WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 7 November 2026

Yellow Barn Showcase Day

UNDER 35S

Supported by the AKO Foundation
Media partner Classic FM

11.00am

Melissa Wimbish soprano • **Anthony Marwood** violin • **Gerard Flotats** cello
Alice Ivy-Pemberton violin • **John Myerscough** cello • **Katherine Yoon** violin
Leland Ko cello • **Julian Chan** piano • **Travis Laplante** saxophone • **Pauline Sachse** viola

Spiritual — Glory, glory 'Lay My Burden Down'

The possibility for string instruments to derive pitches of various heights at one and the same place on the string can be experienced in music as the transition to another plane of existence. And that is joy. – Sophia Gubaidulina

Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-2025) — Freue dich! (1981)

I. eure freude wird niemand von euch nehmen (your joy no man taketh from you) • II. freuet euch der freude (rejoice with them that do rejoice) • III. freue dich, rabbi (rejoice, rabbi) • IV. nun ist er in hau zurückgekehrt (and he returned into his house) • V. hör auf deine innere stimme (listen to the still small voice within)

We cast this message into the cosmos. It is likely to survive a billion years into our future, when our civilization is profoundly altered and the surface of the Earth may be vastly changed. Of the 200 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy, some – perhaps many – may have inhabited planets and spacefaring civilizations. If one such civilization intercepts Voyager and can understand these recorded contents, here is our message:

This is a present from a small distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts, and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations. This record represents our hope and our determination, and our good will in a vast and awesome universe.

– President Jimmy Carter, Voyager spacecraft statement, July 29, 1977

The Sounds of Earth

Live and recorded performances from *The Golden Record*, Voyager I & II, 1977

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) — Prelude and Fugue No. 1 in C BWV870 from *The Well-tempered Clavier Book II* (c.1740)

Travis Laplante (b.1982) — Hidden Bright Lines (2025) in response to 'Izlel je Delyo Hagdutin' ('Rebel Delyo the Hayduk has come out') (Bulgaria)

Willie Johnson (1897-1945) — Dark was the night, Cold was the ground (transcribed for soprano and string quartet) (1927)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) — V. Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo from String Quartet No. 13 in B flat Op. 130 (1825-6)

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. Mobile devices must be powered off during performances. Devices required for medical reasons should be set to silent. Photography and filming are prohibited, other than at the end of concerts during applause. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster, persons are not permitted to stand or sit in gangways intersecting the seating, or in any other gangways. If standing is permitted at the sides and rear, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited. Disabled Access and Facilities – full details from 020 7935 2141. Hearing aids – if your hearing aids have a music setting, this should be selected. For the best listening experience and to avoid feedback sound, ensure hearing aids are snugly and securely fitted, and set to a comfortable volume.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

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Under the artistic direction of pianist Seth Knopp, Yellow Barn is widely recognised as a leading centre for chamber music. Founded in 1969, each year its summer festival draws musicians from across America and the wider world to the small town of Putney, Vermont.

This morning's Yellow Barn concert explores themes of spiritual transcendence and intercultural dialogue. African-American spirituals have long been a vital force of American musical and religious life – as a form of congregational folk music they have embodied hope and community in the face of slavery and oppression. From this rich tradition we'll hear *Glory, Glory!*, a song which has been recorded by artists including Tina Turner and The Byrds.

With the death of Russian composer Sofia Gubaidulina in 2025, the world lost a distinctive musical voice. Spirituality – drawing on both Orthodox and Western Christian traditions – was a central theme of her work, and in her own words 'there is no more serious reason for composing music than spiritual renewal'. Her 1981 sonata for violin and cello, *Freue Dich!* (Rejoice!), is somewhat deceptively titled, for this is not a piece of simple abandonment to joy. It is a substantial work, of large expressive range and intensity, which demands concentration and commitment from its two players.

Its five movements are modelled on the format of the Latin Mass, each titled with quotations by the 18th-century Ukrainian religious philosopher Grigory Skovoroda. At times the two instruments are set against each other, at others they combine to create one sound. But the key spiritual metaphor in the music arises from the use of harmonics – specifically the 'flageolet' technique, in which the string is lightly touched to isolate higher overtones. As Gubaidulina put it, this ethereal effect, juxtaposed with standard playing techniques, represents 'the transition to another reality'.

In 1977, NASA launched two spacecraft to study the outer solar system. In the near half-century since, Voyager I and II have remained operational and now drift in interstellar space, with Voyager I becoming the most distant human-made object from earth. Both spacecraft contain a copy of the *Golden Record*: a gold-plated phonograph disc which contains sounds and image data from our planet, a cosmic message-in-a-bottle to any alien civilisation that might one day encounter it. The sounds include recordings from nature, spoken greetings in many languages, and a selection of music of various styles and traditions.

JS Bach is represented by three tracks on the *Golden Record*, one of which is a recording of Glenn Gould playing the opening Prelude and Fugue in C major from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, that great treasury of keyboard music whose pages are thumbed by piano students around the world. The serene waves of the *Prelude*, and the elegant tread of the four-part *Fugue* that follows, are a testament to humanity's sense of order and beauty, those qualities of lasting value that have made Bach's music so perennially appealing and endlessly adaptable to different cultural contexts.

Another track on the record is by *Blind* Willie Johnson, a Texan preacher and street musician who made a number of recordings in the late 1920s that proved highly influential, though he enjoyed little wealth in his lifetime. Johnson's 1927 song *Dark was the night, Cold was the ground* is notable for the interplay of his bottleneck slide guitar with an expressive (but seemingly wordless) vocal line. There is a deeply worshipful quality to this music – Johnson is sometimes described as a paragon of the 'gospel blues' style – and its title quotes the 18th-century hymn *Gethsemane*, about the scene of the Crucifixion. According to science writer Timothy Ferris, this recording was selected for the *Golden Record* to recognise those around the world who, like Johnson himself, had experienced cold nights of homelessness.

The final track included by NASA was recorded by the Budapest Quartet. Beethoven's String Quartet in B flat Op. 130 is among the group of late quartets that occupied him in the final years of his life, and in which we can find some of the most far-reaching and profound music he ever composed. These years were also marred by bouts of illness, turbulent family relationships and the worsening deafness that so cruelly deprived him of a musician's most important sense. The slow movement of Op. 130, titled *Cavatina* (meaning 'little song'), is undoubtedly the emotional heart of the work – this beautiful *Adagio* is led by a sustained violin line in the human vocal range and supported by close harmonies. In one brief but remarkable passage, the melody seems to dissolve into quiet sobs – here Beethoven writes *beklemmt*, or 'oppressed' – before it recovers its composure. An appropriate closing track for any interstellar listener, this is music that speaks profoundly of the human spirit, in both its vulnerability and fortitude.

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Travis Laplante Hidden Bright Lines

Hidden Bright Lines was originally composed as a musical response to the Bulgarian folk song 'Izlel e Delyo Haydutin' (performed by the celebrated folk singer Valya Balkanska), which appears on the Voyager Golden Record.

I have resonated with Bulgarian folk singing since first hearing *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* in high school. To me, this music holds many paradoxes and somehow transcends them all – sounding both ancient and futuristic, human and otherworldly, still and in motion. I related to it immediately, even across a great distance of culture and time. It felt as if my heart recognized it.

Compositionally, I didn't respond through a process of meticulous musical analysis, but rather allowed myself to receive both inspiration and teaching from this music's profound timbre and energy, attempting to offer something back with gratitude.

The title *Hidden Bright Lines* is a simple image for how different musicians and musical traditions are connected to one another, even when they have never met in the physical world.

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2.00pm

Alasdair Beatson piano • **Julian Chan** piano • **Anna Han** piano
Daniel Meszaros clarinet • **Anthony Marwood** violin • **John Myerscough** cello • **Seth Knopp** piano

György Ligeti (1923-2006) 3 pieces for 2 pianos (1976)

Monument • Selbstportrait mit Reich und Riley (und Chopin ist auch dabei) (Self-Portrait with Reich and Riley (and Chopin in the background)) • In zart fliessender Bewegung (In a gentle flowing movement)

How distant he seems all of a sudden, the comrade of every day, different from himself, at ease in a world in which it will be difficult to follow him. One hardly recognizes him: he, so unassuming, almost shy, is now filled with uncommon self-confidence. All full of his composition, he would like to share with everyone the joy he feels at being able to hold its premiere tonight in the camp… – Marcel Haedrich, one of the prisoners who witnessed the première performance at the Nazi camp Stalag VIII-A on January 15, 1941, describing Olivier Messiaen.

I told them first of all that this quartet was written for the end of time, without any play on words on the length of captivity, but for the end of the notion of past and future, that is to say, for the beginning of eternity, and that the work is based on the magnificent text of the Apocalypse in which Saint John says: 'And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow on its head… His face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and standing on the sea and on the land, he raised his hand toward heaven and swore by He who lives forever and ever, saying: "there will be no more time".' – Olivier Messiaen

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) Quatuor pour la fin du temps (1940-1)

I. Liturgie de cristal (Crystal liturgy) • II. Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps (Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of time) • III. Abîme des oiseaux (Abyss of birds) • IV. Intermède (Interlude) • V. Louange à l'éternité de Jésus (Praise to the eternity of Jesus) • VI. Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes (Dance of fury, for the seven trumpets) • VII. Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps (Tangle of rainbows, for the Angel who announces the end of time) • VIII. Louange à l'immortalité de Jésus (Praise to the immortality of Jesus)

The audience, as far as I remember, was overwhelmed at the time. They wondered what had happened. Everyone. We too. We asked ourselves: 'What are we doing? What are we playing?' Even the prisoners who weren't all highly educated – factory workers, electricians – could have screamed and shouted. But there was a long silence. And then, afterward, lots of unresolved discussions, discussions about this thing that no one had understood.

– Violinist and prisoner Jean Lanier La Boulaine

Olivier Messiaen was 31 when he was taken prisoner by advancing German troops near Verdun. It was the spring of 1940. He had been drafted when the war started just nine months previously. Pale, bespectacled and rather bookish in mien, he was made a low-ranking medical orderly, assigned unfit for active combat by reason of poor eyesight. Tramping through the forests of northern France, he was captured with three comrades and taken to a makeshift open-air camp near Nancy. By an extraordinary twist of fate, two of his fellow captives, Henri Akoka and Éienne Pasquier, were fellow musicians: a clarinet player and a cellist, respectively, who had spent the previous months playing in a military band at the Vauban citadel, near Verdun.

At Vauban, Pasquier and Messiaen had already become fast friends. They would conspire to share the late-night watch in order to catch the dawn chorus together, marvelling at the deafening sound. 'Listen to them!' the young composer would say, 'they're giving each other assignments. They'll reunite tonight, at which time they'll recount what they saw during the day.' No-one, perhaps, was listening more closely than Messiaen himself. By the time they reached the camp at Nancy, he had written a piece for solo clarinet, an 'abyss of birds'. With Pasquier acting as 'music stand', Akoka stumbled through a first rendition, convinced he would never get his head around the complexities of the short movement. 'Yes, yes,' assured Messiaen. 'You will, you'll see.'

Within six months and under just about the worst conditions imaginable, that brief solo, composed on the eve of their capture and first practiced in an improvised outdoor internment camp in the north-east of France, would find its place as the third movement in an eight-part work with one of the most extraordinary gestations in all 20th-century music.

By the time of his enlistment, Messiaen already had quite a storied career. He had entered the Conservatoire at 11, published his first compositions before he'd even graduated. At 22, he became the youngest church organist in France. With André Jolivet, Daniel Lesur and Yves Baudrier, he launched La Jeune France in 1936, an artist group promising 'a living music, having the impetus of sincerity, generosity and artistic conscientiousness', explicitly inimical to the perceived frivolousness of Jean Cocteau and Les Six.

He arrived, then, at the prisoner of war camp already with some renown – and to a certain extent that renown was recognised by at least some of his German captors. He was allowed to keep the precious haversack of scores by Bach, Berg and Debussy that he clutched to his chest as he was stripped naked upon his internment. He was even given paper to write on, pencils to write with. Most importantly of all, he was given time to compose – though the studio he was appointed to work in was no more than a privy.

The *Quartet for the End of Time* received its première on the 15 January 1941, in a large shed-like building at Stalag VIII-A prisoner-of-war camp near Görlitz in Lower Silesia. The hundreds-strong audience consisted of guards and Messiaen's fellow prisoners, shivering against the cold, several of them lying wounded on stretchers. A half-broken upright piano was found for Messiaen himself, Akoka played his clarinet, Pasquier was given an old cello with just three strings, and a fourth man, another prisoner named Jean le Boulaire played the violin. In a short speech before the performance, Messiaen explained to his ragtag audience that the work 'was written for the end of time, not as a play on words about the time of captivity, but for the ending of concepts of past and future: that is, for the beginning of eternity, and that in this I relied on the magnificent text of the Revelation.' The composer would subsequently recall the complete silence that reigned throughout. 'The only memory of the war I wish to keep,' le Boulaire would later say, 'is the memory of the *Quartet for the End of Time*.'

Though 15 years his senior, Messiaen would become a great admirer of **György Ligeti**. Writing for the *Guardian* in 2007, George Benjamin recalled his former teacher's great admiration for the younger composer. '"He's the best!" Messiaen would say, while enthusiastically encouraging his students to study Ligeti's scores.' Though markedly different in style and temperament, they shared certain fascinations and obsessions: with rainbows and with the Last Judgement. They were also both synaesthetic. 'When I hear music,' Ligeti once said, 'I also see colours, figures.' Messiaen, likewise, claimed to hear chords and timbres in the play of light through a church stained glass window.

The *3 Pieces for 2 Pianos* were originally written for Aloys and Alfons Kontarsky, German-born brothers who throughout their career would première significant works by Stockhausen, Berio, Kagel and many others. Composed in the brief window between the completion of Ligeti's opera *La grand macabre* and its first performance in Stockholm in 1978, the work finds the composer at his most rambunctious. Written in part in response to his recent discovery of American minimalist composers, like Terry Riley and Steve Reich (whose names appear in the full title of the second piece), the sparse, jagged shards of the opening part also recall the violent reductionism of his *Musica Ricercata*, first written in Budapest in the early 50s but unperformed until the end of the 60s. But this is also Ligeti at his most lyrical. Reich and Riley share the subtitle with another name and it is the *Presto* from Chopin's florid B flat minor Sonata that hovers here in the background, as Ligeti himself put it, 'like a phantom'.

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