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# Make over Beethoven?

**The cream of British classical talent tell Laura Silverman how they would transform the traditional concert**

It's almost akin to a papal pronouncement. On Monday the world's most influential classical music critic, Alex Ross, will deliver the annual Royal Philharmonic Society lecture to the assembled cognoscenti at the Wigmore Hall in London, entitled *Inventing and Reinventing the Classical Concert*. Ross's book *The Rest is Noise*, a provocative assessment of 20th-century music, was shortlisted for a Pulitzer prize in 2008. Now he is turning his gaze on the concert experience itself. In the US, where Ross writes on classical music for *The New Yorker*, orchestras are under more scrutiny than ever, facing declining revenue and ageing audiences. The time has come, Ross says, to rethink the way that Brahms, Beethoven and Bruckner are presented.

Plenty of rethinking has already gone on in the UK. The Southbank Centre encourages cross-genre events, recently supporting Anna Meredith's new concerto for beatboxer and orchestra. The Barbican puts orchestral scores to films — on Monday night a screening of Mikio Naruse's 1933 silent film *Nightly Dreams* had a soundtrack by Nitin Sawhney. And the Roundhouse's *Reverb* series in January, which introduced classical music to a pop venue, played to packed houses. So what is the best way to reinvent the concert? We asked Britain's classical taste-makers to tell us what they think Ross should say.

**Alex Ross gives the RPS Lecture at the Wigmore Hall, W1 (www.wigmore-hall.org.uk; 020-7935 2141), on Monday (7.30pm). The full text of the lecture will be available at www.royalphilharmonicsociety.org.uk from Tuesday**

## James Rhodes

### Pianist

It's all about me communicating with the audience as one of them, not as a lecturer or an academic. At the moment you go to a concert, the guy comes on, barely glances at the audience, bows, sits down, plays and then leaves. It's like the audience is down there and the performer is up here and there's this huge barrier between them. Musicians should be seen as just like anyone else. When I played at the Roundhouse at the end of last year I told a few jokes to break the ice. I like to talk about what the music means to me, rather than have the audience read something written by some Oxbridge academic 40 years ago about sonata form that doesn't mean anything to me, let alone to them. I'll hang out in the bar afterwards. Music deserves to be shared; it's about that.