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NEW DOCUMENTARY FOCUSING ON ESA-PEKKA SALONEN, JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET, AND MATHILDE LAURENT'S *PROMETHEUS: THE POEM OF FIRE*, PRESENTED WITH THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY AND CARTIER, TO PREMIERE DECEMBER 20 ON MEZZO TV

[Watch](#) the film on December 20 at 8:30 PM CET / 11:30 AM PT

Read about *Prometheus* in [The New York Times](#), the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), [Vogue](#), and [New Scientist](#)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—Mezzo TV, in association with Cartier, presents the world premiere of a documentary and performance film of the San Francisco Symphony and Cartier's 2024 multisensory presentation of Alexander Scriabin's *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire*. This project, helmed by San Francisco Symphony Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen, pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and Cartier's in-house perfumer Mathilde Laurent, infused Scriabin's synesthetic score—composed for piano, orchestra, chorus, and light—with olfactory cues devised by Laurent and delivered using proprietary diffusion technology. The 45-minute film includes both a full 20-

minute performance of the piece from the project's March 2024 premiere as well as a collection of interviews, conversations, and other insights from the three creative leads.

The film will receive its broadcast premiere on Mezzo TV on Friday, December 20 at 8:30 PM CET (11:30 AM PT); additional broadcasts will take place on Tuesday, December 24 at 6:30 AM (9:30 AM); Saturday, December 28 at 2:20 PM (5:20 AM); Wednesday, January 1 at 1:20 AM (Tuesday, December 31 at 4:20 PM); Sunday, January 5 at 1:30 PM (4:30 AM); Monday, January 6 at 10:00 AM (1:00 AM); and Thursday, January 9 at 5:20 AM (Wednesday, January 8 at 8:20 PM). It will also be available on-demand on [medici.tv](https://www.medicivt.com/) beginning December 20.



The concept for the project originated with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, who has long been intrigued by Scriabin's unrealized ambition to create a work that engages all human senses in order to convey something beyond physical experience. Fueled by his own lifelong interest in scent and flair for interdisciplinary collaboration, he turned to a figure he had long admired: Cartier's Mathilde Laurent.

"For as long as I can remember, I've always been fascinated by scent," said Thibaudet in the film. "Many of my earliest memories are related to scent, or have scents attached to them. Since I first performed *Prometheus* many years ago, and then learned of Scriabin's intentions for the piece—to compose for all the senses, not just light and color—I've dreamed of bringing scent into it. I had for many, many years an incredible admiration for Mathilde Laurent, and I was very lucky to meet her. I was immediately fascinated by her artistry, her knowledge, her sensibility, and the way that she perceives the world, and knew she was right for this project."



With Laurent on board, Thibaudet joined her in her laboratory for a first exploration of the piece. Together, they listened to a recording of the piece while Laurent devised a series of scent profiles and their ingredients.

"Scriabin's intention was very clear: to work with scents, although unfortunately he didn't have the opportunity," said Laurent in the film. "That's the reason I really wanted to take on this project. Synesthesia is a subject I work on a lot, because for me, olfaction is an art, perfume is an

art, and its place is among the other arts. And synesthesia is really a way to bring perfume into art. I translated the sound in a very visceral way. In fact, I let myself be guided by my own synesthesia, my own feelings. I tried to behave just like a body that hears and to carry out a sort of emotional automatic writing and let the names come out of the ingredients that I felt I could almost smell, almost breathe, listening to the piece. I had access to scientific data that link the ingredients with human emotions, which allowed me to ensure I wasn't interpreting it in too extremely personal of a manner."

Laurent's work is distinguished by a molecular approach to perfumery, placing synthetic scents on the same footing as natural ones in an effort to create finely honed fragrances that speak directly and intuitively to people on a biological level. For composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, whose own work uses new technology to advance a medium often bound by tradition, her methodology presented a new and untapped potential.

"I had this very naïve idea of a scent artist," said Salonen in the film. "I thought this is some person in a lab with little bottles of various potions, just mixing them up and sniffing until you hit the right combination. The reality was completely different. When I met Mathilde for the first time, I realized that this person is, A, an artist, B, an intellectual. And her approach was imagining a scent—which for me is very hard to even understand—and then seeing the molecular formula. It made me think that her process is very much like, say, Pierre Boulez would have composed. It was a total surprise, and a totally new world opened up to me."



Composed in 1910, *Prometheus* notably incorporates light and color—though performances in Scriabin's lifetime faced immense technological difficulties. His ambitions to compose for other senses, including scent and touch, remained similarly unfeasible with the technology of the time. Salonen, Thibaudet, and Laurent's *Prometheus* overcomes this stumbling block through an array of specially designed vortex dispersers. Using a proprietary technology based on dry fragrances and smoke, these cannon-like devices allowed the scent to be instantaneously and ephemerally distributed throughout the concert hall.

"This production would not have been possible, say, five years ago," said Salonen. "A great deal of the equipment we are using are prototypes, developed specifically for this project. These are very bespoke, particular pieces of technology that allow for instantaneous triggering of the scent. And it can work like a musical accent—so we can match a certain moment in the score, and the scent is instantaneously triggered, and it doesn't linger. That's a complete breakthrough. It has never been done before. I can imagine that later this will become part of the normal technological sphere."

Laurent's intuitive approach to the olfactory cues mimics the ways in which human bodies perceive scent: on a subliminal level, one which, like music, can transcend conscious experience. Paired with this new technology, the resulting production left audiences, musicians, and the creative leads themselves in awe of the powerful synergy of senses.

"Mathilde's method of devising scents isn't by free association," said Salonen. "It's based on science. It's based on evolutionary psychology, and it's based on physiology and neurology. In a way, this is not about an idiosyncratic synesthesia, but about delivering information straight to the cortex, in a way that is independent of language. You don't have this layer of translating what is happening into words, because you know already. You can open yourself to the flow of the music. This to me was the first time I truly felt this piece; it opened up as the most natural, clear, and simple thing. I'm very glad that it happened."

"While I have played *Prometheus* several times in my life, I have never had that full, complete sense and feeling of the performance that we all had last night," said Thibaudet. "It was so exciting. It's something you can't describe even with words—it just transports you. And the audience was fascinated. Some were crying. I could even see that the orchestra members were affected. I think everybody was in a state of absolute bliss."

"Seeing and hearing the audience after the performance was completely moving for me," said Laurent. "I couldn't imagine that pairing olfaction with music could be such a powerful emotional experience."

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