

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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

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.

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

MISWIRED

5 minutes

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.

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

b. 1995

Trumpet Concerto

25 minutes

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.

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

Apparition from a World Grown Alien

10 minutes

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.

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

25 minutes

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.

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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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

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