

From Puppets to Star-Crossed Lovers: A Lithuanian Debut

Thursday, April 16, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, conductor · Emanuel Ax, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	WEINBERG 1919–1996 <i>"Burattino and the Golden Key": Orchestral Suite No. 4, op. 55d</i>	20'
2	WILLIAMS b. 1932 <i>Concerto for Piano and Orchestra</i>	22'
3	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>"Romeo and Juliet," op. 64: Excerpts</i>	50'
TOTAL MUSIC		92'

Mieczysław Weinberg

1919–1996

"Burattino and the Golden Key": Orchestral Suite No. 4, op. 55d

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In 1954-1955, Weinberg composed a children's ballet based on Alexei Tolstoy's *The Golden Key*, a Russian retelling of Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio story in which the wooden puppet Burattino discovers a magical key that opens the door to a hidden world. Weinberg revised the ballet in 1961, and in 1964 he arranged its music into four orchestral concert suites, designated Op. 55a through Op. 55d. The Fourth Suite, heard tonight, brings together some of the most charming and theatrical numbers from the score.

John Williams

b. 1932

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra

22 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

This Piano Concerto has an unusually charming origin story. Williams had mentioned to only a few associates that he was interested in writing for piano and orchestra when Emanuel

Ax, tonight's soloist, called him with an offer: "If you write it, I will play it!" Williams began the score in 2022, and the concerto was given its world premiere on 26 July 2025 at Tanglewood, with Ax as soloist and Andris Nelsons conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The composer was 93 years old.

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

"Romeo and Juliet," op. 64: Excerpts

50 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Romeo and Juliet grew out of negotiations with the Kirov Theatre in Leningrad in 1934, and Prokofiev wrote most of the score in 1935, after a contract had been signed with Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. But the road to the stage was tortuous. Neither theatre staged it at first, and Prokofiev's original ending, in which the lovers survive (because, as he later explained, "living people can dance, the dying cannot"), provoked controversy and was eventually replaced by Shakespeare's tragic conclusion. The full ballet finally received its world premiere on 30 December 1938 not in Russia but at the Mahen Theatre in Brno, Czechoslovakia. The Soviet premiere followed at the Kirov on 11 January 1940, with the legendary Galina Ulanova as Juliet, a performance that immediately entered the history of dance.

MIRGA GRAŽINYTĖ-TYLA, CONDUCTOR

Lithuanian conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, born in Vilnius in 1986, makes her Berliner Philharmoniker debut with these concerts, a moment many in the music world have been waiting for since her rise began over a decade ago. The daughter of a choral conductor father and a pianist-singer mother, she initially trained in painting and French at the M. K. Čiurlionis School of Art in Vilnius before deciding, at age eleven, that music was her calling. She subsequently studied in Graz, Leipzig, and Zurich.

Her career trajectory has been extraordinary. After winning the Salzburg Young Conductors Award in 2012 and serving as a Dudamel Fellow with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, she was appointed Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 2016, the first female conductor ever to hold that historic post. In 2019 she became the first female conductor in the history of Deutsche Grammophon to sign an exclusive recording contract; her debut album for the label, devoted to the music of Mieczysław Weinberg, won the Gramophone Recording of the Year award in 2020. Weinberg's music is one of the central artistic threads of her career, and she is widely regarded as one of the leading champions of his rediscovery, which makes her programming choice for tonight's debut especially meaningful. A small curiosity: her surname "Tyla," which she added herself, is the Lithuanian word for stillness, calm and silence.

EMANUEL AX, PIANO

Emanuel Ax, born in Lviv in 1949 to Polish-Jewish parents who had survived the Nazi concentration camps, has been one of the most beloved pianists in the world for half a century. The family emigrated to Winnipeg before settling in New York in 1961, where Ax studied piano with Mieczysław Munz at Juilliard and earned a degree in French from Columbia. His international career took off when he won the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition in Tel Aviv in 1974, followed by the Avery Fisher Prize in 1979.

A multiple Grammy Award winner, Ax is celebrated equally for his solo recitals, his chamber music partnerships (most famously with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, with whom he won Grammys for recordings of Brahms and Beethoven) and his concerto performances with the world's leading orchestras. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary doctorates from Yale and Columbia. Tonight's performance carries a particular personal significance: it was Ax himself who told John Williams, then in his nineties, "If you write it, I will play it!" The Piano Concerto on tonight's programme exists, quite literally, because Emanuel Ax asked for it.

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