

Knights Errant: From Wagner's Pilgrims to Strauss's Windmills

Thursday, March 5, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Daniel Harding, conductor · Diyang Mei, viola · Ludwig Quandt, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	WAGNER 1813–1883 <i>Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg: Overture</i>	15'
2	HENZE 1926–2012 <i>Barcarola für großes Orchester</i>	20'
3	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Don Quixote, Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character, Op. 35</i>	42'
TOTAL MUSIC		77'

Richard Wagner

1813–1883

Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg: Overture

15 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Tannhäuser, Wagner's fifth opera, premiered in Dresden on October 19, 1845, with the composer conducting. The work draws on three medieval legends: the story of the minnesinger knight Tannhäuser, ensnared by the goddess Venus; the historical Wartburg singing contest; and the life of St. Elisabeth of Hungary.

Hans Werner Henze

1926–2012

Barcarola für großes Orchester

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Henze wrote the *Barcarola* in the summer of 1979 on a commission from the Tonhalle-Gesellschaft Zürich, and Gerd Albrecht conducted the premiere in Zurich on April 22, 1980. It came out of a difficult period in the composer's life, overshadowed by illness and by the deaths of close friends, among them

the film director Luchino Visconti and the composer Paul Dessau. The low D-flat (in German, *Des*) on which the piece begins is a musical nod to Dessau's name.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

Don Quixote, Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character, Op. 35

42 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Don Quixote was composed in Munich in 1897 and premiered in Cologne on March 8, 1898. It is often paired with *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life), which followed a year later. Where *Heldenleben* presents heroism straight, *Don Quixote* offers heroism tilted: the heroism of delusion, of magnificent folly, of a madman who believes himself a knight.

DANIEL HARDING, CONDUCTOR

Daniel Harding was born in Oxford in 1975 and has enjoyed one of the most remarkable conducting careers of his generation. His path to the podium was unconventional: at seventeen he assembled musicians to perform Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* and sent a recording to Simon Rattle. So impressed was Rattle that he hired the teenager as his assistant at the City of

Birmingham Symphony Orchestra for the 1993-94 season. Harding has said that he has never had formal conducting lessons.

His relationship with the Berliner Philharmoniker stretches back nearly three decades; he first conducted the orchestra at twenty-one, and in 1996 he became the youngest conductor ever to appear at the BBC Proms. Harding was Chief Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra from 2007 to 2025 and was appointed Music Director of the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia beginning with the 2024–2025 season. He was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2021.

Perhaps most remarkably, Harding leads a dual life as a commercial airline pilot: since 2022 he has flown Airbus aircraft on medium-haul routes for Air France for about one week a month.

DIYANG MEI, VIOLA

Diyang Mei was born in Hunan, China, and began playing the violin at five, thanks to his grandfather's love of music. At ten, on the suggestion of his teacher Shaowu Wang at Beijing's Central Conservatory, he switched to the viola, drawn to the instrument's "dark and mysterious sound." As a boy he also watched a television documentary about Herbert von Karajan and the Berliner Philharmoniker, and from that moment dreamed of one day joining this legendary orchestra.

That childhood dream became reality in October 2022, when Mei was appointed 1st Principal Viola of the Berliner Philharmoniker after three years as principal viola of the Munich Philharmonic. His path there included studies in Beijing, in Munich with Hariolf Schlichtig, and at the Kronberg Academy with Nobuko Imai, along with a spectacular competition career: First Prizes at the ARD International Music Competition (2018), the Berlin International Max Rostal Competition (2015), and the International Johannes Brahms Competition (2012).

Mei performs on an Antonio Mariani viola from 1646, on loan from a private collection. Tonight he takes on the role of Sancho Panza in Strauss's *Don Quixote*.

LUDWIG QUANDT, CELLO

Ludwig Quandt was born in Ulm and grew up in a musical household. When he was six, Schubert's *Trout Quintet* captivated him, and he went on to choose the cello. He studied in Lübeck with Arthur Troester, first principal cellist of the Berliner Philharmoniker from 1935 to 1945, creating a direct link to the orchestra's storied past.

Quandt joined the Berliner Philharmoniker in April 1991 and later became 1st Principal Cellist, the very position his teacher had once held. His awards include prizes at the ARD Competition, the Brahms Competition in Hamburg, and the "Premio Stradivari" competition in Cremona.

He performs on a 1675 Francesco Ruggieri cello from Cremona, on loan from Deutsche Bank since 1993. Away from music, Quandt pursues interests in astronomy and dragonflies, and enjoys walking, cycling, and kayaking, though most of all he likes to spend time with his family.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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