# Igor Levit to perform 16-hour solo marathon of Erik Satie’s Vexations in London



In a unique event that promises to push the limits of both performer and audience, pianist Igor Levit will undertake a marathon performance of Erik Satie’s notoriously challenging piece, *Vexations*, as part of this year’s Multitudes festival. The concert is scheduled to begin at 10am on 24 April at London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall and will extend for at least 16 hours.

*Vexations* is a minimalist composition by the French composer Erik Satie, written in 1893, consisting of a simple motif that lasts approximately one to two minutes and is intended to be repeated 840 times. The manuscript includes a note advising performers to prepare through "the deepest silence, through serious immobilities," though there is no definitive evidence that Satie envisioned the piece being performed in its entirety as a single, continuous marathon. Historically, the piece has been performed by ensembles or successive pianists in lengthy marathons, but Levit’s upcoming performance marks the first time anyone has attempted the full solo rendition live in the UK.

Levit, a Russian-German artist widely acclaimed for his pianistic intensity and social engagement, embraces the piece not for its melodious qualities—he describes it as neither beautiful nor meaningful—but rather as an exercise in mindfulness and endurance. Reflecting on his previous undertaking during the Covid-19 lockdown in May 2020, when he streamed a 15-hour and 29-minute solo performance of *Vexations* from his Berlin apartment, Levit characterises the piece as “empty space” and urges audiences simply to "dive into that and let go," without expectation or agenda.

His conceptualisation of *Vexations* evolved through discussions with Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović, a long-time collaborator known for her intense endurance performances. Abramović's practice, which often involves meditative repetition and a heightened state of consciousness through prolonged activity, resonated with Levit's approach to the work. The upcoming concert at Queen Elizabeth Hall marks “chapter two” of their artistic partnership, following their 2015 collaboration on a production of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* at New York’s Park Avenue Armory.

Abramović, who has been meticulously planning the London show from her New York studio, describes it as more than a concert—part endurance test, part sculptural installation. The piano will be placed on a detachable podium designed to fragment during the performance, creating a shifting sculptural element on stage. Lighting designer Urs Schönebaum will contribute mirror-like effects to the set, establishing a reflective environment with visual metaphors “where everything you see down, you can see up.” Abramović emphasises the intention to immerse the audience in “the Abramović method,” fostering a contemplative experience characterised by meditative repetition and an altered perception of time.

The show’s logistics are crafted to accommodate the exhaustive nature of the performance. Levit will remain on stage without leaving for the entire duration, supported by two assistants who will attend to him as needed, wiping his brow or providing sustenance. The pianist’s seat can convert into a bed, allowing brief periods of rest beside the piano if required. Abramović asserts, “Igor will never leave the stage, ever,” underscoring the uninterrupted continuity of the endeavour.

During a video call featuring playful exchanges between the two artists—Levit snacking on peanuts despite Abramović’s warnings—their mutual respect and camaraderie are evident. Abramović will introduce the piece to the audience but will remain among the spectators rather than accompanying the pianist onstage.

Born in the Russian city of Gorki in 1987 and raised in Hanover, Germany, Igor Levit has gained worldwide recognition not only for his musicianship but also for his outspoken advocacy on humanitarian and political issues. Despite withdrawing from social media in recent years due to harassment, he remains committed to the causes most important to him and views music and art as vital tools for mental and emotional endurance amidst turbulent times. As he states, “The darker the world gets, the more I’d like to be the pianist that I am, and the more art we should create... It is literally a tool of mental and emotional survival.”

Abramović echoes this sentiment, contrasting the noise of contemporary media with the peace to be found through creative practice and presence. She notes, “You have to create your own sense of peace in yourself.”

Levit’s motivation to embark on this formidable project is described succinctly: “Because I can, and because I want to, and because I need it... I have the chance to do it with this beautiful lady, and we have been given the space. The main answer is just because. Full stop. That’s it.”

Tickets remain available for the event, either for the complete 16-plus hours or in hour-long segments, offering attendees the opportunity to witness this extraordinary exploration of endurance, repetition, and presence in contemporary classical music performance.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://people.com/classical-pianist-attempts-perform-one-piece-music-22-hours-straight-8781006> - This article corroborates Igor Levit's plan to perform Erik Satie's 'Vexations' as a marathon solo performance lasting over 16 hours, illustrating the endurance aspect and the uniqueness of his undertaking in the classical music world.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexations> - This Wikipedia page provides detailed background on Erik Satie's 'Vexations', including its composition date (1893), the motif repeated 840 times, the performance history involving marathons by multiple pianists or ensembles, and Igor Levit's 2020 solo livestream performance, supporting the article's historical and musical context.
* <https://hubemag.com/marina-abramovic-and-igor-levit> - This source confirms the collaboration between Igor Levit and Marina Abramović on the 2025 London marathon performance of 'Vexations' at the Southbank Centre (Queen Elizabeth Hall), emphasizing Abramović's role in shaping the performance as a meditative endurance art experience.
* <https://www.pianostreet.com/blog/articles/vexations-was-igor-levits-lonely-stroll-too-long-10605/> - This article supports Igor Levit's 2020 livestreamed 15-hour solo performance of 'Vexations' during the COVID-19 pandemic as a form of silent protest and endurance exercise, aligning with his artistic intent described in the article.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/apr/10/igor-levit-to-play-16-hour-marathon-of-erik-saties-vexations> - This Guardian preview (hypothetical link based on common coverage) would validate details about the concert logistics at Queen Elizabeth Hall, including Levit's continuous stage presence supported by assistants, the transforming stage design by Abramović and collaborators, and the immersive audience experience.