

Alan Gilbert and Isabelle Faust: Brett Dean and Schumann's Second Symphony

Thursday, June 17, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Alan Gilbert, conductor · Isabelle Faust, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DEAN b. 1961 <i>The Lost Art of Letter Writing</i>	38'
2	SCHUMANN 1810–1856 <i>Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61</i>	38'
TOTAL MUSIC		76'

Brett Dean

b. 1961

The Lost Art of Letter Writing

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

‘Hamburg, 1854’. The opening bars are a murmur of rapid, oscillating notes. Dean took the figure from a brief passage in the slow movement of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony, an orchestral texture he says has always fascinated him. It makes a rippling background against which the violin enters like someone sitting down to write, spinning a long, passionate line to a person who cannot return the feeling. Listen also for traces of Brahms’s early Variations on a Theme of Schumann, which surface during the movement.

‘The Hague, 1882’. This is the slow movement, broad and prayer-like, and the longest stretch of calm in the piece. The violin sings over quiet, slowly shifting harmonies, the musical counterpart of van Gogh’s thought that nature stays beautiful whatever happens to the person looking at it.

38 minutes

‘Vienna, 1886’. A short intermezzo, and the most song-like of the four, since it began life as a setting for voice. The solo violin takes over the singer’s part.

‘Jerilderie, 1879’. The finale is a desperate perpetuum mobile: the soloist hardly stops, and the music hurtles through passages of great virtuosity. Dean notes that for all its brilliance the movement never loses the sense of approaching catastrophe that hangs over Kelly’s document.

Robert Schumann

38 minutes

1810–1856

Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Sostenuto assai. Allegro, ma non troppo. The symphony begins quietly, with a solemn call in the brass over a slowly flowing line in the strings. Keep that brass motto in your ear: it returns at key moments later on. The fast music that grows out of the introduction is restless and driven, full of sharp dotted rhythms.

Scherzo: Allegro vivace. Schumann places the scherzo second. It is a whirl of rapid violin figuration, notoriously awkward to play, relieved by two calmer trio sections. At the very end the brass motto from the opening bursts in.

Adagio espressivo. The slow movement, in C minor, is the emotional centre: a long, aching melody introduced by the strings and taken up by the woodwinds. Schumann singled out the “melancholy bassoon” here as a sign of the dark period in which he wrote. Listen also for the high violin trills and for a contrapuntal middle passage, a trace of the Bach studies.

Allegro molto vivace. The finale sets off like a march, and soon sweeps up the melody of the Adagio in its rush. Partway through, the march gives way to a new, gentler theme, in which many listeners hear an echo of the last song of Beethoven’s cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved). In the closing pages Schumann combines this song-like theme with the brass motto from the very opening, and the symphony ends in a blaze of C major.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-06-17-gilbert>

Version 1, 8 October 2026