

## Classical

Edited by Jonathan Lennie  
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Move over Joni Mitchell  
 Multi-talented Canadian  
 Barbara Hannigan

**HOT  
 STUFF**

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## Singing the changes

Soprano Barbara Hannigan tells **Jonathan Lennie** about loving modern music

**T**here are singers who push themselves to the limit and then there is Barbara Hannigan. The Canadian soprano, from a village in Nova Scotia, has not only stormed the world of modern classical music by breezing through extremely difficult scores, but she also acts and conducts... sometimes at the same time. Check out on YouTube her performance as the dominatrix police chief in Ligeti's 'Mysteries of the Macabre' – it's an extraordinary piece of multitasking, which she modestly shrugs off. 'I thought I would start off with something simple,' she giggles.

The conducting has been a recent activity and, never doing things by halves, last month she conducted Sir Simon Rattle as he narrated William Walton's 'Façade' with players from the Berlin Philharmonic. 'That was pretty fun,' she says. 'He was really nervous, but did a fantastic job.'

A champion of contemporary music, she has had nearly a hundred vocal parts written for her. So if she had to pick between old and new music, the answer is never in doubt. 'If I had to choose just one century, I would choose the twentieth,' she says, 'because I understand it and I think there aren't so many people that love it as passionately as I do.'

It is, therefore, no surprise that she has been invited to perform at the Southbank's 'The Rest Is Noise' festival, a year-long celebration of twentieth-century classical (as an homage to the similarly titled book by Alex Ross). Her three appearances will see her conducting Stravinsky's comic opera 'Renard', and joining the London Philharmonic for Berg's 'Lulu Suite'.

She begins on Thursday by singing in one of the most significant works of that turbulent century – Arnold Schoenberg's Second String Quartet (1908). Halfway through, the music becomes hauntingly atonal and ceases to be in any key. 'I feel air from

other planets,' sings the soprano. The Western classical tradition of tonality is turned on its head. 'It is saying the new world has arrived and we are now departing from harmony,' says Hannigan. 'I really feel like my feet are leaving the ground, and you can see them dangling as the gravity changes.'

**Sir Simon Rattle was really nervous**

**Barbara Hannigan performs at Southbank Centre's 'The Rest Is Noise' festival, Thu Jan 24, Feb 10 and Apr 27.**



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