

George Enescu International Festival

2025

A Personal Chronicle from August 24 to September 21

A photographic and narrative record from six days at Romania's largest classical music festival.

The George Enescu International Festival, held between 24 August and 21 September 2025, stands as one of Europe's most ambitious and far-reaching classical music events. For nearly a month, Bucharest becomes a meeting point for leading orchestras, conductors, soloists, and contemporary creators, shaping a cultural landscape that blends tradition, innovation, and human connection.

Although the festival spans dozens of performances across multiple venues, this article follows six days and seven concerts, offering a personal chronicle of encounters, energy, and artistic depth within Romania's most iconic musical celebration.

August 24 — Palace Hall

Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra · Cristian Măcelaru · Nemanja Radulović

The 2025 edition of the George Enescu International Festival opened on August 24 at the Palace Hall, welcoming the audience into a space already marked by expectation. Even before the musicians stepped on stage, there was a heightened sense of focus — an awareness that this evening marked the beginning of one of Europe's most ambitious cultural events. Conversations in the hall carried a mixture of excitement and reverence, the kind that gathers only around a festival with history and artistic weight. As the lights softened and the orchestra settled, anticipation gave way to attention.



The Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra stands to greet the audience as the 2025 George Enescu International Festival begins at the Palace Hall.



The Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra performing beneath the Festival's opening night visuals.

As spectators took their seats, the Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra began its familiar ritual under the calm leadership of the concertmaster — a subtle signal that the Festival had officially begun. The atmosphere shifted almost imperceptibly, from social to collective, as the hall aligned itself with the stage.



The Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra warming up before the opening concert.

Cristian Măcelaru's conducting that evening was strikingly physical. He shaped each passage with broad, engaged gestures, his movements animated and precise. As the performance unfolded, the intensity of his approach became visible — his jacket gradually dampening, a quiet marker of how fully he inhabited the score. The orchestra met this energy without hesitation, responding with momentum that built steadily and filled the hall.



Cristian Măcelaru acknowledges the orchestra moments before composer Dan Dediu steps on stage for the post-performance celebration of his Concerto for Orchestra.

The opening program included a moment of particular warmth: composer Dan Dediú stepping onto the stage following the performance of his *Concerto for Orchestra*. The applause was immediate and sincere. Măcelaru greeted him with an affectionate embrace, and when Dediú received flowers from the Festival, the gesture felt entirely in keeping with the atmosphere already present — open, generous, and human. The musicians' smiles reinforced the sense of shared celebration.



Composer Dan Dediú is welcomed on stage and embraced by Cristian Măcelaru following the performance of his Concerto for Orchestra.



With flowers in hand, composer Dan Dediú greets the audience as Cristian Măcelaru and the orchestra applaud his appearance on stage.

As the hall prepared for the soloist, the mood shifted once again. Violinist Nemanja Radulović entered the stage with a direct, focused presence.



Nemanja Radulović enters the stage, greeted warmly by Cristian Măcelaru and the orchestra.

His interpretation of Khachaturian's *Violin Concerto* combined technical assurance with a willingness to take risks. From the opening lines, Radulović committed fully, shaping phrases with urgency and flexibility, drawing the orchestra into an active exchange.

The dialogue between soloist and conductor developed with clarity and momentum. Măcelaru responded with sharp, attentive cues, keeping the structure clear while allowing the music to move forward with force. Together, they sustained the concerto's intensity across its span, holding the hall's attention throughout.



Nemanja Radulović and Cristian Măcelaru during the performance of Khachaturian's Violin Concerto at the Palace Hall.



Radulović and Măcelaru in the final passages of Khachaturian's Violin Concerto, with the orchestra fully engaged.*

The performance concluded with a moment that could not have been planned: a spontaneous, unguarded embrace between soloist and conductor.



Radulović and Măcelaru embrace on stage following the concerto.



Radulović acknowledges the audience following the concerto.

The program closed with George Enescu's *Poème roumain*, Op. 1. Projected visuals accompanied the performance, remaining present through the final minutes of the evening.

August 31 — Two Concerts, Two Halls



Daniel Harding acknowledging the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia after the performance at the Palace Hall.

August 31 was my second day at the Festival — not the second day of the Festival itself, but the next one I attended. By then, the George Enescu International Festival was already fully underway, carrying its own momentum and internal rhythm, and stepping back into it felt different from the sense of arrival that marked the opening night.

This day unfolded across two concerts and two halls, each with its own scale, acoustics, and way of shaping the music. The contrast between them was not incidental: moving from the Palace Hall to the Romanian Athenaeum within the same day sharpened the difference between spaces designed for breadth and projection, and those built for closeness and detail.

Rather than forming a single narrative arc, August 31 offered a sequence of perspectives. The Palace Hall emphasized collective force and architectural amplitude, while the Athenaeum drew attention inward — to gesture, phrasing, and the physical presence of performers within a richly ornamented space.

What remained constant was a shared sense of concentration — from the musicians on stage and from an audience clearly attuned to the Festival's pace by this point.

Palace Hall

Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia · Daniel Harding · Seong-Jin Cho

Returning to the Palace Hall on August 31 felt different from the opening night. The atmosphere was more settled. The Festival had found its rhythm, and the audience seemed already inside it.



The Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia receiving applause at the Palace Hall.

Daniel Harding opened the evening with the orchestra. The sound took shape gradually — measured, controlled — filling the hall without urgency. The scale of the space became apparent early, carried by the orchestra's weight and balance rather than sheer volume.



Seong-Jin Cho acknowledging the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia at the Palace Hall, conducted by Daniel Harding.

Seong-Jin Cho entered after the orchestral opening and took his place at the piano. The performance unfolded in clearly defined sections, with pauses between them. Cho remained closely coordinated with Harding and the orchestra, shaping his part with consistent attention to timing and balance.



Seong-Jin Cho at the piano during rehearsal at the Palace Hall.

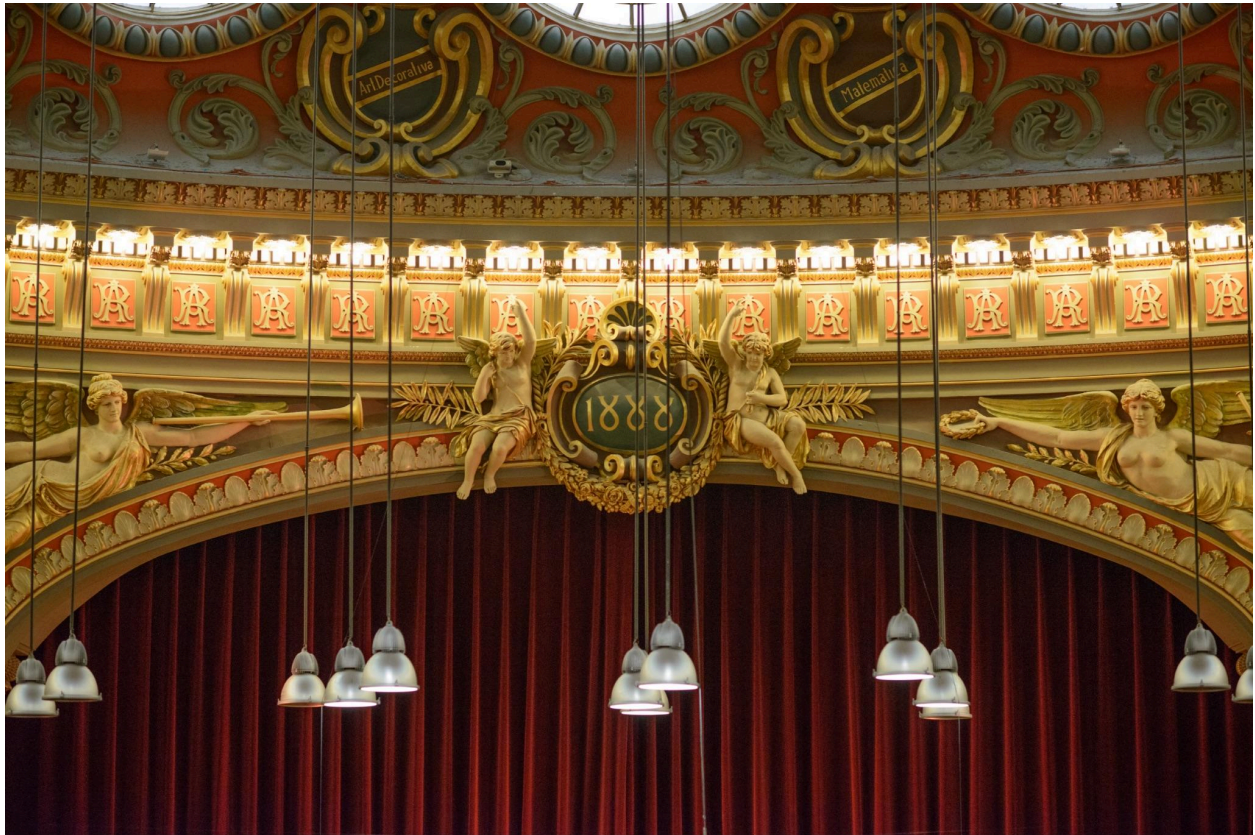
The response was immediate and sustained. Cho was called back to the stage several times, the applause restarting before it fully settled.



The Palace Hall stage during the interval.

Romanian Athenaeum — Midnight Concerts Series

Asmik Grigorian · Lukas Geniušas



Interior detail of the Romanian Athenaeum during the Midnight Concerts Series.

The day ended at the Romanian Athenaeum with a recital from the Midnight Concerts Series — a late-night slot that altered the atmosphere even before the first note. After the Palace Hall, everything felt closer: the sound, the attention, even the way the audience listened.



Interior view of the Romanian Athenaeum foyer during the August 31 concert evening.

Soprano Asmik Grigorian and pianist Lukas Geniušas introduced each work from the stage, briefly outlining the program as it progressed. The recital unfolded in clearly defined sections, with pauses between pieces that reset the room's focus and reinforced the sense of direct address.

Grigorian's approach was focused and contained. Her attention remained on the text, with phrasing shaped carefully from one section to the next, without theatrical emphasis.

Geniušas's role shifted across the evening. Alongside the voice, he maintained a steady, attentive presence at the piano; in his solo passage, the focus moved fully to him, his playing bringing the hall into a quieter, more concentrated state before the program continued.



Asmik Grigorian and Lukas Geniušas during their recital at the Romanian Athenaeum.

By the end of the recital, the hall responded with sustained attention. Grigorian and Geniušas returned to the stage several times, and the additional pieces continued within the same concentrated atmosphere established earlier in the evening.



Asmik Grigorian and Lukas Geniušas acknowledging the audience at the Romanian Athenaeum.



Ceiling and stained-glass detail inside the Romanian Athenaeum.

September 14 — Palace Hall

Shostakovich · *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*

Giancarlo Guerrero · Kristine Opolais · Andreas Bauer Kanabas · Vincent Wolfsteiner ·
Sergey Polyakov · Maria Barakova



*Giancarlo Guerrero conducting Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* at the Palace Hall.*

Day 3 returned to the Palace Hall for Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. It was a long evening, and the hall seemed to register that early on — a quiet adjustment to the duration of the work, to its repeated shocks and extended stretches of stillness.

Giancarlo Guerrero kept the score moving with steady momentum. Sections followed one another without rupture, and the larger shape of the opera remained clear across the evening, allowing abrupt turns and violent contrasts to register within a broader span.

The orchestra played with focus and definition. The strings held a firm edge, winds articulated details with clarity, and the brass entered with force that remained contained within the overall texture. Even in denser passages, individual lines stayed audible, and balance across the ensemble was consistently maintained.

Kristine Opolais stood at the center of the performance as Katerina Lvovna Ismailova. Her presence was marked by stillness and sustained attention. Long phrases were shaped carefully, with tension accumulating gradually across scenes, giving the role a continuous, concentrated weight.



Kristine Opolais (Katerina Lvovna Ismailova) during Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.

Andreas Bauer Kanabas brought a dense, grounded authority to Boris Timofeyevich Ismailov, his vocal delivery exerting pressure on the space around him. Vincent Wolfsteiner's Sinovi Ismailov appeared unsettled and exposed, his instability registering clearly within the ensemble.



Andreas Bauer Kanabas (Boris Timofeyevich Ismailov) during Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.

Scenes involving Sergey Polyakov and Maria Barakova (Sonjetka) shifted the atmosphere later in the evening. Their entrances tightened the focus of the action, redirecting its momentum and altering the balance on stage without interrupting the opera's forward motion.



Sergey Polyakov (Sergey Filipytsch) and Maria Barakova (Sonjetka) during Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.

Multimedia projections formed a constant visual layer throughout the performance. Faces, fragments of text, and stark imagery remained present in the background, shaping the visual environment alongside the music.

At the close of the performance, the hall held a brief pause before applause gathered. The response was steady and sustained, marking the end of a demanding evening and acknowledging the shared concentration required from both performers and audience.



The orchestra acknowledging the audience following the performance of Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.

September 15 — Romanian Athenaeum

Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo · Charles Dutoit · Martha Argerich

The September 15 afternoon concert at the Romanian Athenaeum brought the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo under the direction of Charles Dutoit. The program paired Ravel and Debussy, filling the hall.



Charles Dutoit conducting the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo during the concert at the Romanian Athenaeum.

Ravel's *Ma mère l'Oye* opened the concert.

The central work of the afternoon was Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G major*, with Martha Argerich as soloist. The piano entered clearly, and the exchange between soloist and orchestra remained tightly coordinated throughout the performance.

After the interval, the orchestra returned alone for Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. Debussy's *La Mer* closed the program.



Charles Dutoit at the podium during the curtain call at the Romanian Athenaeum.

Sustained applause followed, with conductor, orchestra, and soloist returning to the stage to close the afternoon.



Martha Argerich and Charles Dutoit acknowledging the audience after the performance at the Romanian Athenaeum.



Martha Argerich receiving flowers after the performance at the Romanian Athenaeum.

September 18 — Palace Hall

Orchestre National de France · Cristian Măcelaru · Anne-Sophie Mutter



Anne-Sophie Mutter acknowledging the audience at the Palace Hall.

The evening at the Palace Hall unfolded in two clearly defined parts, moving from a soloist-centered first half to a larger, multimedia-driven second.

The first part brought Anne-Sophie Mutter to the stage with the Orchestre National de France, conducted by Cristian Măcelaru. Thomas Adès's *Air* for Violin and Orchestra opened the program, its contemporary writing placing the soloist in direct dialogue with the orchestral texture. Mutter articulated the line with close attention, maintaining a focused exchange with the ensemble under Măcelaru's direction.



Anne-Sophie Mutter with conductor Cristian Măcelaru on stage at the Palace Hall.

Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 1 in B-flat major* followed, maintaining a shared focus between soloist, conductor, and orchestra. Phrasing and pacing were shaped collectively across the movements, with an emphasis on balance and continuity.



Anne-Sophie Mutter among the musicians of the Orchestre National de France at the Palace Hall.

After the interval, the program shifted to Maurice Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. As the music began, stage lighting was reduced and a large-scale multimedia projection appeared on the central screen behind the orchestra. Visual elements extended across the stage space and remained present throughout the work, evolving alongside the progression of the score.



Cristian Măcelaru conducting the Orchestre National de France during the concert at the Palace Hall.

The Orchestre National de France was joined by the George Enescu Philharmonic Choir, prepared by Iosif Ion Prunner. With the entrance of the choir, the forces on stage expanded, adding a sustained vocal layer behind the orchestral texture.

Throughout *Daphnis et Chloé*, orchestra, choir, and projections operated in parallel. The visual layer accompanied the performance continuously, shaping the environment without interrupting the musical flow. At the conclusion of the work, the full ensemble returned to the stage for acknowledgments, bringing the evening to a close.

September 21 — Palace Hall

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra · Klaus Mäkelä · Jean-Yves Thibaudet

The Festival concluded on September 21 at the Palace Hall with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under the direction of Klaus Mäkelä, joined by Jean-Yves Thibaudet as soloist. After nearly a month of performances across the city, the return to the Palace Hall for the final evening carried a clear sense of culmination.

The program brought together Enescu, Saint-Saëns, and Stravinsky, placing the Festival's namesake alongside works that extended the frame outward without obscuring its center. Across the evening, the scale of the orchestra and the continuity of the direction shaped a long arc, within which Thibaudet's presence marked a distinct point of focus.

With the conclusion of the concert, the Festival's 2025 edition closed in the same hall where it had opened, returning the space to stillness after weeks of sustained activity.

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