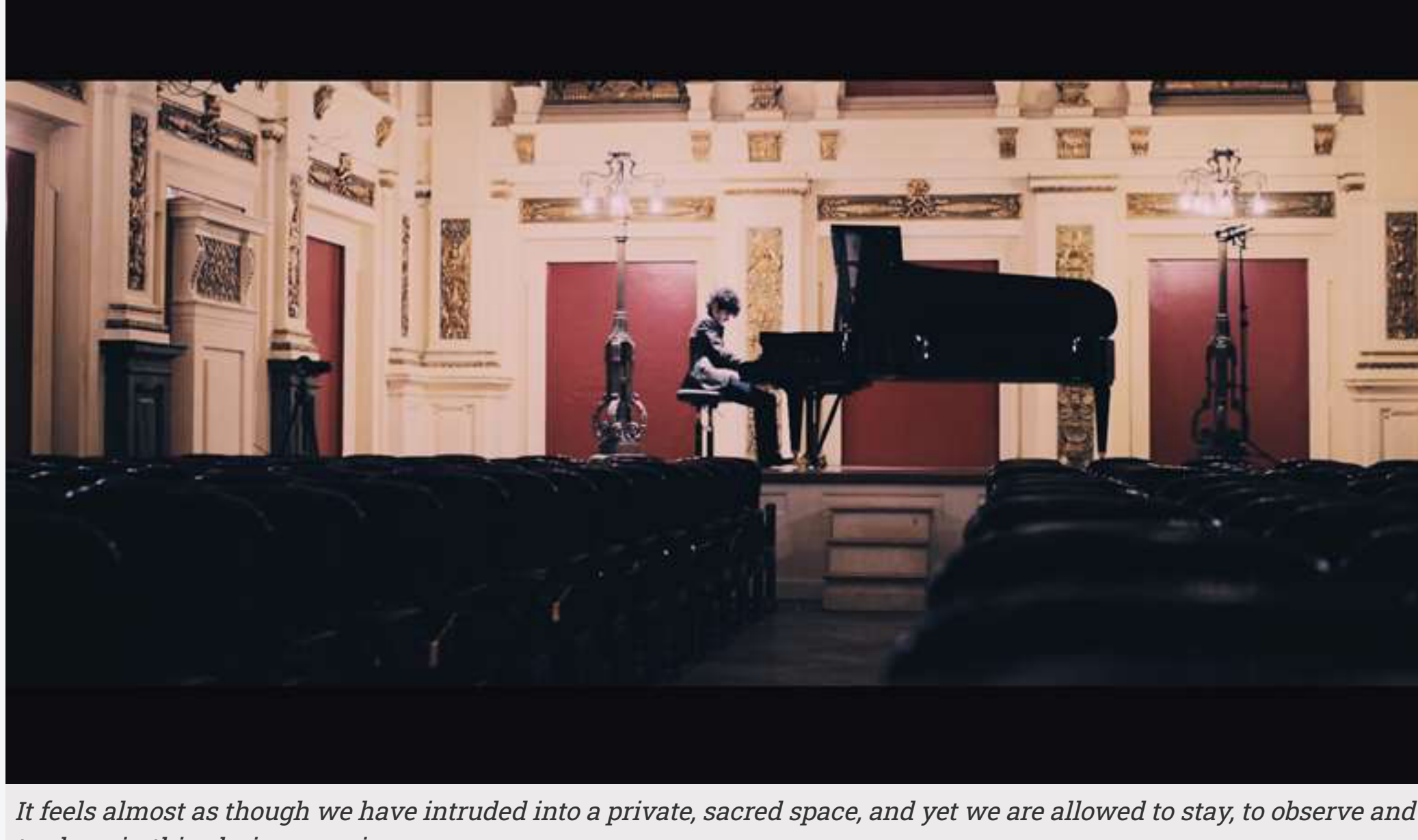


## 'MY LENS BECOMES THE AUDIENCE': STEWART FRENCH'S FLY ON THE WALL COLLECTION

Stephen Pritchard  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2025

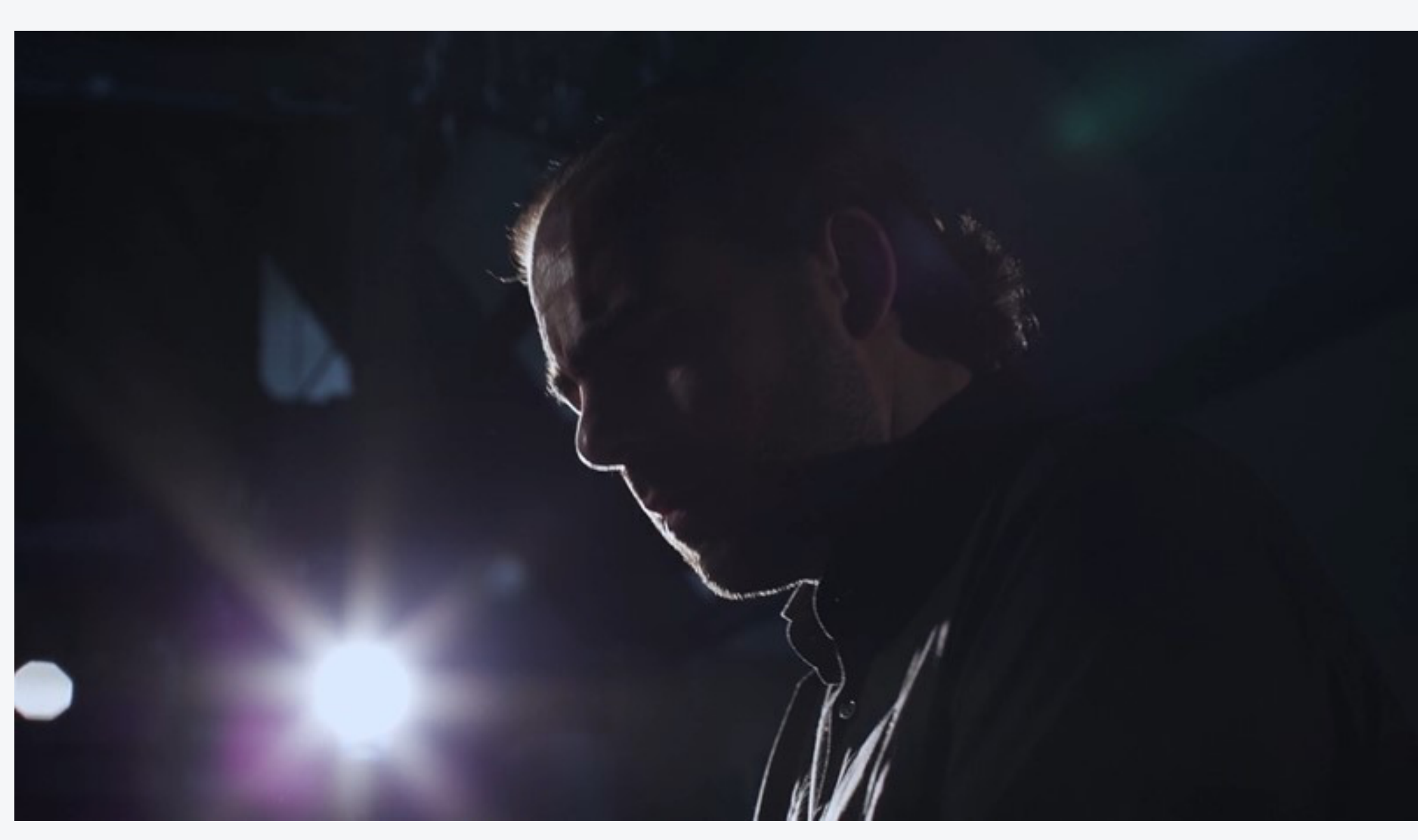
As a musician as well as a filmmaker, Stewart French is able to gain unparalleled access to his colleagues. He sits down with Stephen Pritchard to talk about his latest project, *The Collection*, which bring together a decade of his work filming the world's leading artists



*It feels almost as though we have intruded into a private, sacred space, and yet we are allowed to stay, to observe and to share in this glorious music*

An extraordinary archive of unfiltered films, showing major musicians away from the concert platform, at work preparing for recitals or recordings, is now available free online. Pianists Angela Hewitt, Boris Giltburg and Marc-André Hamelin, cellist Steven Isserlis, violinist Alina Ibragimova, The King's Singers, La Nuova Musica and Colin Currie are just some of the 40 artists captured raw and uncut in *The Collection*, a 10-year documentary project by musician and filmmaker Stewart French.

His single handheld camera gets up very close to his subjects. He says: 'Over the past decade, I've filmed hundreds of my colleagues. My aim was to capture the experiences that usually go unseen: the quiet focus of the studio, the charged moments before a concert, the creative flow behind closed doors. Now, 300 films later – featuring some of the world's leading artists, labels, and venues – I've brought the highlights together into a narrated journey.'



©Stewart French

But how does he gain such access and retain the trust of these world-class artists? 'Mention the word "film" and most artists expect a director and crew to arrive with lights and several cameras, turning the whole thing into a set; that's not an attractive prospect for musicians who wish to concentrate on their rehearsal, but when they know it's just me and a single handheld camera, they know I won't disturb them. I think they are reassured that I am a musician and that I understand what it is to be a performer. I don't go into an actual recording, for instance. That's not what I want to capture. I want to capture the focus, the concentration in rehearsal.'

"My aim was to capture the experiences that usually go unseen"

And he feels his camera can sometimes help in the preparations for a performance. 'In the very early days of phonograph recordings, artists found it difficult to play to just a cone. "Where are the people?," they would ask, "I can't do this if no one is listening." In these situations, my lens becomes that audience. It can make a difference.'



©Stewart French

A classical guitarist, French's 20 years of experience in music span performance, audio production, editing, filmmaking, writing and lecturing. He founded his production company *Fly On The Wall* in 2021 with, he says, 'the mission to find better ways for performing arts to engage with digital audiences'. He read pure mathematics at Cambridge and received the highest postgraduate final recital grade mark in the history of the Royal Academy of Music.

It was at the Academy that he started to make films. 'I used to rehearse there at night, and would film myself to help improve my playing. Other students then asked me to do the same, which became the genesis of my future projects.'

"They are reassured that I am a musician and that I understand what it is to be a performer"

*The Collection* presents 56 curated films drawn from more than 300 behind-the-scenes shoots. It is divided into eight 'volumes', under headings such as *The Singers*, *New Music* and *Behind Closed Doors*. Each promise never-before-seen footage from the project's extensive archives, documenting musicians doing what they do best, almost under a microscope. In *The Singers*, for example, the camera comes right up to star counter-tenor Tim Mead as he and La Nuova Musica rehearse Bach's alto cantata, *Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust* BWV 170. We see a combination of concentration and sheer rapture on Mead's face as he shapes the music, as much with his hands as his voice. It feels almost as though we have intruded into a private, sacred space, and yet we are allowed to stay, to observe and to share in this glorious music.

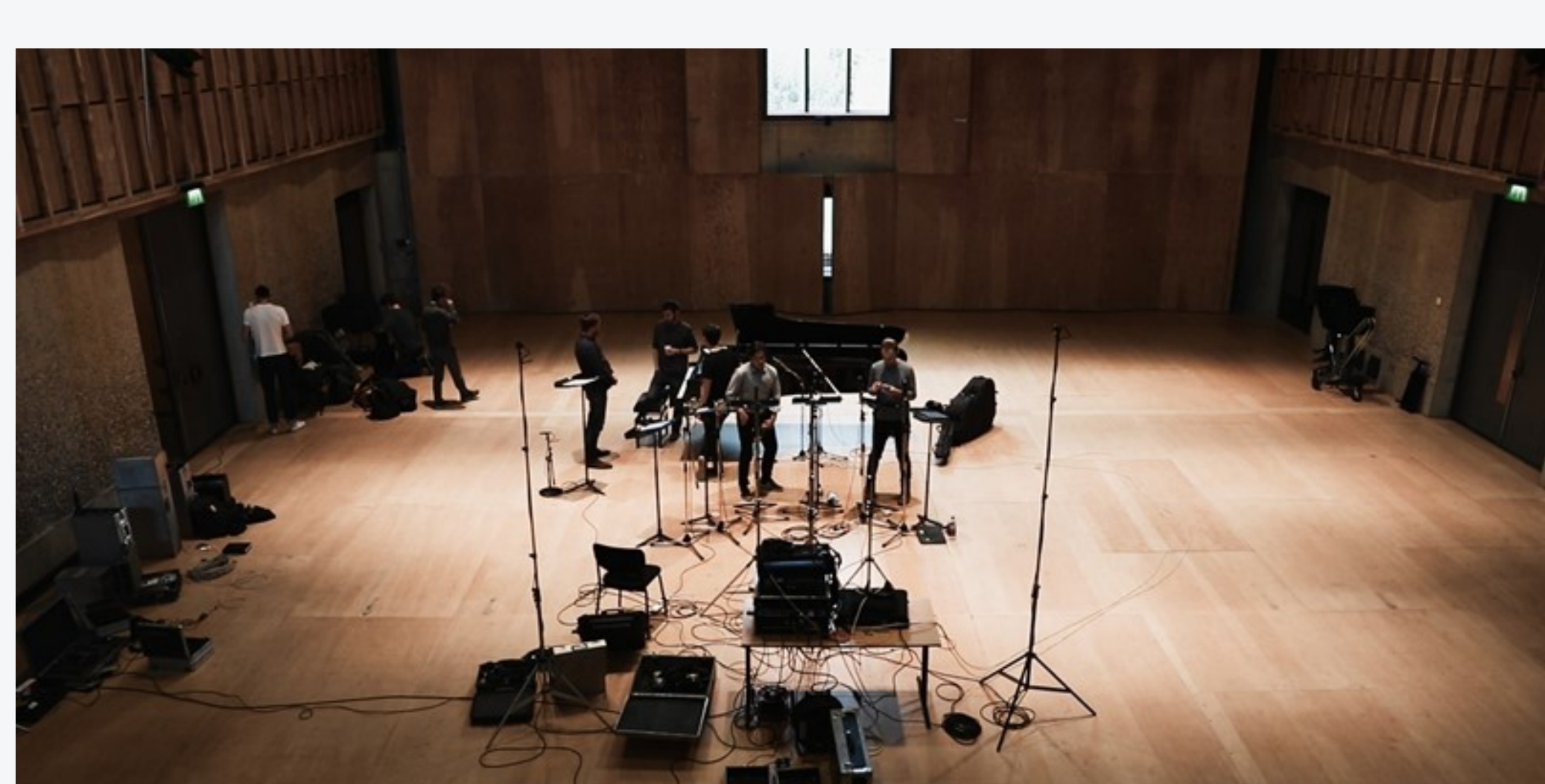


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From cabaret trios, early music ensembles to classical guitar quartets and percussion collectives, the exhibition ranges across a broad stylistic spectrum and brings viewers inside rarely seen places – famous concert halls after dark, locked recording studios and private rehearsal rooms. He filmed Boris Giltburg, for example, in a single, uncut film as he played, late at night, Rachmaninov's second set of Etude-Tableaux Op 39 in a piano shop just off London's Edgware Road.

"I've always been drawn to the raw, unfiltered magic that happens behind closed doors"

Accompanying each film is a written narrative offering behind-the-scenes insight and context, what French calls 'untold stories from deep within the creative process'.



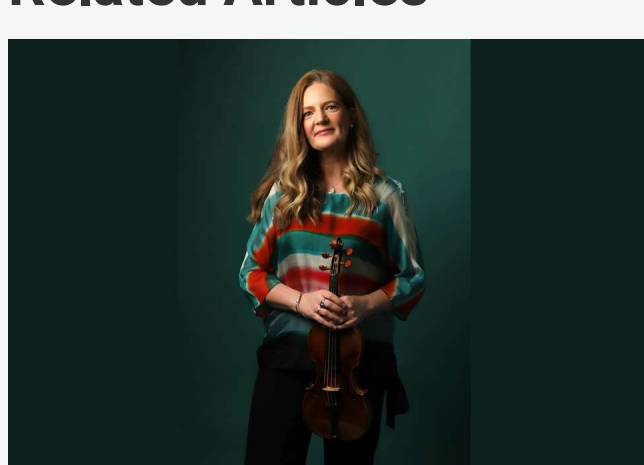
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French aims to blend cinematic long-take storytelling with the intimacy of portrait photography, discarding flashy edits in favour of what he hopes will be seen as immersive, emotionally charged moments. He says his goal is to create a deeper connection between digital audiences and the visceral experience of live music.

'As a performer myself, I've always been drawn to the raw, unfiltered magic that happens behind closed doors – moments of focus, anticipation, creative flow. With *The Collection*, I wanted to capture those flashes of vitality that sit at the very heart of music-making.'

Viewers can access the exhibition at [The Collection](#) website.

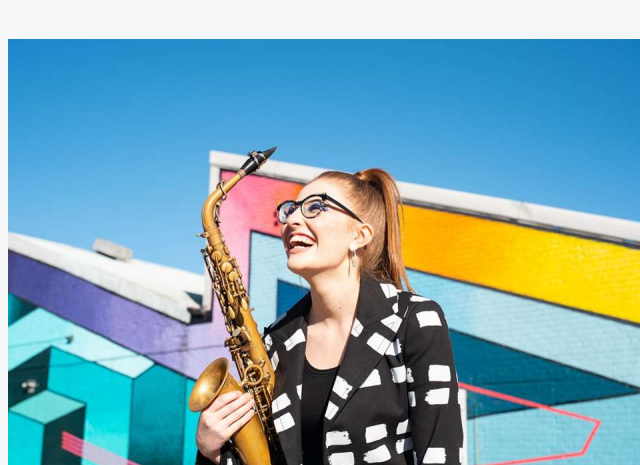
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