

**80th Birthday
Season 2025/26**

**Battle of the Sexes:
Marin Alsop conducts Balls
Thursday 20 November 2025
Royal Festival Hall**

Phil har mo nia



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In a nutshell...

This evening's performance weaves together the stories and talents of people who have played a part in the struggle for gender equity in different fields: tennis legend Billie Jean King and her circle, trailblazing conductor Marin Alsop, Hollywood composer Laura Karpman, poet and critic Edith Sitwell. Even American suffrage campaigner Susan B. Anthony makes a cameo appearance. All the soloists you'll see on stage are also actively engaged in promoting gender equity in the music industry.

Ever since its first performance a century ago, Walton and Sitwell's *Façade* has been met with as much bewilderment as admiration. Don't worry if you don't 'get it', or if the sheer oddness of it gives you the giggles – Sitwell herself said 'the audience is meant to laugh.'

The audience for the 'Battle of the Sexes' remains the largest for any tennis match in the US. As well as being made into an opera, the match has inspired two films, the most recent starring Emma Stone and Steve Carrell. But the battle for equal pay and equal opportunity continues, in the worlds of sport, entertainment and beyond.

Welcome to this evening's performance

Philharmonia **80**

Battle of the Sexes: Marin Alsop conducts Balls

Thursday 20 November 2025, 7.30pm
Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Marin Alsop – conductor
Emma Doherty – director (Balls)

WALTON *Façade*
(38 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

KARPMAN *Balls* (World premiere of version with full orchestra)
(45 mins)

This performance finishes at approximately 9.30pm

Philharmonia debates... Music & Gender

6pm, Level 5 Function Room

How far has orchestral music come in the journey towards gender equity? What can the orchestral world learn from sport about fostering equality while avoiding tokenism? Join experts including composer Laura Karpman for the third of a series of debates running through our 80th birthday season.

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Philharmonia Social

Philharmonia Social is our new initiative to help everyone feel welcome at our concerts.

Our staff, players and volunteers will be in the bar on Level 4 Green Side before and after the concert and in the interval.

6.30pm: a short, informal introduction to the orchestra and this evening's performance

6.45pm, interval and 9.30pm: your chance to join the conversation, ask questions and connect with your fellow audience members

William Walton (1902 - 1983)

Libretto by Edith Sitwell (1887 - 1964)

Façade

(1922 - 1929, revised 1942, 1951, 1977)

(38 mins)

Fanfare

Hornpipe

En Famille

Mariner Man

Long Steel Grass

Through Gilded Trellises

Tango-Pasodoble

Lullaby for Jumbo

Tarantella

Daphne

By the Lake

Country Dance

Aubade

Something Lies beyond the Scene

Valse

Jodelling Song

Scotch Rhapsody

Fox-Trot: 'Old Sir Faulk'

Sir Beelzebub



Portrait of Edith Sitwell by Roger Fry, 1918

William Walton is perhaps best known for composing the march *Crown Imperial*, a rousing, regal and entirely respectable piece for orchestra, commissioned for the coronation of George VI in 1937. So how on earth did the same William Walton compose *Façade*, an avant-garde musical experiment whose first public performance in 1922 prompted the withering response from one critic: 'Drivel they paid to hear'?

Despite being born into a musical family, and being admitted to Oxford University as an undergraduate at the tender age of 16, William Walton was sent down for failing his algebra and Greek examinations. Luckily for the nineteen-year-old dropout, he had become friends with the aristocrat, bohemian, and writer Sacheverell Sitwell, brother of Edith and Osbert Sitwell, who

invited him to lodge in the attic of their Chelsea home.

For Walton, the years he spent at 2 Carlyle Square proved to be formative for his development as an artist, and his entry into high society. *Façade* was the most famous artistic collaboration to emerge from this period, and the work received its private premiere in typically eccentric fashion: in the L-shaped drawing room of the Sitwell home in January 1922, with Edith reciting her text from behind a curtain through a Sengerphone (described in one account as 'a megaphone devised for operatic use').

The first public performance followed in 1923, bringing Walton a degree of notoriety, although it hardly alienated him from the British cultural establishment, as the *Crown Imperial* march and other prominent commissions would demonstrate. He continued to work on *Façade* throughout his life, publishing a complete version of the work in 1951, and an expanded edition, including so-called 'leftovers', in 1977.

The words – which are declaimed rhythmically, over a lively, multi-textured and wildly inventive chamber accompaniment – were performed by Edith Sitwell herself several times during her lifetime, and legend has it that the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was inspired by Edith's aristocratic drawl and clipped tones in a 1954 recording. It has been suggested

that some of the verses refer to sights and impressions from Edith's own childhood in the seaside town of Scarborough.

The work is a riotous gallimaufry of musical styles, combining imperial nostalgia with 1920s avant-garde experimentalism and music hall tunes (listen out for 'Oh, I do like to be beside the seaside' in Tango-Pasodoble).

Whatever the result, the intention, Sitwell said, was 'a work for the most part of gaiety... the audience is meant to laugh.' So sit back and enjoy the march of Walton and Sitwell's creation, in all its madcap mischief.

Interval (20 mins)

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Laura Karpman (b. 1959)

Libretto by Gail Collins (b. 1945)

Balls

(2017, arranged for full orchestra 2025)
(45 mins)

In her autobiography, *All In*, Billie Jean King describes sitting in class, gazing at the world map and dreaming of the places she would go. 'England, Europe, Asia, South America, Africa! Even then, I felt that borders had no hold on me... As much as I loved my family and hometown, I always knew that my life would somehow take me beyond their embrace.' Yet her path was not simple. She encountered sexism as a young tennis player at school (one tournament prize consisted of 'a racket and... a baby doll. Seriously?') and throughout her career. Yet King's tenacious character, relentless ambition and astonishing skill would propel her on a remarkable journey to sporting greatness and – to her own surprise – social impact: 'Even if you're not a born activist,' writes King, 'life can damn sure make you one.'

Billie Jean King is a woman of many 'firsts'. Born Bille Jean Moffitt to a firefighter father and homemaker mother in Long Beach California in 1943, she became the first female player in tennis history to earn over \$100,000 in a year. She was the founder of the Women's Tennis Association. She was also involved in the

creation of the first women's circuit. And on September 20, 1973 – by which time, King was at the peak of her powers, having held the world number 1 title for a total of 5 years since 1966 – she embarked on another 'first': a televised tennis match against self-proclaimed chauvinist (and former men's number 1) Bobby Riggs. Dubbed the 'Battle of the Sexes', the event became a seminal moment in sporting and cultural history. A crowd of 30,472, then a record for tennis, came to the Houston Astrodome to watch the match, and an estimated 90 million more watched the event worldwide on TV, a record in televised sporting history.

Speaking in 2017, composer Laura Karpman recalled: 'The event itself was mythic. It was grand, it was important, it was historic. And people had *fun*.' That sense of fun is reflected in what Karpman calls the 'triple entendre' of the opera's title, which references 1) tennis, 2) sexual politics, and 3) the chutzpah of Billie Jean King (and, to a certain extent, the misplaced self-confidence, or 'gall' as Karpman puts it, of Bobby Riggs). The music is playful, too: from the finger-snapping, wisecracking chorus, to the inclusion of 1970s jingles and cigarette advertisements, to a cameo from the 19th-century suffragette and women's rights activist, Susan B. Anthony (1820 - 1906). The orchestra joins in the genre-hopping fun, too, with hints of Bossa Nova, a slice of the Grand March from Verdi's opera *Aida*, and a battery of percussion,



Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs in 1973, via Wikimedia Commons

reinforced with foot-stomps from the ensemble.

The tennis match itself was pure theatre: wearing a lurid yellow and red jacket emblazoned with the words 'Sugar Daddy' (courtesy of his lollipop-manufacturing sponsors), Bobby Riggs arrived on the court on a rickshaw pulled by female models. Not to be outdone, Billie Jean King arrived on a lavishly feathered and jewel-encrusted litter carried by male athletes. Karpman reflects: 'I think sport is opera, for a lot of people. Sport... is a way for an entire group of people to feel something collectively... For them to have heroes and heroines, and to connect with each other.'

The vocal writing revels in the pantomime aspect of Riggs, with falsetto outbursts and snarling, misogynistic one-liners

– although he softens by the end. By contrast, Billie Jean King's vocal lines are soaring, upward-leaping, evoking the ambition that she describes in her book as 'smouldering' within her from an early age. Marilyn Barnett, King's secretary and secret lover also appears with a seductive serenade, as (briefly) does King's doting, tolerant husband. Match-day commentary adds to the texture of voices, but it is the chorus that propels the action forwards, embodying the courtside spectators, gasping, heckling and cheering on the players as the tension ratchets (or rather, rackets) up.

Towards the end of the opera, there is a moment when the chorus appears to step out of time. BJK is still playing, closing in on victory, but the voices around her conjure the names of other great icons of women's rights in the 20th and 21st centuries. The young, daydreaming Billie Jean King may have foreseen her greatness on the tennis court. Yet she could never have anticipated her most surprising transformations: into an icon of equal rights – and through Karpman's music, into a living, breathing, singing opera heroine.

Programme notes by Sophie Rashbrook

Balls: Music by Laura Karpman, based on an idea by Laura Karpman and Gail Collins, libretto by Gail Collins, Nora Kroll-Rosenbaum and Shannon Hawles.

Balls: the real-life characters

Billie Jean King

One of the greatest tennis players of all time, Billie Jean King won many Grand Slam titles in singles and doubles between 1965 and 1980. She fought for equal prize money for women players, and founded the Women's Tennis Association and the Women's Sports Foundation. She also played a key role in the founding of the first professional women's tennis tour, the Virginia Slims.

She has worked all her life for women's and LGBTQ+ rights, received many honours including a Presidential Medal of Freedom, and has several sports venues and awards named after her.

Bobby Riggs

Bobby Riggs was one of the top men's tennis players of the 1930s and 40s. He was ranked World No. 1 in 1939, when he won the French and US Opens and the men's singles and men's and mixed doubles at Wimbledon. A famous hustler and gambler, he made a small fortune betting on himself to win all three Wimbledon titles.

In 1973, aged 55, Riggs came out of retirement with a claim that no woman could beat him. King at first refused to play him, but changed her mind after he beat Margaret Court in less than an hour in the 'Mothers' Day Massacre'.

In later life Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs became friends, and they stayed in touch until his death in 1995.

Howard Cosell

Howard Cosell was a leading American sports broadcaster from the 1950s to the 1980s. "I've been called arrogant, pompous, obnoxious, vain, cruel, verbose, a showoff," said Cosell, "and, of course, I am."

Marilyn Barnett

In the 1970s, Marilyn Barnett was Billie Jean King's personal assistant, secretary and manager. At the time of the 'Battle of the Sexes' match, the two were lovers.

Larry King

Larry King and Billie Jean met at university, and were married from 1965 to 1987. He was a staunch supporter of her tennis career, and it was his idea to form a professional women's tour. The two remain close friends.

Rosie Casals

Billie Jean King and Rosie Casals won many Grand Slam doubles titles together, and Casals was instrumental in the fight for equal prize money for women players and the formation of the Virginia Slims tour.

Susan B. Anthony

Born in 1820, Susan B. Anthony was a leading figure in the women's suffrage movement in the US. She was arrested for attempting to vote in 1872. The 19th amendment allowing women to vote was eventually ratified in 1920, 14 years after her death.



1. Billie Jean King carried onto court ahead of the match © Associated Press
2. Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs publicising the match © Everett / Shutterstock
3. Howard Cosell © ABC Television
4. Marilyn Barnett © Bettman / Getty Images
5. Larry King and Billie Jean King © Richard Meek / The LIFE Picture Collection / Shutterstock
6. Rosie Casals © ANL / Shutterstock
7. Susan B. Anthony © Everett Collection

Marin Alsop – Principal Guest Conductor



Marin Alsop © Chris Christodoulou

Marin Alsop was chosen by the players of the Philharmonia as Principal Guest Conductor in 2023, in recognition of her exceptional musicianship, her commitment to diversity and education, and the breadth of her repertoire. She has since conducted the Philharmonia in collaborations featuring the Marcus Roberts Trio, world champion tango dancers, and an animated film by artist William Kentridge, as well as music by Bernstein and Gustav and Alma Mahler.

Alsop also holds Chief Conductor positions in Vienna, Poland, Philadelphia and Ravinia, and is Music Director Laureate at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. She made history in 2013 as the first woman to conduct the Last Night of the Proms.

In 2002 she founded the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship to nurture female conductors' careers. The only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship, she has also been honoured with the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award. She is the winner of the 2025 Golden Baton Award from the League of American Orchestras.

Laura Karpman – composer



Laura Karpman © George Evan

Laura Karpman is an Oscar®- and Grammy®-nominated, five-time Emmy®-winning composer who creates powerful, imaginative scores. Her work spans film, television, theatre, interactive media and live performance, reflecting an audaciously creative spirit. Her latest projects include *Down Cemetery Road*, *American Fiction*, *Duster*, *Captain America: Brave New World* and *All American*, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

After co-founding the Alliance for Women Film Composers, Karpman went on to become the first female governor of the music branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, where she served as a fierce champion for diversity, equity and inclusion in Hollywood.

Karpman is acclaimed for her Grammy® Award-winning album *Ask Your Mama*, a multimedia opera inspired by Langston Hughes' iconic poems. Other notable concert works include *Brass Ceiling*, commissioned and recorded by the US Army Band.

Emma Doherty – director



Emma Doherty © Dale Huntley

Emma Doherty is a dynamic stage director and musician whose work spans professional, educational, and community settings, from national opera houses to prisons, homelessness hostels, and schools. Passionate about the transformative power of creativity, she champions its role in empowerment, wellbeing, and fostering community cohesion.

Emma studied Music at the University of Manchester, where she regularly performed as a soprano. She is the co-founder and former Artistic Director of The Opera Shack, a collective dedicated to bringing opera into unexpected and unconventional spaces.

As a Create and Sing Artist with the Royal Opera House, Emma specialises in youth engagement, frequently directing for both the Royal Opera House and Opera North Youth Company. Recent directing credits include *Opera Highlights* and *The Giant's Harp* for Scottish Opera. In the new year, she will assist Natalie Abrahami on a new production of *The Turn of the Screw* at the Royal Opera House.

Emma Kennedy – actor



Emma Kennedy © Georgie Gibbon

Emma Kennedy is an award winning writer and performer.

She has written 14 books, two of which were Sunday Times Bestsellers.

She was the writer and creator of BBC1 comedy series *The Kennedys*, she has written for lots of children's programmes including *The Adventures of Paddington*, *Dangermouse*, *Lloyd of the Flies*, *Waffle the Wonderdog* and *Lovely Little Farm*.

She is also a Script Editor.

She was the *Celebrity Masterchef* Champion in 2012 and holds a Guinness World Record for organising the world's largest kazoo orchestra!

Emma presents the *Why?* podcast – for curious minds.

She is currently working on her 15th book, *Dead to Begin With*, and is brilliant at conkers.

Nikola Printz – mezzo-soprano



Nikola Printz © Destiny Grace

Nikola Printz is a versatile artist making waves in opera, concert and recital.

In the 2025–26 season Printz performs in Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été*, Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, Wagner's *Parsifal*, Glass's *Les Enfants terribles* and in the title role of Handel's *Alcina*.

At San Francisco Opera – which Printz considers their 'home company' – performance highlights include the title role in *Carmen Encounter*, and featured roles in Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*, Gabriela Lena Frank's *El Último Sueño de Frida y Diego*, and Mason Bates's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*.

Nikola Printz is an accomplished aerialist, choreographing and performing acrobatic opera productions in grand concert halls and smoky cabaret clubs. Beyond their operatic and acrobatic work, they enjoy cycling, film photography, activism, and exploring the subversion of gender norms through art and performance. They are an advocate for accessibility in the arts and are currently learning ASL.

Nicky Spence – tenor



Nicky Spence © Ki Price

Nicky Spence's skills as a singing actor and the rare honesty of his musicianship have earned him a place at the top of his profession. BBC Music Magazine named him 'Personality of the Year' in 2022, he was made an OBE in the 2023 King's Birthday Honours, and in 2024 was the winner of the RPS Singer Award.

Nicky's roles in the 2025/26 season include debuts at Staatsoper Hamburg and Opera Philadelphia. He returns to Opéra National de Paris as Arjuna in *Satyagraha*. In concert, he performs in *Wozzeck*, *The Dream of Gerontius* and *Die Walküre*.

In previous seasons he has performed at the Royal Ballet and Opera, Glyndebourne Festival, as Peter Grimes at Welsh National Opera, and as Sergei in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* at the BBC Proms.

Noted for his interpretation of Janáček's music, Nicky has appeared worldwide in his operas, being awarded the Leoš Janáček Memorial Medal at the Janáček Brno Festival in 2024.

Lotte Betts-Dean – mezzo-soprano



Lotte Betts-Dean © Matthew Johnson

The 2025/26 season sees the launch of her album *everything you've ever lived*, as well as several important international debuts. She is admired for her curatorial skills, having worked on a series of programmes including everything from Renaissance lute song and German lied to 20th-century art song, cabaret and experimental art rock, and her acclaimed solo voice and electronics show *Voice Electric*, which debuted at the Aldeburgh Festival in 2022.

Lotte Betts-Dean's expansive repertoire encompasses art song, chamber music, early music, opera, oratorio and non-classical collaborations. She is a leading interpreter of new music, having given the world premieres of over 30 works.

She is a regular collaborator with various chamber groups in the UK and Australia, and her non-classical collaborations include recording with Luke Abbott/Jack Wyllie (2023) and tours with DJ Pete Tong (2018) and electronic duo The Presets (2014).

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© Imogen Gower

Get to know Laura Karpman



Laura Karpman © Amanda Witt

What inspired you to tell the story of a tennis match through opera?

The 'Battle of the Sexes' was always an opera. The almost melodramatic action, the stakes, the importance of the match not only for each individual person but also for society at large...

Also, as a staged dramatic work, *Balls* can take a moment to look at the interior thoughts of every person involved in the match. I love that about theatre – when you're in the middle of something, you can pause and look at what's happening inside of somebody's body, inside of their mind, inside of their thoughts.

How has your advocacy for gender equality shaped your creative process?

I have always felt that where I can make the most difference is in my own field. Billie Jean King took what was a very small world of women's tennis and used it as a platform to make massive economic and social change not only to the sport of tennis but in women's sports, and then,

in the women's movement at large. She has always been my role model: start small and take it as far as you can. The change will come in the larger spaces once you can change your own backyard.

This evening's programme opens with Walton's *Façade* – are there connections between his approach to composition and yours?

Yes, I think Walton's *Façade* is a perfect companion. I love that he was having fun. I love the idea that he was combining words and music without thinking formally about what those two meant together and how they would function together. Very specifically, the narrator role in *Façade* is very much like the Howard Cosell role in *Balls*, so Marin [Alsop] was a genius in pairing these two works.

You've written for film, television and games – what draws you to opera?

I don't see a difference between my writing for film and television and opera and games. It's all about understanding how music can function within drama, how it can bring out an actor's performance or amp up a player's experience in a game. With an opera, it's exactly the same – how are you going to tell a story, and do it through music but still keep story as the primary communication force?

About the Philharmonia

Founded in 1945, the Philharmonia Orchestra celebrates its 80th birthday in the 2025/26 season.

Conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as Principal Conductor in 2021, and Marin Alsop joined him as Principal Guest Conductor in 2023.

They follow in illustrious footsteps: Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Riccardo Muti, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Christoph von Dohnányi, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Esa-Pekka Salonen are some of the key conductors who have shaped the Philharmonia's reputation as one of the world's great orchestras.

The Philharmonia has premiered music by composers including Richard Strauss, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and Errollyn Wallen and performs with many of the world's most admired soloists. Víkingur Ólafsson is this season's Featured Artist, and Gabriela Ortiz is Featured Composer.

Resident at the Southbank Centre since 1995, the Philharmonia also holds residencies in Basingstoke, Bedford, Canterbury and Leicester, and tours extensively worldwide. Last month the Orchestra undertook a major US tour culminating in two concerts at Carnegie Hall.

The Philharmonia's 80-year recording history includes many benchmark LPs and more than 150 film and videogame soundtracks. The Orchestra's recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 is travelling through interstellar space on board the Voyager spacecraft, and immersive installations and virtual reality experiences introduce orchestral music to new audiences.

The Philharmonia is committed to nurturing and developing the next generation of instrumentalists and composers, with a focus on increasing diversity within the classical music industry.



Santtu-Matias Rouvali and the Philharmonia © Mark Allan

FAÇADE	Melanie Marshall Lufuno Nduo Juliet Schiemann
Narrators Nikola Printz Nicky Spence Lotte Betts-Dean	Tenors: Peter Harris* Daniel Lewis* Robin Bailey Andrew Friedhoff Philip Sheffield
BALLS	Basses: Benjamin Bevan* Gavin Cranmer-Moralee* David Porter-Thomas James Quilligan Lawrence White
Billie Jean King Nikola Printz	*semi-chorus
Bobby Riggs Nicky Spence	Director Emma Doherty
Howard Cosell Emma Kennedy	Assistant Conductor Ben Parry
Marilyn Barnett Lotte Betts Dean	Costume Deisgner Ruth Paton
Susan B. Anthony / ensemble Eve Pearson	Costume Assistant Robin Sian Farr
Larry King / ensemble Oliver Barker	Wardrobe Assistants from the University for Creative Arts Casper Farago Melina Pico Louie Buckmaster
Rosie Casals / ensemble Mia Serracino-Inglott	Prop Assistants from the University for Creative Arts Robin Fox Owen Willcocks
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Ensemble Ariana Ricci Lucile Guedj Tim Burton Archie Inns Gyaan Bhuyan	Stage Manager Jan Robotycki
Chorus – London Voices Sopranos: Elizabeth Armitage* Ann De Renais* Caroline Fitzgerald Isabelle Haile Rachel Oyawale Altos: Rebekah Jones* Amy Lyddon*	Deputy Stage Manager Zach Griffin

Producer Joanna Phillips	<i>Thank you to all our volunteers in the stands</i>
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TRUMPETS Matthew Williams Robin Totterdell	TROMBONE Roger Cutts
PICCOLO Robert Looman †	

OBOES Timothy Rundle <i>The Principal Oboe Chair is endowed in memory of Stephen Rundle</i> Henrietta Cooke <i>The No. 2 Oboe Chair is endowed by Michael Stott</i>	BASS TROMBONE James Buckle † <i>The Principal Bass Trombone Chair is endowed by Christopher Elliott MBE</i>
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TIMPANI Dominic Hackett	† Professor at the Royal Academy of Music # Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama § Professor at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance ** Professor at Codarts, Rotterdam
PERCUSSION Paul Stoneman † <i>The Principal Percussion Chair is endowed by Patricia Kalmans and Michael Ozer</i> Tom Edwards Karen Hutt	<i>This list was correct at the time of going to print but is subject to alteration. For all Philharmonia members visit philharmonia.co.uk/orchestra/players.</i>
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