

Zubin Mehta and Pinchas Zukerman with Bruch's First Violin Concerto

Thursday, November 12, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Zubin Mehta, conductor · Pinchas Zukerman, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Le nozze di Figaro, K. 492: Overture</i>	4'
2	BRUCH 1838–1920 <i>Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26</i>	25'
3	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70</i>	40'
TOTAL MUSIC		69'

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

4 minutes

1756–1791

Le nozze di Figaro, K. 492: Overture

THE COMPOSER

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart needs little introduction. Born in Salzburg in 1756, he was a prodigy whose talents were cultivated and exhibited across Europe by his father Leopold. By the time he composed this concerto in 1779, the twenty-three-year-old Mozart was restless in provincial Salzburg, dreaming of Vienna and larger stages. Within two years he would make the move that defined his mature career.

Less well known is his sister Maria Anna, called “Nannerl,” five years his senior. She was an equally brilliant pianist as a child, and the siblings toured together as wonders of nature until Nannerl’s touring career ended when she was about seventeen. Following the customs of the time, she stayed at home while Wolfgang continued traveling with their father. The brother and sister remained close, and this concerto was written for the two of them to play.

ABOUT THE WORK

Le nozze di Figaro (“The Marriage of Figaro”) was the first of Mozart’s three operas with the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, followed by *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*. Its source was Beaumarchais’s comedy *La*

folle journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro, in which a servant outwits his aristocratic master. The opera opened at the Burgtheater in Vienna in May 1786, with Mozart directing from the keyboard.

The story unfolds over a single “mad day” in the household of Count Almaviva, as his valet Figaro and the maid Susanna try to get married while the Count schemes to seduce Susanna himself. The overture sets the pace for all this intrigue. The overture is in D major and marked Presto, and it is entirely self-contained. Unlike the overtures to *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *Così fan tutte* and *The Magic Flute*, it neither quotes melodies from the opera nor runs straight into the first scene. Instead it captures the mood of the whole comedy, quick, witty and a little breathless, before a note of the plot has been sung. It is also often played on its own as a concert piece. The result lasts about four minutes.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The overture begins with a hushed, scurrying figure, so quiet and fast that it almost sounds like whispering behind a door. It is easy to miss if the hall is still settling, so listen closely from the very first bar. Then the full orchestra bursts in, with trumpets and timpani. Listen for how often Mozart repeats this pattern of whisper and outburst, and for the chattering woodwind phrases that answer the violins. There is no slow section and no pause for breath: the music drives straight through to a brilliant close, just as the opera’s plot never lets its characters rest.

Max Bruch

1838–1920

25 minutes

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

THE COMPOSER

Max Bruch, born in Cologne in 1838, was a thoroughly Romantic German composer whose long life ran from the age of Mendelssohn well into the twentieth century, yet whose musical convictions never budged from the mid-Romantic ideals of his youth. A precocious talent who was composing by the age of nine, he made his living chiefly as a conductor, holding posts in Mannheim, Koblenz, Sondershausen, Liverpool (with the Liverpool Philharmonic) and Breslau, before settling into a long and influential professorship of composition at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik from 1890 to 1910. Bruch prized melody above all, and his sympathies lay with the conservative tradition rather than the ‘music of the future’ of Wagner and Liszt. He was a prolific composer of choral works and operas that he regarded as his most important achievements, but posterity has been ruthlessly selective: today he is remembered almost entirely for three instrumental pieces: the First Violin

Concerto, the Scottish Fantasy for violin and orchestra, and Kol Nidrei for cello, the last built on a Jewish liturgical melody that led to a persistent and false assumption that Bruch was himself Jewish (he was, in fact, raised a Protestant). He lived just long enough to see the Romantic world he embodied swept away by the First World War, dying in Berlin-Friedenau in 1920.

ABOUT THE WORK

Max Bruch wrote many works, including symphonies, operas and choral pieces, but for most concertgoers his name means one piece: the Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor. It is one of the most frequently performed violin concertos of all, and its fame became something of a burden to its composer. Late in life Bruch complained that violinists kept turning up to play it for him and begged them to try his other concertos instead.

The concerto had a difficult birth. Bruch completed a first version in 1866, and it was performed that April with Bruch conducting. He was not satisfied and turned for advice to the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who helped him reshape the solo part. The revised concerto was first performed by Joachim in Bremen in January 1868, and it was this version that quickly entered the repertoire. Joachim's influence can be heard in the natural, idiomatic virtuosity of the solo writing, which is brilliant without ever sounding mechanical.

The concerto is unusual in shape. Bruch called the first movement a *Vorspiel*, a prelude, and it leads without a break into the slow movement, which is the emotional heart of the work.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Vorspiel: Allegro moderato. A quiet woodwind phrase is answered by the solo violin in a short, free cadenza. This happens twice before the movement proper begins, with a strong main theme and a warmer, more lyrical second one. At the end the opening cadenzas return, more elaborate than before, and the orchestra leads straight into the slow movement.

II. Adagio. One long song for the violin, over an orchestral accompaniment that keeps moving underneath. This is the music most listeners remember: listen for how the melody keeps rising to new climaxes, each more intense than the last.

III. Finale: Allegro energico. After a quiet, expectant orchestral introduction, the violin enters with a vigorous dance theme played in double stops (two strings at once). A broad, singing

second theme interrupts it several times, before the tempo quickens into a final Presto and the concerto ends in a blaze of virtuosity.

Antonin Dvorak

1841–1904

40 minutes

Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70

THE COMPOSER

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

His breakthrough came when Johannes Brahms, serving on a jury for a composition 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" Symphony and the Cello Concerto.

ABOUT THE WORK

In the early 1880s Antonín Dvořák was becoming internationally famous. Brahms had championed him, his *Slavonic Dances* had sold widely, and his *Stabat Mater* had been a triumph in London. In June 1884 the Philharmonic Society of London elected him an honorary member and asked him for a new symphony. Dvořák had recently heard and admired Brahms's new Third Symphony, and he set out to write something on the same scale: a symphony, as he wrote to a friend, that "must be capable of stirring the world".

The Seventh is the darkest of Dvořák's nine symphonies. The folk-dance colour of his so-called "Slavonic period" gives way to music of dramatic tension, gloom and stubborn defiance. Various explanations have been offered. Dvořák noted in the score that the main theme came to him as he watched a festive train arrive in Prague from Pest, bringing visitors to a patriotic event at the National Theatre. Others point to the death of his mother. The Dvořák Society's own account is cautious about all of these readings, and it is best to let the music speak.

Dvořák completed the score on 17 March 1885 and conducted the first performance at St James's Hall in London on 22 April. It was received with great enthusiasm. His German publisher, Simrock, was less keen and haggled over the fee, but Dvořák held out and eventually got the price he asked.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro maestoso. The main theme emerges quietly over a low, sustained D, like the calm before a storm, then rises suddenly to a harsh, dissonant peak. The second theme is gentler, but the development is one of the most dramatic passages Dvořák wrote. Listen to the end of the movement: after a fierce climax, the music ebbs away in the same hushed mood in which it began.

II. Poco adagio. A calm opening melody, sometimes heard as a prayer, is troubled by darker episodes. After the premiere Dvořák tightened this movement and told his publisher that there was “not a single superfluous note” left in the work.

III. Scherzo: Vivace. A dance, but not a carefree one. The main theme is sharply rhythmic, with a contrasting counter-melody, and the key of D minor keeps casting a shadow. Towards the end of the main section the music gathers into a wild, dark whirl.

IV. Finale: Allegro. The main theme opens with a bold upward leap and has a heroic, driving character. The movement fights its way through contrasting episodes to a broad, resolute coda that brings the symphony to a confident close.

Tonight's artists

Pinchas Zukerman *violin*

Pinchas Zukerman, like Zubin Mehta on the podium, has been associated with the Berliner Philharmoniker for decades, and the two have often performed together. Bruch's concerto, with its long singing lines, is a natural vehicle for a violinist who has spent a whole career in the Romantic repertoire.

Pinchas Zukerman, born in Tel Aviv in 1948, is one of the defining string players of his generation: a violinist, violist and conductor of rare versatility. The son of Holocaust survivors, he began on recorder and clarinet before switching to the violin at eight, and his gifts were spotted by Isaac Stern and Pablo Casals, who arranged for him to study in New York at the Juilliard School under the legendary teacher Ivan Galamian. He shared the Leventritt Competition prize with Kyung-wha Chung in 1967 and launched an international career that has now spanned more than half a century. Equally celebrated on the viola, Zukerman has long been admired above all for the warmth, breadth, and effortless beauty of his tone, qualities that make him an ideal interpreter of the great Romantic concertos of Bruch, Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Tchaikovsky. He has also built a substantial parallel career as a conductor, as Music Director of the National Arts Centre Orchestra of Canada from 1998 to 2015, and is a devoted teacher.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE Mozart: The Reign of Love

Jan Swafford, Harper Perennial 2021

Jan Swafford's biography of Mozart is a good companion to the *Figaro* overture, with a full account of how *Le nozze di Figaro* came to be written.

ACCESSIBLE Max Bruch: His Life and Works

Christopher Fifield, Boydell Press 2005

The standard English life of Max Bruch, telling how the G minor Violin Concerto was revised with Joseph Joachim and then overshadowed everything else Bruch wrote.

DEEPER Dvořák and His World

Michael Beckerman (ed.), Princeton University Press 1993

Essays and documents from the Bard Music Festival on Dvořák's life and reception, a scholarly background to the Seventh Symphony.

SOURCES

1. Berliner Philharmoniker, Mehta, Zukerman, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/concert/calendar/57056/>
2. Zubin Mehta and Pinchas Zukerman, Digital Concert Hall. <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/en/concert/57056>
3. The Marriage of Figaro, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Marriage_of_Figaro
4. The Marriage of Figaro: Overture, Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/works/the-marriage-of-figaro-overture>
5. Violin Concerto No. 1 (Bruch), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_No._1_\(Bruch\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_No._1_(Bruch))
6. Max Bruch, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Bruch
7. Symphony No. 7 (Dvořák), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._7_\(Dvořák\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._7_(Dvořák))
8. Symphony No. 7 in D Minor, Op. 70, B141, Antonín Dvořák Society. <https://www.antonin-dvorak.cz/en/work/symphony-no-7/>
9. Symphony No. 7 (Dvořák), Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/works/symphony-no-7-dvorak>
10. Pinchas Zukerman, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinchas_Zukerman
11. Mozart: The Reign of Love, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780062433619>
12. Max Bruch: His Life and Works, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781843831365>
13. Dvořák and His World, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780691000978>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2026-11-12-mehta>

Version 2, 30 September 2026