. The Grafenegg biography adds fragile systems and forms that arise from interruption and unstable time. Five minutes is not long, and a composer with those concerns is likely to make every gesture count. It may be worth listening less for themes than for what happens to a sound after it has been made.

Joel Järventausta

25 minutes

b. 1995

Trumpet Concerto

THE COMPOSER

Joel Järventausta is a Finnish composer, born in 1995. He spent his childhood in Luxembourg and Germany and studied in Britain: at the University of York, at the Royal College of Music in London, and at King's College London, where he took a doctorate in composition under George Benjamin. He is now based in Finland and works as a freelance composer. In 2019 he won first prize in the Île de Créations competition of the Orchestre national d'Île-de-France with *Ripped Tapestry*, and third prize in the Alexander Zemlinsky composition competition. He took part in the London Symphony Orchestra's Panufnik Composers' Scheme in 2018/19, which led to the orchestral piece *Sunfall*, first performed by the LSO in 2022. His titles often point to nature, painting and poetry.

ABOUT THE WORK

This is the first performance of Joel Järventausta's *Trumpet Concerto*, a piece of about 25 minutes and the longest new work on the programme. The orchestra lists it as an LSO co-commission, and it has been written for one of its own players: James Fountain, the LSO's Principal Trumpet, is the soloist. The composer's publisher names the concerto among his main projects of the 2026/27 season.

Järventausta, a Finnish composer born in 1995, has a history with this orchestra. He was one of the six composers on the LSO's Panufnik scheme in 2018/19, when he was working towards a doctorate at

King's College London, and he was then commissioned to write a longer piece. That was Sunfall, which the LSO introduced at the Barbican in April 2022 under François-Xavier Roth and, according to Music Finland, played again in Germany and Denmark in the days that followed. The concerto is a larger undertaking than Sunfall, which lasts about a quarter of an hour, and it puts a soloist in front of the orchestra that Järventausta has already written for.

The evening is built around the scheme. The two shorter new pieces are by composers from its 2024/25 intake, and Järventausta's return shows where that road can lead: from a three-minute workshop piece to a full concerto in under a decade.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

No description of the concerto had been published when this guide was written, so it would be wrong to promise particular events. Some things can be expected on general grounds. Järventausta's publisher describes his music in terms of vivid colours, distinctive sound-worlds and a delicate lyricism, and Music Finland notes how often his pieces take their cue from nature, paintings, books and poems. A trumpet concerto has to decide early what kind of instrument its soloist is to be: the bright, martial voice of tradition, or the quieter, singing one that players of Fountain's schooling, which began with the cornet in brass bands, know just as well. A span of 25 minutes leaves room for both.

Yunho Jeong

10 minutes

Apparition from a World Grown Alien

THE COMPOSER

Yunho Jeong is a composer and pianist, born in South Korea and based in the United Kingdom. He studied composition at Seoul National University and moved to London in 2015 to continue at the Royal College of Music, later undertaking doctoral study at the University of Manchester. His Clarinet Concerto was first performed in 2022 in the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Debut Sounds concert, and in 2023 he played a piano piece of his own at the Musikverein in Vienna. His music has also been performed by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Quatuor Lontano. In 2024/25 he was one of the six composers on the London Symphony Orchestra's Helen Hamlyn Panufnik Composers' Scheme. He often appears as the pianist in his own works.

ABOUT THE WORK

Apparition from a World Grown Alien is the second of the evening's commissions from the LSO Helen Hamlyn Panufnik Composers' Scheme, and at about ten minutes the larger of the two. Its composer, Yunho Jeong, took part in the scheme in 2024/25 alongside Laila Arafah. At the end of that year the orchestra chose the two of them to write new works, a five-minute piece from Arafah and a ten-minute piece from Jeong, to be rehearsed in workshop with the LSO and then given at the Barbican in the 2026/27 season.

Jeong was born in South Korea, moved to London in 2015 and is based in Britain. He is a pianist as well as a composer and often plays his own music. The LSO's announcement of the commission describes his writing as shaped by 'poetic dramaturgy' and 'lyrical intensity', and says that it draws on his interest in painting, literature and psychology as well as on his experience at the keyboard.

He has written for a London orchestra before. In July 2022 his Clarinet Concerto was played at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Debut Sounds concert, the annual showcase for that orchestra's young composers, which Brett Dean conducted.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The orchestra has not yet said anything about how the piece goes. The title is the only clue, and it suggests a scene more than an abstract design: something seen, or half seen, in surroundings that have become strange. That would fit what Jeong has said about earlier music. Of the Clarinet Concerto he explained that the soloist stood for the ego and the orchestra for 'another unconscious world', an idea he took from psychology. Whether this piece works in a similar way remains to be heard. With no soloist this time, any such drama has to be played out inside the orchestra itself, and ten minutes gives it room for more than one change of scene.

John Adams

b. 1947

Doctor Atomic Symphony

THE COMPOSER

John Adams (born 1947) is among the most frequently performed living composers, and one of the defining American musical voices of his era. Emerging in the 1970s and 1980s in the wake of minimalism, he forged from its pulsing, repetitive language a richer, more dramatic and harmonically ex-

25 minutes

pansive style entirely his own. He first reached a wide public with works like *Harmonielehre* and *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, and went on to write a series of landmark operas drawn from contemporary history (*Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *Doctor Atomic*) that redefined what opera could address. A conductor as well as a composer, deeply versed in the orchestra, he has produced a steady stream of major orchestral scores. His music combines rhythmic drive and brilliant, sensuous orchestration with a distinctly American openness, wit and grandeur.

ABOUT THE WORK

Doctor Atomic, John Adams's opera about J. Robert Oppenheimer and the first atomic bomb, was first staged in San Francisco in 2005. Peter Sellars compiled the libretto largely from documents: declassified government papers, the communications of the scientists, officials and soldiers involved, and poetry, the Holy Sonnets of John Donne among it. The action is confined to the weeks and then the hours before the Trinity test in the New Mexico desert in July 1945, and the opera ends in the last stretched moment before the explosion. It is less a history play than a study of people under unbearable pressure.

In 2007 Adams made an orchestral work from it. He conducted the first performance himself, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 21 August 2007, during the BBC Proms. The version heard that night is reported to have been considerably longer and in four movements; Adams then cut it back, and the published score lasts about 25 minutes and runs without a break. David Robertson and the Saint Louis Symphony took up the revised version and recorded it.

It is called a symphony, not a suite, and the difference matters. Adams did not simply string together the opera's orchestral passages. A reviewer of the first performance noted newly written music linking them, and the three sections, headed 'The Laboratory', 'Panic' and 'Trinity', are joined into a single span. Adams has pointed to Sibelius's Seventh Symphony, another symphony in one unbroken movement, as his model for the form.

No words are sung, so the plot is gone and its weather remains: dread, haste, and at the end a kind of prayer. In the opera Oppenheimer sings Donne's sonnet 'Batter my heart', with its plea to be broken, burned and made new. In the symphony that music is still the destination, but the voice has become a trumpet.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

‘The Laboratory’ opens explosively, in the word of one review of the first performance, with surging brass, driving strings and thundering percussion. The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra’s note on the piece hears in its timpani and brass a violent force that recalls Edgard Varèse. Another listener found this first section portentous and brooding: it sets a mood of menace before anything has happened.

‘Panic’ is the longest part. The strings scurry, in one critic’s phrase, as if out of control, while wind interjections cut across them. This is the Adams of fast, driving pulse, turned to the purposes of anxiety and not of exhilaration. Listen for how seldom the music is allowed to settle.

The music passes without a pause into ‘Trinity’, which takes its name from the test. Here the solo trumpet takes over the melody of ‘Batter my heart’. The Concertgebouw note hears an almost Renaissance character in the sound of the lament on this instrument, and speaks of Purcell-like music in the score. A reviewer of the Saint Louis recording called the solo bleakly serene and observed that it never quite calms the agitation around it. In a concert that has already put a trumpet concerto at its centre, this second long solo for the instrument gives the evening a shape of its own.

Tonight's artists

James Fountain *trumpet*

The soloist in Joel Järventausta's new Trumpet Concerto comes from inside the orchestra: James Fountain has been the LSO's Principal Trumpet since 2021. It is a fitting piece of casting for a concert about the orchestra's own composers' scheme, since the concerto has been written by one of the scheme's former members for one of the orchestra's own principals. Elim Chan, who conducts, has her own history here. She won the Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition in 2014 and has been a regular guest with the orchestra since.

James Fountain is Principal Trumpet of the London Symphony Orchestra, a post he took up in 2021. He grew up in a family of Salvation Army brass band players and began on the cornet at the age of three. He was principal cornet of the National Youth Brass Band of Great Britain and the GUS Band, and at seventeen became principal cornet of the Grimethorpe Colliery Band. He studied the trumpet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and, while still a student there, was appointed Principal Trumpet of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 2015. After five years he moved to the same position with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and from there to the LSO. He is Professor of Trumpet at the Royal College of Music and a member of the brass ensemble Septura and of the Neoteric Ensemble, and he plays on film, television and video game soundtracks.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life**

John Adams, Picador 2009

Adams's own memoir, and the best account of how his operas came to be written and what he made of them afterwards. Both Adams pieces in this programme began in the opera house.

ACCESSIBLE **The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century**

Alex Ross, Picador 2008

Alex Ross's history of twentieth-century music ends in the world this concert comes out of: minimalism, Adams, and the many directions composers have taken since.

DEEPER **The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer**

Thomas May (editor), Amadeus Press 2006

Essays, interviews and programme notes on Adams's music up to 2006, with a good deal on the stage works and the orchestral pieces that grew from them.

SOURCES

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2. London Symphony Orchestra/Elim Chan, Barbican. <https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2027/event/london-symphony-orchestraelim-chan>
3. Adams: The Chairman Dances, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/adams-the-chairman-dances>
4. The Chairman Dances, Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/724/the-chairman-dances>
5. The Chairman Dances: Foxtrot for Orchestra, Wise Music Classical. <https://www.wisemusic-classical.com/work/23700/The-Chairman-Dances-Foxtrot-for-Orchestra--John-Adams/>
6. The Chairman Dances, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chairman_Dances
7. Two Helen Hamlyn Panufnik composers awarded commissions, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/two-helen-hamlyn-panufnik-composers-awarded-commissions/>
8. LSO Helen Hamlyn Panufnik Composers' Scheme, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/learn-and-discover/support-for-emerging-artists/helen-hamlyn-panufnik-scheme/>
9. Laila Arafah: Ink Still Wet 2026, Grafenegg. <https://www.grafenegg.com/en/mediatheque/laila-arafah-ink-still-wet-2026/2256>
10. Joel Järventausta, Wise Music Classical. <https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/composer/5553/Joel-J%C3%A4rventausta>
11. Joel Järventausta's Sunfall commissioned by LSO premiered this week, Music Finland. <https://musicfinland.com/en/news/joel-j%C3%A4rventaustas-commissioned-work-by-lso-premiered-this-week>
12. Joel Järventausta, 2019 winners, Alexander Zemlinsky Prize for Composition. <https://zemlinskyprize.org/2019-winners-orchestral-prize/joel-j%C3%A4rventausta>
13. World Premiere: Yunho Jeong's Concerto for clarinet and orchestra, London Korean Links. <https://londonkoreanlinks.net/2022/07/13/world-premiere-yunho-jeongs-concerto-for-clarinet-orchestra/>
14. June House Concert: Yunho Jeong (piano), London Korean Links. <https://londonkoreanlinks.net/2023/06/05/june-house-concert-yunho-jeong-piano/>
15. Doctor Atomic, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Atomic
16. John Adams: Doctor Atomic Symphony, Boosey & Hawkes. <https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Doctor-Atomic-Symphony/49187>

17. John Adams: Doctor Atomic Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouwkeest.nl/en/adams-doctor-atomic-symphony>
18. John Adams: Doctor Atomic Symphony; Guide to Strange Places, BBC Music Magazine. <https://www.classical-music.com/reviews/orchestral/john-adams-doctor-atomic-symphony-guide-strange-places>
19. John Adams: Doctor Atomic Symphony; Guide to Strange Places, Saint Louis Symphony/David Robertson (Nonesuch), Audiophile Audition. <https://www.audaud.com/?p=16834>
20. James Fountain, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/bio/james-fountain/>
21. Welcome to James Fountain, our new Principal Trumpet, London Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.lso.co.uk/welcome-to-james-fountain-our-new-principal-trumpet/>
22. James Fountain, Conn Selmer. <https://connselmer.com/artists/james-fountain>
23. Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780312428617>
24. The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780312427719>
25. The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781574671322>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-06-17-chan>

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