

For immediate release: Wednesday 1 October 2025

barbican

Barbican announces The Unthanks 20th Anniversary Concert with Royal Northern Sinfonia

The Unthanks at 20

An Anniversary Special with Royal Northern Sinfonia

Saturday 31 January 2026, 7.30pm

Barbican Hall

Tickets from £30* plus booking fee

Marking two decades of music-making, and the 10th anniversary of their BBC Folk Album of the Year *Mount The Air*, Northumbrian folk group **The Unthanks** return to the Barbican with a special concert alongside **Royal Northern Sinfonia**. Conducted by **Ellie Slorach**, the performance presents highlights from across their 15 albums in new orchestral arrangements by band member, pianist and composer Adrian McNally.

Known for their ability to enrich folk traditions with orchestral depth, the band continue to push boundaries while staying true to the stories and songs at the heart of their music. The Unthanks have built a reputation for carefully developing their own orchestral arrangements, ensuring the songs remain closely connected to their origins. Their approach highlights the stories and traditions at the centre of their music while expanding the scale and colour of its presentation.

This concert celebrates a remarkable 20-year journey for The Unthanks. Founded by sisters Rachel and Becky Unthank, with McNally as arranger and composer, the group emerged from the folk clubs of North-East England to become one of the UK's most distinctive musical voices. Their career spans 15 albums and a Mercury Prize nomination, with projects that range from traditional Northumbrian ballads to large-scale collaborations and reinterpretations of the music of Robert Wyatt, Antony & The Johnsons, and Molly Drake. Always rooted in storytelling, their work has consistently challenged expectations of what folk music can be.

Over the years, The Unthanks have earned admiration for their ambitious collaborations, performing with the BBC Concert Orchestra at the Proms, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band, and Charles Hazlewood's Army of Generals. Their partnership with NewcastleGateshead's Royal Northern Sinfonia now provides a fitting way to mark 20 years of innovation and artistry — cementing their reputation as a group whose music bridges tradition and invention, intimacy and scale.

Generously supported by Trevor Fenwick and Jane Hindley.

Produced by the Barbican

[Find out more](#)

~

LISTINGS – BARBICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC PROMOTIONS COMING UP IN 2025

- Ustad Noor Bakhsh + Jaubi + Amrit Kaur ([Fri 3 Oct 2025, Barbican Hall 7.30pm](#))
- JAMBINAI with London Contemporary Orchestra - K-Music Festival 2025 ([Sun 5 Oct 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Trio Da Kali ([Mon 6 Oct 2025, Milton Court Concert Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- The Divine Comedy: Rainy Afternoon + Studio Electrophonique ([Sat 11 - Sun 12 Oct 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))

- Hayden Thorpe: Song of Ness with Robert Macfarlane and Propellor Ensemble ([Thu 16 Oct 2025, Milton Court Concert Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Touching Bass presents: Halima & Illnoledge ([Fri 17 Oct 2025, Milton Court Concert Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Louis VI Presents... NATURE AIN'T A LUXURY – Fragile Earth Series ([Sat 25 & Sun 26 Oct 2025, Conservatory, various times](#))
- Public Service Broadcasting with London Contemporary Orchestra ([Sat 1 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 3pm & 8pm](#))
- Daniel Avery ([Sat 8 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 8pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: aja monet with guests ([Fri 14 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: We Exist! The Dee Dee Bridgewater Quartet ([Sat 15 Nov, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: Dhamaal ([Sun 16 Nov 2025, Milton Court Concert Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: Anthony Joseph: Rowing Up River To Get Our Names Back ([Mon 17 Nov 2025, Milton Court Concert Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: The Evolution of UK Jazz – 20 Years On ([Wed 19 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: Hiromi's Sonicwonder ([Fri 21 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: Tortoise ([Sat 22 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- EFG London Jazz Festival: Japanese Jazz ([Sun 23 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Hania Rani – Non Fiction: A Piano Concerto in Four Movements ([Tue 25 – Weds 26 Nov, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Carlos Alomar presents: The D.A.M. Trilogy ([Fri 28 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 8pm](#))
- Le Trio Joubran: Twenty Springs ([Sat 29 Nov 2025, Barbican Hall, 8pm](#))
- GoGo Penguin + special guest Daudi Matsiko ([Wed 3 Dec 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Nonclassical presents: Vari/ations – An Ode to Oram ([Thurs 4 Dec 2025, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Dirty Three ([Mon 8 Dec 2025, Barbican Hall, 8pm](#))
- **NEW** - The Unthanks at 20 - An Anniversary Special with Royal Northern Sinfonia Tour ([Sat 31 Jan 2026, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Lucinda Williams ([Tue 3 February 2026, Barbican Hall, 8pm](#))
- Christian Löffler: Until We Meet Again Tour ([Wed 11 Feb 2026, Barbican Hall, 8pm](#))
- Jóhann Jóhannsson: Cinematic Suites ([Wed 18 Feb 2026, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Blonde Redhead ([Thurs 19 Feb 2026, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))
- Ryoji Ikeda Weekender: Portrait ([Fri - Sat 20-21 Feb 2026, Various Venues](#))
- The Köln Concert - with Maki Namekawa & Thomas Ehnco ([Sat 6 Apr 2026, 7.30pm](#))
- Mammal Hands ([Wed 29 Apr 2026, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm](#))

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For further information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:

Ed Maitland Smith, Communications Manager for Music

e – Edward.MaitlandSmith@barbican.org.uk

t – 0203 834 1115

Amy Allen, Communication Officer for Music

e – amy.allen@barbican.org.uk

t – 0203 834 1048

Simone Gibbs, Communications Assistant for Music

e – simone.gibbs@barbican.org.uk

Barbican press room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), our Resident Orchestra, and a London base for the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our Artistic Associates the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Darbar Arts](#), [Cultural and Heritage Trust](#), and [Serious](#), who produce the [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), alongside other associates and partners including [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), and [Trafalgar Theatre Productions](#).

For more information, visit our [website](#) or connect with us on [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Spotify](#) | [LinkedIn](#)