

69th Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy | 18 July – 6 September 2025

Change

Humility – Transformation – Migration

As we enter the third and final year of our “Change” cycle (2023 – 2025), we are focusing on the relationship between music, migration and identity.

Migration stands among the most pressing challenges facing global society today, alongside climate change, conflicts around the world and the ripple effects they bring. Leaving one’s homeland – whether by choice or under duress – and beginning anew in exile often leads to profound ruptures in personal histories. By 2022, nearly 40% of Switzerland’s population had a migration background, underscoring how deeply migration shapes modern society. Embracing the unfamiliar, whether through the local Italian restaurant or the kebab stand at the station, is part of daily life. The 2025 edition of Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy seeks to illuminate the many dimensions of migration through the language of music.

Music has the unique ability to reflect the emotional spectrum of migration, from the pain of displacement to the hope of new horizons. Central topics such as memory, identity and belonging find expression through music, offering a source of resilience and connection. Music becomes a medium for the deep, unspeakable yearning for what is familiar, what is lost and what has been left behind. It also serves as a “repository” for those who are displaced or have a background in migration. It serves as a cultural archive and a means of preserving traditions, while also acting as a conduit for intercultural exchange and the reimagining of social and artistic landscapes.

During the 2025 Festival edition, we explore migration across four dimensions: “Origin”: Music rooted in one’s homeland; “Escape to Exile”: Music born from the experience of flight and exile; “Inner Emigration”: Music by composers living under oppressive political regimes or those who, whether by choice or necessity, turn inward to find a path to self-liberation; “Nostalgia”: A yearning for the homeland left behind, voluntarily or otherwise – capturing the deep ache of homesickness.

The “Origin” concert series offers a diverse programme that combines traditional and folk music as well as centuries-old dance and song forms as the inspiration for new creations in classical music. Fazıl Say’s *Bosporus Fantasies*, the “New World” project by the King’s Singers who are delving into musical treasures from Portuguese and Spanish explorers in Central and South America, as well as Avi Avital’s Mediterranean journey rooted in the traditional sounds of Apulia all highlight the powerful inspiration that deep connections to one’s musical heritage can provide.

“Escape to Exile” reflects the experience of leaving home, the hardships of flight and life in exile. Georg Friedrich Handel’s striking oratorio *Israel in Egypt* vividly captures the suffering of oppressed people and their exodus. Through imagery of bloody water, frogs, hail and darkness, the oratorio evokes the torment of bondage in its first part, the liberation in the second and a celestial hymn of praise in the finale. Another programme focuses on the perilous “Western Balkan Route”, following

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the migration journey across Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary, as performers from these regions contribute to an eclectic world-music concert, playing global sounds on traditional instruments. This series also explores the expression of loss and longing in the music of exiled composers such as Schulhoff, Jacobi and Hindemith. Sergei Rachmaninov, who fled to Dresden with his family after the 1905 St. Petersburg “Bloody Sunday”, found solace in exile, composing his *Second Symphony*, a work of dark beauty filled with Russian folk influences that resonate with the essence of his homeland. Is Verdi’s *Requiem* also a reflection on escape and transcendence? Perhaps an escape from earthly struggles to the peace of paradise. In the “Dies Irae”, humanity confronts the end of the world with chilling power, though a glimmer of hope for salvation emerges in the “Recordare Jesu pie”. In Bellini’s *Norma*, the characters Adalgisa and Pollione’s flight to Rome expresses both departure and new beginnings, entwined with love and duty.

Dmitri Shostakovich, whose 50th anniversary will be marked in 2025, was forced to navigate his art within an oppressive political regime. Though he outwardly cooperated with the Soviet authorities, often composing at their request, he lived in constant fear of reprisal, knowing his work was perceived as a threat. His state of “inner emigration” describes a retreat into an inner world, where he found creative freedom without leaving his homeland. His later chamber works, filled with complexity and layered meanings, became an artistic refuge. Shostakovich’s music today holds poignant relevance, embodying the struggle to preserve human dignity and inner strength amid war and crisis. Even Beethoven, nearly deaf, turned inward with his final three piano sonatas, Op. 109 – 111, creating an unparalleled richness of sound and complexity through his “inner ear”.

Finally, music offers a doorway to nostalgic feelings, evoking longings for the past, for childhood, for places far away and the profound ache of homesickness. The elegant French lifestyle and charm inspired many Russian and Polish Romantic composers, including Tchaikovsky and Wieniawski. Dvořák, tormented by homesickness during his years in the United States, channelled his longing into some of his most beloved works, such as the “American Quartet” and his *Ninth Symphony* “From the New World”. George Bizet’s “L’Arlésienne” suites, inspired by themes from Provence, evoke the nostalgic beauty of his experiences there. Contemporary works by composers like Gabriela Montero and Fazıl Say also draw on these deep emotions, blending world music and folk traditions to create something vibrant in exile – a sound that balances distance and closeness, rooted in nostalgia but brimming with hope for the future.

During the third edition of our “Music for the Planet” series, Patricia Kopatchinskaja explores questions of origin, future and the urgent challenges posed by rapidly accelerating impacts from climate change with two distinct programmes.

The first programme, alongside *Cello Sonata*, centres around Shostakovich’s powerful *Second Piano Trio*, composed in 1944 near towards the end of the Second World War. The piece is a wordless expression of profound grief and lament, infused with a deeply personal lyricism. In the final movement, Shostakovich draws on themes from Jewish folk music, evoking an intense sense of pain. Complementing these musical works are texts by Swiss author and cabaret artist Franz Hohler, including his 1973 text *Wann wird das sein? [When will That Be?]*, written under the immediate impact of the Club of Rome’s report “The Limits to Growth”, which today resonates as a strikingly prophetic view of the world’s climate challenges. However, with short texts like *Die Göttin [The Goddess]* and *Die Schöpfung [The Creation]*, Hohler also introduces a sense of hope and resilience. The music and lyrics are tied together by a sense of helplessness that, through the powerful impact of the sound, can

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transform into a feeling of strength – or even a cautious optimism – sparked by the possibilities of a new beginning.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja, who left her home early on to seek new paths abroad, describes the second programme of this year's "Music for the Planet" series as follows: "The roots of our programme lie underground, yet at the same time in heaven. But most of all, they are planted in our hearts." The concert explores the idea of putting down roots in exile and reflects on life-giving trees – trees that guide us as humans but are increasingly threatened by climate change. "We left to plant new roots, to make friends in other places, but the trees of our childhood ... they are still waiting there." The life of Polish composer Andrzej Panufnik, a close friend of Yehudi Menuhin, was deeply marked by exile. In 1954, Panufnik fled his homeland due to political pressures and sought asylum in the UK. Since childhood, he was fascinated by nature and in particular by trees – their colours, shapes, the way their branches dance in the wind and the soft murmurs of their leaves. He imagined their roots stretching upward into the cosmos while their branches reached down into the earth. His piece *Arbor Cosmica* is accompanied by striking images from photographer Marco Borggreve, capturing both the strength and vulnerability of trees – as symbols of beauty, resilience and the delicate world we inhabit.

The topic of migration in the upcoming Festival programme is brought to life through personal stories: Many of the musicians performing have lived through experiences of fleeing and starting anew in exile, facing political oppression and travel restrictions, enduring war or persecution or carry with them a deep longing for their homeland, artistic freedom and the yearning for peace and justice in the places they left behind. This adds a tangible sense of authenticity and immediacy to the programme and the endless possibilities to explore the intersectional perspectives on music and migration.

With my 23rd programme in the 24th year of being part of the Festival, I am saying farewell to you, dear audience, from Gstaad. Allow me to share some personal thoughts with you. I have always strived to create a programme that stands out for its high quality, uniqueness, diversity and broad appeal.

Running a music festival that operates in the "free market" caters to a wide range of expectations and tastes. Attracting a large audience while offering joy and entertainment has always been a priority, while I've enjoyed facing the challenge of not simply following the mainstream or relying on predictable crowd-pleasers.

To counter this, I found my way through the annual Festival topics. I aimed to create a guiding thread within each theme that would serve as both an entry point and an inspiration for musicians and audiences alike – a kind of roadmap. I wanted to offer programmes with real substance, even if there was always a pressure to make things commercially viable. I'm grateful that during all those years, these efforts were supported by our team and sponsors. In the past three years, we've boldly tackled major social issues, opening the door for debate and tackling fundamental questions. Over time, I've become more daring in my programming, which I hope has shown the evolution of the Festival's profile as I approach the end of my time as its Artistic Director.

By introducing new formats like academies, programmes for young talent, orchestral offerings for amateur musicians, the Discovery format and of course, the Gstaad Festival Orchestra with its Conducting Academy, we've created spaces where people from different backgrounds, generations and levels of experience – professionals and amateurs alike – can come together, creating and nurturing art, culture and artistic sustainability. Concerts are unique, unforgettable moments;

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however, the structures we've developed over the last sixteen years (beginning with the first Academy in 2008) provide artistic values and content that can evolve, mature and extend their influence into the future. The Festival has transformed from a purely concert-driven initiative into a well-rounded music and events organisation with lasting artistic impact on multiple levels.

I feel a deep sense of fulfilment and happiness knowing that this "framework" is now stable, fully embraced and carried forward by everyone involved. For me, the next logical step is to hand over the creative reins, so our formats can move into the future with new ideas and the perspectives of other creative minds.

I am deeply grateful for your unwavering support and commitment to my ideas and projects. Our success is a shared success, made possible only because you were open to new paths and inspired those around you to join in creating shared experiences. Even at this point, we see traces of a migratory spirit: embracing the unknown, encountering experiences beyond the expected, the initially unfamiliar – ultimately putting down roots in innovation. It brings me the greatest satisfaction to see that we view change as an opportunity and a new perspective, welcoming it together. Since 2002, our audience numbers have nearly doubled.

We still have a summer of musical discoveries and encounters ahead of us. I look forward to exploring with you the paths of musical origins, exile, inner imagination and nostalgia during the 69th Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy in the summer of 2025.

With warmest regards

Christoph Müller
Artistic Director, Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy

Press contact:

Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy AG
Lukas Wittermann
Executive Director

Dorfstrasse 60, P.O. Box
3792 Saanen

Tel +41 33 748 83 38
Direct +41 33 748 83 37
lw@gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch

Publisher:

Gstaad Menuhin Festival & Academy AG
gstaadmenuhinfestival.ch