

A Spring Awakening: From Bohemia to Vienna

Thursday, January 8, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin
Petr Popelka, conductor · Gil Shaham, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>"The Wood Dove" (Holoubek), Symphonic Poem, Op. 110</i>	18'
2	BERG 1885–1935 <i>Concerto for Violin and Orchestra "To the Memory of an Angel"</i>	25'
3	SCHUMANN 1810–1856 <i>Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38 "Spring"</i>	33'
TOTAL MUSIC		76'

Antonin Dvorak

1841–1904

"The Wood Dove" (Holoubek), Symphonic Poem, Op. 110

18 minutes

THE COMPOSER

Antonin Dvorak was born on September 8, 1841, in Nelahozeves, a small vil-
lage north of Prague in Bohemia. The eldest of fourteen children, he was ex-
pected to follow his father into the butcher's trade, but his unmistakable mu-
sical talent led him on a different path. After studying at the Prague Organ
School, Dvorak spent years playing viola in theatre orchestras while compos-
ing in his spare time, often in conditions of considerable hardship.

His breakthrough came when Johannes Brahms, serving on a jury for a com-
position prize, recognized Dvorak's exceptional gifts and recommended him
to his own publisher, Simrock. The resulting Slavonic Dances (1878) were an
immediate international success. Following in the footsteps of Bedrich
Smetana, Dvorak went on to achieve worldwide fame as a Czech composer.
His time as director of the National Conservatory in New York (1892-1895)
produced some of his most beloved works, including the "New World" Sym-
phony and the Cello Concerto.

ABOUT THE WORK

"The Wood Dove" (also known as "The Wild Dove") was composed in the autumn of 1896, shortly after Dvorak's return from America to his beloved Bohemia. It is the last of four symphonic poems he wrote in quick succession, all based on ballads from Karel Jaromir Erben's celebrated collection *Kytice* (A Bouquet of Folk Legends).

The ballad tells a dark tale of guilt and retribution. A young woman poisons her husband and, after a brief period of mourning, marries another man. But a wood dove takes up residence on her first husband's grave, singing a mournful song day after day. The dove's persistent cooing awakens the woman's conscience until, overwhelmed by guilt, she drowns herself in the river.

Dvorak translates this narrative into four connected musical scenes, though the music flows continuously. The work opens with a funeral march depicting the husband's burial, followed by festive wedding music for the hasty remarriage. The dove's haunting song appears as a recurring motif, growing ever more insistent. The final section depicts the woman's mental disintegration and death.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The mournful melody representing the dove's song, which becomes increasingly prominent as the woman's guilt intensifies. Notice how Dvorak transforms the bright wedding music into something increasingly hollow and desperate as the psychological drama unfolds.

Alban Berg

1885–1935

25 minutes

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra "To the Memory of an Angel"

THE COMPOSER

Alban Berg was born on February 9, 1885, into a comfortable Viennese family, though his father's death when Berg was fifteen brought financial difficulties. Largely self-taught until his early twenties, Berg began studying with Arnold Schoenberg in 1904, remaining his devoted pupil for six years. Together with Schoenberg and Anton Webern, Berg formed the core of what became known as the Second Viennese School, pioneering the radical twelve-tone technique that would reshape twentieth-century music.

Yet Berg was never content with pure abstraction. His music blends the rigorous architecture of serialism with a warmth and emotional intensity inherited from the Romantic tradition, particularly from Gustav Mahler. His opera *Wozzeck* (1925) brought him international fame, while the unfinished *Lulu* occupied his final years. Berg was a man of aristocratic bearing and generous

spirit, deeply loyal to his friends and passionately devoted to his art. He died tragically on Christmas Eve 1935, from blood poisoning caused by an insect sting.

ABOUT THE WORK

In February 1935, the Ukrainian-American violinist Louis Krasner approached Berg with a commission for a violin concerto. Berg, absorbed in composing his opera *Lulu*, was initially reluctant. But his precarious finances and, soon after, a devastating personal loss changed his mind.

On April 22, 1935, eighteen-year-old Manon Gropius died of polio. She was the daughter of architect Walter Gropius and Alma Mahler (widow of Gustav Mahler), and Berg had been deeply fond of her. Shaken to his core, Berg suddenly saw how the concerto might become a requiem for the young woman he called "an angel." He composed the work at extraordinary speed during the summer of 1935; the finished manuscript is dated August 11.

The concerto is in two movements, each divided into two sections. The first movement offers a musical portrait of Manon: the opening Andante presents her character with tender lyricism, incorporating a lilting Carinthian folk song that evokes her youth and charm. The subsequent Allegretto depicts her dancing, full of life and grace.

The second movement confronts death directly. The Allegro opens with a twelve-tone cry of anguish, music of shattering intensity. But the final Adagio brings transcendence: Berg quotes the Bach chorale "Es ist genug" (It is enough) from Cantata BWV 60, its strange, ascending whole-tone scale perfectly suited to the twelve-tone context. The violin rises ever higher, finally dissolving into silence.

Berg did not live to hear his concerto performed. The premiere took place on April 19, 1936, in Barcelona, with Louis Krasner as soloist. The work had become a double memorial: for Manon Gropius and for Berg himself.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Carinthian folk tune in the first movement, evoking youthful innocence. In the second movement, listen for the moment when the Bach chorale emerges from the twelve-tone texture, its centuries-old melody offering consolation. The violin's final ascent into the stratosphere is one of the most moving passages in all of music.

Robert Schumann

1810–1856

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38 "Spring"

THE COMPOSER

Robert Schumann was born on June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Saxony, into a literary household. His father was a publisher and bookseller, and throughout his life, Schumann remained as devoted to literature as to music, editing an influential music journal and writing eloquent criticism that championed Chopin, Berlioz, and the young Brahms.

After abandoning law studies in Leipzig, Schumann pursued a career as a concert pianist, but a growing weakness in the fingers of his right hand forced him to focus on composition. His piano works of the 1830s, including *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, and *Kinderszenen*, established him as a leading voice of musical Romanticism. In 1840, after a long legal battle with her father, he married the celebrated pianist Clara Wieck, and their union sparked an extraordinary creative outburst: more than half of all Schumann's songs date from that single year.

Schumann's later years were shadowed by mental illness, which had plagued him intermittently since youth. In 1854, after attempting suicide, he was confined to an asylum near Bonn, where he died on July 29, 1856, at the age of forty-six.

ABOUT THE WORK

The "Spring" Symphony marks Schumann's triumphant entry into orchestral composition. Until 1841, he had been known primarily for his piano music and songs. It was Clara who encouraged him to think bigger, noting in her diary that his piano compositions were orchestral in feeling.

Inspired by a poem by Adolf Bottger celebrating the coming of spring, Schumann sketched the entire symphony in just four days (January 23–26, 1841) and completed the orchestration by February 20. The premiere on March 31, 1841, with Felix Mendelssohn conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, was warmly received.

Originally, each movement bore a descriptive title: "The Beginning of Spring," "Evening," "Merry Playmates," and "Spring in Full Bloom." Though Schumann withdrew these before publication, they illuminate the work's character. The symphony opens with a brass fanfare that Schumann wanted to sound "like a summons to awakening," a clarion call that generates the thematic material for the entire first movement. The slow movement is an extended song for orchestra, drawing on Schumann's unparalleled gift for melody. The scherzo is full of rhythmic vitality, while the finale brings the work to a jubilant close, as if spring has indeed arrived in full bloom.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening brass fanfare and how its rhythm pervades the entire first movement. In the slow movement, listen for the warm, singing melody that could have come straight from one of Schumann's Lieder. The finale's exuberance is irresistible, carrying the listener forward on a wave of vernal optimism.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Schumann: The Faces and the Masks**

Judith Chernaik, Vintage 2019

A lively modern life of Schumann that places the "Spring" Symphony in 1841, the first year of his marriage to Clara, when he turned from piano music and song to the orchestra.

ACCESSIBLE **Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman**

Nancy B. Reich, Cornell University Press 2001

Clara Schumann's life, drawn from her diaries and letters, which are among the main witnesses to the months in which Robert wrote the "Spring" Symphony.

DEEPER **Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"**

John Daverio, Oxford University Press 1997

A scholarly study of Schumann's life and music that sets the First Symphony within his literary ideals and his hopes for a "new poetic age" in German music.

SOURCES

1. Petr Popelka debuts with Schumann's "Spring Symphony", Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/concert/calendar/56383/>
2. Petr Popelka makes his debut with Schumann's "Spring Symphony", Digital Concert Hall. <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/en/concert/56383>
3. Programme Note "The Wood Dove", Symphonic Poem op. 110, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/antonin-dvorak-the-wood-dove-symphonic-poem-op-110/>
4. The Wild Dove, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wild_Dove
5. The Wild Dove (Holoubek), Op. 110, B198, antonin-dvorak.cz. <https://www.antonin-dvorak.cz/en/work/the-wild-dove/>
6. Antonín Dvořák, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton%C3%ADn_Dvo%C5%99%C3%A1k
7. Violin Concerto (Berg), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_\(Berg\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_(Berg))
8. Programme Note: Alban Berg, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra "To the Memory of an Angel", Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/alban-berg-concerto-for-violin-and-orchestra-to-the-memory-of-an-angel>
9. Alban Berg: Violinkonzert, Universal Edition. <https://www.universaledition.com/en/Works/Violinkonzert/P0040196>
10. Alban Berg, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alban_Berg
11. Symphony No. 1 (Schumann), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._1_\(Schumann\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._1_(Schumann))

Robert Schumann · Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38 "Spring"

12. Programme Note: Robert Schumann, Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major op. 38 "Spring", Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/robert-schumann-symphony-no-1-in-b-flat-major-op-38-spring>
 13. Robert Schumann, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Schumann
 14. Schumann: The Faces and the Masks, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781101974254>
 15. Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780801486371>
 16. Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age", Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780195091809>
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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2026-01-08-popelka>

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