

## Media Release

### The pianist Víkingur Ólafsson to curate Lucerne Festival Pulse in May 2026

**Starting on 8 May, the new Festival Pulse will be held for the first time. In his inaugural edition, titled “Time and Space,” Víkingur Ólafsson will explore connections spanning from Johann Sebastian Bach to the present. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* will be brought to life in a new, immersive setting, accompanied by a light installation by the Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.**

Lucerne, 26 November 2025. Lucerne Festival’s Executive and Artistic Director Sebastian Nordmann is launching a new festival, Pulse, curated by the Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson and extending from 8 to 17 May 2026. The first edition will open with an art-and-music project in Meggen from 8 to 10 May: J.S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, performed by Ólafsson, will be accompanied in real time by the light installation *The Shadows of Sounds and the Unforeseeable Shapes of Love* created by the visual artist Olafur Eliasson. From 14 to 17 May, over the long holiday weekend, five concerts will take place at the KKL Luzern. Ólafsson will appear both as a soloist and in collaboration with internationally renowned artists and ensembles – and at times lets them take the spotlight. Among these are the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, the MDR Radio Choir, the Danish String Quartet, Thomas Adès, Elim Chan, and Patricia Kopatchinskaja.

“Pulse is a festival that follows the rhythm of thought and feeling. It’s meant to be more than just a piano festival,” says Sebastian Nordmann, who has invited Víkingur Ólafsson to curate it for three seasons. “In recent years, I have come to know Víkingur not only as a brilliant pianist but as a deeply imaginative curator. For him, music is the art form that unites all the other arts – he finds it in architecture and in the visual arts. The collaboration in Meggen with the extraordinary light artist Olafur Eliasson embodies this idea and gives the festival a distinctive new dimension.”

Víkingur Ólafsson adds: “I am thrilled and deeply honoured to take on this new role in Lucerne. Music offers a unique way of experiencing time and space, altering and exalting our perceptions of both through pitch, rhythm and acoustics. The theme of ‘Time and Space’ for 2026 enables us to do a bit of travelling through centuries and across countries, connecting different worldviews and completely different personalities. Throughout the festival, there will be traces of Bach – the most contemporary composer of all time.”

Ólafsson will join forces with Olafur Eliasson in the St. Pius Church in Meggen, near Lucerne, to stage Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. In the process, visual art and music will merge into a synesthetic work of sound and light. The project will be performed on three evenings, from 8 to 10 May. With its translucent marble walls, the St. Pius Church offers a remarkable setting – “an intimate space I think is perfect for Bach’s music and for this new kind of experience,” as Ólafsson puts it.

Pulse will continue for four days at the KKL Luzern over the extended holiday weekend beginning 14 May 2026. The music of Johann Sebastian Bach anchors a program that reaches from his own time to the present. In the concert *Poème Symphonique*, conductor and composer Thomas Adès will lead the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the MDR Radio Choir in contemporary works by György Ligeti, György Kurtág, Thomas Adès, and Arvo Pärt.

On Friday, the Danish String Quartet will present an evening of chamber music featuring Beethoven’s final String Quartet in F major, Op. 135, alongside arrangements of works by Johann Sebastian Bach and Igor Stravinsky, as well as Stravinsky’s Three Pieces for String Quartet. Later that night, Víkingur Ólafsson joins the quartet for a late-night performance of Morton Feldman’s *Piano and String Quartet* – a quietly meditative masterpiece of American expressionism.

# LUCERNE FESTIVAL

In his solo recital *Opus 109* on Saturday evening, Ólafsson will juxtapose music by J. S. Bach and Franz Schubert with Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 109. And in the *Grand Finale* on 17 May, he will close the festival with Bach's Piano Concerto in F minor, with Elim Chan conducting the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. The program will also feature Alban Berg's Violin Concerto with Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Brahms's Fourth Symphony, culminating in an invitation to the audience to sing along in a performance of the Bach chorale *Es ist genug*.

Tickets for Lucerne Festival Pulse will go on sale starting 9 December 2025 at 10.00 a.m. (Swiss time). Complete program details are now available on the [Festival's website](#).

Photos may be downloaded at [lucernefestival.ch/en/press/photos](https://lucernefestival.ch/en/press/photos)

Biography of [Vikingur Ólafsson](#)

Sebastian Nordmann in conversation with Vikingur Ólafsson:



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