

BBC
Symphony
Orchestra
& Chorus



**TOTAL IMMERSION:
PIERRE BOULEZ**

Sunday 30 March 2025

barbican
Associate Orchestra

RADIO **3** SOUNDS

BBC
**Symphony
Orchestra
& Chorus**

SAKARI ORAMO
CHIEF CONDUCTOR

Feel the Music

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Barbican

WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH, 7.30pm

Stasevska conducts Ravel

BÉLA BARTÓK Cantata profana

MAURICE RAVEL Piano Concerto for the Left Hand

LEOŠ JANÁČEK Sinfonietta

Dalia Stasevska *conductor*

Robin Tritschler *tenor*

Miklós Sebestyén *bass-baritone*

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *piano*

BBC Symphony Chorus

SUNDAY 30 MARCH

Total Immersion: Pierre Boulez

A centenary tribute to one of the 20th century's most iconoclastic composers and thinkers, and former Chief Conductor of the BBC SO.

FRIDAY 4 APRIL, 7.30pm

Wigglesworth conducts Debussy and Berg

ALBAN BERG

Three Pieces from 'Lyric Suite'
Der Wein

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Le livre de Baudelaire
Nocturnes

Ryan Wigglesworth *conductor*

Sophie Bevan *soprano*

BBC Symphony Chorus

FRIDAY 11 APRIL, 7.30pm

Oramo conducts Vaughan Williams

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Serenade to Music

DOREEN CARWITHEN

Concerto for Piano

MALCOLM ARNOLD

Symphony No. 5

Sakari Oramo *conductor*

Alexandra Dariescu *piano*

BBC Singers

WEDNESDAY 16 APRIL, 7.30pm

Oramo conducts Mahler's Fourth Symphony

DOROTHY HOWELL Lamia

KURT WEILL Der neue Orpheus

GUSTAV MAHLER Symphony

No. 4 in G major

Sakari Oramo *conductor/violin*

Anu Komsí *soprano*

FRIDAY 25 APRIL, 7.30pm

Hough plays Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Egmont - overture

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor

GUSTAV MAHLER Symphony

No. 1 in D major

Sakari Oramo *conductor*

Stephen Hough *piano*

FRIDAY 16 MAY, 7.30pm

Slobodeniouk conducts Prokofiev's 'Romeo and Juliet'

LILI BOULANGER Psalm 130,
'Du fond de l'abîme'

SIR JAMES MacMILLAN Three
Interludes from 'The Sacrifice'

SERGEY PROKOFIEV Romeo
and Juliet - excerpts

Dima Slobodeniouk *conductor*

Marta Fontanals-Simmons

mezzo-soprano

BBC Symphony Chorus

FRIDAY 23 MAY, 7.30pm

Elder conducts Mahler

FRANZ SCHREKER

Kammersymphonie

GUSTAV MAHLER Das Lied
von der Erde

Sir Mark Elder *conductor*

Alice Coote *mezzo-soprano*

David Butt Philip *tenor*

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RADIO **B** SOUNDS



TOTAL IMMERSION

Pierre Boulez

SUNDAY 30 MARCH 2025



TOTAL IMMERSION: PIERRE BOULEZ

11.00am
CINEMA 1

FILM

Pierre Boulez at the BBC

Two classic BBC Television Boulez documentaries: *Master and Maverick*, fronted by Tom Service, and the late Barrie Gavin's *Boulez at the BBC*, one of his many celebrated films. Using archive footage and interviews to explore Pierre Boulez's very special relationship with the BBC and its orchestras. *Introduced by writer and broadcaster Kate Molleson.*

1.30pm
FOUNTAIN ROOM

TALK

The Man and the Music

Musicologist Professor Jonathan Cross talks to former members of the BBC Symphony Orchestra – violinist Daniel Meyer and harpist Sioned Williams – as well as former Radio 3 Controller Sir Nicholas Kenyon about their personal experience of working with Pierre Boulez. *Free event. Limited capacity, but guaranteed entry for Day Pass holders.*

3.00pm
MILTON COURT CONCERT HALL

CONCERT 1

The Second Piano Sonata

Pierre Boulez

Domaines 14'

Piano Sonata No. 2 30'

Dialogue de l'ombre double 20'

Guildhall School Musicians

There will be no interval

For programme notes, see opposite

5.00pm
FOUNTAIN ROOM

TALK

The Legacy

Professor Jonathan Cross talks to Gillian Moore CBE – a lifelong advocate for Boulez's music – about his creative and cultural legacy. *Free event. Limited capacity, but guaranteed entry to Day Pass holders. This talk will be broadcast in the interval of the 7.00pm concert.*

7.00pm
BARBICAN HALL

CONCERT 2

Pli selon pli

Pierre Boulez

Deux Études 6'

12 Notations 10'

Incises 9'

Cummings ist der Dichter 13'

Pli selon pli 70'

Anna Dennis soprano
Tamara Stefanovich piano
BBC Symphony Orchestra
BBC Singers
Martyn Brabbins conductor

For programme notes, see page 9

CONCERT 1

3.00pm MILTON COURT CONCERT HALL

The Second Piano Sonata

PIERRE BOULEZ

Domaines for solo clarinet 14'

Piano Sonata No. 2 30'

**Dialogue de l'ombre double for clarinet
and electroacoustic device** 19'

Lily Payne clarinet

David Palmer piano

Beñat Erro Diez clarinet

Hannah Miller recording engineer

Guildhall School Musicians

There will be no interval

This concert is being broadcast live by BBC Radio 3.
It will be available for 30 days via BBC Sounds,
where you can also find podcasts and music mixes.

PIERRE BOULEZ (1925–2016)

**Domaines – for solo clarinet
(1961–8)**

Lily Payne clarinet

Like many of Boulez's works, *Domaines* exists in more than one version. The published score indicates it is 'for clarinet with or without orchestra', and the solo clarinet version was composed in 1961, but not premiered until 20 September 1968 in Ulm by Hans Deinzer.

The score has 12 pages (Boulez calls them 'cahiers'), six labelled 'Original' and six 'Miroir'. The mirror sections are almost exact reversals of the original, 'almost' being the important word as Boulez was always happy to diverge from exact symmetry when he felt like it. In the solo version of *Domaines*, the six 'Original' pages are performed first in an order chosen by the soloist, followed by the six 'Miroir' in reverse order (for instance, if the soloist plays the 'Original' sections in the order AFDCEB, the 'Miroir' sections will be performed BECDFA). Individual pages vary greatly in density and activity, 'A' being fragmentary and 'F' extremely dense.

Each 'cahier' features six brief fragments, each with different tempo and performance markings. Some individual fragments may be repeated a prescribed number of times, usually with different dynamics and/or playing technique, and for some fragments, Boulez gives a choice of performance indications or tempo.

This limited choice given to the performer is a good example of what Boulez termed 'controlled chance'. For the composer, the idea of chance is linked to Surrealist aesthetic notions of automatism. In his article *Aléa*, Boulez wrote: 'opposing accidental chance, we find chance by automatism, whether consciously pure or with some idea of controlled alternatives.' Another important influence was Mallarmé's startling typographical poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* ('A throw of dice will never abolish chance', 1897). The paradox expressed in the title of Mallarmé's poem is an angle under which Boulez continued to explore his Surrealist-inflected notion of chance.

The clarinet writing in *Domaines* is characteristic of Boulez's melodic language. Very frequently, a rapid group of notes is followed by a sustained pitch, reminiscent of Debussy's arabesques. Boulez's extremely mobile melodic lines are constantly decorated with tremolandos or trills, and he uses extended techniques such as harmonics and flutter-tonguing which were unusual in the 1960s.

Domaines was revised in 1968 for clarinet plus six ensembles, extending the obsessive 'magic' function of the number six. Contrary to popular opinion, Boulez is not an arithmetical composer, but one whose music springs in part from the magic of number.

Programme note © Caroline Potter

Caroline Potter is Visiting Reader in French Music at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Her most recent book is *Pierre Boulez: Organised Delirium* (Boydell Press, 2024).

PIERRE BOULEZ

Piano Sonata No. 2 (1947–8)

- 1 **Extrêmement rapide** [Extremely fast]
- 2 **Lent** [Slow]
- 3 **Modéré, presque vif** [Moderately, almost lively]
- 4 **Vif** [Lively]

David Palmer piano

Boulez completed his Second Piano Sonata in 1948 at the age of 23. That's an age when most composers are still unsure of themselves, but this piece is striking for its colossal ambition and air of total assurance. Even more striking is its pent-up anger (*rapide et violent* and *exaspéré* are two typical performance directions). Boulez had had a troubled relationship with his father, and the fury of this piece has a patricidal quality to it. It's as if he wants to 'slay the father', by evoking the great canonical forms of the Classical tradition and reducing them to rubble.

One might see this as a sign of the times, when a new Europe was being rebuilt from the rubble of the old. However, Boulez says brusquely that strong civilisations always behave like this because they are

confident enough to destroy the past, 'even while cherishing what is destroyed'. Signs of cherishing are admittedly hard to find in this piece, though some reckon the emphatic trill followed by a flurry of grace notes at the beginning of the fourth movement evokes the fugal finale of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata.

The other father who had to be confronted was Arnold Schoenberg. Boulez had already paid an elaborate homage to the great inventor of the 12-note method in his *Sonatine* for flute and piano of 1946. This followed the example of Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony in compressing the four movements of a Classical sonata or symphony into one. The Second Sonata restores the division into four movements.

This might seem a retrogressive step but Boulez only restores the boundaries in order to make the act of 'pulverisation' more visible. In the opening movement it is sonata form which is first suggested and then obliterated. He does this by offering discernible shapes, derived from a 12-note row, and then progressively dissolving them into a furious welter of tiny motifs.

In the second movement the unfolding of a melodic statement is undermined by interpolations of increasing length, like a piece of prose which is progressively disrupted by comments in parentheses. (This was to become a favourite technique for Boulez, particularly in the Third Piano Sonata.)

The third movement is almost straightforward in its alternation of a playful 'scherzo' section with three contrasting trios.

The finale falls into two parts, the first a very slow fugue which gradually disintegrates, the second a breakneck play of shorter motifs which lose their definition and eventually fly apart into shards. A brief slow coda surveys the wreckage, with what almost feels like tenderness.

Programme note © Ivan Hewett

Ivan Hewett is a critic and broadcaster who for nine years presented BBC Radio 3's *Music Matters*. He writes for *The Telegraph* and teaches at the Royal College of Music.

PIERRE BOULEZ
Dialogue de l'ombre double
(1982–5)

**Signle initial – Strophe I – Transition I à II –
Strophe II – Transition II à III – Strophe III –
Transition III à IV – Strophe IV – Transition
IV à V – Strophe V – Transition V à VI –
Strophe VI – Signle final**

Beñat Erro Díez clarinet

Hannah Miller recording engineer

Throughout his long creative life, Boulez's concerns and objectives as a composer remained remarkably constant. And for all his reputation as an avant-garde radical, his music is by no means fixated on issues of extreme modernist complexity.

Composed for the 60th birthday of the Italian composer Luciano Berio, *Dialogue de l'ombre double* ('Dialogue of the Double Shadow') is, by Boulezian standards, a strikingly simple work. Indeed, it resembles a manual of his own compositional method, with its sequential, easy-to-follow design and wide range of musical gestures, from fierce eruptiveness to poised, Debussyan arabesque.

Dialogue de l'ombre double derives from a scene in the play *Le soulier de satin* ('The Satin Slipper', 1929) by Paul Claudel, in which the shadows of a man and woman are projected onto a screen, so that this 'double shadow' seems to be in dialogue with itself. From this idea Boulez devised his own 'dialogue' – between the solo clarinettist on the platform and a 'clarinette double', whose pre-recorded material is projected into the auditorium through six surrounding loudspeakers. Within this simple concept, sophisticated processes develop. The electronic manipulation through space of the pre-recorded sounds, and (towards the end of the work) the simultaneous layering of these, mean that the 'clarinette double' is effectively in dialogue with itself, as well as with the soloist on the stage. At times, too, the soloist's playing is conveyed by its own loudspeaker to an offstage piano, whose amplified, echoing resonance generates another layer of musical interplay.

These concepts of solo and ensemble, strophic design and sound travelling through physical space relate to a

formative experience in Boulez's childhood, when he heard Gregorian chant sung in a church acoustic, with a solo singer alternating with the choir. The self-contained musical drama of *Dialogue de l'ombre double* is presented with similar directness. The soloist plays only in the six 'Strophes'; the 'Transitions' – linking and partially overlapping with these – and the opening and closing 'Sigles' ('Symbols') are heard only through the surrounding loudspeakers; and the onstage spotlighting is dimmed when the soloist is silent. Prominent landmarks along the way are the first appearance of the echoing piano resonance in 'Strophe II' (where the soloist picks up on the fluttering trills of the preceding 'Transition'); the pattering barrage of rapid repeated notes in 'Strophe IV'; and the multiphonic snarls and wild virtuosity of 'Strophe VI'. Then 'Sigle final' recalls and finally disperses the work's material.

Programme note © Malcolm Hayes

Malcolm Hayes is a composer, writer, broadcaster and music journalist. He contributes regularly to *BBC Music Magazine* and edited *The Selected Letters of William Walton*. His BBC-commissioned Violin Concerto was performed at the Proms in 2016.

BEÑAT ERRO DÍEZ

CLARINET

Beñat Erro Díez is a young Basque clarinetist. He was born in Pamplona and has been playing the clarinet since the age of 6. He studied at the Pamplona Conservatory, from which he graduated with honours in 2019, before moving to London to study at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he is currently completing his Orchestral Artistry Masters degree.

His clarinet mentors include Andrew Webster, Andrew Marriner, Joy Farrall, James Burke and Robert Ault. He has also participated in masterclasses with Martin Fröst, Michael Collins, Anthony McGill, José Luis Estellés and Andreas Sundén.

As a chamber musician, he has performed at various festivals in Spain, the UK and Italy. His repertoire ranges from the clarinet quintets of Brahms, Mozart and Weber to contemporary works by composers such as Amy Crankshaw. He recently performed Schubert's Octet D803 with the Aidan Woodcock Charitable Trust for its centenary concert at the Menuhin Hall. He has also participated in past BBC Total Immersion events, performing music by Saariaho, Varèse, Berio, Maderna and Dallapiccola.

As an orchestral musician, Beñat Erro Díez has performed with English National Opera, the Hallé and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

DAVID PALMER

PIANO

David Palmer was born in 1997 and is a London-based composer and pianist specialising in 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. He is in demand as a soloist and collaborative pianist, and has a particular interest in song accompaniment. He was a 2022/23 Britten Pears Young Artist, a 2024 Leeds Lieder Young Artist, and attended the Ensemble Modern Young Ensemble Academy in 2024.

He read Music at the University of Oxford, graduating with a first-class BA in 2019; he currently teaches undergraduate modules at Oxford. He studies piano with Rolf Hind and Ronan O'Hora on the Artist Diploma course at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, having previously received a Master's in performance. He was a composer for the National Youth Orchestra and attended the Junior Royal Northern College of Music. He has studied composition with Richard Barrett, Robert Saxton and Matthew Sergeant.

His repertoire includes concertos by Berg, Finnissey and Xenakis, major solo works such as Murail's *Territoires de l'oubli*, Nono's ... *sofferte onde serene* ... and Vivier's *Shiraz*, and many new commissions (including forthcoming works by Finnissey, Saxton and Metcalf). Recording projects include an album with the contemporary music ensemble Mad Song and a solo album of contemporary British music.

LILY PAYNE

CLARINET

Lily Payne started learning the clarinet at the age of 7, when she was taught by her mother. In 2014 she began her studies with Joy Farrall at the Purcell School, from which she graduated in 2022. She currently studies with Andrew Marriner at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. She was principal clarinet of the Britten Sinfonia Academy in 2019 and was also a member of the National Youth Orchestra in 2020.

Highlights have included performing Stravinsky's Three Pieces for solo clarinet in Russia; winning first prize in the Purcell School senior concert competition, for which she played Copland's Clarinet Concerto; performing Debussy's *Première rhapsodie* at Wigmore Hall; and playing second clarinet to Anthony McGill in a performance of Mozart's *Gran Partita* as a member of the Guildhall Wind Soloists. She has participated in a number of masterclasses, most significantly those led by Karl Leister, Pascal Moraguès, Harri Mäki and Martin Fröst.

GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC & DRAMA

The Guildhall School of Music & Drama is a vibrant international community of musicians, actors and production artists in the heart of the City of London. Ranked number one in Arts, Drama & Music by the *Complete University Guide 2025* and one of the top five institutions in the world for Music and Performing Arts (QS World University Rankings 2024), the school offers world-class professional training in partnership with distinguished artists, companies and ensembles. As a global leader in creative and professional practice, it promotes innovation, experiment and research, and is one of the UK's leading providers of lifelong learning in the performing arts, offering inspiring training for children, young people, adult learners and creative and business professionals.

GSMD is highly regarded in the profession for intensive, dedicated music training taught by renowned international teaching staff and through partnerships with the Barbican, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Ballet and Opera and the Academy of Ancient Music. It offers state-of-the-art facilities including a world-class concert hall and three theatres, and has a distinguished list of music graduates including Thomas Adès, Alison Balsom, Sa Chen, Sir James Galway, Tasmin Little, Zara McFarlane, Anne Sofie von Otter, Sir Bryn Terfel, Roderick Williams and Debbie Wiseman.

CONCERT 2
7.00pm BARBICAN HALL

Pli selon pli

PIERRE BOULEZ

**Deux Études – musique concrète
for tape*** 6'

12 Notations 10'

Incises 9'

Cummings ist der Dichter 14'

INTERVAL

Pli selon pli 70'

Anna Dennis soprano

Tamara Stefanovich piano

BBC Symphony Orchestra

BBC Singers Andrew Griffiths chorus-master

Martyn Brabbins conductor

**Performance material supplied with
the kind assistance of INA GRM, Paris*

PIERRE BOULEZ (1925–2016)
**Deux Études – musique concrète
for tape (1951–2)**

1 Étude sur un son [Study on One Sound]

2 Étude sur sept sons [Study on
Seven Sounds]

Boulez was always fascinated by new technology. The early 1950s were a crucial period in the development of tape and electronic music, and in Paris the key figure was Pierre Schaeffer, whose GRMC (Groupe de recherche de musique concrète) studio grew out of the French Radio-based Studio d'Essai which he founded during the Second World War. Schaeffer pioneered *musique concrète* – tape music that used recorded sounds, not necessarily produced by musical instruments, as its source material – and composers including Boulez, Messiaen and Stockhausen spent brief periods in his studio.

Boulez's first *Étude* 'on one sound' is based on a recording of a *sanza*, a small hand-held African instrument with metal bars and discs that create buzzing sounds when the bars are pinged. The eighth of Boulez's *Notations* for piano, originally titled 'Afrique', is also based on the sound of this instrument, an early example of his interest in music from non-Western cultures. Boulez explained to John Cage that for *Étude* 1, he created 72 transpositions of the source by changing the speed of the tape, and he organised the piece using serial methods: the *sanza* is unrecognisable as the source material.

This concert is being broadcast live by BBC Radio 3.
It will be available for 30 days via BBC Sounds,
where you can also find podcasts and music mixes.

The second *Étude*, ‘on seven sounds’, features more recognisable drum and other percussive sonorities, though again they are chopped up and subject to serial manipulation.

Both *Études* were created in 1951–2 and premiered in March 1952. Boulez felt that these were unsuccessful experiments because he was frustrated with the limitations of the technology and disliked Schaeffer’s ‘do-it-yourself’ studio methods.

Programme note © Caroline Potter

Caroline Potter is Visiting Reader in French Music at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Her most recent book is *Pierre Boulez: Organised Delirium* (Boydell Press, 2024).

PIERRE BOULEZ 12 Notations (1945)

- 1 **Fantastique – Modéré** [Fanciful – Moderate]
- 2 **Très vif** [Very lively]
- 3 **Assez lent** [Fairly slow]
- 4 **Rythmique** [Rhythmical]
- 5 **Doux et improvisé** [Gentle and improvised]
- 6 **Rapide** [Quick]
- 7 **Hiératique** [Hieratic]
- 8 **Modéré jusqu’à très vif** [Moderate to very lively]
- 9 **Lointain – Calme** [Distant – Calm]
- 10 **Mécanique et très sec** [Mechanical and very dry]
- 11 **Scintillant** [Scintillating]
- 12 **Lent – Puissant et âpre** [Slow – Powerful and harsh]

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Notations is an interesting case of a piece which started out as a satire on something that exasperated Boulez but then took on a life of its own and ended up becoming a genuine work of art. The target of his ire was René Leibowitz, the one-time pupil of Anton Webern who had settled in Paris and become the self-appointed guardian of 12-note orthodoxy in that city. In 1945, after his year studying with Messiaen, Boulez was eager to find out more about the 12-note technique and took some lessons with Leibowitz.

He soon became bored with Leibowitz’s pedantic analyses of 12-note works, which

(according to Boulez) never went further than a triumphant demonstration that 12-note works were indeed constructed from a 12-note row. To exemplify his contempt for this 'mania for 12s', Boulez mocked it by writing 12 piano miniatures, each employing a 12-note row, each being exactly 12 bars long. The resulting set of gnomic piano miniatures, which he entitled *Notations*, is his earliest surviving piece.

In some respects the works are very unlike the mature Boulez. The bleached-out melancholy of No. 9 sounds like an echo of Schoenberg's piano piece evoking Mahler's funeral, which forms the last piece of his Op. 19 set. No. 7 is like one of Bartók's Balkan laments; and the drifting arpeggios of No. 5 sound like one of those mystical pre-Revolutionary Russian composers like Roslavets. But, whatever the expressive tone, Boulez displays endless ingenuity in disguising and varying the row. For example, the little right-hand flourish that begins No. 1 is heard a few bars later as a proper, drawn-out melody. In No. 4 an obstreperous little six-note figure in the left hand exposes half the row, and the right hand little by little supplies the remaining notes. No. 2 is a typically Boulezian fury, with 11-note rows vamping up and down in retrograde and inverse motion; the incessant hammered A flat in the right hand is the 'missing' note. Humour appears in No. 10, which sounds like two machines mimicking each other's movements and occasionally crashing into each other in the process. There are definite echoes of the later

Boulez but also hints of many expressive tones that Boulez would never pursue. Above all, there is a vivid conciseness of expression that he never attempted again. That suggestion of paths not taken gives these little miniatures a peculiar weight.

Programme note © Ivan Hewett

Ivan Hewett is a critic and broadcaster who for nine years presented BBC Radio 3's *Music Matters*. He writes for *The Telegraph* and teaches at the Royal College of Music.

PIERRE BOULEZ

Incises (1994, rev. 2001)

Tamara Stefanovich piano

In 1994, Boulez wrote the first version of *Incises* as a test piece for the first Umberto Micheli Piano Competition, a commission prompted by Maurizio Pollini who was a champion of Boulez's music. Boulez stated that the title is related to Gregorian chant: 'INCISE, a rhythmic unit of several notes analogous to a motif'. It is possible that *Incises* also represents a homage to his ethnomusicologist friend Simha Arom; the term 'incise' – referring to an incision or engraving – might have been inspired by Arom's article on the notation of monody, where he uses the terms 'incise' and 'chute' to denote the start and end of a melodic line. But there are also less spiritual aspects to the piece: according to Arnold Whittall, Boulez described the most prominent gesture in *Incises* as a 'gifle' – a slap in the face.

The musical material is partly derived from the surname of Boulez's friend, the conductor and philanthropist Paul Sacher (E flat–A–C–B–E–D): Boulez used this SACHER motif in several pieces. *Incises* has a slow introduction followed by a super-voluble Prestissimo toccata noteworthy for its many hammered repeated figures. The work was expanded to more than three times its original length in 2001, after the composition of its derivation *sur Incises* for three pianos, three harps and three percussionists. This longer version, heard today, features sections based on rapid figures followed by sustained chords that are reminiscent of similar passages in *sur Incises*. These slower sections act as respite from the relentless toccata energy.

Programme note © Caroline Potter

PIERRE BOULEZ

Cummings ist der Dichter (1970, rev. 1986)

BBC Singers

It was by mischance that this piece by a French musician, setting a US poet, ended up with a German title. Boulez wrote to Stuttgart, where the first performance was to take place, saying that 'Cummings is the poet', which was interpreted as the name of the work. His acceptance of that accidental title should not, however, be taken as indicating a casual or minor work. This is a score elaborately laid out for 16-part choir and an orchestra of 27,

the latter a characteristically Boulezian ensemble having equal numbers of woodwind, brass and strings with three harps. The piece also strikes back to the most crucial period of Boulez's composing, in that it takes material from his 1952 unaccompanied chorus *Oubli signal lapidé*. At the same time it belongs with two of his greatest achievements, *Le marteau sans maître* and *Pli selon pli*, as a musical transposition of poetry. It belongs, too, in that equally important body of works Boulez left unfinished, for it was to have been followed by further instalments setting other Cummings poems.

There is something generative in the nature of the music, which is forever exploding from and subsiding back into chords chosen from a small stock. Just as the words seem to be at once the germinal substance for a simple sentence – 'Birds here inventing air, using twilight's vastness, become soul' – and the debris left after its shattering, so the music is both nascent and posthumous. It moves towards an unloosing of line from chord that reaches an ultimate stage in abstracted birdsong, and along the way matches the poet in being simultaneously sophisticated and naive, playful.

Though Boulez had known Cummings's poetry since 1952, through Cage, he delayed his creative engagement until 1970, and in 1986 revised the resulting score, generally to enrich its exquisite detail.

Programme note © Paul Griffiths

A former critic for *The Times* and *The New Yorker*, Paul Griffiths is an authority on 20th- and 21st-century music. Among his books are studies of Boulez, Cage and Stravinsky, as well as *Modern Music and After* (OUP, 2011, 3rd edition) and *A Concise History of Western Music* (CUP, 2006). He is also a novelist.

Surtitles produced and operated by Damien Kennedy

PIERRE BOULEZ
Pli selon pli (Portrait de Mallarmé)
(1957–60; rev. 1962, 1977, 1983–4,
1989–90, 2003)

- 1 **Don – ‘Don du poème’** [The Poem’s Gift]
- 2 **Improvisation sur Mallarmé 1 ‘Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui’** [Virginal, lively and lovely today]
- 3 **Improvisation sur Mallarmé 2 ‘Une dentelle s’abolit’** [Lace waves into vanishing]
- 4 **Improvisation sur Mallarmé 3 ‘À la nue accablante tu’** [To the overwhelming cloud hushed]
- 5 **Tombeau** [Tomb]

Anna Dennis soprano

Pli selon pli is Boulez’s largest piece, and the one he intended to stand as his ‘masterwork’. That was a bold declaration for a composer who was only 35 at the time of the work’s first complete performance in 1960. Yet time has proved Boulez right. *Pli selon pli* epitomises his music in its exotic glittery sonorities, its ambiguous motion, poised between stasis and attack, and its tendency to drown structure in ornament. But it also has a tragic weight that is profoundly different to his other works, which so often end in a provisional way, as if reluctant to assume a final, definitive state.

INTERVAL: 30 MINUTES

One of the factors that gives *Pli selon pli* its peculiar weight is the all-pervasive presence of a second creative spirit alongside the composer: the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Boulez actually calls his piece a 'portrait of Mallarmé', and the title – which means 'Fold upon fold' – comes from a poem of his, though one not actually set in Boulez's work. The poem describes the slow emergence of the city of Bruges from a dense mist, its massive stony reality gradually appearing 'fold upon fold'. In this piece it is Mallarmé himself who gradually takes shape.

Pli selon pli is laid out in five movements, each of which contains a poem of Mallarmé, in whole or in part. However, these pieces do not 'set' the poems to music in the way that, for example, Strauss or Schubert do. Instead, Boulez aimed for a different sort of fusion of text and music, which he described as 'the direct seizure of the poem through music, in the general sphere of form, in syntax, lastly in rhythm and the sound of the words themselves'. This suggests the paradoxical thought that the words themselves could disappear because the poetry has been absorbed in the sounds, in the way salt is both present and absent in a salt solution. This often happens in *Pli selon pli*, particularly in the first and final movements, which are largely instrumental. As Boulez put it: 'The poem, centre of the music, can be absent from it.'

In the three central movements, entitled 'Improvisations', the poems step centre

stage. They are settings of sonnets, chosen by Boulez precisely because their form is so strict, and the music mirrors their form at many levels. In 'Improvisation 1', the simplest of the three, the music echoes the 'top' formal level, i.e. the poem's division into strophes or verses. 'Improvisation 2' goes deeper. The sonnet has lines of eight syllables and this number saturates the musical discourse at every level. In 'Improvisation 3' the poetry itself is in retreat and only one verse of the sonnet is actually sung. The fabulously subtle musical fabric takes over, echoing the play of assonance, rhyme and rhythm within the verse.

In the end, though, the appeal of these particular poems to Boulez was emotional. There is a sensuous association between certain ideas and images in Mallarmé which clearly struck a chord in Boulez and suggested musical equivalents. The idea of birth is one. It is evoked with unforgettable vividness at the very beginning, in a way that suggests something convulsive, violent and yet dark, and threatened always by dissolution. That astonishing opening crash dies away in a composed 'echo' which suggests the closeness of birth and death, as do the omnipresent sounds of vibraphones, guitars, harps and pianos, which start to fade the moment they are born.

Another idea is the sterility of purity, suggested by the whiteness of the swan portrayed in the first 'Improvisation',

trapped in a frozen lake. In the second 'Improvisation' the vain circlings of the soprano and the ornate tracteries of the music suggest the lace curtain and the room where, it seems, a useless (because solitary) sexual act takes place. In the third 'Improvisation' the strange sound of the soprano and harp mistuned by a quarter-tone, mingled with a huge percussion battery, summons the atmosphere of Mallarmé's 'tomb-like shipwreck'. Finally comes the enormous acceleration and accumulation of the last movement, which gathers energy as if the piece is hurling itself against death. At the last moment, called forth by the piano's desperate cadenzas, the soprano makes one last appearance. Then the music dies, with the very same sound that brought it into being.

Programme note © Ivan Hewett

B B C
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& Chorus**

FRIDAY 4 APRIL 7.30pm

Wigglesworth conducts Debussy and Berg

ALBAN BERG

Three Pieces from the Lyric Suite
Der Wein

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Le livre de Baudelaire
Nocturnes

Sophie Bevan soprano

Ryan Wigglesworth conductor

BBC Symphony Orchestra

BBC Symphony Chorus

"Let us fly without rest or pause into the land of my dreams..." For Claude Debussy, the poetry of Baudelaire conjured new and ravishing colours, just waiting to be transformed into sound. Over in 1890s Vienna, meanwhile, those same verses unlocked dark passions and wild (sometimes dangerous) imaginings – a glorious, iridescent turmoil into which Alban Berg dived headlong.

So don't expect Ryan Wigglesworth to hold back, as he joins the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a concert of shimmering hues and pure, intoxicating sensuality. Soprano Sophie Bevan joins him on this journey into delirium – perfect music for a singer who's been described as "magnetic". And to finish, the upper voices of the BBC Symphony Chorus bring a special enchantment to Debussy's luminous Nocturnes.

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Associate Orchestra

MARTYN BRABBINS
CONDUCTOR

Martyn Brabbins was recently appointed Chief Conductor of the Malmö Symphony Orchestra and of the Symphony Orchestra of India, both starting in the 2025/26 season. He was Music Director of the English National Opera (2016–23).

He appears as a guest conductor with top international orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw, San Francisco and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony orchestras and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, as well as the leading UK orchestras. He is a popular figure at the BBC Proms, which, in 2019, commissioned 14 living composers to write a 60th-birthday tribute to him. Known for his advocacy of British composers, he has conducted hundreds of world premieres across the globe. He has recorded over 150 CDs to date. In 2023 he received the RPS Conductor Award for his ‘colossal’ contribution to UK musical life.

He was Associate Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (1994–2005), Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic (2009–15), Chief Conductor of the Nagoya Philharmonic (2012–16) and Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Festival of Music (2005–7). He is Prince Consort Professor of Conducting at the Royal College of Music, Visiting Professor at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire and Artistic Advisor to the Huddersfield Choral Society.

ANNA DENNIS
SOPRANO

Anna Dennis studied at the Royal Academy of Music and was the recipient of the 2023 Royal Philharmonic Society’s Singer award.

In the current season she sings Queen of the Night (*The Magic Flute*) for Opera North; Thomas Ades’s *America: A Prophecy* with the Hallé; Pergolesi’s *Stabat mater* with the Portland Baroque Orchestra; Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* with the Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid; and Poulenc’s *Gloria* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Her opera performances include Katie Mitchell’s *New Dark Age* at the Royal Opera House, Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen* at Drottningholm, Handel’s *Rodelinda* at the Göttingen Handel Festival, Mozart’s *Idomeneo* at Birmingham Opera Company and Damon Albarn’s *Dr Dee* at English National Opera. She recently created the title-role of Violet in Tom Coult’s debut opera, premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival.

Her numerous recordings include Elena Langer’s *Landscape with Three People*; the Grammy-nominated Kastalsky Requiem with the Orchestra of St Luke’s under Leonard Slatkin; two orchestral song-cycles with the BBC Philharmonic on Tom Coult’s debut album, *Pieces that Disappear*, with the BBC Philharmonic, and Handel’s *Amadigi di Gaula* with the Early Opera Company under Christian Curnyn.

TAMARA STEFANOVICH

PIANO

Tamara Stefanovich is one of the leading interpreters of contemporary piano repertoire today. She partners with eminent ensembles, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Bavarian Radio, BBC, Chicago and London Symphony orchestras, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Mahler Chamber Orchestra. She performs at the world's major concert venues and festivals.

She continues to present a wide range of piano concertos, from Bartók, Ravel and Szymanowski to those by Magnus Lindberg, Liza Lim and Hans Abrahamsen.

Highlights this season include Nono's *Como una ola de fuerza y luz* and recitals at the Boulez Saal Berlin, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Leipzig Gewandhaus and Wigmore Hall, among others.

Tamara Stefanovich has worked with composers such as Pierre Boulez, Sir George Benjamin, György Kurtág and Hans Abrahamsen. She works with chamber music partners including Matthias Goerne and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, and conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski and Joana Mallwitz.

The most recent addition to her award-winning discography is Boulez's Second Sonata, released earlier this month.

BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For over 90 years the BBC Symphony Orchestra has been a driving force in the British musical landscape, championing contemporary music and giving voice to rarely performed and neglected composers. It plays a key role in the BBC Proms, performing regularly throughout each season, including the First and Last Nights.

The BBC SO is Associate Orchestra at the Barbican, where it presents a distinctive season of concerts. Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo has a long-standing and widely acclaimed relationship with the orchestra. His concerts this season include four Mahler symphonies, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with Sir Stephen Hough, Doreen Carwithen's Concerto for Piano and Strings with Alexandra Dariescu, the UK premiere of Kaija Saariaho's trumpet concerto *HUSH* and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the BBC Symphony Chorus, dedicated to the memory of the late Andrew Davis. The BBC Symphony Chorus also joins the BBC SO for Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass and Bartók's *Cantata profana*, conducted by Principal Guest Conductor Dalia Stasevska. Carolyn Kuan

conducts the UK premiere of Huang Ruo's opera *M. Butterfly* and Total Immersion days are dedicated to Pierre Boulez and to electronic music. *Wild Isles* features highlights on the big screen from the BBC nature documentary series.

The BBC SO makes appearances across the UK and internationally, and gives free concerts at its Maida Vale studios. You can hear the vast majority of the BBC SO's performances on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Sounds, with all 2024 BBC Proms currently available on BBC Sounds and Proms including the First and Last Nights available to watch on BBC iPlayer.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus – alongside the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Proms – offer innovative education and community activities. Together they play a lead role in the BBC Ten Pieces and BBC Young Composer programmes, including work with schools, young people and families in East London ahead of the BBC SO's move to its new home in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford.

Keep up to date with the BBC Symphony Orchestra

To find out more about upcoming events and broadcasts, and for the latest BBC SO news, visit bbc.co.uk/symphonyorchestra.

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Sakari Oramo

Principal Guest Conductor

Dalia Stasevska

Günter Wand Conducting Chair

Semyon Bychkov

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Mark Sheridan
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Beverley Jones
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Steve Rossell**Flutes**Daniel Pailthorpe
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Fergus Davidson

Oboe

Tom Blomfield

Cor Anglais

Olivia Fraser

ClarinetsMatt Glendening
Jonathan Parkin**E flat Clarinet**

Harry Cameron Penny

Bass Clarinet

Thomas Lessels

Alto SaxophonesDamon Oliver
Ethan Townsend**Bassoons**Julie Price
Graham Hobbs**Horns**Nicholas Korth
Michael Murray
James Pillai
Mark Wood
David Horwich**Trumpets**Niall Keatley
Joseph Atkins**Trombones**Helen Vollam
Gemma Riley**Bass Trombone**

Robert O'Neill

Contrabass Trombone

Dan West

Tuba

Sam Elliott

Timpani

Antoine Bedewi

PercussionDavid Hockings
Alex Neal
Joe Cooper
Joe Richards
Heledd Gwynant
Owen Gunnell
Stefan Beckett
Kizzy Brooks**Harps**Elizabeth Bass
Anneke Hodnett
Helen Tunstall**Piano**

Elizabeth Burley

Celesta

Zeynep Ozsucu

Mandolin

Dan Thomas

Guitar

James Woodrow

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BBC SINGERS

Celebrating its centenary this season, the BBC Singers is based at the BBC's Maida Vale Studios. It records music for broadcast on BBC Radio 3 alongside work for other network radio, television and commercial release. It presents an annual series of concerts at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama's Milton Court Concert Hall, gives free concerts in London, appears at major festivals in the UK and abroad, regularly performs with many of the world's leading composers, conductors and soloists, and appears annually at the BBC Proms, including at the First and Last Nights. Last summer it made eight appearances at the BBC Proms.

The choir promotes a 50:50 gender policy for composers whose music it performs, and champions composers from all backgrounds: recent concerts

and recordings have included music by Soumik Datta, Joanna Marsh, Reena Esmail, Sun Keting and Roderick Williams, and recent collaborations have featured Laura Mvula, Clare Teal and the South Asian dance company Akademi. The BBC Singers recently joined voices from the popular CBeebies programme *Hey Duggee* to release a Christmas single and appeared last year in the show's 'The Choir Badge' episode.

As part of the BBC's plan to open its new BBC Music Studios at East Bank in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford, the choir has begun working closely with the local community through a programme of music education, outreach events and live performances. Last March the BBC Singers received the Royal Philharmonic Society's Ensemble Award.

Keep up to date with the BBC Singers

Listen to our BBC Radio 3 broadcasts via the BBC Sounds app. To find out more about us and our concerts, visit our website: bbc.co.uk/singers and follow us on X: @BBCSingers, Facebook: facebook.com/BBCSingers and Instagram: [bbc_singers](https://instagram.com/bbc_singers)

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Sofi Jeannin

Principal Guest Conductors

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Owain Park

Associate Conductor, Learning

Nicholas Chalmers

Artist in Residence

Eric Whitacre

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Emma Tring

Olivia Robinson

Felicity Hayward

Cressida Sharp

Altos

Ciara Hendrick

Nancy Cole

Katherine Nicholson

Rebekah Niesser-Jones

Tenors

Peter Davoren

Tom Raskin

Ben Durrant

Graham Neal

Basses

Andrew Rupp

Edward Price

Charles Gibbs

Jimmy Holliday

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Ensemble Manager

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