TONIGHT'S CONCERT

Steve Reich at 90

Thursday 12 November 7pm
Barbican

Steve Reich
Music for a Large Ensemble
Music for Pieces of Wood
Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards

Interval

Steve Reich
Three Movements
Music for Ensemble & Orchestra

Susanna Mälkki conductor
London Symphony Orchestra

Concert finishes at approximately 9pm

Welcome



Welcome to tonight's concert, conducted by Susanna Mälkki, celebrating the 90th birthday of American composer Steve Reich, who reached this milestone on 3 October. The programme brings together five of Reich's works, spanning his music for different combinations of instruments and orchestra.

Coming up later this month, saxophonist, rapper and composer Soweto Kinch joins the LSO for music from his trilogy of works exploring race, culture and the changing political landscape. On Wednesday 25 November, Sir Antonio Pappano conducts a Half Six Fix concert devoted to Vaughan Williams, pairing his Third and Eighth Symphonies. The LSO Percussion Ensemble then returns to the music of Steve Reich for a special chamber concert at LSO St Luke's on Saturday 5 December.

Thank you for joining us this evening and we look forward to welcoming you back soon.

Sarah Quinn
Chair of the Board, Sub-Principal Second Violin

Coming Up

Thursday 19 November 7.30pm
Barbican

Soweto Kinch: Trilogy

The saxophonist, rapper and composer Soweto Kinch revisits the trilogy of works he has created with the LSO since 2019, with music from *The Black Peril*, *White Juju* and *Soundtrack to the Apocalypse*. This event is part of EFG London Jazz Festival.

6, 7, 10 and 13 January 2027
Barbican

John Adams at 80

Four concerts celebrating the 80th birthday of one of the great Modernist composers – conducted by both Sir Simon Rattle and Adams himself – featuring *Harmonielehre*, *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, *The Chairman Dances* and more.

Welcome to tonight's group bookers
Sirikorn Green
Lucy Taylor-Warwick

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Please switch off all phones.
Photography and audio/video recording is not permitted during the performance.

Details correct at time of going to print.

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Visit **lso.co.uk/survey** or scan the QR code to complete a short survey about tonight's concert.

Steve Reich at 90

by Timmy Fisher

Music for a Large Ensemble
(17 minutes)

Steve Reich's particular skill as a composer is his ability to continuously shed new light on the same, apparently simple material. This necessarily means that his music unfurls gradually, at once reflective and revelatory, unified and fluid. The same thing could also be said of his development as a composer. Throughout his career, Reich has maintained a fundamental interest: to spotlight the very processes that give each piece its overall form – whether that be phasing, variations, augmentation etc – making them the ends as well as the means. At the same time, he has continuously found new, ever more subtle ways to express this. Tonight's concert offers a birds-eye view of that 'gradual process', with works stretching from his early years as a member of the New York counterculture to the large-scale orchestral pieces of the 1980s and beyond.

Music for a Large Ensemble was written at the peak of Reich's early maturity, not long after his breakout hit *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76). The huge success of that work had encouraged him to start publishing his music, which up until that point he had generally performed with his own ensemble, Steve Reich and Musicians. It also brought him to the attention of establishment institutions such as the Holland Festival in Amsterdam, which in 1978 commissioned him to write a piece for the following year's festival, to be performed by the Netherlands Wind Ensemble along with members of Reich's own group. In terms of forces, this would be his largest work yet (around 30 players, with several instruments mic'd up), offering him both a richer colour palette and the opportunity to explore 'process' on a grander scale.

The dual process that governs *Music for a Large Ensemble* is one of melodic expansion and reduction. Each of the work's four sections can be subdivided into a five-part arch: ABCBA. Here, short, repeating riffs, vamped by pianos, marimbas and xylophones,

are gradually extended through A to B to C, reaching an apex before returning to their original length (B to A). This stringing together of short patterns to create an extended melody is something Reich had explored in *Music for 18 Musicians*, and was further spurred by his recent study of traditional Jewish psalm singing or 'cantillation'. The four central apexes, meanwhile, are marked by a set of broad, sustained chords played by four trumpets, each written 'to take one comfortable breath to perform'. Reich had first developed an interest in using human breath as a measure of duration in 1973's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ*, and it neatly reflects a key element of his overall style: that sense of being simultaneously mechanical and organic.

The overall effect of *Music for a Large Ensemble* is bright and joyful. Each sounding of trumpets is like some great, satisfied sigh. Beneath, the pulsing syncopations revolve like circles within circles, giving the work a sense of infinity, so that when the end does actually arrive, it is as though the music has simply been switched off. Also important is the sense of ceremony. Like *Music for 18 Musicians*, this piece was written to be watched as well as heard – a performance in the truest sense, with players passing around melody as in some great, ancient ritual. The optional, amplified women's voices (not used tonight), singing only vowel sounds, adds to this sense.

Though the general direction of Reich's music during the 1970s was towards ever-larger forces, a few works from that era went against the prevailing current. These include the much-loved *Clapping Music* (1972) and, written a year later, **Music for Pieces of Wood**. Both were a response to the practical demands of pieces such as *Drumming* (1970–71): as he began touring more widely with his ensemble, Reich yearned for music that could be performed without a vanload of gear. *Music for Pieces of Wood* is scored for

Music for Pieces of Wood
(10 minutes)

Percussion
Neil Percy
David Jackson
Sam Walton
Patrick King
Aidy Spillett

Rhythmic construction represents an early shift in Reich's development. His initial creative breakthrough was based on repetitions in two or more lines drifting apart – known as 'phase music'.

Music for Pieces of Wood
(10 minutes)

five pairs of tuned claves – a simple percussion instrument, originally from Cuba, which makes a bright, penetrating sound as two pieces of hardwood are struck together. In Latin American dance music, claves often play ostinato patterns or 'keys' (in Spanish, claves): repeat figures that help root the other players in a groove. Reich nods to this with his own repeated ostinato (the same one found in *Clapping Music*, in fact). From here, he builds outwards using a method that he calls 'rhythmic construction'.

Rhythmic construction represents an early shift in Reich's development. His initial creative breakthrough was based on repetitions in two or more lines drifting apart – known as 'phase music'. *Clapping Music* was the last piece he wrote based purely on that process. Phasing is still integral to *Music for Pieces of Wood*, but rhythmic construction puts another, simultaneous process in play – one of revelation. Reich splits his ensemble into two groups. The first group acts as a constant: one player beats the pulse (like a metronome); another beats the root ostinato figure. The second group supplies the revelation: one by one, each player fills rests with beats, until all three are beating the same root ostinato figure. The point at which they begin that figure, however, is staggered (or phased), so that each new entry emphasises a different overlying pulse. Ever the gradualist, Reich had already experimented with rhythmic construction in *Drumming* and then again in *Six Pianos* (1973). He had also tried something similar in 1970's *Four Organs*, which caused uproar when it was performed for the Boston Symphony Orchestra's subscription audience at Carnegie Hall (the conductor, Michael Tilson Thomas, later recalled how one woman walked down the aisle and banged her head on the stage, wailing: 'Stop, stop, I confess').

As well as a certain mania, what rhythmic construction gives to all these early pieces – in opposition to *Music for a Large Ensemble*, which seems to appear fully formed – is a clear sense of direction. In *Music for Pieces of Wood*, there are three 'revelations' in all, and Reich amplifies (literally) the thickening texture and metric instability by instructing the players to crescendo with the momentum. With each set of claves pitched

to a different note, their unison fortissimo makes for quite the climax. (In his own programme note, Reich calls the piece 'one of the loudest I have ever composed'.) Moreover, Reich gradually shortens the root ostinato figure from six beats to four to three, which serves to ratchet up the tension across the whole piece and points to a thumping, unequivocal finish.

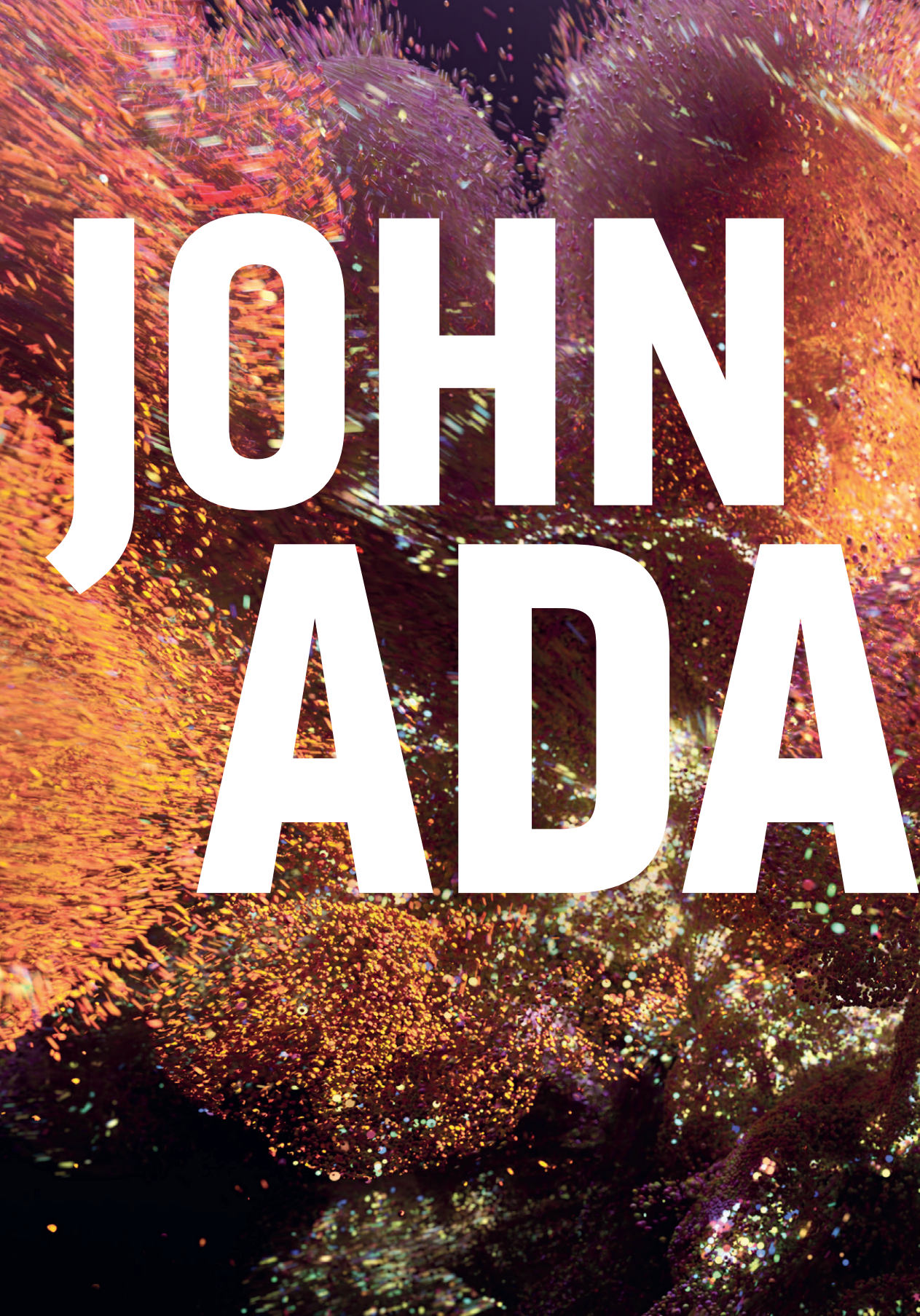
The next piece on tonight's programme, **Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards**, dates from the very end of the 1970s and strikes a more questing, pensive tone. Here Reich brings his own take to an age-old device: the chaconne. In a Baroque chaconne, a short, repeated chord sequence underpins a set of melodic variations. Reich does the same – but his circular chord sequence is stretched out on an epic scale, with three complete cycles taking around six, ten and nine minutes respectively. Against this, the winds and keys provide a continuous stream of twinkling melody in canon (phased), which becomes more florid as the work progresses. This chaconne/canon hybrid has a famous forerunner, Pachelbel's *Canon*, a piece which had recently entered the cultural mainstream. Whether directly influenced or not, Reich demonstrates another key aspect of his style: an all-embracing musical vision – one that placed him in direct opposition to ultra-Modernists of the era such as Boulez and Stockhausen, who rejected the past outright. To look in the other direction, perhaps the most famous contemporary chaconne is Max Richter's *On the Nature of Daylight*, which has featured in soundtracks to films from *Shutter Island* to *Arrival* to *Hamnet*. It is surely no coincidence that Richter cites Reich as a major influence on his own brand of ambient minimalism.



Interval – 20 minutes
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Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards
(21 minutes)

Reich demonstrates another key aspect of his style: an all-embracing musical vision – one that placed him in direct opposition to ultra-Modernists of the era such as Boulez and Stockhausen, who rejected the past outright.


JOHN
ADA


Sir Simon Rattle leads the LSO on an electrifying journey through the composer's luminous soundworld, including performances of *Harmonielehre* and *Frenzy: a short symphony*.
Wednesday 6 January 6.30pm
Thursday 7 January 7pm
Sunday 10 January 7pm
MS
AT 80



Steve Reich in rehearsal at UCLA, 1979

Three Movements
(15 minutes)

Music for Ensemble and Orchestra
(20 minutes)

Composed in 1986, six years after *Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards* had its full-orchestral premiere in San Francisco, **Three Movements** builds on the same idea of slow-moving chord progressions while hinting at another development in Reich's style – the tackling of extra-musical subjects. This had begun with *The Desert Music* (1982–84), which set poetry by William Carlos Williams and offered a warning of the dangers of nuclear warfare. Reich would do it again in one of his most celebrated works, 1988's *Different Trains*, which compares the long train journeys he made as a child with those made at the same time by Jewish children in Nazi-occupied Europe. The programme in *Three Movements* is more oblique. As Reich writes, 'This slow change from chord to chord may suggest the changing light as clouds move slowly across the sky, or, in musical terms, it may recall the middle piece in Schoenberg's *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, 'Summer Morning by a Lake (Colours)'.

While the atmosphere Reich conjures is a little stormier than a lakeside reverie might suggest, there is certainly a clear sense of the ever-shifting. This is partly due to the constant presence of diminished seventh chords, traditionally used as a musical pivot point (and containing the so-called 'Devil's interval' of a tritone – by the 1980s, Reich had become more interested in scrunchy harmony). And though the work closes on A minor, providing a resolution of sorts, Reich leaves room for doubt with a ringing added seventh: his clouds are left circling. Phasing and other rhythmic trickery only add to the tempest. The finale, for example, contains what Reich calls a 'mensuration' canon, in which the same subject appears simultaneously but at two different speeds. (The finale of Sibelius' Fifth Symphony contains a famous example of this same process, with the soaring horn 'swan' theme mirrored at one third the speed in the double basses.)

As in *The Desert Music*, Reich suggests a specific seating plan to help the audience visualise the overlapping sets of melodic material. He divides the strings into two equal groups, placed either side of a central vamping section (marimbas, vibraphones and pianos). This setup also gives the whole ensemble sight of the pulsing nerve centre, encouraging 'one unified rhythm direction', as Reich puts it.

We skip forwards three decades for the final piece on tonight's programme. Written in 2018, **Music for Ensemble and Orchestra** neatly gathers many of the different threads we have encountered so far. Like *Music for a Large Ensemble*, it maintains a sense of Escher-like infinity with its constant piano-led pulse and arch structure (across five continuous movements, the primary note value of the piano vamp shifts from 16 to 8 to 4, then back again from 4 to 8 to 16). As with *Three Movements*, its harmonies often sound suspended or scrunchy, with no definite sense of a home key. And, as in the *Variations*, Reich takes a Baroque model and stretches it – in this case, *concerto grosso*. This format traditionally sees musical material passed between a small group of soloists and a full orchestra. Reich's group, however, comprises 20 players – strings, winds, brass, electric bass, vibraphones, pianos. Such a large number of solo parts gives the piece the feel of chamber music, allowing Reich to 'write the intricate, detailed music that I like to write'. And the detail is startling. The soloists drift in and out of the accompanying texture, offering up bursts of melody that cause chain reactions among the ensemble – like cells dividing. The ostinato patterns are more angular than we have so far heard, crafted from unusual scales and often sounded in octaves or in large unison groups, giving them a distinctly non-Western flavour. Meanwhile, the combinations of timbres – electric bass with piano and vibraphone, for example – give echoes of jazz and gamelan.

Offering a lateral counterargument to these vertical-sounding passages, in the second movement Reich introduces a new style of ostinato based on slowly a rising scale. This, he says, is a 'tip of the hat' to the surging opening melody from J S Bach's Fifth *Brandenburg Concerto*, itself a sort-of *concerto grosso*. Using scales in this way is something he'd never done before – 'but they work!' Once again, Reich demonstrates his essential philosophy, looking backwards to go forwards, always moving, gradually, inexorably.

Music for Ensemble and Orchestra
(20 minutes)

Reich demonstrates his essential philosophy, looking backwards to go forwards, always moving, gradually, inexorably.

Steve Reich

b 1936 (United States)



Contemporaries
John Adams, Philip Glass

Key events
1965: Composes *It's Gonna Rain*
1971: Premieres *Drumming*
1990: *Different Trains* wins a Grammy Award
2009: Wins a Pulitzer for *Double Sextet*

Listen to
Sextet, *Clapping Music* and *Music for Pieces of Wood*
lsolive.co.uk

With the LSO
2018: UK premiere of *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra*

Composer profile by **Timmy Fisher**

Steve Reich is the best-known of a generation of composers who blazed a new path away from the extremes of mid-century Modernism. His firm belief in tonality and pulse, and his early discovery of 'phase music', have nourished a career's worth of music and brought him legendary status as one of the fathers of minimalism.

Born in New York City, Reich studied at Cornell University and the Juilliard School of Music before enrolling at San Francisco's Mills College, where his teachers included Luciano Berio. It was here, while working in an electronics studio, that he made his chief creative breakthrough. He discovered that, when playing the same loop simultaneously on two separate machines, the natural variance in technology caused the repetitions to drift in and out of sync – a process he called 'phase music'. This led to his first recognised work, 1965's *It's Gonna Rain*.

Following a return to New York in 1966, Reich began applying the principles of phase music to acoustic instruments, adding influences from West African drumming music and jazz. He quickly made a name for himself in the city's Downtown scene, giving concerts at galleries with his own ensemble. Throughout this period, his style grew in complexity and scope, beginning with *Drumming* (1970–71) and culminating in *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76).

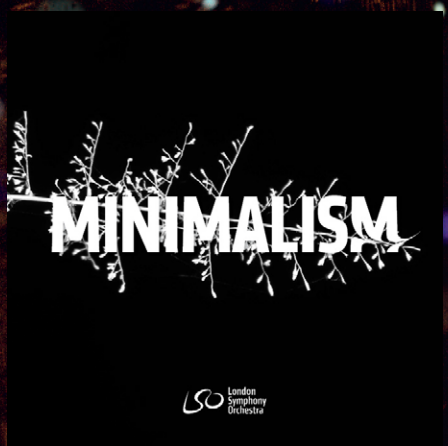
As well as commissions from major orchestras, the 1980s saw several further developments in his style, such as the setting of texts, as in 1981's *Tehillim*, inspired by Jewish psalm singing, and the tackling of definite – rather than abstract – subjects, as in his cantata *The Desert Music* (1982–83) and the Grammy-winning *Different Trains* (1988).

That work also features 'speech melody', wherein instrumental melody is derived from fragments of recorded speech. Reich later extended the idea to video in his two operas, *The Cave* (1990–93) and *Three Tales* (1997–2001). This later period also saw him compose a series of solo works that exploited overdubbing on a grand scale, the most famous of which is *Electric Counterpoint* (1987), written for jazz guitarist Pat Metheny.

London Symphony Orchestra

MINIMALISM

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Susanna Mälkki

conductor



Susanna Mälkki is one of today's leading conductors, sought after by symphony orchestras and opera houses at the highest level worldwide. She is Chief Conductor Emeritus of the Helsinki Philharmonic, where she served as Chief Conductor from 2016 to 2023. By invitation of Pierre Boulez, Mälkki served as Music Director of the Ensemble intercontemporain from 2006 to 2013. She was also Principal Guest Conductor with the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 2017 to 2022 and holds the prestigious position of Professor of Orchestral Conducting at the Sibelius Academy.

Praised for her theatrical instinct, clarity of vision and ability to draw vivid drama from the score, Mälkki has made opera an increasingly prominent facet of her artistry. The 2026/27 season sees her conduct new productions of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* at Dutch National Opera and Rossini's *William Tell* at the Hamburg State Opera, as well as Wagner's *Lohengrin* at Deutsche Oper Berlin. Past operatic engagements include performances at the Metropolitan Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Vienna State Opera, Teatro alla Scala, the Royal Opera House, Opéra national de Paris, Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona and the Festival d'Aix-en Provence – with repertoire ranging from Mozart and Wagner to groundbreaking contemporary works.

Her work in orchestral repertory remains equally distinguished. She has worked with the Berlin Philharmonic, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Staatskapelle Berlin, Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. In the 2026/27 season, she appears with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Helsinki Philharmonic, Les Siècles and Ensemble intercontemporain, among others.

Mälkki was awarded the high honour of Commander of the Order of the Lion of Finland in 2024, after receiving the Pro Finlandia Medal in 2011. She was appointed Officier (2014) and Commandeur (2022) de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and, in January 2016, was made a Chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in France. She is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in London and a member of the Kungliga Musikaliska Akademien in Stockholm. In October 2016, she was named *Musical America*'s 2017 Conductor of the Year, and in November 2017, she was awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize. In 2024, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Uniarts Helsinki.

London Symphony Orchestra

On Stage

Leader
Benjamin Marquise Gilmore

First Violins
Alice Ivy-Pemberton
Clare Duckworth
Ginette Decuyper
William Melvin
Claire Parfitt
Laurent Quénelle
Harriet Rayfield
Sylvain Vasseur
Caroline Frenkel
Ricky Gore
Lena Segal

Second Violins
Thomas Mathias
Sarah Quinn
Miya Väisänen
Helena Buckie
Matthew Gardner
Naoko Keatley
Alix Lagasse
Belinda McFarlane
Csilla Pogány
Cindy Foster
George Lawson
Polina Makhina

Violas
Natalie Loughran
Malcolm Johnston
Anna Bastow
Steve Doman
Thomas Beer
Julia O'Riordan
Mizuho Ueyama
Errika Collins

Cellos
David Cohen
Laure Le Dantec
Alastair Blayden
Young In Na
Daniel Gardner
Amanda Truelove
Joanna Twaddle
Morwenna Del Mar

Double Basses
David Desimpelaere
Mehdi Nejjoum-Barthélémy
Thomas Goodman
Joe Melvin
Jani Pensola
Philip Nelson
Alexander Önce
Evangeline Tang

Flutes
Amy Yule
Imogen Royce
Gareth Davies

Piccolo
Patricia Moynihan

Oboes
Juliana Koch
Rosie Jenkins

Cor Anglais
Sarah Harper

Clarinets
Chris Richards
Chi-Yu Mo
Ferran Garcerà Perelló

Soprano Saxophone
Simon Haram
Amy Green

Bassoons
Daniel Jemison
Dominic Tyler
Jamie King

Contrabassoon
Martin Field

Horns
Diego Incertis Sánchez
Timothy Jones
Casey Rippon
Alex Willett
Flora Bain

Trumpets
James Fountain
Adam Wright
Katie Smith
Holly Clark

Trombones
Simon Johnson
Jonathan Hollick

Bass Trombone
Paul Milner

Tuba
Ben Thomson

Percussion
Neil Percy
David Jackson
Sam Walton
Patrick King
Aidy Spillett
Matthew Farthing
Steve Whibley

Pianos
Elizabeth Burley
Catherine Edwards
Ian Tindale
Ashkan Layegh
Hamish Brown

Bass Guitars
Peter Wilson
Greg Mudd