80th Birthday Season 2025/26

Santtu and Fazil Say Sunday 30 November 2025 Royal Festival Hall



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## In a nutshell...

Our Principal Conductor Santtu loves being outdoors in nature. In between performances around the world, he spends as much time as he can in the forest or fishing on the lake near his home in Finland. So he's just the person to conduct the UK premiere of Fazil Say's *Mother Earth*, with its evocations of forest, sea and river.

The first piece in this afternoon's concert is a suite created from a ballet score. Here's the story: the gypsy Candela wants to remarry after the murder of her unfaithful husband, but she's still

haunted by his ghost, and has to dance with him every night. A ritual dance fails to solve her spooky problem, so she has to trick him into leaving with the soul of his erstwhile lover. Like many ballets, the plot may be far-fetched, but it's a great excuse for some fantastic music.

Dvořák visited London at least eight times, and his music was a huge success here. In a Sunday Times interview in 1885, he said: "And let me not end without telling you how deeply I appreciate the welcome which the English people have given to me and my works."

## Welcome to this afternoon's concert



### Santtu and Fazil Say

Sunday 30 November 2025, 3pm Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall

Santtu-Matias Rouvali – conductor Fazıl Say – piano

DE FALLA El Amor Brujo Suite (orchestral version) (23 mins) SAY Piano Concerto 'Mother Earth' (UK premiere) (30 mins)

Interval (20 mins)

**DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 8** (36 mins)

This performance finishes at approximately 5.15pm

## You're invited to our 80th birthday party!

5.20pm, The Clore Ballroom, Level 2

Join us after the concert to celebrate our 80th birthday. Philharmonia players and fellows will lead us in music and dance, there will be quizzes and competitions, and of course, a birthday cake!

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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 near the singing lift on Level 2 Blue Side before the concert, and in the interval.

2pm: a short, informal introduction to the orchestra and this afternoon's performance

2.15pm and interval: your chance to join the conversation, ask questions and connect with your fellow audience members

0800 652 6717

## **Programme notes**



## Manuel de Falla (1876 - 1946)

El amor brujo

(Suite arranged 1925) (23 mins)

I Introduction and scene

XII Finale: the bells of dawn

Ib In the gypsies' cave: night-time
II Song of a broken heart
III The apparition
IV Dance of terror
V The magic circle: the fisherman's story
VI Midnight: the spells
VII Ritual fire dance: to drive away evil spirits
VIII Scene
IX Song of the will-o'-the-wisp
X Pantomime
XI Dance of the game of love

Born in Cádiz in Spain, Manuel de Falla made a living as a musician in Madrid before winning a competition for a new Spanish opera in 1905; his winning entry was *La vida breve* (Life is short), inspired by gypsy music. Falla made his way to Paris, where he met a who's-who of artists including Ravel, Stravinsky, Schmitt, Debussy, Diaghilev, Albéniz and Dukas, absorbing ideas like a sponge. In 1911–12 he travelled to Milan, Brussels and London, then in 1913 to Nice, before the outbreak of the First World War forced him to return to Spain.

During 1914 and 1915, Falla travelled across Spain with the theatrical impresario Gregorio Martínez Sierra and Gregorio's



wife, María Lejárraga – who, it later transpired, was the real brains of the pair, writing almost all of the plays credited to Gregorio. It was almost certainly María who wrote the scenarios for Falla's next two stage works, the gitanería ('gypsy revel') *El amor brujo* (Love the magician) and the pantomime *El corregidor y la molinera* (The magistrate and the miller).

Back in Madrid, Falla set to work writing *El amor brujo*, in which – as with *La vida breve* – he sought to unite art music with the spirit of traditional gypsy music. His objective was to celebrate the full beauty of gypsy folk music through the lens of the classical tradition, without losing the raw essence of the original. One of the work's stars was the singer and dancer Pastora Imperio, a celebrated artist of gypsy origin. Though she was not classically trained, she had an immediate affinity with Falla's output,

mastering it with what he called 'the ease of a consummate solfègist' (one who can read music).

The ballet tells the story of the widow Candela, who longs to marry her childhood sweetheart Carmelo. Candela is haunted (literally) by her unfaithful husband. She must dance with his ghost every night, until she can trick him into leaving with his erstwhile lover Lucia's soul instead of hers, and be with her true (and, crucially, very much alive) love at last. In the orchestral suite we hear today, the role of the singing and dancing gypsy Candela is played by the cor anglais.

Despite the ambition of his vision, Falla's El amor brujo did not quite ascend to the dizzy heights of *La vida breve* when it came to its reception in Madrid. His attempts to draw upon authentic Spanish musical traditions were regarded by some critics as being swamped by 'foreign influences' and his 'obsession with the modern French school', his use of impressionistic orchestral colour picked up in Paris and elsewhere apparently too much for their sensibilities. Others praised his orchestral palette and deft combination of popular elements into a classical framework. It is difficult not to side with these more open-minded listeners when it comes to the orchestral suite from the ballet, with its luscious 'Pantomime' complete with singing cello solo, dazzling 'Dance of terror', and the 'Ritual fire dance' that has become Falla's best-known work.

## **Fazil Say (b. 1970)**

Piano Concerto 'Mother Earth' (2025) (30 mins)

I Prelude
II Earth
III Forest
IV Interlude
V Sea
VI River
VII Postlude

Born in Ankara, Fazil Say showed an early aptitude for both piano and composition – passions that he continues to combine to this day. In his own music, Say frequently draws upon his Turkish roots and his experiences of studying in Germany – allusions to the great Austro-German composers abound – alongside a deep love of jazz and improvisation.

Say is also acutely aware of political and environmental concerns, from the lamentation of his rhapsodic piano composition, *Black Earth* (2005) – partly inspired by Turkish folklore – to addressing terrorist attacks and their impact in his cello concerto *Never Give Up* (2007). Reflecting a similar concern for our world, *Mother Earth* is a seven-movement piano concerto conceived, in the composer's words, as 'a dramatic wake-up call in the fight to avoid a climate crisis'.

The work begins with a 'Prelude' in which the piano articulates the essence of this message with an arresting musical call





to action: a main theme that threads its way through the whole concerto. Several movements represent nature in all its powerful variety. The second movement, 'Earth', evokes the destructive force of earthquakes and landslides - a planet in pain. Movement three, 'Forest', contrasts the sounds of the forest and animal calls with the devastation of forest fires. and a similar juxtaposition is found in movements five and six, 'Sea' and 'River' respectively, which incorporate the life-giving properties of water with the dangers of drought and flood. Framing these powerful nature pictures, along with the 'Prelude', are an 'Interlude' (movement four) and 'Postlude' (movement seven), in which Say uses pertinent and poignant quotations from *Black Earth*.

Programme notes © Joanna Wyld, 2025

Interval (20 mins)

## Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

**Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88** (1889) (36 mins)

I Allegro con brio II Adagio III Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace IV Allegro ma non troppo

The summer of 1889 was an especially happy one for Antonín Dvořák. He wrote to his friend Alois Göbl that his head was full of musical ideas - 'if only one could write them down straight away!' Many were for his Eighth Symphony, much of which he composed during August and September at his rural retreat in Vysoká u Příbramě. Bohemia. The composer's biographer Otakar Šourek suggested that the landscape there had a considerable effect on his work: 'in communion with Nature, in the harmony of its voices and the pulsating rhythms of its life, in the beauty of its changing moods and aspects, his thoughts came more freely.'

Dvořák wrote the symphony to celebrate his admission into the Prague Academy, dedicating it 'to the Bohemian academy of Emperor Franz Joseph ... in thanks for my election'. He conducted both the acclaimed Prague premiere on 2 February 1890 and several further performances, including one in Cambridge in 1891, on the eve of his receiving an honorary doctorate.

The Eighth Symphony is sometimes called Dvořák's 'English' symphony, partly because of its popularity here, and partly because – due to a dispute between the composer and his publisher Simrock – it was initially published by Novello in London. However, its music is wholly Czech in flavour. Although it is one of the composer's sunnier orchestral works, especially compared to the turbulent Seventh Symphony, it still contains plenty of drama.

The opening Allegro con brio begins with a dignified, broad-breathed theme for cellos and wind instruments. This returns twice, the second time in a dramatic version for brass. The movement's other principal theme is a birdcall-like melody introduced in the flute. There is also a wealth of subsidiary musical ideas which. in the words of Dvořák's compatriot Leoš Janáček, keep the listener in a state of 'constant but pleasurable excitement'. The ensuing Adagio begins quietly, with a pensive string melody, a dialogue between chattering flute and languid clarinets, and a little folk dance featuring a violin solo. However, the mood becomes increasingly intense, culminating in a thrilling climactic passage for full orchestra. Only in the final bars does calm return.

Dvořák followed his friend Brahms (in his Second and Third Symphonies) by making the third movement a reflective intermezzo rather than an ebullient scherzo. Its outer sections are a wistful minor-key waltz. The optimistic major-key trio and the sprightly

polka-like coda recycle a melody from the composer's comic opera *The Stubborn Lovers*. A trumpet fanfare that the Czech conductor Rafael Kubelík termed a 'call to the dance' opens the finale. This is an inventive set of variations on a graceful theme introduced – like the symphony's very first theme – in the cellos. Highlights include a noisy passage resembling a village folk band, an elegant flute solo and an energetic Slavic march. The later variations become increasingly meditative and soulful, but the 'village folk band' music eventually returns to sweep the symphony to an exhilarating conclusion.

Programme note © Kate Hopkins, 2023

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## **Get to know Fazil Say**



#### What inspired *Mother Earth*?

*Mother Earth* is a piano concerto written around the themes of ecology and the environmental challenges our planet faces today, particularly climate change. It portrays both the beauty of our world and the damage we cause with our own hands. I wanted to create a piece that raises awareness of this great danger.

#### How has improvisation shaped your identity as both a pianist and composer?

My first piano teacher was Mithat Fenmen, when I was only five years old. Before each lesson, he had a very interesting method: he would ask me to improvise freely, as long as I wanted. He told me to express through music whatever I had seen that day, the cars on the street, children playing at school, football, traffic jams, whatever came to mind. I would start to play and translate it all into sound. This practice greatly developed my

improvisational ability. Improvisation is the twin sibling, indeed, the very mother of composition. Every composition is born from improvisation. So, I began both playing the piano and composing music simultaneously when I was five.

#### You were awarded the International Beethoven Prize for Human Rights and Freedom. How do social and political themes influence your music?

My compositions have always reflected the world we live in. Sometimes I depict a city, sometimes an event, sometimes nature or its destruction, sometimes an individual. Almost all my works have a subject, a story. Therefore, the social and political realities of the world have always found their way into my music. I received the Beethoven Prize in 2016. Beethoven, of course, stands among our greatest guiding lights in music when it comes to ideals like human rights and democracy. For that reason, receiving an award in his name was a profound honor for me.

#### What do you hope audiences take away from your music?

I believe that both the orchestra musicians, Maestro Rouvali, and the London audience will enjoy Mother Earth and appreciate what I wanted to convey through it. It's rich in rhythm, melody, and atmosphere, easy to follow, yet full of expressive depth. You'll often hear sounds that evoke nature itself, which I hope will make it a fascinating experience for everyone.

## 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 video game 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.



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## Santtu-Matias Rouvali – Principal Conductor



Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra in 2021. He is just the sixth person to hold that title since the Philharmonia was founded in 1945.

Santtu performs with us in all our residency venues – at the Southbank Centre in London, and in Bedford, Leicester, Canterbury and Basingstoke – at the BBC Proms, and Edinburgh International Festival. Annual visits to the Mikkeli Festival in Finland have fast become a highlight of our players' calendars.

In October 2025, as the Philharmonia turned 80, Santtu conducted on a major tour to the US, culminating at Carnegie Hall. He has also toured with us to Finland, Estonia, Germany, Austria, Spain and Japan.

In our 2025/26 London season, he collaborates with soloists including Víkingur Ólafsson, Hilary Hahn and Lisa Batiashvili, and conducts music from Beethoven to Bernstein. In the season finale, he recreates an epic all-Strauss

concert originally conducted in 1947 by Richard Strauss himself.

In autumn 2024 Santtu led our series Nordic Soundscapes, conducting music by Sibelius, Grieg, Nielsen, María Sigfúsdóttir, Miho Hazama and Mats Larsson Gothe. In our 2023 series Let Freedom Ring he conducted music by George Gershwin, Duke Ellington and Wynton Marsalis. Originally a percussionist, he had the audience dancing in the aisles when he played drum kit in the first ever performance of the Philharmonia Big Band.

Santtu's live recordings on the Philharmonia Records label feature Strauss tone poems, Shostakovich symphonies, Mahler's Resurrection Symphony and two Stravinsky ballets.

From 2017 – 2025 Santtu was Chief Conductor of Gothenburg Symphony, with whom he is recording an award-winning Sibelius cycle. He is Honorary Conductor of Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, and also performs regularly with many top orchestras around Europe and the US including Berliner Philharmoniker and Concertgebouw, as well as New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra and Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

When he's not conducting, Santtu loves to spend time meditating, foraging and hunting in the forest around his home in Finland, and cooking the food he brings home.

## Fazıl Say – piano





Fazıl Say has been captivating audiences and critics around the world for over 25 years – in a way that is uniquely his own. A concert with Fazıl Say is never just a performance: it speaks directly to the heart.

Say has performed with many renowned American and European orchestras and numerous leading conductors. His repertoire ranges from Bach to contemporary music, including his own compositions for piano. He has performed on all five continents. With violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, he performs in a long-standing duo, and other notable collaborators include Maxim Vengerov, the Minetti Quartett, and Marianne Crebassa.

As a composer, Say has received commissions from leading orchestras and institutions. His oeuvre encompasses six symphonies, two oratorios, several solo concertos, as well as numerous works for piano and chamber ensembles.

This season, Fazıl Say is the Artist in Residence at both the Schleswig-Holstein

Festival and the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, as both performer and composer.

As well as the Philharmonia, orchestras performing his latest piano concerto *Mother Earth* this season include the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, the Helsinki Philharmonic, the RAI Torino, and the Orchestre National de Belgique.

Upcoming premieres include a Mandolin Concerto commissioned by Avi Avital, a string quartet commissioned by the Goldmund Quartet and a concerto for ancient lyre, commissioned by the Thessaloniki State Orchestra, which will be premiered at Vienna's Musikverein.

Say has built a discography of over 50 recordings. They have earned numerous accolades, including four ECHO Klassik Awards and a Gramophone Classical Music Award. Notable recordings include his critically acclaimed complete Beethoven piano sonatas and Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, both released by Warner Classics in January 2020. His album *Oiseaux Tristes* was awarded the 2025 OPUS KLASSIK Award in the Solo Instrumental category.

In the 2025/2026 season, the release of Say's major new work *Mozart and Mevlana* marks a powerful musical dialogue between East and West, premiered alongside Mozart's Requiem and inspired by the poetry of Rumi. He also continues to release his own compositions on his own label. ACM.

## Who's who



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