

Paavo Järvi and Christian Tetzlaff: Pärt, Shostakovich and Prokofiev's Fifth

Thursday, April 8, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Paavo Järvi, conductor · Christian Tetzlaff, violin

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	PÄRT b. 1935 <i>Silhouette (Hommage à Gustave Eiffel)</i>	7'
2	SHOSTAKOVICH 1906–1975 <i>Violin Concerto No. 2 in C-sharp minor, Op. 129</i>	33'
3	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 100</i>	45'
	TOTAL MUSIC	85'

Arvo Pärt

b. 1935

Silhouette (Hommage à Gustave Eiffel)

7 minutes

THE COMPOSER

Arvo Pärt, born in Paide in Estonia in 1935, is among the most performed living composers. He studied composition with Heino Eller in Tallinn and in his early works, among them *Nekrolog* (1960) and *Credo* (1968), used the modernist techniques of the time. In 1976, with the piano piece *Für Alina*, he arrived at the spare, bell-like style he calls tintinnabuli, which he has used ever since in works such as *Fratres*, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* and *Spiegel im Spiegel*. He left Estonia with his family in 1980 and lived for many years in Berlin before returning home. Much of his later music sets sacred texts.

ABOUT THE WORK

Arvo Pärt has said that *Silhouette* began with a recording. He heard Paavo Järvi conducting one of his pieces, liked the performance enough to telephone him, and learned in the course of the call that Järvi was about to become chief conductor of the Orchestre de Paris. Pärt offered to write something for the new post, and looked for a subject that belonged to the city.

He found it on his desk, in a book of illustrations of Gustave Eiffel's plans and working drawings for the tower. What struck him, he wrote in his note for the premiere, was Eiffel's "combination of sober rationality and elegance". An engineer's tower and a piece of music seemed to him to have things in common: the way structural elements connect, the transparency of the construction, even stillness, which he called as important in music as in architecture. The subtitle, *Hommage à Gustave Eiffel*, names the dedicatee in spirit. The score itself is dedicated to Järvi and the Orchestre de Paris, who commissioned it.

The piece was finished in 2009 and first played on 4 November 2010 in the Salle Pleyel in Paris, by the Orchestre de Paris under Järvi. It is written for string orchestra and four percussionists and lasts about seven minutes. The Arvo Pärt Centre's catalogue also records a revision in 2015.

Silhouette is not a typical piece by the composer of *Fratres* and *Spiegel im Spiegel*. Pärt's music since the 1970s has mostly been slow, and built on a technique of his own that he calls tintinnabuli, from the Latin for little bells. This piece follows that technique strictly, according to the Arvo Pärt Centre, but it moves. "The piece came out short and light," Pärt wrote, "like a dance, a waltz, something dizzying", and he compared it to the winds that play around the tower.

For this concert the work comes back to the conductor it was written for, at the head of a programme that otherwise looks east, to Shostakovich and Prokofiev.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Arvo Pärt Centre describes a design in layers, modelled on the three platforms of the tower. A slow introduction sets out the material. Then the dance begins: plucked strings in light, unstable harmonies stand for the airy ironwork, and bowed passages in firmer harmony for the platforms where the structure comes to rest. The percussion, which includes vibraphone, tubular bells, crotales and gongs, adds points of metallic colour and never a beat to march to. A slow coda returns to the idea of the opening, so that the piece ends where it began, as if the eye had travelled up the tower and down again.

Dmitri Shostakovich

33 minutes

1906–1975

Violin Concerto No. 2 in C-sharp minor, Op. 129

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

Shostakovich wrote his Second Violin Concerto in the spring of 1967 for David Oistrakh, the violinist for whom he had written the First nearly twenty years earlier. It was meant as a present for Oistrakh's sixtieth birthday that September. Shostakovich had the year wrong: Oistrakh, born in Odessa in 1908, was turning fifty-nine. The composer made up for it the following year with a violin sonata, written for the real anniversary.

Oistrakh played the concerto first at a closed performance in Bolsho, outside Moscow, on 13 September 1967, and then in public in Moscow, both times with the Moscow Philharmonic under Kirill Kondrashin. It was the last of Shostakovich's six concertos.

The two violin concertos are very different pieces. The First is a big public work in four movements, with a furious scherzo and a pas-sacaglia at its centre. The Second, written by a man in poor health who had begun to lose friends and colleagues, is leaner and more inward. The orchestra is small. Four horns are the only brass, and the percussion is reduced to timpani and a tom-tom. The key, C-sharp minor, sits awkwardly on the violin, with few open strings to help the resonance, and that slightly veiled sound suits the music.

It belongs with the works of Shostakovich's last decade, the late quartets and the final symphonies, in which textures thin out, single lines carry long stretches, and humour, when it appears, is dry. What keeps it from bleakness is the solo part. Shostakovich wrote it for Oistrakh's singing tone, and long passages are simply melody over a spare accompaniment.

Christian Tetzlaff, the soloist in these concerts, has a phrase for how to approach it, quoted by the Berliner Philharmoniker: "Listen inwardly and give yourself time."

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Moderato. Cellos and basses begin alone with a winding line. The violin enters above them with a theme that circles round a handful of notes and gradually opens out. A second, perkier idea arrives in the piccolo and is taken up by the soloist in plucked chords, with the tom-tom tapping underneath. Listen for a scrap of an Odessa street song, the bagel seller's "Bubliki", slipped in as a private greeting to Oistrakh. The cadenza is written in two voices, the violin accompanying itself, and the movement fades out to the tom-tom.

Adagio. The slow movement is in three parts, with an accompanied cadenza at the centre. It starts in the depths of the orchestra, and the violin's long melody is joined by a solo flute. Near the end a solo horn is heard, as if from a distance, and its call leads straight into the finale.

Adagio, Allegro. After a short slow introduction the horn and the soloist trade rude remarks, and the rondo is off: a rough, stamping dance with the woodwind and horns answering back. The longest cadenza of the three comes late in the movement and looks back over material from earlier in the concerto. The ending is abrupt, punched home by timpani and tom-tom.

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 100

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.

45 minutes

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

Prokofiev had not written a symphony for fourteen years when he began his Fifth, and his previous two had both been made from theatre music. In the summer of 1944 he set out to write one from scratch. He was living at the composers' retreat near Ivanovo, north-east of Moscow, a country estate where the Union of Soviet Composers housed and fed its members away from the hardships of war-time. Prokofiev drafted the symphony in about a month and finished the orchestration in Moscow in the autumn.

The war was turning. The Red Army was pushing the German forces back across the Soviet border, and the Western Allies had landed in Normandy in June. Prokofiev said that he thought of the new symphony as a hymn to the free and happy human being, to his strength and the purity of his spirit, and added that he had not chosen the theme deliberately: it had been born in him and demanded expression.

He conducted the first performance himself, on 13 January 1945 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. The pianist Sviatoslav Richter, who was in the audience, remembered that as Prokofiev raised his baton, artillery salvos began to thunder outside. Prokofiev waited with his arms raised until the guns stopped, and then began.

The symphony was a success at once, at home and abroad. Serge Koussevitzky gave the American premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in November 1945. It marked the high point of Prokofiev's standing in the Soviet Union during his lifetime.

How much of the official language to believe is an open question. The music is broad, melodic and affirmative in a way the regime could approve, but it is also full of the old Prokofiev: the mocking scherzo, the dissonant climaxes of the slow movement, and an ending that sounds less like rejoicing than like a machine running out of control.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Andante. Unusually, the symphony opens with a slow movement. Flute and bassoon, an octave apart, play the first theme unaccompanied, and from it Prokofiev builds a long span in sonata form. When the opening theme returns it is given to the trumpets, and the coda piles up to a huge, grinding close under a roaring tam-tam.

Allegro marcato. The scherzo is the wry, fast Prokofiev of the ballets. A clarinet starts a tune over ticking violins, and the music darts about like a game of cat and mouse. After a more relaxed middle section the scherzo returns slowly and menacingly, and winds itself up faster and louder to the end.

Adagio. A long, winding melody passes among the woodwind and then climbs into the violins' highest register. The middle of the movement darkens into something like a funeral march, with harsh climaxes, before the opening song comes back.

Allegro giocoso. The finale begins by remembering the first movement, in a quiet passage that hands its opening theme to the cellos. Then a solo clarinet launches the main theme, cheerful and slightly cheeky, and the movement runs as a rondo. In the last pages the full orchestra suddenly drops away to a handful of solo strings, with piano, harp and percussion clattering mechanically, before the final shout.

Tonight's artists

Christian Tetzlaff *violin*

Christian Tetzlaff plays the less familiar of Shostakovich's two violin concertos, a work the Berliner Philharmoniker describe him as approaching with particular care. Its three cadenzas and long unaccompanied lines leave the soloist very exposed.

Christian Tetzlaff, born in Hamburg in 1966, is a German violinist known for searching, unsentimental interpretations and for a repertoire that runs from Bach's solo sonatas and partitas to the music of his own time. He studied with Uwe-Martin Haiberg in Lübeck and with Walter Levin in Cincinnati, and came to wide attention in 1988 with performances of Schoenberg's Violin Concerto in Munich and Cleveland. Since then he has appeared with most of the world's leading orchestras, and he has championed contemporary concertos by composers such as György Ligeti, Jörg Widmann and Thomas Adès. Chamber music has always been central to his work: in 1994 he founded the Tetzlaff Quartet with his sister, the cellist Tanja Tetzlaff, and for many years he played and recorded with the pianist Lars Vogt. Unusually for a soloist of his standing, he plays a modern instrument, made by the German violin maker Stefan-Peter Greiner.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE Shostakovich: A Life Remembered

Elizabeth Wilson, Princeton University Press 2006

Shostakovich's life told through the recollections of people who knew him, including the musicians of the Oistrakh circle for whom the late concertos and sonatas were written.

ACCESSIBLE Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography

Harlow Robinson, Northeastern University Press 2002

The standard English-language life of Prokofiev, with a full account of the wartime summer at Ivanovo and the Moscow premiere of the Fifth Symphony.

DEEPER The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years

Simon Morrison, Oxford University Press 2010

Morrison's archival study of Prokofiev's Soviet years sets the Fifth Symphony's triumph of 1945 against what the state asked of him before it and did to him after.

SOURCES

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2. Silhouette, Arvo Pärt Centre. <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/work/6>
3. Pärt: Silhouette, Hommage à Gustave Eiffel (2009) for string orchestra and percussion, Universal Edition. <https://www.universaledition.com/en/Works/Silhouette/P0061220>
4. Silhouette, IRCAM. <https://brahms.ircam.fr/en/work/silhouette>
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7. Violin Concerto No. 2 (Shostakovich), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_No._2_\(Shostakovich\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_No._2_(Shostakovich))
8. Shostakovich: Violin Concerto No. 2, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/violin-concerto-no-2-shostakovich>
9. Shostakovich's Second Violin Concerto: Mournful, Introverted, and Singing, The Listeners' Club. <https://thelistenersclub.com/?p=17762>
10. Symphony No. 5 (Prokofiev), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_\(Prokofiev\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_(Prokofiev))
11. Prokofiev: Symphony No. 5 in B-flat, Opus 100, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/prokofiev-symphony-no-5>
12. Music at War: A Guide to Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5, Houston Symphony. <https://houston-symphony.org/music-war-guide-prokofievs-symphony-no-5/>
13. Shostakovich: A Life Remembered, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780691128863>
14. Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781555535179>
15. The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780199753482>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-04-08-jarvi>

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