



Sakari Oramo launches his 13th season as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra with his debut performance of Mahler's monumental Ninth Symphony

Critically acclaimed conductor's Barbican series includes UK premiere of Camille Pépin's *Inlandsis* and first performance of Detlev Glanert's revised Harp Concerto, together with Cecilia Damström's *ICE*, violin concertos by Adès and Magnus Lindberg, and Stravinsky's rarely heard *Persephone*

Other highlights include eight-concert East Asia tour, Pierre-Henri Dutron's revised version of Mozart's Requiem and a celebration of works by composers exiled from Europe to the United States

'Here again, Oramo's control of his players was masterly, whether the composer was spinning out forlorn singing lines, conjuring up advanced harmonies or letting loose a frightening dissonant shriek. Definitely a concert to remember.'

The Times, five-star review of Kaija Saariaho's Hush, 27 January 2025

Repertoire riches and performances distinguished by their compelling depth, intensity and eloquence stand as hallmarks of the flourishing partnership between the BBC Symphony Orchestra and its Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo. Their forthcoming series of concerts at London's Barbican Centre embraces an ample array of music, complete with powerful contemporary compositions, fine rarities and towering symphonic masterworks. The 2025-26 season also includes an extensive tour of East Asia and an outing closer to home for a date at The Anvil in Basingstoke.

On the eve of his thirteenth season as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Oramo reflects on the important part played by the Barbican series. "The audience for our Barbican concerts has grown exponentially and also diversified very much in terms of age and different social economic groups," he comments. "It's great to see that development over the last twelve years." Having launched last season with a critically acclaimed interpretation of Mahler's Sixth Symphony, Oramo and the BBC SO start their latest Barbican series on Saturday 4 October with the Austrian composer's Ninth Symphony (1908-09).

"It's my debut with the piece," notes Sakari Oramo. "It's the only Mahler symphony I have never conducted before. I wanted to pass the age of Mahler's death, and by quite a few years in fact, before agreeing to tackle it." The performance, which takes place three weeks before the conductor's 60th birthday, will draw on his wide experience as a Mahlerian and of life off the podium to explore the complex work's kaleidoscopic range of emotions and expressive contrasts.

Mozart occupies the spotlight for most of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's next Barbican Centre concert on Friday 31 October. Oramo has chosen to place the composer's dark-hued Piano Concerto No.24 in C minor K.491, with Martin Helmchen as soloist, in company with the recent version of Mozart's Requiem made by French musicologist and composer Pierre-Henri Dutron. "I've realised that the orchestra does too little Viennese Classical music, so we'll begin by turning our attention here to Mozart and this edition of his Requiem. Dutron has made improvements to the clear shortcomings of the version by Mozart's pupil Franz Xaver Sußmayr. It struck me as being close to the familiar Sußmayr, yet I believe it works much better." The concert begins with the UK premiere of Camille Pépin's *Inlandsis* (2023), given soon after the BBC SO's world premiere of her *Fireworks* at the Last Night of the BBC Proms. The French composer's 15-minute 'icy orchestral fresco', the first of her *Climatic trilogy*, evokes the Antarctic's melting polar ice cap with dramatic dashes of orchestral timbre and contrasting tonal textures.

Violinist Christian Tetzlaff joins Oramo and his orchestra for their next Barbican appearance on Friday 7 November. The programme opens with Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Symphonic Variations on an African Air*

(1906), a tightly argued set of variations on the African-American song, 'I'm troubled in mind'. "I think the work's modest title belies the sumptuousity and fantastic orchestration," observes Oramo. "This piece was recommended to me by one of my former students at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. I'm very grateful to him for introducing me to it, it's quite stunning." Tetzlaff takes the solo part in Thomas Adès's Violin Concerto *Concentric Paths* (2005), marked not least by the lyricism of its slow movement and vitality of its two outer movements. The concert's second half is devoted to Sibelius' *Four Legends from the Kalevala*, better known as the *Lemminkäinen Suite*. "We recorded the *Lemminkäinen* pieces in 2018 for Chandos," Oramo recalls. "But it's time to do them again – always better, always better!"

Orchestra and conductor travel to The Anvil, Basingstoke on Thursday 29 January 2026. Their concert begins with Cecilia Damström's *ICE*, a 10-minute work of remonstrance and recuperation, commissioned in 2021 for the Lahti Symphony Orchestra to mark Lahti's year as Green Capital of Europe. The programme also contains Brahms's Violin Concerto, with Hana Chang as soloist, and Beethoven's Symphony No.4. "It's always good to go back to The Anvil, because of its sonorous acoustics and very committed audience," says Oramo. The Damström and Beethoven works are on the bill for the following evening's Barbican concert, paired with Detlev Glanert's three-movement Harp Concerto (2016-17). The latter, evocative of the instrument's association with ancient myth and early Mediterranean civilisation, has been freshly revised by the German composer for the BBC SO's principal harp, Elizabeth Bass.

Damström's work confronts the consequences of climate change, taking its lead from the melting polar ice and the foreshortening of winters in the northern hemisphere. 'Through this piece,' notes the composer, 'I try to express how global warming as well as the collapse of ecosystems and the ever faster growing tempo of the world, is killing the beautiful snow and ice structures of millions of years, and how the heart of the earth is fighting for its existence through each beat.' *ICE* stands both for the frozen liquid itself and as an abbreviation for 'In Case of Emergency', the pressing nature of which is signalled in the score by an insistent SOS motif. The work's optimistic conclusion encompasses a retrograde statement of material heard earlier and a recapitulation of its opening, symbolic of the return of cold winters. "It's a stunning piece," comments Sakari Oramo. "I heard its premiere on television at home in Finland and was very impressed by it."

Magnus Lindberg's Violin Concerto No.1 (2006) and Stravinsky's 'mélodrame' *Persephone* (1934), a work for speaker, solo voices, chorus and orchestra to a libretto by André Gide, provide fascinating companion pieces for the BBC SO's next Barbican concert with Oramo on Friday 6 February. "I performed *Persephone* in Birmingham and remember it very fondly," says the conductor. "It's a very different kind of Stravinsky piece, lyrical and beautifully crafted. Its aura is different from almost anything else we know from him. One could say it's almost Neo-Romantic, especially in some passages that call to mind his ballet *The Fairy's Kiss*. And Magnus Lindberg's magnificent First Violin Concerto is already a classic. Even though the orchestra is small, it's notoriously difficult to balance because of how sonorously it is written. Our soloist Lisa Batiashvili has played it many times, and she and I recorded it together with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2007."

Works inspired not by a changing climate but by a change of scenery occupy the programme of Oramo's next Barbican outing on Friday 6 March. Camille Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No.5 'Egyptian', with Bertrand Chamayou as soloist, reflects its composer's love for the sights and sounds of north Africa, while the genial warmth Brahms's Symphony No.2 is rooted in his visit to the Austrian lakeside resort of Pörtlach am Würthersee in the summer of 1877. 'Chamayou never loses sight of the fact that this is a virtuoso piano concerto,' noted *Gramophone* in its rapturous review of the French pianist's recording of the 'Egyptian' Concerto.

The Welcome Arrival of Rain (2001) opens the BBC SO's Barbican concert on Friday 13 March. Judith Weir's work for large orchestra, inspired by thoughts of India's monsoon season and its life-giving annual return, takes its title from a line in the *Bhagavata Purana*, a central text within the vast corpus of Hindu scripture. It will be followed by Bartók's Piano Concerto No.3 and Finzi's *Eclogue* for piano and strings, both with Yeol Eum Son as soloist, and Stravinsky's Suite from *The Firebird* in its 1945 version. The programme supplies the repertoire for Oramo and the BBC SO's eight-concert tour of East Asia, which includes dates in Shanghai, Beijing, Busan, Seoul, Daejeon and Gyeonggi-do (Wednesday 18 – Saturday 28 March).

Sakari Oramo brings his orchestra's Barbican season to a close on Friday 22 May with Korngold's Violin Concerto (1945), featuring Maria Dueñas as soloist, and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra (1943), part of the BBC SO's thought-provoking *Making America* programme. "The Korngold and the Bartok, together with several other pieces in the BBC Symphony Orchestra's wider season, explore this strand of music by European emigres to the United States," the conductor observes. "These two works, one written during the

Second World War, the other soon after its end, represent the story of people who were uprooted from their homelands and found refuge in the USA.”

www.harrisonparrott.com/artists/sakari-oramo

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Saturday 4 October, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Mahler Symphony No.9

Sakari Oramo conductor | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Friday 31 October, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Camille Pépin *Inlandsis*

Mozart Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor

Mozart Requiem in D minor (compl. Süssmayr)

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Martin Helmchen** piano | **Francesca Chiejina** soprano | **Claire Barnett-Jones** mezzo-soprano | **Caspar Singh** tenor | **Frazer Scott** bass | **BBC Symphony Orchestra** | **BBC Symphony Chorus**

Friday 7 November, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Coleridge-Taylor *Symphonic Variations on an African Air*

Adès Violin Concerto 'Concentric Paths'

Sibelius *Lemminkäinen Suite*, Op 22

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Christian Tetzlaff** violin | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Thursday 29 January, 7:30pm
The Anvil, Basingstoke

Cecilia Damström *ICE*

Brahms Violin Concerto

Beethoven Symphony No.4

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Hana Chang** violin | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Friday 30 January, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Cecilia Damström *ICE*
Detlev Glanert Harp Concerto
Beethoven Symphony No.4

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Elizabeth Bass** harp | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Friday 6 February, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Lindberg Violin Concerto No. 1
Stravinsky *Perséphone*

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Lisa Batiashvili** violin | **Peter Tantsits** tenor | **BBC Symphony Orchestra** | **BBC Symphony Chorus**

Friday 6 March, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 5 in F major, 'Egyptian'
Brahms Symphony No. 2

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Bertrand Chamayou** piano | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Friday 13 March, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Judith Weir *The Welcome Arrival of Rain*
Bartók Piano Concerto No. 3
Gerald Finzi Eclogue for Piano and Strings Op. 10
Stravinsky The Firebird Suite (1945 version)

Sakari Oramo conductor | **Yeol Eum Son** piano | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**

Friday 22 May, 7:30pm
Barbican Hall, London

Korngold Violin Concerto in D major
Bartók Concerto for Orchestra

Sakari Oramo conductor | **María Dueñas** violin | **BBC Symphony Orchestra**