

# George Enescu International Festival 2025

## A Photographic Chronicle from August 24 to September 21

A photographic and editorial record from six days at Romania's leading international classical music festival.

The George Enescu International Festival, held from August 24 to September 21, 2025, is 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 brings together tradition, innovation, and artistic exchange.

Although the festival spans dozens of performances across multiple venues, this article follows six days and seven concerts, offering a photographic chronicle of artistic encounters, concentrated listening, and festival atmosphere across one of Europe's major classical music events.

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 venue already marked by anticipation. Even before the musicians took the stage, there was a heightened sense of focus, an awareness that the evening marked the beginning of one of Europe's major classical music festivals. Conversations in the hall carried a mixture of excitement and reverence, the kind that gathers around an event with history, scale, and artistic weight. As the lights softened and the orchestra settled, anticipation gave way to concentrated attention.



*The Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra greets the audience as the 2025 George Enescu International Festival opens at the Palace Hall.*



*The Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra performs beneath the festival's opening-night visuals.*

As the audience settled into place, the Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra began its familiar pre-performance ritual under the concertmaster's calm lead, a subtle signal that the festival had formally begun. The atmosphere shifted almost imperceptibly from social to collective, as the hall aligned its attention with the stage.



*The Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra warms up before the opening concert.*

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



*Cristian Măcelaru leads the orchestra during the performance of Dan Dediu's Concerto for Orchestra.*

The opening program also included a moment of particular warmth, as composer Dan Dediu stepped 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 Dediu received flowers from the festival, the gesture felt fully in keeping with the atmosphere already established: open, generous, and distinctly human. The musicians' smiles reinforced that sense of shared celebration.



*Composer Dan Dediu is welcomed onstage and embraced by Cristian Măcelaru following the performance of his Concerto for Orchestra.*



*With flowers in hand, composer Dan Dediu greets the audience as Cristian Măcelaru and the orchestra applaud his appearance onstage.*

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



*Nemanja Radulović enters the stage, welcomed by Cristian Măcelaru and the orchestra.*

His interpretation of Khachaturian's *Violin Concerto* combined technical assurance with a clear willingness to take risks. From the opening lines, Radulović committed fully, shaping phrases with urgency and flexibility and 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 full span, holding the hall's attention throughout.



*Nemanja Radulović and Cristian Măcelaru during 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 staged: a spontaneous, unguarded embrace between soloist and conductor.



*Radulović and Măcelaru embrace onstage following the concerto.*



*Radulović acknowledges the audience after the concerto.*

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

## August 31 — Two Concerts, Two Halls



*Daniel Harding acknowledges 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 festival's second day, 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 returning to it felt different from the sense of arrival that marked the opening night.

The 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 central to the experience: 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 distinct perspectives. The Palace Hall emphasized collective force and architectural amplitude, while the Athenaeum drew attention inward, toward gesture, phrasing, and the physical presence of performers within a richly ornamented space.

What remained constant was a shared sense of concentration, both from the musicians on stage and from an audience clearly attuned to the festival's pace by that 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 fully inside it.



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

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



*Seong-Jin Cho acknowledges the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia at the Palace Hall under the direction of Daniel Harding.*

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



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

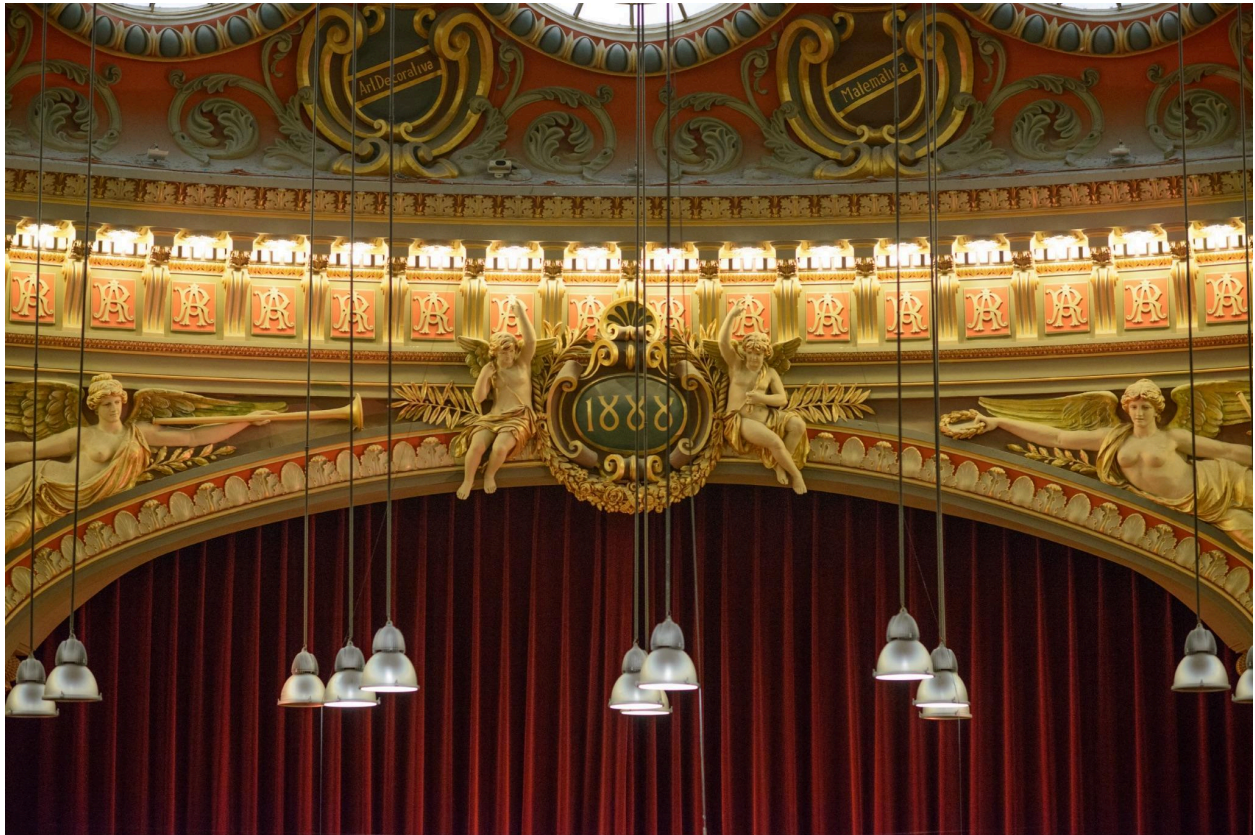
The response was immediate and sustained. Cho was called back to the stage several times, with the applause renewing before it had fully settled.



*The Palace Hall stage during intermission.*

## Romanian Athenaeum — Midnight Concerts Series

Asmik Grigorian · Lukas Geniušas



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

The day ended at the Romanian Athenaeum with a recital in the Midnight Concerts Series, a late-night setting that shaped the atmosphere even before the first note. After the Palace Hall, everything felt closer: the sound, the focus, and even the way the audience listened.



Interior view of the Romanian Athenaeum foyer on the evening of August 31.

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 a sense of direct address.

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

Geniušas's role shifted over the course of 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 drawing the hall into a quieter, more concentrated state before the program continued.



Asmik Grigorian and Lukas Geniušas during the Midnight Concerts 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 encore pieces continued within the same concentrated atmosphere established earlier in the evening.



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



Ceiling and stained-glass detail at 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 conducts Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.*

Day 3 brought me back 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 from the outset, adjusting quietly to the work's duration, its repeated shocks, and its extended stretches of stillness.

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

The orchestra played with focus and definition. The strings maintained a firm edge, the winds articulated detail with clarity, and the brass entered with force that remained contained within the overall texture. Even in denser passages, individual lines stayed audible, and the 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 concentration. Long phrases were shaped with care, as tension accumulated gradually across scenes and gave the role a continuous, concentrated weight.



*Kristine Opolais as Katerina Lvovna Ismailova in Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.*

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



*Andreas Bauer Kanabas as Boris Timofeyevich Ismailov in Shostakovich's Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District at the Palace Hall.*

Scenes involving Sergey Polyakov and Maria Barakova as Sonietka shifted the atmosphere later in the evening. Their entrances tightened the dramatic focus, redirecting the opera's momentum and altering the stage balance without interrupting its forward motion.



*Sergey Polyakov as Sergey Filipytsch and Maria Barakova as Sonietka in 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 the applause gathered. The response was steady and sustained, marking the end of a demanding evening and acknowledging the concentration required from performers and audience alike.



*The orchestra acknowledges the audience after 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, drawing a full audience into the hall.



*Charles Dutoit conducts the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo 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 with clarity, 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 the conductor, orchestra, and soloist returning to the stage at the close of the afternoon.



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



*Martha Argerich receives flowers after the performance at the Romanian Athenaeum.*

September 18 — Palace Hall

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



*Anne-Sophie Mutter acknowledges 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 broader, multimedia-driven second.

The first half 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 shaped the line with close attention, maintaining a focused exchange with the ensemble under Măcelaru's direction.



*Anne-Sophie Mutter with conductor Cristian Măcelaru onstage at the Palace Hall.*

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



*Anne-Sophie Mutter with 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, the 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 score's progression.



*Cristian Măcelaru conducts the Orchestre National de France at the Palace Hall.*

The Orchestre National de France was joined by the George Enescu Philharmonic Choir, prepared by Iosif Ion Prunner. With the choir's entrance, the forces on stage expanded, adding a sustained vocal layer to 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 disrupting 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



*Jean-Yves Thibaudet at the piano during rehearsal at the Palace Hall.*

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 Mäkelä's 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.

*Text and photographs © Diana Nikolova*