

# barbican



## Classical Music

### Concert programme



**Seong-Jin Cho:**  
**A Ravel-athon**

Fri 2 May 7.30pm  
Hall

# Important information



## When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 10.15pm, with 2 20-minute intervals.



## I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



## Please ...

Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



## Please don't ...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



## Use a hearing aid?

Please use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



## Need a break?

You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



## Looking for refreshments?

Bars are located on Levels -1, G and 1.



## Looking for the toilets?

The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels -1, G and 2.



## Carrying bags and coats?

Drop them off at our free cloak room on Level -1.

# Seong-Jin Cho: A Ravel-athon

## 150th Anniversary Tribute

Fri 2 May 7.30pm, Hall

### Seong-Jin Cho piano

#### **Maurice Ravel** *Sérénade grotesque*

*Menuet antique*

*Pavane pour une infante défunte*

*Jeux d'eau*

*Sonatine*

- 1 Modéré
- 2 Mouvement de menuet
- 3 Animé

*Interval 20 minutes*

#### *Miroirs*

- 1 Noctuelles
- 2 Oiseaux tristes
- 3 Une barque sur l'océan
- 4 Alborada del gracioso
- 5 La vallée des cloches

#### *Gaspard de la nuit*

- 1 Ondine
- 2 Le gibet
- 3 Scarbo

*Interval 20 minutes*

Produced by the Barbican

#### *Menuet sur le nom de Haydn*

*Valses nobles et sentimentales*

- 1 Modéré – très franc
- 2 Assez lent – avec une expression intense
- 3 Modéré
- 4 Assez animé
- 5 Presque lent – dans un sentiment intime
- 6 Vif
- 7 Moins vif
- 8 Épilogue – lent

#### *Prélude*

*À la manière de Borodine*

*À la manière de Chabrier*

*Le tombeau de Couperin*

- 1 Prélude
- 2 Fugue
- 3 Forlane
- 4 Rigaudon
- 5 Menuet
- 6 Toccata

Programme produced by Harriet Smith  
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**Tonight Seong-Jin Cho brings colouristic finesse, virtuosity and drama to the stage as he performs Ravel's complete solo piano music in a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth.**

Tonight's Ravel epic from Seong-Jin Cho offers us a chance to revel afresh in the individuality of each piece in his solo piano output, be it miniscule or large-scale. That's evident from the start, in the *Sérénade* written when he was 18 (which he aptly renamed *Sérénade grotesque* in 1928). In a mere three minutes the composer announces his sharp sense of humour and a harmonic language that boldly eschews any hint of the Wagnerian headiness that had seduced so much of the musical world. Music of a long-gone era was a frequent source of inspiration, as we find in the *Menuet antique* from 1895. It gains an archaic quality from the modally tinged cadences, but this is no mere pastiche, with delightfully crunchy harmonies and slyly disconcerting rhythms. The *Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899) similarly combines ancient and modern.

New century, new innovation: the glittering, scintillating *Jeux d'eau* of 1901 takes Liszt's *Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este* as its starting point, though Ravel's lacks the religious overtones of Liszt's. Instead, he quotes at the head of the score a line from an Henri de Régnier poem – 'river god laughing as the water tickles him' – though in fact it's not a god but a goddess (Latona), seated on a tortoise in a fountain at Versailles. From the glittering to the neo-Classical, and the *Sonatine*, whose first movement began life in 1904 as a competition entry, with Ravel adding the remaining movements the following year. What's striking is the translucent textures, in part due to a propensity for writing in the treble register, and the understated yet emotionally fragile slow movement, whose introversion is banished by a brilliant toccata finale.



Even though Ravel tried never to repeat himself compositionally, nothing could have prepared his audiences for *Miroirs* (1905), a sequence of five intensely coloured miniature tone-poems. In 'Noctuelles' (Night moths) the frenetic unpredictability of the fluttering moths is ravishingly evoked via ever-changing metres and striking appoggiaturas and trills. 'Oiseaux tristes' (Sorrowful birds) emphasises contrast between the heavy textures of the sombre forest and the shrill bird-calls. 'Une barque sur l'océan' (A boat on the ocean) takes the post-Lisztian virtuosity of *Jeux d'eau* to a whole new level; however, its challenges are less punishing than those of the untranslatable 'Alborada del gracioso' (Ravel himself offered the approximate 'Morning song of the clown'), a pig of a piece to bring off, replete with evocations of a strummed guitar. In 'La vallée des cloches' (The valley of the bells) the inspiration is Parisian, with Ravel building arching sonorities from the tiniest of building blocks.

Three years after *Miroirs*, bells again featured in *Gaspard de la nuit*. Here he set out to write something more difficult than Balakirev's famously treacherous *Islamey*. But that's to imply a superficiality which would be misleading indeed. It was inspired by the poetic fantasies of Aloysius Bertrand and much of the work's intense difficulty is not overt. In the first piece the water nymph Ondine attempts to lure a young man looking out of his window by moonlight to join her in her watery palace. When he protests that he has a mortal lover, she laughs derisively and showers his windowpane with droplets before vanishing. Ravel sets the scene in 'Le gibet' (The gallows) with an obsessively tolling B flat, which evokes not only an insistent bell but also the lifeless body itself, swaying in the gentlest of breezes. What disturbs most is not the sense of desolation and hopelessness but an almost exultant quality at the piece's centre. How to depict a shape-shifting gnome? Ravel takes a simple, if ominous, three-note idea and constantly transforms it, even lending it stature and magnificence at one point, though the fluctuating rhythms set up an inherent instability. And Scarbo's abrupt disappearance is perfectly captured by the phantasmagorical ending.

The year 1909 marked the centenary of Haydn's death and Ravel's contribution to the celebrations was the *Menuet sur le nom de Haydn*, combining Gallic poise with deliciously non-Haydnesque harmonic twists. But it never stops sounding like Ravel, which is less true of his *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911). The cycle's first public outing was given at a concert of contemporary music in which the names of the composers were not revealed. *Valses* garnered very mixed reactions and a wide variety of attributions, including Satie and Kodály! Ravel offers a sequence of seven waltzes and an *Épilogue*, though at times the cross-rhythms are so prominent that the characteristic emphasis on the first beat of the bar is all but lost. In the *Épilogue* various themes are recalled, wrapped in a haze that sounds almost nostalgic.

Ravel wrote his *Prélude* (1913) as a sight-reading exercise for the Paris Conservatoire, based on a motif from the last of his *Trois Poèmes de Mallarmé*, reworked in modal garb. From around the same time (1912–13) he wrote pastiches in homage to two composers particularly close to his heart. *À la manière de Borodine* is a Slavic-tinged waltz, while for that of Chabrier he takes the aria 'Faites-lui mes aveux' from Gounod's *Faust*, transforming it in an ironic Chabrier-esque manner.

Ravel suffered as much as anyone during the First World War, with horror at the carnage mingled with personal loss at the death of his mother in 1917. *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1914–17) became a memorial, with each movement dedicated to a fallen friend, even though its mood is noticeably un-elegiac. The bubbling *Prélude* delights in its moto perpetuo propulsion; this is followed by Ravel's only published Fugue, while the dotted rhythms of the Forlane are pervasive but too airy to become relentless. The *Rigaudon* positively bursts in, while the *Menuet* is the epitome of grace and poise, its self-containment ruffled only by a central *musette*. The Suite ends with a fiendish *Toccata* that he proudly described as 'pure Saint-Saëns', though equally obvious is Ravel's fondness for Domenico Scarlatti's sonatas.

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## Seong-Jin Cho

Seong-Jin Cho has established himself as one of the leading pianists of his generation. With an innate musicality and consummate artistry, he is celebrated worldwide.

He came to the world's attention when he won First Prize at the 2015 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw, and his career has rapidly ascended since that time. The following year he signed an exclusive contract with DG and in 2023 was awarded Korea's prestigious Samsung Ho-Am Prize in the Arts.

He regularly works with leading orchestras, including the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras, Boston Symphony Orchestra and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and in the 2025/26 season has been named the London Symphony Orchestra's Artist Portrait. Conductors with whom he regularly collaborates include Myung-Whun Chung, Gustavo Dudamel, Andris Nelsons, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Gianandrea Noseda, Sir Antonio Pappano, Sir Simon Rattle, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Lahav Shani.

This season he is Artist-in-Residence with the Berlin Philharmonic, a position which has allowed him to work with the orchestra on multiple projects, including concerto performances, chamber music collaborations, on tour to the Baden-Baden Easter Festival and in recital. Other highlights included opening the Philadelphia Orchestra's season with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and appearing with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Cleveland Orchestra. He has also embarked on several international tours, including a return to the Vienna Philharmonic with Andris Nelsons in Korea and to the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra with Sir Simon Rattle in Korea, Japan and Taiwan, following a performance of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto in Munich.

As a recitalist he appears at the world's most prestigious concert halls, including Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw, Vienna Musikverein, Alte Oper Frankfurt, KKL Luzern, Sala Santa Cecilia, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Prague Rudolfinum and Suntory Hall, Tokyo, as well as at the Roque d'Anthéron and Verbier festivals. Tonight's concert is part of this season's Ravel celebration that sees him performing the complete solo piano music at venues such as the Vienna Konzerthaus, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Boston Symphony Hall, Walt Disney Hall Los Angeles and Carnegie Hall.

Seong-Jin Cho's latest recordings for DG are *Ravel: The Complete Solo Piano Works* and *Ravel: The Piano Concertos*. Previous releases include *The Handel Project* (2023) and Chopin's Piano Concerto No 2 and Four Scherzos (2021), all of which have received warm critical acclaim.

Seong-Jin Cho was born in 1994 in Seoul; he started learning the piano at the age of six and gave his first public recital aged 11. In 2009 he became the youngest-ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition. In 2011 he won Third Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. From 2012 to 2015 he studied with Michel Béroff at the Paris Conservatoire. He is now based in Berlin.

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**Mahan Esfahani**  
Sat 3 May, Milton Court



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**Khatia Buniatishvili & Friends**  
Thu 12 Jun, Hall



Book now at [barbican.org.uk](https://www.barbican.org.uk)