# Last Night of the Proms sees growing display of EU flags amid evolving cultural celebration



This year’s Last Night of the Proms presented a remarkable tableau of unity and musical celebration, marked notably by the widespread display of European Union flags among the audience at the Royal Albert Hall, a striking contrast to the fractious political protests that took place earlier in London. According to Dr George Mowat-Brown from Devon, the prominence of the EU flag symbolised a softer, more inclusive spirit that transcended the often divisive nationalistic fervour associated with the event in past years. This visual display highlighted how the Proms, long regarded as a bastion of British patriotism, have evolved into a venue where international camaraderie and cultural diversity find expression alongside tradition.

The 2025 Last Night of the Proms was widely hailed as one of the most enjoyable in recent memory, showcasing a vibrant mix of classical music intertwined with rock, musical theatre, and comedy elements. The season welcomed some of the world’s foremost orchestras, including the Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Vienna Philharmonic, underscoring the Proms' international character despite the backdrop of Brexit. Conductor Elim Chan opened with a dramatic interpretation of Mussorgsky, and there were significant contemporary contributions from composers Camille Pepin, Rachel Portman, and Lucy Walker. Performers such as soprano Louise Alder and trumpeter Alison Balsom, who announced her retirement at 46, brought charisma and skill, while comedian Bill Bailey’s rendition of Leroy Anderson’s typewriter concerto added levity to the evening. A special tribute celebrated the 50th anniversary of Queen’s "Bohemian Rhapsody," with Brian May and Roger Taylor joining to mark the occasion. While traditional patriotic songs maintained their place during the finale, Proms director Sam Jackson balanced respect for enduring customs with modernity, signaling the festival's thriving status after challenges posed by the pandemic.

The tradition of waving EU flags at the Proms is not new but has grown more prominent in recent years, often stirring political debate. Back in 2016, amid heightened Brexit tensions, anti-Brexit campaigners organised to distribute EU flags to the audience as a form of solidarity, emphasising music’s transcendence of national boundaries. Organisers argued that the international nature of music, benefiting greatly from EU membership, made the Proms a fitting venue to express support for the EU. This gesture generated both support and backlash, notably from figures such as Nigel Farage, who accused flag-wavers of living in denial about Brexit. Eurosceptic critics have described the display of EU flags at the event as inappropriate, a politically charged gesture that some feel undermines British tradition. Former Conservative MP Harvey Proctor called for a BBC inquiry following the large presence of EU flags at the Proms, highlighting ongoing tensions between patriotic expression and political symbolism at the concert.

Yet, the Proms have historically been a colourful, international affair, rather than a purely British nationalist event. Past performances have included diverse cultural elements, such as Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez appearing dressed as an Inca warrior during "Rule, Britannia!," underscoring the event’s celebration of global cultures. Flags from across the world, including those of Tibet and visiting German spectators adorned in Union Jacks, mingle in the auditorium, reinforcing the Proms’ inclusive spirit. This enduring mix of patriotism, internationalism, and festive fancy dress suggests the Last Night remains a complex cultural phenomenon—a sophisticated party embracing both tradition and change.

Recent years have further cemented the Proms as a site of cultural fusion. In 2024, for example, prominent performances included Puccini arias and pieces inspired by Welsh nursery tunes as well as tributes to pioneering Black musicians, blending diverse musical legacies. Celebrations often include playful elements, such as an orchestral medley of sports themes accompanied by audience participation in a Mexican wave, demonstrating the event’s embrace of both high art and popular enjoyment.

In sum, the 2025 Last Night of the Proms illustrated how this iconic British event continues to evolve, balancing cherished traditions with a broad and inclusive cultural embrace. The visibility of EU flags among the audience pointed to an ongoing negotiation of identity and community within the Proms, where patriotism coexists with international solidarity, and music remains a powerful unifier amidst the fractures of contemporary political life.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/sep/15/the-flag-that-brought-us-together-at-the-proms), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/sep/10/brexiters-in-outcry-after-crowds-wave-eu-flag-at-last-night-of-the-proms), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/10/eu-flags-waved-at-last-night-of-the-proms-in-anti-brexit-protest), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/11/verdi-requiem-last-night-of-the-proms-juan-diego-florez-martin-alsop-oramo-review)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/350ab0af-31ac-4435-83b5-8b7caa161277)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/10/eu-flags-waved-at-last-night-of-the-proms-in-anti-brexit-protest), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/sep/10/eu-flags-at-last-night-of-the-proms-anger-farage), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/sep/10/brexiters-in-outcry-after-crowds-wave-eu-flag-at-last-night-of-the-proms)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/11/verdi-requiem-last-night-of-the-proms-juan-diego-florez-martin-alsop-oramo-review)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2024/sep/15/last-night-of-the-proms-review-royal-albert-hall-london), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/350ab0af-31ac-4435-83b5-8b7caa161277), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/sep/15/the-flag-that-brought-us-together-at-the-proms)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/sep/15/the-flag-that-brought-us-together-at-the-proms> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/350ab0af-31ac-4435-83b5-8b7caa161277> - The 2025 Last Night of the BBC Proms was celebrated as the most enjoyable in years, blending classical music with elements of rock, musicals, and comedy. Although fewer international flags were seen in the audience—a shift noted since Brexit—the season was far from parochial, featuring leading global orchestras like the Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Vienna Philharmonic. Highlights included conductor Elim Chan’s dramatic Mussorgsky opening, new commissions from Camille Pepin, Rachel Portman, and Lucy Walker's standout piece 'Today.' Comedian Bill Bailey entertained with Leroy Anderson’s typewriter concerto, while soprano Louise Alder and trumpeter Alison Balsom delivered charismatic performances—Balsom having announced her retirement at 46. A special tribute to Queen’s 'Bohemian Rhapsody' featured Brian May and Roger Taylor, celebrating the song’s 50th anniversary. Traditional patriotic songs capped the night, with Proms director Sam Jackson maintaining some long-standing traditions despite modernizing efforts. After years of uncertainty during the pandemic, the Proms are confirmed to be thriving again.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/10/eu-flags-waved-at-last-night-of-the-proms-in-anti-brexit-protest> - Concertgoers at The Last Night Of The Proms have shown their solidarity with the European Union by waving EU flags during the performance. In the run-up to the finale of the annual classical music event, it was reported that anti-Brexit campaigners were trying to drum up support for a twist on the usual union-jack-waving opportunity by handing out the EU banner to those in attendance instead. A crowdfunding page raised more than £1,100 to buy the flags, with the annual musical event apparently chosen as it is 'televised and has a very high profile.' An organiser wrote: 'As music is such an international activity that benefits greatly from our membership of the EU, this event feels an appropriate venue to show UK solidarity with the EU.' They added: 'Concertgoers waving EU flags along with the union jack would send a message to the world and our own people about how much music lovers value the EU.'
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/11/verdi-requiem-last-night-of-the-proms-juan-diego-florez-martin-alsop-oramo-review> - In the end, it didn’t happen: the Last Night of the Proms didn’t descend into a Brexit v EU flag-off; no punches were thrown during Land of Hope and Glory. Certainly the EU flags were more prominent than usual, but as ever they jostled with stripes and crosses and emblems from all around the world – to decipher them all one would need to invent Shazam for flags. In the arena, two of the Prommers most ostentatiously dressed head to-toe in union jacks were visiting Germans, and the biggest, brightest flag of all belonged to Tibet. It’s a mistake to think of the Last Night as an exclusively British thing. Instead, in a way, it’s more of a fancy-dress party. Nobody understood that better than Juan Diego Flórez, the Peruvian star tenor, who came on for Rule Britannia dressed as an Inca warrior complete with blue and orange feathered headdress and gold earrings as big as beermats, and brandishing an axehead on a staff.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/sep/10/eu-flags-at-last-night-of-the-proms-anger-farage> - Nigel Farage has accused concertgoers who waved European Union flags at the Last Night of the Proms on Saturday of being in denial about Brexit, as remain campaigners claimed a publicity victory when BBC TV pictures showed a sea of blue and gold stars at the traditionally patriotic event.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/sep/10/brexiters-in-outcry-after-crowds-wave-eu-flag-at-last-night-of-the-proms> - Those waving the EU flag in the Royal Albert Hall appeared to outnumber those waving the union flag at the event, which is usually a patriotic display, following a campaign by pro-Europeans. The spectacle of so many EU flags being waved as the hall belted out Rule, Britannia! provoked disgust from leading Eurosceptics. Harvey Proctor, a former Conservative MP, said it was a 'disgraceful' display and called for an inquiry by the BBC, which organises and broadcasts the Proms. In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, he said: 'BBC must investigate how so many EU flags were waved & on display at The Last Night of the Proms. Disgraceful & misguided BBC messing up a British tradition; a political gesture which would make Sir Henry Wood turn in his grave. Utterly vulgar & wrong. Rule Britannia, not Rule EU!'
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2024/sep/15/last-night-of-the-proms-review-royal-albert-hall-london> - Blue, who was fulfilling a childhood dream by singing here, was on velvet-voiced form in two Puccini arias plus a flirty Spanish operetta number by Ruperto Chapì, delivered while lobbing roses into the audience, before returning to lead Rule, Britannia. Once again, the 'azure main' she sang about might have referred to the sea of EU flags joining the union jacks and others throughout the hall. As well as a couple of worthwhile Proms firsts – a bittersweet part song by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, beautifully delivered by the BBC Singers, and Grace Williams’s elegant Fantasia on Welsh Nursery Tunes – there were two more premieres. Carlos Simon’s Hellfighters’ Blues paid tribute to the pioneering Black musicians of the 369th Infantry Regiment band in a joyful collision of blues and march, with a louchely jazzy starring turn for the BBCSO’s principal trumpet. And, following a sporting theme begun earlier by Charles Ives’s almost surreal orchestral depiction of the Yale-Princeton Football Game, Iain Farrington’s Extra Time was a mash-up of all the BBC’s sports theme tunes: a fluffy but inspired bit of Last Night silliness that had the BBC Symphony Chorus starting a huge Mexican wave.