

LUCERNE FESTIVAL



PULSE 2026

08.-17.05.

“Time and Space”
Víkingur Ólafsson

Program
english

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WELCOME TO LUCERNE FESTIVAL PULSE!



Sebastian Nordmann
Executive and Artistic
Director of Lucerne Festival

Most people associate Víkingur Ólafsson first and foremost with Johann Sebastian Bach — his interpretation of the *Goldberg Variations* has already achieved legendary status. Yet while Bach is his foundation, anyone who spends time with Víkingur soon discovers that his curiosity extends far beyond the usual confines of the classical world.

I first met him in 2018 at a Philip Glass evening at the Konzerthaus Berlin. Since then, I've visited him several times in Reykjavík, where we've talked for many hours about Bach, Icelandic culture, contemporary music, and the shifting palette of colors he coaxes from his different grand pianos. One night we wandered from bar to bar in Reykjavík, and in every place — at each gallery opening, each restaurant — we ran into friends or acquaintances: rock and pop musicians, scientists, visual artists, people from every creative sphere. That's Víkingur Ólafsson in a nutshell: endlessly curious, always reaching beyond the music itself toward the mysteries that lie behind it.

It's from this outlook that his extraordinary programs take shape — as in "Opus 109," which we'll experience at Lucerne Festival Pulse. His collaboration with Olafur Eliasson reflects the same mindset: the encounter between Eliasson's unmistakable light installation and the focus and depth of Ólafsson's *Goldberg Variations* becomes a vivid embodiment of the festival's theme, "Time and Space."

With Lucerne Festival Pulse, Víkingur is creating a festival within the Festival — an artistic jewel that moves to the rhythm of thought and feeling.

I'm sure that this new festival will not only make us feel our own pulse, but will also help shape the heartbeat of Lucerne Festival in the years ahead.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sebastian Nordmann".

“IT’S A PLAY-GROUND OF IDEAS”

Víkingur Ólafsson on...



... Lucerne Festival Pulse

I love to program things that go back to the Baroque or even Renaissance and all the way up to the present. To me, those three or four hundred years are just the blink of an eye. In terms of human history, it's nothing. It's just a very tiny part of human existence here on Earth. That's classical music. People say it's old, but by doing this festival, I think we will prove that it's young and even still in its infancy. There's so little difference and distance between you and Johann Sebastian Bach and Ligeti, for instance. They belong together. And so we've chosen the theme of "Time and Space."

The pulse is an unmistakable sign of life and the foundation of music itself. Like the pulse of the human heart, the musical pulse beats evenly yet is never static. It is not mechanical but allows for interpretative freedom. It responds to our emotions and experiences, its pace ever-changing, yet it sustains equilibrium, ensuring that the lifeblood of the music reaches all its extremities.

... “Time and Space,” the theme of the festival

Why this theme? Why this program? Because music is time in space, pitch and acoustic. And the theme of “Time and Space” enables us to do a little time traveling, connecting different decades, different centuries, very different personalities. There will be traces of Bach throughout the festival. Bach is the most modern composer of all time, while sometimes what's just been written is the most Romantic. “Time and Space” simply allows us to explore music in the widest possible perspective. And to really jump between incredibly different styles. It's a playground of ideas.

... Olafur Eliasson

Olafur Eliasson is a great and sort of explosive personality. He will visualize my musical interpretation of the *Goldberg Variations* in real time. It is all very futuristic. It's going to be that kind of beautiful colliding of ideas, of art forms, of minds. Olafur thinks incredibly musically in his work and that's what makes our collaboration so productive.



... the *Goldberg Variations* in the St. Pius Church

The *Goldberg Variations* are pure architecture. I think the piece lends itself very well to a visual expression. The St. Pius Church in Meggen, with its thin marble, is incredibly beautiful. It's an intimate space and I think it's perfect for the *Goldberg Variations* and for this new kind of experience. It will be a very personal one, very intimate and very exciting. But as I always say: Bach is the future, and this is just one step into that future.

...Thomas Adès

Thomas Adès is one of our greatest living composers and creators. I think he is going to belong in music history with figures we consider the giants of the past. When someone like Thomas Adès is sitting right next to you and sharing a pint of beer, sometimes it's difficult to understand that.



...“classical” and contemporary music

I think that all music is contemporary music if we play it today. Bach and Beethoven can sound just as contemporary as György Ligeti, György Kurtág, and Alban Berg. I've always had a bit of a problem with the word “classical.” It seems to imply the distant past, something that was done way back then. It seems to imply the Greeks and the Romans. When I play a bit of Bach or Brahms, I don't feel classical at all. I feel very contemporary. I feel very much alive.

...the KKL Luzern

I remember the first time I came to Lucerne – in 2019 – being amazed by the famous roof over the KKL and how it seemed to just go on and on. Was I imagining it floating in the air? I wondered how many different types of music can we fit under this umbrella-like roof. I still think about the roof as a metaphor for how much finds shelter under it.



... Iceland

One of the good things about Iceland is that no one really thinks about what the music is called — whether it's classical or rock or pop or folk or indie or techno, whatever. People are cross-collaborating across different genres and different art forms. Here in the Icelandic Parliament, we actually had a choir — I'm not sure if it still exists — where members from opposing political parties would sing together. People who were arguing all day would then come and sing side by side. ... It used to be that there was no TV on Thursdays in Iceland. So the Iceland Symphony concerts were scheduled at just the right time on Thursdays. And, believe it or not, beer was prohibited in Iceland even until the late 1980s. It was a different place.... Today's Iceland couldn't be more modern, of course.



DISCOVER MORE

Video: **Víkingur Ólafsson**
in conversation with
Sebastian Nordmann
lucernefestival.ch/en/pulse

THE SHADOWS OF SOUNDS AND THE UNFORESEEABLE SHAPES OF LOVE



Olafur Eliasson, Visualisation of upcoming site-specific light installation for St. Pius Church, Switzerland; commissioned on the occasion of Lucerne Festival Pulse 2026



“On the occasion of Víkingur Ólafsson’s performance of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* at the St. Pius Church in Meggen, I will create a temporary, site-specific work that dialogues with the architecture of the church and the music. My artwork explores the relations among space, light, and sound to activate the building and to extend the concert out into the world, beyond the exact time and place of its emergence.

I have long been fascinated by the potential of translating soundwaves into light to create synaesthetic experiences that transcend the boundaries of both media. *The Shadows of Sounds and the Unforeseeable Shapes of Love* extends these investigations with an emphasis on the effects of echoes and reverberations on our perception of time and space.”

Olafur Eliasson



“IT IS ALL VERY FUTURISTIC”

**Víkingur Ólafsson on the
Goldberg Variations with Olafur Eliasson**

Fri 08.–Sun 10.05.



**Ólafsson & Eliasson:
Goldberg Variations**

21.00

St. Pius Church, Meggen

Víkingur Ólafsson piano
Olafur Eliasson light installation

Johann Sebastian Bach

Aria with Diverse Variations,
BWV 988 *Goldberg Variations*

with Olafur Eliasson's new light
installation *The Shadows of
Sounds and the Unforeseeable
Shapes of Love*

80 min

This concert has no intermission.

CHF 150 (open seating)



Some concerts you simply do not forget. Such was the case when Víkingur Ólafsson performed Bach's monumental *Goldberg Variations* at the 2023 Lucerne Festival. He did so in a way few had ever encountered before: as a vivid drama of the human condition, bringing a multitude of voices and characters to life and spanning the full range of emotions. He subsequently took the work on tour, performing it nearly 100 times around the world. "This piece is very close to me, so I've been giving it a bit of a rest because I wanted to have a fresh take on it," Víkingur recalls. That time away from the *Goldbergs* gave rise to a bold idea. For the opening of Lucerne Festival Pulse – which he

will curate for the next three years – Víkingur will join forces with his compatriot, the celebrated visual artist Olafur Eliasson, to reimagine Bach's masterpiece as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a total work of art uniting sound and light projection. The setting for this 90-minute journey through time and space is the St. Pius Church in Meggen, with its delicate walls of translucent marble. Eliasson will respond to Víkingur's playing in real time with his new, site-specific light installation, making each of the three performances unique. "I don't really know how it's going to turn out," says Víkingur. "But that should be the spirit of the festival, to embrace the unexpected."



Thu 14.05.

Poème Symphonique

18.30

KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Mahler Chamber Orchestra

MDR Radio Choir

Thomas Eitler-de Lint chorus master

Thomas Adès conductor

Víkingur Ólafsson piano

Anna Dennis soprano

György Ligeti

Poème Symphonique

for 100 metronomes

8–15 min

Thomas Adès

Concerto Conciso for piano and ensemble

world premiere of the revised version
8 min

György Kurtág

... quasi una fantasia... for piano and groups of instruments dispersed in space, Op. 27, no. 1
9 min

Arvo Pärt

Credo for piano, mixed choir, and orchestra

15 min

Thomas Adès

America – A Prophecy for soprano, large orchestra, and chorus, Op. 19
expanded version (2024)
Swiss premiere
23 min

Introduction to the Concert

17.30 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium
with **Malte Lohmann** (in German)

CHF 170/150/110/90/60/30

“THE BEST CONCERT PROGRAM I HAVE EVER DONE”

Víkingur Ólafsson

Three short piano concertos in one evening – each connecting past and present. In *Credo*, Arvo Pärt takes up the famous C major Prelude from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, pitting avant-garde compositional techniques against tonality and triads. György Kurtág – who turns 100 in February 2026 – takes inspiration from the freely unfolding design of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas, Op. 27, in his fascinating spatial composition... *quasi una fantasia...*, which distributes the instruments around the audience. And Thomas Adès, who will himself conduct the Mahler Chamber Orchestra in his dazzling *Concerto Conciso*, flirts with jazz, blues, and Baroque dance. In *America – A Prophecy*, by contrast, he unfolds a dark vision of destruction involving the fall of Mayan culture at the hands of the Spanish conquistadors, with a soprano as the prophetic witness. Before all that, the concert opens with 100 ticking metronomes in György Ligeti's *Poème Symphonique*, where they come to a stop one by one, until silence prevails. When the last metronome stops, “it feels like the end of life itself,” says Víkingur Ólafsson.

FOUR “VIKINGS” FOR VÍKINGUR

“Is there a string quartet on this planet that I like more?” Víkingur Ólafsson rhetorically asks. The answer, of course, is no. Formed 25 years ago at the Royal Academy of Music in Copenhagen, the Danish String Quartet has achieved cult status, with a shelf full of awards to match. Most recently, the four “Vikings,” as they jokingly call themselves on account of their bearded looks, received the prestigious Léonie Sonning Music Prize. Their hallmarks include electrifying arrangements of Nordic folk music, yet they are equally at home in the classical and contemporary repertoire. Their Festival debut begins, fittingly for Víkingur’s programming vision, with Bach. Stravinsky’s neoclassical *Suite Italienne*, heard here in the quartet’s own arrangement, also draws on Baroque models. But the title of the concert comes from Beethoven, who inscribed the finale of his last string quartet with a question: “Muss es sein?” (“Must it be?”) — and gave his own reply in the lively main section: “It must be!” Just like this concert.

Fri 15.05.

Muss es sein?

18.30

KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Danish String Quartet:

Frederik Øland violin

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen violin

Asbjørn Nørgaard viola

Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin cello

Johann Sebastian Bach

Vor deinen Thron tret' ich hiermit
("Before Thy Throne I Now Appear"),
BWV 668

4 min

Igor Stravinsky

Three Pieces for String Quartet
8 min

Suite Italienne

arranged for string quartet by
the Danish String Quartet
17 min

Johann Sebastian Bach

Contrapunctus XIV: Fuga a 3
Soggetti from *The Art of Fugue*,
BWV 1080
12 min

Ludwig van Beethoven

String Quartet in F major, Op. 135
25 min

Introduction to the Concert

17.30 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium
with **Susanne Stähr** (in German)

CHF 90/60/30





Fri 15.05.



Out of Time

22.00

KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Danish String Quartet:

Frederik Øland violin

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen violin

Asbjørn Nørgaard viola

Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin cello

Víkingur Ólafsson piano

Morton Feldman

Piano and String Quartet

80 min

This concert has no intermission.

CHF 50

“IT CHANGES OUR PERCEPTION OF TIME”

Víkingur Ólafsson on *Piano and String Quartet*

Could this be what eternity sounds like? A performance of *Piano and String Quartet*, a late work by the American composer Morton Feldman (1926–87), lasts some 80 minutes — yet in all that time we hear little more than delicate, endlessly resonating piano arpeggios and sustained string chords. This crystalline study in pianissimo seems to have no beginning and no end, no sense of direction — there is only surrender to the present moment of sound. Listening to it is a paradoxical experience: in its radical stillness, Feldman’s slow-motion music exerts a powerful pull. “The first 30 minutes feel a little bit slow because the piece is made of these surreal, beautiful, slow moving — or almost not moving — harmonies,” Víkingur remarks. “It’s just this way of being. The next 30 minutes go by so much faster. And the last 30 minutes, believe it or not, go by in a flash.” He was especially eager to return to this “one-of-a-kind” piece, which he last performed a decade ago. The setting will add to the magic, with the audience seated onstage, close to the five performers.

“THE PERFECT PIANO SONATA”

Víkingur Ólafsson on Beethoven’s Opus 109

Víkingur Ólafsson believes that Ludwig van Beethoven reinvented himself with the Sonata in E major, Op. 109, while at the same time paying homage to one of his great inspirations: Johann Sebastian Bach, who served as Beethoven’s “compass” for this venture into the unknown, as he puts it. The last movement of Op. 109 is a theme and variations that reveals “striking connections with the *Goldberg Variations*,” according to Víkingur. “Both are built on a songful Sarabande theme which comes back at the end in a cyclical return — the only time Beethoven does so in a variation movement. Even more, he brings little glimpses from the *Goldbergs* into play, including direct citations from Bach and such techniques as a fugato and so on.” Víkingur’s recital traces a path to this pinnacle through four works, all in E major or minor yet each strikingly different in character. Alongside a Bach prelude and the great E minor Partita, he includes a rarely heard Schubert sonata comprising only two movements that he believes was written in response to Beethoven’s own two-movement Sonata in E minor, Op. 90 — which is why it, too, merits a place on his program.

Sat 16.05.

Opus 109

18.30

KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

NO PAUSE

Víkingur Ólafsson piano

Johann Sebastian Bach

Prelude in E major, BWV 854

2 min

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata in E minor, Op. 90

13 min

Johann Sebastian Bach

Partita in E minor, BWV 830

30 min

Franz Schubert

Piano Sonata in E minor, D 566

11 min

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata in E Major, Op. 109

20 min

This concert has no intermission.

Introduction to the Concert

17.30 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium

with **Susanne Stährl** (in German)

CHF 150/120/80/50



Víkingur Ólafsson



Sun 17.05.

Grand Finale: Es ist genug (?)

17.00

KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Mahler Chamber Orchestra

Elim Chan conductor

Víkingur Ólafsson piano

Patricia Kopatchinskaja violin

Johann Sebastian Bach

Piano Concerto in F minor,

BWV 1056

10 min

A Vegale af'n Zweschpmbam
("A Little Bird on a Plum Tree"):
Carinthian folk song
arranged for violin by PatKop
1 min

Alban Berg

Violin Concerto *To the Memory
of an Angel*

26 min

Johann Sebastian Bach

Chorale *Es ist genug* from
the cantata *O Ewigkeit,
du Donnerwort*, BWV 60

3 min

Johannes Brahms

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

45 min

Introduction to the Concert

16.00 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium
with **Susanne Stähr** (in German)

CHF 170/150/110/90/30

"IT TOUCHES YOUR HEART LIKE NOTHING ELSE"

Víkingur Ólafsson on Berg's Violin Concerto

Bach — and beyond. For the grand finale of Lucerne Festival Pulse, Víkingur Ólafsson himself takes the stage to perform the composer's famous F minor Piano Concerto. Following intermission, Hong Kong-born maestra Elim Chan leads the Mahler Chamber Orchestra in Brahms's Fourth Symphony — a work that likewise bears Bach's influence. The finale's Passacaglia theme, which Brahms transforms with masterly skill, comes from Bach's earliest surviving cantata, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* ("For Thee, O Lord, I Long"), BWV 150. Even in Berg's Violin Concerto — "one of the most Romantic ever," as Víkingur calls it — a Bach reference appears in the form of a quote from the chorale *Es ist genug* ("It Is Enough"). For this performance, he has invited his favorite violinist, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, entrusting her with a special role: instead of an encore, she will play the original chorale. The orchestra will sing along, and the audience is invited to join in. "That's something I'm not sure has ever been done at Lucerne Festival," Víkingur says. "But the question is, can we really ever have enough of music?" The answer is clear: no — nor of Lucerne Festival Pulse, which will return for its second edition in 2027.



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Get in touch with us:
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friends@lucernefestival.ch



TICKETING INFORMATION

Tickets available starting 9 December 2025, at 10.00 am (Swiss time)

Online

lucernefestival.ch

By telephone

+41 (0)41 226 44 00

Mon–Fri from 10.00 am to 12.00 noon (Swiss time); throughout the festival (including the week when the festival begins), extended telephone hours also include between 2.00 and 4.00 pm.

We are also available by telephone on weekends (Saturday and Sunday) while the festival is under way.

Ticket Refunds

Purchased tickets cannot be returned or exchanged. Changes in programming or performers do not entitle the ticket holder to a refund or exchange.

Discounts

Special offers for events that are not sold out will be available for grade school, university, and vocational students up to the age of 29 as well as for KulturLegi holders. Detailed information can be found at lucernefestival.ch/young-adults.

Information on Wheelchairs

The main concert hall of the KKL Luzern has wheelchair spaces with a good view of the stage, which are available on special terms. Wheelchair spaces are also available at the St. Pius Church. Wheelchair spaces cannot be purchased online. To book a wheelchair space, please contact our ticket office by phone at +41 (0)41 226 44 00; from 14 May 2026, you may also visit the Lucerne Festival ticket counter at the main entrance of the KKL Luzern (lake side). Additional information for people with disabilities can be found at lucernefestival.ch/accessibility.

Entrance to the Concert Hall

The main KKL Concert Hall opens 30 minutes before the beginning of the concert. For events at one of the venues outside the KKL, if applicable, access will start shortly before the beginning of the event. For the sake of the musicians and the audience, latecomers will not be admitted until intermission or at the discretion of the Concert Hall staff. In certain instances, concerts will have no intermission and allow no latecomers. If the concert is missed on account of tardy arrival, tickets will not be refunded.

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GETTING THERE

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Your concert tickets entitle you to a discount of 40% (1st or 2nd class) for a round trip to Lucerne. (Concert tickets must be presented upon inspection.) This special ticket must be purchased before beginning your trip: either at a Swiss Rail ticket counter, or by calling the SBB Contact Center at 0848 44 66 88 (CHF 0.08/minute in the Swiss telephone network), or online at sbb.ch/lucernefestival.

Arrival by Car

The KKL Luzern is located right next to Lucerne's main train station. Owing to the parking and traffic situation, we recommend using public transportation during the Festival season. Guests who travel

by car are advised to observe the city's parking guidance system and to take the bus from the parking garages to the KKL Luzern. For information on parking facilities, please visit parkingluzern.ch.

Travel to Meggen

By train (from Lucerne's main station): Take the S3 or the Voralpen-Express to the "Meggen Zentrum" stop.

By bus (from Lucerne's main station): Take bus line 24 to "Schlössli," or lines 6 or 8 to "Brüelstrasse" and transfer there to line 25 to "Piuskirche."

By car: The "West/St. Pius" parking garage is located near the St. Pius Church.

PUBLISHING CREDITS

Lucerne Festival

Hirschgässli 13 | CH-6003 Luzern
t +41 (0)41 226 44 00
info@lucernefestival.ch | lucernefestival.ch

Verkauf & Gästeservice

Lucerne Festival | P.O. Box | CH-6002 Luzern
t +41 (0)41 226 44 00
ticketbox@lucernefestival.ch | lucernefestival.ch

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