

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Elim Chan and Seong-Jin Cho: Gubaidulina, Prokofiev and Lutosławski

Thursday, June 10, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Elim Chan, conductor · Seong-Jin Cho, piano

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	GUBAIDULINA 1931–2025 <i>Fairytale Poem</i>	9'
2	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 16</i>	30'
3	LUTOSŁAWSKI 1913–1994 <i>Concerto for Orchestra</i>	28'
	TOTAL MUSIC	67'

Sofia Gubaidulina

1931–2025

Fairytale Poem

9 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Fairytale Poem began as music for the radio. In 1971 Sofia Gubaidulina wrote the score for a children's radio programme based on "The Little Piece of Chalk", a story by the Czech writer Miloš Macourek. She later said that she liked the tale so much, and found it so symbolic of an artist's fate, that she came to have a very personal relationship with the piece. It has had a second life in the concert hall as a short work for orchestra.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

You can follow the tale without a text. Listen for how the music is built from small, distinct instrumental voices that come forward one at a time, more like characters in a story than themes in a symphony.

One writer on the piece points to a jazzy fugue for plucked strings, begun by the double bass, among the adventures along the way, and to the ending, where after a last bloom of orchestral colour the music dissolves into silence. That close matches the end of the story, in which the chalk disappears into its own drawing.

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 16

30 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Prokofiev was a student at the St Petersburg Conservatory, with a reputation as its enfant terrible, when he wrote his Second Piano Concerto in 1912 and 1913. While he was working on it, in April 1913, his close friend and fellow student Maximilian Schmidthof killed himself, having sent Prokofiev a farewell letter. The concerto is dedicated to his memory.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Andantino. Allegretto. The concerto opens quietly. After a couple of bars from the orchestra the piano begins a long, melancholy theme in G minor, like the start of a tale. The centre of gravity comes later: an enormous cadenza for the soloist alone, which takes up much of the second half of the movement and carries it to its climax.

Scherzo: Vivace. Two and a half minutes of perpetual motion. The pianist's two hands race along in unison without a single rest, while the orchestra chases after them.

Intermezzo: Allegro moderato. Where a slow movement might be expected, Prokofiev writes a heavy-footed, grotesque march. One annotator compares its tread to the lumbering of some immense prehistoric beast.

Finale: Allegro tempestoso. The marking says it: a storm of leaping chords and octaves across the whole keyboard. A quieter, contrasting episode brings a brief respite before the pursuit resumes and drives to the end.

Witold Lutosławski

1913–1994

Concerto for Orchestra

28 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In 1950 Witold Rowicki, director of the Warsaw Philharmonic, an orchestra then re-establishing itself after the war, asked Witold Lutosławski for a piece with which the orchestra could show what it could do. Lutosławski took four years over it. The Concerto for Orchestra was finished in 1954, is dedicated to Rowicki, and was first performed under him in Warsaw on 26 November of that year.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Intrada. The movement opens over a steady, ominous drumbeat. Above it the low strings introduce a folk-like tune, which passes from section to section while the texture thickens. Having built upwards to a climax, the music then reverses its course and ends in a calm coda.

Capriccio notturno ed Arioso. An airy, virtuoso scherzo for strings and woodwind: night music of great lightness. In the middle the brass break in with a broad, dramatic theme, the Arioso. The scherzo then returns and fades out in low rumblings.

Passacaglia, Toccata e Corale. The finale is the longest movement and the weightiest. It begins with a brooding theme in the double basses that is repeated over and over while variations accumulate above it. A lively toccata follows, built on the same theme. At its centre a solemn chorale appears, and when the chorale returns at the end it crowns the whole work, before a final dash for the full orchestra.

Tonight's artists

Seong-Jin Cho *piano*

Seong-Jin Cho plays Prokofiev's Second Concerto on 10, 11 and 12 June. The orchestra calls the work ideal terrain for a pianist whose playing unites virtuosity with refinement, and both are needed here: the long first-movement cadenza and the unbroken sprint of the scherzo test stamina, while the opening theme asks for a quiet, storytelling touch. He appears with Elim Chan, who makes her debut with the Berliner Philharmoniker in these concerts.

Seong-Jin Cho, born in Seoul in 1994, is one of the most admired pianists of his generation. He took up the piano at six, gave his first recital at eleven, and won a string of competitions as a teenager before the victory that made his name internationally: first prize at the 2015 International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, the first South Korean ever to win it. Trained in Seoul and then at the Conservatoire de Paris with Michel Béroff, he has since appeared with the world's foremost orchestras and signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, recording a wide repertoire from Mozart and Schubert to Chopin, Debussy and Ravel. Famed for the poise, refinement and quiet intensity of his playing, he served as Artist in Residence of the Berlin Philharmonic for the 2024–25 season.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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