

New Year's Eve Concert with Kirill Petrenko and Alexander Malofeev

Tuesday, December 29, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin
Kirill Petrenko, conductor · Alexander Malofeev, piano · David Guerrier, trumpet

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	NICOLAI 1810–1849 <i>Overture to Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor (The Merry Wives of Windsor)</i>	9'
2	SHOSTAKOVICH 1906–1975 <i>Piano Concerto No. 1 in C minor, Op. 35</i>	21'
3	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Symphony No. 1 in D major, Op. 25, 'Classical'</i>	15'
4	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op. 28</i>	15'
5	STRAUSS II 1825–1899 <i>Overture to the operetta Der Zigeunerbaron (The Gypsy Baron)</i>	8'
TOTAL MUSIC		68'

Otto Nicolai

1810–1849

Overture to Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor (The Merry Wives of Windsor)

THE COMPOSER

Otto Nicolai (1810–1849) was born in Königsberg in Prussia and received his first musical training from his father. He studied in Berlin with Carl Friedrich Zelter and then went to Rome as a musician at the Prussian embassy, where he turned to opera and scored a series of successes with Italian operas. In the early 1840s he became a leading figure in the musical life of Vienna, and in 1842 he founded the Philharmonic Concerts that gave birth to the Vienna Philharmonic, which still honours him as its founder. Disappointed when the Court Opera declined his new German opera, *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (The Merry Wives of Windsor), he left Vienna in 1847 for Berlin. The op-

9 minutes

era had its premiere there in March 1849, and two months later, shortly after his appointment as music director of the Berlin court opera, he died of a stroke at the age of thirty-eight.

ABOUT THE WORK

Otto Nicolai is remembered today for two things: he founded the Philharmonic Concerts in Vienna in 1842, the origin of the Vienna Philharmonic, and he wrote *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (The Merry Wives of Windsor), the comic opera whose overture opens tonight's programme.

Nicolai had made his name in Italy with a series of Italian operas before settling in Vienna, and the Shakespeare opera, composed mostly in 1845 and 1846, was his first major work in German. The libretto, by Salomon Hermann Mosenthal, follows Shakespeare's plot: two married women, Frau Fluth and Frau Reich, discover that the vain and penniless Falstaff has sent them identical love letters, and set about humiliating him, first by tipping him into a ditch in a laundry basket and finally at a midnight masquerade in Windsor Forest, where he is tormented by guests disguised as spirits and elves. Around this runs the love story of Anna Reich and the young Fenton, who marry in secret while her parents each try to marry her off to someone else.

The work proved hard to place. The Vienna Court Opera declined to give the first performance, a disappointment that was one of the main reasons Nicolai left the city in 1847. The opera was finally premiered in Berlin on 9 March 1849, with Nicolai conducting, but he died there only a short time later, in May, having just been appointed court music director. Its lasting popularity came after his death, above all in Germany and Austria, where it has remained in the repertoire. The overture became a concert favourite in its own right.

Musically the opera follows the German Singspiel tradition, with musical numbers joined by spoken dialogue, and it combines two strands of German opera of the time: the romantic, supernatural colouring of Weber in the moonlit forest scenes, and the comic style of Albert Lortzing in the scenes with Falstaff and the jealous husbands.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The overture opens quietly, with a slow, lyrical introduction in the strings that sets a romantic, nocturnal mood before the comedy begins. The main Allegro is quick, light and full of bustle, with themes from the opera tossed between strings and woodwind. Nicolai, an experienced conductor, writes with great clarity; listen for the crisp dialogue between sections of the orchestra and for the brilliant, high-spirited coda.

Dmitri Shostakovich

1906–1975

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C minor, Op. 35

THE COMPOSER

Dmitri Shostakovich was born on September 25, 1906, in St. Petersburg (then still the Russian capital) into a cultured family. His father was an engineer, and it was his mother who gave him his first piano lessons. The young Dmitri showed exceptional talent, entering the Petrograd Conservatory at thirteen and graduating at nineteen with his First Symphony, whose triumphant premiere in 1926 soon brought him international fame.

Shostakovich's life thereafter became inseparable from the tortured history of the Soviet Union. His 1934 opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was initially a sensation, but in 1936 a devastating Pravda editorial, widely taken to reflect Stalin's own displeasure, condemned it as "muddle instead of music." Shostakovich lived for years in fear of arrest, at one point waiting at night on the landing outside his flat so that his family would not be disturbed if the knock came.

Yet under this shadow, Shostakovich composed a stream of masterpieces. His fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets constitute one of the twentieth century's greatest artistic achievements: music that bears witness to its era's terrors while transcending them through its humanity and craft. He died in Moscow on August 9, 1975.

ABOUT THE WORK

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his First Piano Concerto in 1933, at the age of twenty-six, for himself to play. The concerto is tailored to his own strengths at the keyboard: brilliance and a light touch, dry humour, and a knack for switching character in an instant.

The unusual scoring came about almost by accident. Shostakovich began by planning a trumpet concerto for the trumpeter Alexander Schmidt. As work went on he added the piano, the piece turned into a kind of double concerto, and in the end the piano took the lead, with the trumpet as a prominent partner and commentator, accompanied only by strings. The official title reflects this compromise: Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and String Orchestra.

The premiere took place on 15 October 1933 at the season-opening concerts of the Leningrad Philharmonic, with Shostakovich as soloist, Schmidt on trumpet and Fritz Stiedry conducting. It was received with enthusiasm and helped establish Shostakovich as a concert pianist as well as a composer.

The concerto is full of jokes and borrowings. Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata is quoted near the start, and the finale takes in a Haydn piano sonata and Beethoven's rondo *Rage over a Lost Penny*,

along with snatches of Shostakovich's own theatre music. The effect is of a young composer cheerfully raiding the classical cupboard, sometimes affectionately, sometimes with a sneer. The whole piece lasts about twenty minutes.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro moderato. The piano begins with a flourish and a quote from the "Appassionata", before setting out a wistful main theme. The music moves quickly between lyrical moments and sharp, sarcastic ones, with the trumpet adding the occasional comment.

Lento. The emotional centre: a slow, melancholy movement with a long piano solo in the middle that builds to an impassioned climax. Near the end the muted trumpet takes over the melody in a moment of real tenderness.

Moderato. A short, reflective interlude, often played as an introduction to the finale.

Allegro con brio. The finale is a madcap chase full of quotations, abrupt changes of direction and music-hall humour. After a short piano cadenza that parodies the classical concerto, the trumpet comes into its own with fanfares and street-band tunes, and the work ends with a burst of C major.

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

15 minutes

Symphony No. 1 in D major, Op. 25, 'Classical'

THE COMPOSER

Sergei Prokofiev was born in 1891 in Sontsivka, then part of the Russian Empire (now Ukraine), and was admitted to the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1904, several years younger than most of his classmates. By his teens he was already a fearsome pianist and an enfant terrible of Russian modernism, scandalising audiences with the percussive dissonance of his early works.

In 1918, Prokofiev left Russia with official Soviet permission and spent nearly two decades in the West, first in the United States, then mostly in Paris, composing operas, ballets, symphonies, and concertos that earned him a place among the leading modernists of his generation. After several years of shuttling between Paris and Moscow, he settled permanently in the Soviet Union in 1936. The remaining years of his life were marked by official denunciation in 1948, deteriorating health, and personal tragedy. He died on 5 March 1953, the same day as Stalin. Soviet newspapers, consumed by the dictator's death, barely noted his passing.

ABOUT THE WORK

In the summer of 1917, as Russia lurched from the February Revolution towards the Bolshevik seizure of power, the twenty-six-year-old Sergei Prokofiev retreated to the countryside outside Petrograd and wrote a symphony of disarming sunniness and poise. He had made his name as an enfant terrible whose raucous early works had outraged his teachers. Now he set out to write a symphony in the style of Haydn. “It seemed to me,” he later wrote, “that if Haydn had lived in our day he would have retained his own style while accepting something of the new at the same time.”

Unusually for him, he composed away from the piano, believing that the orchestral writing would be more natural and transparent that way. He called the work “Classical”, he said, partly because it was simple and partly out of naughtiness, to “tease the geese”. The Gavotte had been written earlier; the other movements came in 1917, and the score was finished in September. Prokofiev himself conducted the first performance in Petrograd in April 1918. Soon afterwards he left Russia, and he did not settle there again for many years.

The orchestra is the size Haydn would have known: pairs of woodwind, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings, with no trombones. At around fifteen minutes it is by far the shortest of Prokofiev’s seven symphonies, and it became one of the most frequently played symphonies of the twentieth century. It is often cited as an early example of the neoclassicism that Stravinsky and others would take up in the 1920s.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro. A crisp sonata-form movement that opens with a rocket-like arpeggio. Listen for the way Prokofiev uses classical gestures (scales, trills, sudden contrasts of loud and soft) and then gives them a small twist, jumping into an unexpected key and straight back again. The second theme, for the violins, is famous for its huge leaps and delicate grace notes.

Larghetto. A graceful slow movement whose melody floats high in the first violins over a gently ticking accompaniment.

Gavotta. Barely more than a minute long, a stately old dance with heavy-footed bass notes, wide leaps and harmonic surprises.

Finale: Molto vivace. A breathless finale that Prokofiev wrote, by his own account, without a single minor chord. It races along with sparkling woodwind writing and cheerful good humour to the end.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

15 minutes

Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op. 28

THE COMPOSER

Richard Strauss was the heir to Wagner and Liszt, the composer who carried the late Romantic tradition into the twentieth century. Born in Munich in 1864, the son of the principal horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra, he received a conservative musical education before an encounter with Alexander Ritter, a violinist married to one of Wagner's nieces, converted him to the "music of the future."

Between 1889 and 1898, Strauss composed a series of tone poems that made him the most famous composer in Germany: *Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ein Heldenleben*. Each pushed the orchestra to new extremes of virtuosity and expression. Then he turned to opera, creating the scandalous *Salome* (1905), the shattering *Elektra* (1909), and the nostalgic masterpiece *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).

Strauss lived long: through two world wars, the Nazi era, and the destruction of the German musical culture he had embodied. His late works, including the *Metamorphosen* for strings and the *Four Last Songs*, are elegies for a lost world. He died in 1949, shortly after completing those final songs.

ABOUT THE WORK

Richard Strauss wrote *Till Eulenspiegel* in 1894 and 1895, in the wake of a failure. His first opera, *Guntram*, had met a lukewarm reception in Weimar and a disastrous one in Munich, his home city. His first idea for revenge was another opera, in which the medieval prankster Till Eulenspiegel would take on the narrow-minded burghers of Schilda, a thinly disguised Munich. He dropped the opera and poured the idea into an orchestral piece instead.

Till Eulenspiegel is an old figure of German folk tales, a peasant trickster who plays pranks on everyone from market traders to priests and professors. Strauss's full title describes the piece as "Till Eulenspiegel's merry pranks, after the old rogue's tale, set in rondeau form for large orchestra". The French spelling "rondeau" was itself something of a joke: the music is less a textbook rondo than a series

of adventures held together by the return of Till's themes. Strauss later wrote notes into a friend's copy of the score that tell the story section by section.

The piece was dedicated to Strauss's friend Arthur Seidl and first performed in Cologne in 1895 by the Gürzenich Orchestra under Franz Wüllner, with great success. It is Strauss's most compact tone poem, at around fifteen minutes, and one of his most often played, even though it calls for a larger orchestra than any of his earlier ones, including a ratchet and a shrill clarinet in D.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

After a few gentle bars in the strings that suggest "once upon a time", the horn plays Till's first theme, a long, lilting phrase that rises, falls and ends with three emphatic notes. Soon the D clarinet answers with his second theme, a cheeky, wheedling figure that seems to laugh at its own joke. These two ideas return throughout the piece in endless disguises.

Then the adventures begin. Till rides his horse through the market, scattering the stalls (listen for the rattle of the ratchet). He disguises himself as a priest, and the music turns mock-solemn until his theme pokes through. He flirts with the girls, with a love theme in the first violins. He mocks a group of pompous scholars, their pedantic theme given to the bassoons.

The mood changes abruptly with a loud drum roll. Till is arrested and put on trial, and the heavy chords of the court alternate with his increasingly nervous attempts to joke his way out. The sentence is death. The D clarinet screams as he is hanged, and then the music falls silent. But Strauss adds an epilogue: the "once upon a time" music returns, and a final burst from the whole orchestra suggests that the spirit of a Till Eulenspiegel can never really be killed.

Johann Strauss II

1825–1899

8 minutes

Overture to the operetta Der Zigeunerbaron (The Gypsy Baron)

THE COMPOSER

Johann Strauss II, born in Vienna in 1825, was the most celebrated member of a whole dynasty of dance composers and remains, more than any other figure, the musical embodiment of imperial Vienna. His father, Johann Strauss I, forbade him a musical career, hoping to spare him a precarious life; the boy studied the violin in secret and in 1844 made his debut at the head of

his own orchestra. He soon eclipsed his father and his brothers Josef and Eduard, touring Europe, Russia, and the United States, and earning the title 'the Waltz King.' Over a long career he produced some five hundred waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and marches, raising the Viennese waltz to a peak of melodic richness and orchestral colour, and turning to the operetta stage with *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*. His *An der schönen blauen Donau* (The Blue Danube) is often called Austria's unofficial anthem. He died in 1899, and his music has formed the heart of the Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's Concert ever since.

ABOUT THE WORK

After the enormous success of *Die Fledermaus* in 1874, Johann Strauss II struggled for a decade to repeat it. His second lasting hit came from Hungary. His wife Adele introduced him to *Saffi*, a story by the Hungarian writer Mór Jókai, and in 1883 Strauss met Jókai, who was delighted with the idea of an operetta and suggested the librettist Ignaz Schnitzer.

The story is set in eighteenth-century Hungary. Sándor Barinkay returns from exile to reclaim his family estates and falls in love with Saffi, a Gypsy girl who turns out to be the daughter of a Turkish pasha and the heir to a buried treasure. Strauss wrote music of unusual weight for the genre, and *Der Zigeunerbaron* (The Gypsy Baron) is sometimes described as closer to comic opera than to operetta. Its score is full of Hungarian colour.

Strauss took his time, and the piece was not finished until the autumn of 1885. The premiere, conducted by the composer at the Theater an der Wien in October 1885, was a triumph, and the operetta soon became an international success. During Strauss's lifetime only *Die Fledermaus* was more popular.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The overture is a medley of the operetta's best tunes, in the manner of a Viennese potpourri. It moves between Hungarian and Viennese moods: dark, chromatic themes and the fiery accelerations of the *csárdás* on one side, lilting waltz melodies on the other, above all the tune of the famous *Schatz-Walzer* (Treasure Waltz). Listen for the colourful orchestration that gives the Hungarian passages their flavour, and for the way Strauss builds the final pages into a whirlwind of speed and brilliance, a fitting close to a New Year's Eve programme.

Tonight's artists

Alexander Malofeev *piano*

Alexander Malofeev makes his debut with the Berliner Philharmoniker in these concerts. Shostakovich wrote the concerto as a showcase for himself as a young pianist in his twenties, and it rewards exactly the qualities of a young virtuoso: speed, wit and the ability to turn from mockery to tenderness in a bar. Listen for the long solo in the slow movement and for the parody cadenza near the end.

Alexander Malofeev was born in Moscow in 2001 and began playing the piano at five. He studied at the Gnessin music school and at the Moscow Conservatory, and came to international attention in 2014 when, at the age of thirteen, he won first prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians. He has since appeared as a soloist with orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, working with conductors such as Riccardo Chailly and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and is especially admired in Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky. An outspoken critic of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he left Russia in 2022 and has lived in Berlin since. He records exclusively for Sony Classical, which released his first solo album, *Forgotten Melodies*, in February 2026.

David Guerrier *trumpet*

The trumpet soloist comes from within the orchestra: David Guerrier has been the Berliner Philharmoniker's principal trumpet since January 2024. He has recorded this concerto before, with Martha Argerich and the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra. The part is less a solo role than a running commentary, mostly short interjections until the finale, when the trumpet takes centre stage.

David Guerrier, born in Pierrelatte in France, began playing the trumpet at the age of seven and later took up the horn as well. He studied at the Conservatoire de Lyon with Pierre Dutot and won first prizes at the Maurice André Competition in Paris and the ARD Music Competition in Munich, and was twice named instrumental soloist of the year at France's Victoires de la Musique. Unusually, he has held principal posts on two instruments: he began his orchestral career in 2004 as principal horn of the Orchestre National de France, held the same post with the Luxembourg Philharmonic, where he switched to trumpet, and became principal trumpet of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in 2021. He joined the Berliner Philharmoniker as principal trumpet in January 2024, and is also active as a soloist and chamber musician, on modern and period instruments.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century**

Alex Ross, Picador 2008

Alex Ross's history of twentieth-century music tells the stories of Shostakovich and Prokofiev and the Soviet world behind the First Piano Concerto and the 'Classical' Symphony.

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Richard Strauss**

Bryan Gilliam, Cambridge University Press 1999

A short life of Richard Strauss that places *Till Eulenspiegel* among the tone poems of his early fame.

DEEPER **Shostakovich: A Life**

Laurel E. Fay, Oxford University Press 2005

Laurel Fay's documented life of Shostakovich, which covers the early 1930s when he wrote the First Piano Concerto.

SOURCES

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3. Summer Night Concert 2025, Vienna Philharmonic. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/summer-night-concert-2025/10673/>

Johann Strauss II -Overture to the operetta Der Zigeunerbaron (The Gypsy Baron)

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5. Piano Concerto No. 1 (Shostakovich), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._1_\(Shostakovich\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._1_(Shostakovich))
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9. Symphony No. 1, 'Classical', Hollywood Bowl. <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/3908/symphony-no-1-classical>
10. Prokofiev: Symphony No. 1, Classical, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/symphony-no-1-classical>
11. Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Till_Eulenspiegel%27s_Merry_Pranks
12. Strauss: Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/till-eulenspiegels-merry-pranks>
13. The Gypsy Baron, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gypsy_Baron
14. Overture, 'The Gypsy Baron', Hollywood Bowl. <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/2630/overture-the-gypsy-baron>
15. Gypsy Baron, The (Der Zigeunerbaron), Josef Weinberger. <https://www.josef-weinberger.com/operas-operetta/opera/gypsy-baron-the-der-zigeunerbaron.html>
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17. Alexander Malofeev, Salzburg Festival. <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/a/alexander-malofeev>
18. David Guerrier, Principal trumpet, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/about-us/orchestra/musicians/david-guerrier/>
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Version 2, 30 September 2026