LUCERNE FESTIVAL



PULSE 2027

06.–09.05.

“Spirit & Matter”
Víkingur Ólafsson

Program
English



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SPIRIT & MATTER

Music is the true medium by which we cross boundaries between the material and spiritual worlds. Through music we are exalted from earth to the heavens. We escape the concrete and enter into a sphere of pure ideas and ethereal sensations. As such, music offers a unique way to explore the perennial mystery of human consciousness — how material frictions and collisions give rise to both our most intellectually rigorous notions and our deepest emotional experiences. Every musical performance exists in a state of creative interplay between material constraints and the free spirit of innovation: between instrumental reality and artistic ideal.

At Lucerne Festival Pulse 2027, I am proud to present four extraordinary soloists. Soprano Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir brings us a vocal program with a Nordic twist, pianist Joep Beving takes us into liminal space, guitarist Sean Shibe unravels the evolutionary history of the guitar, and cellist Alisa Weilerstein brings us Bach's monumental and transcendent Cello Suites. With the uniquely innovative Mahler Chamber Orchestra, I explore encounters of matter and spirit in music by Bach, Brahms, and John Adams. And in my opening recital, I am excited to share a conversation between three ground-breaking musical thinkers: Jean-Philippe Rameau, Claude Debussy, and Philip Glass.

The theme of Spirit & Matter opens up opportunities to explore familiar and unfamiliar works of great music in a fresh context, merging the worlds of the mundane and the metaphysical, physics and poetry, life and death.

I look forward to seeing you at Pulse 2027!

Víkingur Ólafsson



Above the rooftops of Lucerne: Víkingur Ólafsson on the KKL Lucerne's rooftop terrace



“Víkingur Ólafsson never ceases to impress me with his curiosity and open-mindedness. At Lucerne Festival Pulse 2027, he once again ventures well beyond conventional horizons, surprising us with unusual programs that open up entirely new perspectives: from Icelandic folk songs to Minimalism, from Rameau to Philip Glass, from Bach to Brahms.”

Sebastian Nordmann
Executive and Artistic Director, Lucerne Festival



ON TO NEW WORLDS

Music for all the senses: Claude Debussy allows us to hear not only sounds but "colors, scents, light and shadow," according to Víkingur Ólafsson. He sees the result as something holistic — perfectly in keeping with the Festival theme "Spirit & Matter." "Debussy's flowing, airy textures defy the percussive nature of the piano," says Víkingur. "They break through the material limits of the instrument." The French composer's piano pieces often mirror nature as well: he can make snowflakes dance, for example, or create the illusion of rain dripping. Jean-Philippe Rameau was doing something similar 150 years before Debussy. The harpsichord suites of this eccentric Baroque master evoke birdcalls as well as the roar of a veritable whirlwind. In this recital, Víkingur brings Rameau and Debussy into conversation with Glass, who turns 90 in 2027. The two Frenchmen "conjure up wildly imaginative images of the natural world," while Glass "creates new spaces for spiritual reflection within the crystalline structures of tonal harmony that Rameau, the 'Newton of Music,' sought to explain through the laws of physics."

Thu 06.05.

Opening: Víkingur solo
18.30
KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Víkingur Ólafsson piano

Philip Glass
Opening from *Glassworks*

Etude for Piano No. 3

Etude for Piano No. 15

Claude Debussy
Ondine aus *Préludes pour piano,* Book II

Serenade for the Doll from *Children's Corner*

Jardins sous la pluie from *Estampes*

The Snow Is Dancing from *Children's Corner*

Jean-Philippe Rameau
Selected *Pièces de clavecin* from the Suites in E minor, RCT 2; D major, RCT 3; and A minor, RCT 5

This concert has no intermission and ends at about 20.00.

Introduction to the Concert
17.30 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium (entrance on the train station side) with **Susanne Stähr** (in German)

CHF 150/120/80/50/30



VOICE OF THE NORTH

When Víkingur Ólafsson released his 2022 album *From Afar*, which draws on memories of his childhood and homeland, he also invited six Icelandic musicians to create accompanying clips featuring their own artistic interventions. Among these collaborating artists was the young soprano and composer Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir, who reworked Víkingur's recording of Brahms's Intermezzo, Op. 116, No. 4, as a nocturne, adding a text she had written herself: a lullaby for her newborn son. Víkingur found the result "enchantingly beautiful," remarking: "I'm a huge fan of hers. She is one of a kind." Here, both Álfheiður and Víkingur will give their first live performance together in a song recital. The program spans Icelandic folk tunes arranged for soprano and piano quintet, Sibelius's tone poem *Luonnotar*, French music, and Richard Strauss. Álfheiður's career is on a rapid ascent: after three years in the ensemble at Theater Basel, she was named a "Rising Star" by the European Concert Hall Organisation and toured major concert halls across Europe in 2025–26. High time for an appearance in Lucerne!

Fri 07.05.

Song: Álfheiður & Víkingur
18.30
KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Álfheiður Erla Guðmundsdóttir
soprano
Víkingur Ólafsson piano
Soloists from the Mahler Chamber Orchestra

Selected songs by **Jón Leifs, Wilhelm Stenhammar, Henri Duparc, Páll Ísólfsson,** and **Edvard Grieg**

Icelandic folk songs
arranged for voice and piano quintet by Viktor Orri Árnason

Ernest Chausson
Chanson perpétuelle Op. 37
for soprano and piano quintet

Maurice Ravel
Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé
for soprano, two flutes, two clarinets, and piano quintet

Jean Sibelius
Luonnotar Op. 70

Selected songs by **Richard Strauss** and **Jean Sibelius**

This concert has an intermission and ends at about 20.15.

CHF 90/70/50/30



6 STRINGS, 6 CENTU-RIES

Sean Shibe's imagination extends far beyond the standard guitar repertoire. In his concerts and on his nine albums to date, he brings centuries-old music into dialogue with the music of today, combining classics with rarities, original works and his own arrangements, and acoustic with electric guitar. Born in 1992, the Scottish musician has been hailed by Víkingur Ólafsson as "one of today's most interesting musical artists." In addition to dazzling technique and a finely tuned ear for tone color, he is endlessly curious and remarkably versatile. In the first half of his Lucerne Festival debut, Shibe invites us to the Iberian Peninsula, tracing a path from delicate fantasies originally written for the vihuela, the foremost plucked instrument of the Spanish Renaissance, to a brand-new work by Francisco Coll drawing on medieval songs of the Sephardim, the Jewish minority of the Iberian Peninsula. He will then take up the electric guitar for a set juxtaposing the ethereal, mystical music of Olivier Messiaen and American performance artist Meredith Monk with Steve Reich's Minimalist classic *Electric Counterpoint*.

Sat 08.05.

Guitars: Sean Shibe
15.00
Chamber Music Hall KKV, Vitznau

Sean Shibe guitar, electric guitar

Luis de Narváez
Mille regretz

Alonso Mudarra
Fantasías VII and X

Joaquín Rodrigo
Tres piezas españolas

Francisco Coll
Sefarad

Olivier Messiaen
O sacrum convivium!
arranged for electric guitar by Sean Shibe

Steve Reich
Electric Counterpoint
for electric guitar and tape

Meredith Monk
Nightfall
arranged for electric guitar by Sean Shibe

This concert has no intermission and ends at about 16.30.

CHF 60



INTO THE LIGHT

For Víkingur Ólafsson, what is miraculous about Bach's Cello Suites is that "the musical whole seems to be greater than the sum of its parts. The spirit contained within these works truly defies material constraints." Here Bach pulled off the remarkable feat of writing music for a single voice that at the same time contains the sonic space and richness of polyphony. He does not even need double, triple, or quadruple stops to create this paradoxical effect: all by itself, the pure melodic line is enough to suggest intricate polyphonic textures, to hint at inner voices and counterlines, or to create harmonic illusions. Bach also transforms the traditional dance forms — ranging from the allemande and courante through the sarabande to the minuet and gigue — "from the earthly into the spiritual," as Víkingur puts it. That is why he invited Alisa Weilerstein to explore this year's Pulse theme, "Spirit & Matter," with a complete performance of Bach's Cello Suites. When the American cellist released her acclaimed recording of all six works six years ago, *The Guardian* praised the "sunlit clarity" of her interpretation.

Sat 08.05.

Cello: Alisa Weilerstein
18.30
KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Alisa Weilerstein cello

Johann Sebastian Bach
Six Suites for Solo Cello
BWV 1007–1012

This concert has an intermission and ends at about 20.45.

Introduction to the Concert
17.30 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium (entrance on the train station side) with **Susanne Stähr** (in German)

CHF 90/70/50/30



GENTLE FORCE

When Joep Beving sits down at the piano, his music is melodic, minimalist, and meditative. The Dutch composer and pianist self-produced his debut album, *Solipsism*, in 2015, reaching millions of listeners through streaming with a contemplative yet highly expressive musical language stripped down to its essentials. Beving has since become a star of so-called neoclassical music, though he himself is not entirely comfortable with the label. He writes "simple music for complex emotions," as he puts it. "The world is a hectic place right now. I felt a deep urge to reconnect on a basic human level with people in general. Music as our universal language has the power to unite." In Lucerne, he will present music from his current album *Liminal* alongside a specially chosen selection from his existing repertoire. Beving's delicate melodies, tinged with melancholy, recall Erik Satie or Philip Glass and linger long after the final notes. For Víkingur Ólafsson, Beving is "a unique voice."

Sat 08.05.

Late Night: Joep Beving
21.30
KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Joep Beving piano

"Liminal Tour"

This concert has no intermission and ends at about 23.15.

CHF 90/70/50/30


STEINWAY & SONS

FIRE AND WAVES

“When we think of Brahms, we usually picture him as an old man: portly, with a long, bushy beard, almost like Santa Claus,” says Víkingur Ólafsson. “But when he composed his First Piano Concerto, he was strikingly handsome — he could have been a model. And he had real fire! He pushed the piano to its limits and set it in a charged dialogue with the orchestra.” For the grand finale of the second Pulse Festival, Víkingur takes on Brahms’s bold first venture into the genre, a work that is not only among the most technically demanding in the repertoire but also places enormous demands on the performer, from tender introspection to dramatic eruption. He pairs this towering work with another high-energy concerto in D minor, by Johann Sebastian Bach, who may be regarded as the inventor of the piano concerto. The Festival finale opens, however, with a tribute to American composer John Adams on the occasion of his 80th birthday. *Shaker Loops* takes its name from “the devoted Christian Shaker sects of Maine” and from the early minimalist technique of using “tape loops” to “create patterns of melodic or rhythmic fragments,” says Víkingur. “Modern technology meets pious sectarian devotion, conjuring up the *ghost in the machine*.”

Sun 09.05.

Finale: Víkingur & Mahler Chamber Orchestra
17.00
KKL Luzern, Concert Hall

Mahler Chamber Orchestra
Víkingur Ólafsson piano and musical direction

John Adams
Shaker Loops for string orchestra
28 min

Johann Sebastian Bach
Piano Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052
24 min

Johannes Brahms
Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15
50 min

Introduction to the Concert
16.00 | KKL Luzern, Auditorium (entrance on the train station side) with **Susanne Stähr** (in German)

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

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Víkingur Ólafsson at a Lucerne Festival Friends reception

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lucernefestival.ch

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Monday to Friday, 10.00 am–12.00 noon (Swiss time)
Additional telephone hours from 2.00 to 4.00 pm during the week advance sales begin (24–27 November 2026), during the opening week, and throughout the Festival; also on weekends during the Festival.

Lucerne Festival Box Office at the KKL Luzern (main entrance)
Open daily from 4.00 pm during the Festival (6–9 May 2027).

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LUCERNE FESTIVAL

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Tickets available starting 24 November 2026 at 10.00 am (Swiss time)

	Time | Venue	Event	No. of tickets	Ticket price	Total
Thu 06.05.	18.30 | KKL Luzern	**Opening: Víkingur solo**			
Fri 07.05.	18.30 | KKL Luzern	**Song: Álfheiður & Víkingur**			
Sat 08.05.	15.00 | KKV Vitznau	**Guitars: Sean Shibe**			
Sat 08.05.	18.30 | KKL Luzern	**Cello: Alisa Weilerstein**			
Sat 08.05.	21.30 | KKL Luzern	**Late Night: Joep Beving**			
Sun 09.05.	17.00 | KKL Luzern	**Finale: Víkingur & Mahler Chamber Orchestra**			
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