

3 World Premieres at Le Piano Symphonique 5 years of the piano festival at Lake Lucerne

From 12 to 18 January 2026, "Le Piano Symphonique" will once again bring both international and rising stars to Lucerne for a "piano festival of the highest order"*



Luzerner Sinfonieorchester with Martha Argerich in the KKL (c) Philipp Schmidli

The piano festival, "Le Piano Symphonique," has delighted audiences from the very beginning with a programme that attracted over 10,000 concertgoers in 2025. The festival, which will take place from **January 12 to 18 2026**, explores and illuminates all musical aspects of the piano in concerts, chamber music, solo recitals, masterclasses, and panel discussions – and it does so through surprising combinations. A concert is never just a symphonic evening: it can suddenly turn into a recital or the intimate

chambermusic setting of a quartet. This is also evident in the division of the programme into "Act 1" and "Act 2."

The **Luzerner Sinfonieorchester** the initiator and central orchestra of the festival, is able to effectively showcase world stars such as **Hélène Grimaud** and **Alexandre Kantorow**, as well as first-class chamber musicians and promising newcomers, resulting in inspiring and surprising performances for audiences. The artistic heart and shining light of the festival week is the *Pianiste Associée* **Martha Argerich**. "Her presence was palpable even when she wasn't performing," wrote the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in its review of the 2025 edition.

In 2026, for the very first time, there will be a collaboration with the *Irving S. Gilmore International Piano Festival* to further enhance the unique and outstanding diversity of the programme.

Debuts and World Premieres

With "French Sound Poetry to Start the Festival," **Hélène Grimaud** will have the honor of kicking off an exciting week on Monday, January 12. She will perform the first half with her duo partner **Renaud Capuçon** (violin), before then presenting one of the most popular solo works in piano literature with the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester under **Michael Sanderling**: Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto in G major. This concert marks Hélène Grimaud's debut with "Le Piano Symphonique." Also appearing for the first time is **Christoph Eschenbach**, who will conduct the evening concert on Thursday, January 15. The soloist in Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 3 in C major, Op. 26, is Gilmore Prize winner

Alexandre Kantorov. After the interval, Kantorov will present a **world premiere** of the new work for solo piano commissioned by him from the Swedish composer **Anders Hillborg**.

In the pianistic spirit of Mozart and Schubert

On Tuesday 13th January, 'Schubert's Klangwelten' (Worlds of Sound) will open at the festival in the KKL Luzern. In Act 1, **David Fray**, who was already a guest at the festival in 2024, will now be performing Franz Schubert's Piano Sonata No. 21 in B flat major, D. 960. In Act 2, Fray will be joined by **Lisa Schatzman** (violin), **Alexander Besa** (viola), **Heiner Reich** (cello) and **David Desimpelaere** (double bass) – all of them soloists with the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester – to perform Schubert's Piano Quintet in A major ('The Trout Quintet'), D. 667.

The program on Wednesday 14th January is entitled 'Timeless Piano Music'. **Robin Ticciati**, former chief conductor of the DSO, will make his debut conducting the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester that evening. The concept behind the festival's programme can be felt here to an almost exaggerated extent: two completely different concert halves are brought together this evening. In the first act, Ticciati and the young pianist **Alexandra Dovgan** interpret Mozart's Overture to La Clemenza di Tito, K. 621, followed by Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466. The second act is devoted entirely to a recital, with **Beatrice Rana** presenting excerpts from Sergei Prokofiev's 10 Piano Pieces from Romeo and Juliet, Op. 75, supplemented by an arrangement from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite, Op. 71a, and Prokofiev's powerful – in the last movement even wild – Piano Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82. The Italian star pianist, whose hands the Times described as having 'Orphic powers of seduction', thus puts the piano back at the centre of attention. Sound volume and symphonic music are possible here even without an orchestra – a perfect example of the programmatic diversity of "Le Piano Symphonique".

On Friday January 16, the music is accompanied by another component: an artificial light projection. In cooperation with the **Lucerne Festival of Light**, harpsichordist **Jean Rondeau** will present his intimate and immersive improvisation program "Sisyphus" in the Great Hall of the KKL Lucerne. **Martha Argerich** will open the evening with her trusted chamber music partners **Janine Jansen** (violin) and **Mischa Maisky** (cello) performing the contrasting pieces of Beethoven's Sonata for Piano and Cello in G minor, Op. 5 No. 2, and Beethoven's Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 9 in A major, the famous "Kreutzer Sonata." Both works highlight the prominent piano part, in which the piano is placed before the cello and violin in the manuscript version, thus emphasizing the equality of both instruments. Following this, Martha Argerich and Stephen Kovacevich, who will be celebrating his 85th birthday shortly before, will perform Debussy's "En blanc et noir" and the Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune for two pianos.

Lunchtime at the Schweizerhof

The KKL Lucerne isn't the only venue serving as a performance venue. **Three debut concerts** will take place at 12:30p.m. each day in the Zeugheersaal of the Hotel Schweizerhof Luzern. Bochum-born pianist **Schaghajegh Nosrati** will perform on Thursday January 15. **Roman Borisov** (Friday January 16) and **Fil Liotis** (Saturday January 17) follow. Following on from Schaghajegh Nosrati's debut concert, the English-language **panel** "Discovering and Nurturing the Next Generation: Different Approaches" invites you to explore a controversial topic on Thursday January 15. Christoph Eschenbach will lead a public masterclass at the Schweizerhof on Friday January 16, and Saturday January 17. Participants include the outstanding young pianists Elliott Wu, Jethew Lee, and Jan Schulmeister. "Le Piano Symphonique" 2026 will end with the **final masterclass concert** on Sunday January 18 at 11:00a.m.

Film World Premiere by William Kentridge

The evening of Saturday January 17 will see another world premiere celebrated at the KKL Lucerne; namely, "O quickly disappearing photograph," a film by South African theater and film director William Kentridge. In his artistic reflection, specially commissioned by the Lucerne Piano Festival, Kentridge will focus on Luigi Dallapiccola's work for piano *Quaderno musicale di Annalibera*, performed by the young pianist **Mirabelle Kajenjeri**, whose parents come from Burundi and Ukraine. Prior to this, **Akane Sakai** (piano), together with soloists from the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester, **Gregory Ahss** (violin) and **Samuel Niederhauser** (cello), will open the evening in keeping with the festival's symphonic theme with Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 in his original transcription for piano trio – a chamber music prelude to this extraordinary world premiere.

Following the world premiere, Martha Argerich introduces the young pianist **Martina Meola**, who opens Act 2 with Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23. The evening concludes with the festival's "Associate Pianist," Martha Argerich, as soloist in Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19, together with the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester under the direction of Gregory Ahss. To bring the festival to a close, a very special premiere is on the program: Martha Argerich, together with **Christoph Eschenbach**, will perform Debussy's La Petite Suite for piano four hands, rounding off the festival with this intimate chamber music performance.

Full of Anticipation

Numa Bischof Ullmann, founder and artistic director of "Le Piano Symphonique," is looking forward to the festival's fifth edition: "We are delighted with the many wonders and marvels we are able to present to our audience in the fifth edition of 'Le Piano Symphonique.' This edition highlights the 'Piano Symphonique' theme. Key works of piano literature will be celebrated in both their pianistic and symphonic forms: Mephisto Walz, Schoenberg's transcription of Brahms's Piano Quartet, the suite from Romeo and Juliet, Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 as a piano trio, and many other works will be performed by leading pianists of our time. A commissioned work by the internationally acclaimed South African artist **William Kentridge**, which will receive its world premiere at the finale, underscores the significance of our piano festival. Another world premiere (Hillborg) as well as the four-hand joint premiere performance of our *pianist associée* Martha Argerich and Christoph Eschenbach illustrate the international appeal that our festival has achieved in its short history."

World premieres, high-profile reunions with international stars, and first-class debuts: The start of 2026 is all about the piano! SRF summed it up in its coverage: "A piano festival of the highest order."*

* SRF Kultur Kompakt, 20 January 2025

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1805
RESIDENZORCHESTER KKL LUZERN



Information & Tickets
Ticketline: +41 412260515
karten@sinfonieorchester.ch
sinfonieorchester.ch
kkk-luzern.ch

 Bettina Schimmer

Lindenstraße 14
50674 Köln

+49 (0)221 - 168 796 23
bettina.schimmer@schimmer-pr.de
www.schimmer-pr.de