

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Gustavo Dudamel and Mitsuko Uchida: Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto and Bruckner's 'Romantic' Symphony

Thursday, April 22, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Gustavo Dudamel, conductor · Mitsuko Uchida, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19</i>	30'
2	BRUCKNER 1824–1896 <i>Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major, WAB 104 ('Romantic')</i>	68'
TOTAL MUSIC		98'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19

30 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The numbering is misleading. The concerto in B-flat is the earliest of Beethoven's five mature piano concertos, older than the one in C major that we call No. 1. The C major concerto simply reached the printer first. The B-flat was published in 1801 as Op. 19, and so has been "No. 2" ever since.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro con brio. The orchestra opens with a brisk fanfare figure and answers it at once with a soft, curling phrase in the violins: two ideas, one public and one private, that the movement keeps setting against each other. Listen for the moment early in the orchestral introduction when the music drops without warning into a remote key. The piano, when it comes in, does not repeat the opening but begins with a new thought of its own.

Adagio. The heart of the concerto, in E-flat major. The melody is broad and hymn-like, the piano decorates it with ever finer figuration, and the mood is that of a nocturne. Just before the end the orchestra falls silent and

the piano is left alone with a few halting single notes, like a singer's recitative, which Beethoven marks to be played "with great expression".

Rondo: Molto allegro. A romp in six-eight time. The joke in the main theme is that the accents fall in the wrong place, on the weak beats of the bar, so that the tune seems to hiccup. A central episode in the minor pushes the syncopation harder still. Shortly before the end the piano tries the theme in the wrong key and with the accents straightened out, before the orchestra puts things right.

Anton Bruckner

1824–1896

Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major, WAB 104 ('Romantic')

68 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Bruckner was fifty-six before a symphony of his was a real success in Vienna, and the work that did it was the Fourth. Hans Richter conducted the Vienna Philharmonic in the first performance on 20 February 1881. It was the first premiere of a Bruckner symphony that the composer did not conduct himself.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Bewegt, nicht zu schnell. The strings shimmer almost inaudibly, and a solo horn calls out a falling and rising fifth. It is among the most famous openings in the symphonic repertoire, and the horn call returns as a signpost throughout the work. The main theme proper arrives with Bruckner's favourite rhythm, two notes followed by a triplet. The second group, begun by the violas, is the music Bruckner associated with birdsong in the forest.

II. Andante quasi allegretto. A slow march in C minor, more a night procession than a funeral. The cellos sing the main theme over a walking accompaniment. Later the violas have a long, wandering melody to themselves, accompanied only by plucked strings. The movement builds to a single great climax and then dies away over quiet drum taps.

III. Scherzo: Bewegt. The hunt. Horns start it softly, as if from far off, in the two-plus-three rhythm of the first movement, and the brass pile in until the whole orchestra is at full cry. The trio is a gentle country dance for woodwind, the huntsmen's rest.

IV. Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell. The mood darkens. Over a throbbing bass, a falling figure in the minor gathers into a massive unison theme for the full or-

chestra, and the hunting rhythm of the scherzo breaks in. The movement proceeds in great blocks, separated by silences, as so often in Bruckner. The coda begins in near darkness, with slow string figures over a long crescendo, and at the summit the horn call from the very opening of the symphony comes back in the full brass.

Tonight's artists

Mitsuko Uchida *piano*

Mitsuko Uchida is the soloist in the earliest of Beethoven's piano concertos, a work the Berliner Philharmoniker's introduction to these concerts describes as one of irresistible charm and youthful vitality.

Mitsuko Uchida, born in Atami, Japan, in 1948, is among the most revered pianists of her generation, celebrated above all as one of the supreme interpreters of the Viennese classics. She moved to Vienna as a child when her father was posted there as a diplomat, and studied at the city's Academy of Music, absorbing the tradition at its source. International recognition came through major competitions, including a prize at the 1970 Chopin Competition in Warsaw, but it was her profound affinity for Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven that defined her career. Her recordings of Mozart's piano sonatas and concertos, among them concertos directed from the keyboard, are landmarks of the discography, as are her searching accounts of Schubert's late sonatas. Equally devoted to Schoenberg and Berg, she brings the same clarity and seriousness to twentieth-century music. Named a Dame of the British Empire in 2009, Uchida is admired for a playing of rare refinement, intellectual rigour, and luminous tone.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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