

# Kroke/Nigel Kennedy's Polish Weekend

Southbank Centre, London

★★★★★

**John L. Walters**

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Plays like a dream ... Nigel Kennedy performs in 2010. Photograph: Roberta Parkin/Redferns

Nigel Kennedy may be the Michael Jackson of classical music: a prodigy whose boy-man persona is essential to his success. And if Jackson had Neverland, Kennedy has Poland. Thrilled by his adopted homeland's culture, he has turned the Southbank Centre "into a miniature Poland for a few days".

When Kennedy comes on stage to join the klezmer-influenced Polish trio Kroke, sporting Aston Villa strip and a sculpted haircut, he is thrilled to be in the spotlight. He plays like an angel, pushing the terrific band's quasi-classical tone poems, rapturous rhythms and heart-tugging folk melodies to another level. Kroke's own compositions are the highlights, including Lullaby for Kamila and the infectious Time, and the set ends with a witty reinvention of Brahms's Hungarian Dances.

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The World Cup Project, later the same day, was a curate's egg: 20-odd musicians playing alongside a screening of the notorious 1973 football match between England and Poland. Kennedy's riffs were redolent of Hot Rats-era Zappa, electric Miles and white funk. There's nothing like Wembley and endless feedback solos to bring out one's inner bloke. The match was better structured than the music, though, as heroic goalkeeper Jan Tomaszewski made save after save against the vivid green pitch and K-tel ads of 1970s TV football. When Poland scored, the audience erupted, but the "soundtrack" just rified on until coming to an arbitrary halt. Combining football and music is a great idea, but it may need a more responsive lineup.

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