

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Jakub Hrůša and Yuja Wang: Dvořák, Bartók and Brahms

Thursday, January 7, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Jakub Hrůša, conductor · Yuja Wang, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>Nocturne in B major, Op. 40</i>	9'
2	BARTÓK 1881–1945 <i>Piano Concerto No. 1, Sz. 83</i>	24'
3	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>Serenade No. 1 in D major, Op. 11</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		78'

Antonin Dvorak

1841–1904

Nocturne in B major, Op. 40

9 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

This short piece had two earlier lives before it found a permanent home. It began around 1870 as the slow movement, marked *Andante religioso*, of a String Quartet in E minor that Antonín Dvořák never published. A few years later he reused the music as a slow movement in his String Quintet in G major, then took it out of that work as well. Only in the early 1880s did he rework it as a piece in its own right, giving it the title *Nocturne*. It was published in 1883 as his Op. 40, and besides the version for string orchestra he prepared one for violin and piano and one for piano four hands.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The *Nocturne* holds a single mood from beginning to end. After a brief, plain introduction, the upper strings begin a long, winding melody that moves in small steps over a gently pulsing accompaniment. Underneath it the basses hold one deep note, an F sharp, for a very long time. That held note is what gives the first part of the piece its feeling of suspense: the harmony seems to be waiting to resolve and never quite does. The main Czech reference site on the composer describes the effect as almost hypnotic.

Eventually the bass lets go, the music becomes more animated, and the texture opens out. The opening returns at the end, but the tension has gone, and the piece closes in calm.

Béla Bartók

1881–1945

Piano Concerto No. 1, Sz. 83

24 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In 1926, after a period in which he had written very little, Béla Bartók produced a run of piano works in quick succession. The largest of them was his First Piano Concerto, composed in the autumn of that year. He wrote it for his own use: he was in demand across Europe as a pianist, and he wanted a concerto of his own to play. He gave the first performance himself on 1 July 1927 in Frankfurt, at the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, with Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro moderato. The concerto begins quietly, with low rumbling from timpani, piano and brass. Out of this comes the idea that drives the whole movement: one note, struck again and again by the piano. The main Al-

legro piles up from there in octaves and syncopated orchestral chords. Listen for how often the piano and the drums seem to be finishing each other's sentences.

II. Andante. The strings are silent throughout this movement. The piano is joined only by woodwinds, brass and percussion, which gives the music a bare, nocturnal colour. It opens as a quiet exchange between piano and drums; the winds enter one by one in the middle and build, over a repeating figure in the piano, to a harsh climax before the opening returns.

III. Allegro molto. The finale follows without a break, launched by drums and sliding trombones. It is a fast, stamping dance dominated by piano and percussion, with the brass punctuating. A short, angry fugal passage interrupts near the end, and the concerto stops abruptly, at full speed.

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

Serenade No. 1 in D major, Op. 11

45 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In the autumn of 1857 the 24-year-old Johannes Brahms took up a post at the small court of Detmold, obtained on the recommendation of Clara Schumann. He taught the piano to a princess, conducted the choir and, most usefully, had the run of a court orchestra. It was his first regular contact with one. The ensemble played Haydn and Mozart as well as newer music, and Brahms used his time to study their symphonies, serenades and divertimenti closely.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro molto. Low strings set up a drone, like a bagpipe, and a horn plays a cheerful, rustic tune over it. The opening closely resembles the finale of Haydn's last symphony, No. 104, which is in the same key and begins over the same kind of drone. The movement is broad and sunny, and the horns stay prominent throughout.

II. Scherzo: Allegro non troppo. A shadowy movement in D minor, quiet and restless, with a warmer middle section in B flat major.

III. Adagio non troppo. The longest movement and the centre of the work, in B flat major. It unfolds slowly, with long melodies for the woodwinds and horn over murmuring strings.

IV. Menuetto I and II. Two tiny minuets, the first in G major and the second in G minor, scored for only a few instruments. This is the movement where the serenade's origin as chamber music is easiest to hear.

V. Scherzo: Allegro. A short, boisterous movement led by the horns.

VI. Rondo: Allegro. The finale is built on a bouncing, dotted rhythm that keeps returning between contrasting episodes, and it ends the work in high spirits.

Tonight's artists

Yuja Wang *piano*

Yuja Wang is the soloist in Bartók's First Piano Concerto, a work in which, the orchestra quotes her as saying, the composer "created a unique sound world". The programme is given on 7, 8 and 9 January.

Yuja Wang, born in Beijing in 1987, is one of the most dazzling and charismatic pianists in the world. Trained at the Central Conservatory in Beijing and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, she had her breakthrough in 2007 when, aged twenty, she stepped in for Martha Argerich with the Boston Symphony, and she has been a star of the concert platform ever since. An exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist and a Grammy winner, she is celebrated for a phenomenal, seemingly effortless technique, electrifying stage presence and fearless musicianship across a vast repertoire, with the great virtuoso Russian concertos among her specialities.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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