

Season Finale at the Waldbühne with Daniel Harding and Augustin Hadelich

Saturday, June 26, 2027 · 20:15 · Waldbühne
Daniel Harding, conductor · Augustin Hadelich, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	STRAUSS II 1825–1899 <i>Die Fledermaus: Overture</i>	
2	RAVEL 1875–1937 <i>Tzigane, Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra</i>	10'
3	STRAUSS II 1825–1899 <i>Csárdás from Ritter Pásmán, Op. 441</i>	
4	STRAVINSKY 1882–1971 <i>Suite from 'The Firebird' (1919)</i>	22'
5	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Salome, Op. 54: Dance of the Seven Veils</i>	9'
6	SARASATE 1844–1908 <i>Carmen Fantasy, Op. 25</i>	12'
7	STRAUSS II 1825–1899 <i>Künstlerleben, Waltz, Op. 316</i>	
8	RAVEL 1875–1937 <i>La Valse</i>	12'
TOTAL MUSIC		65'

Johann Strauss II

1825–1899

Die Fledermaus: Overture

THE COMPOSER

Johann Strauss II, born in Vienna in 1825, was the most celebrated member of a whole dynasty of dance composers and remains, more than any other figure, the musical embodiment of imperial Vienna. His father, Johann Strauss I, forbade him a musical career, hoping to spare him a precarious life;

the boy studied the violin in secret and in 1844 made his debut at the head of his own orchestra. He soon eclipsed his father and his brothers Josef and Eduard, touring Europe, Russia, and the United States, and earning the title 'the Waltz King.' Over a long career he produced some five hundred waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and marches, raising the Viennese waltz to a peak of melodic richness and orchestral colour, and turning to the operetta stage with *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*. His *An der schönen blauen Donau* (The Blue Danube) is often called Austria's unofficial anthem. He died in 1899, and his music has formed the heart of the Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's Concert ever since.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Berliner Philharmoniker end their season out of doors, at the Waldbühne, with an evening built on dance: waltzes and a csárdás from Vienna, two Hungarian and Spanish showpieces for the violin, a Russian ballet, the most notorious dance in opera, and Ravel's dark portrait of the waltz itself. It starts where such evenings should, with Johann Strauss.

Die Fledermaus (The Bat) is his best-loved operetta. It was first given at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna on 5 April 1874, to a libretto by Karl Haffner and Richard Genée. It is a comedy of flirtations, disguises and comeuppances in the Vienna of its own day, and its second act takes place at a masked ball, which is one reason so much of the score is dance music.

The overture is a trailer for what follows: a string of the operetta's best tunes, one after another, each more tempting than the last.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first notes have been compared to three champagne corks popping, and champagne is what the whole operetta runs on. After that the melodies come in a cascade, with the great waltz among them.

What makes the overture exciting, and difficult, is how often it changes speed. A Strauss waltz or polka usually settles into its tempo and stays there. Here the music keeps slowing down, hesitating and racing off again, and the players have to turn together on each corner. It is a demanding piece for an orchestra and a famously enjoyable one to hear.

Maurice Ravel

1875–1937

Tzigane, Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra

THE COMPOSER

Maurice Ravel was born on March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, a small town in the French Basque Country near the Spanish border. His mother was Basque and his father a Swiss-born engineer and inventor, a heritage that would profoundly shape his musical identity. From an early age, Ravel showed exceptional musical talent and entered the Paris Conservatoire at fourteen, where he studied with Gabriel Fauré and absorbed the harmonic innovations of his time.

Often paired with Claude Debussy under the “Impressionist” label, Ravel himself rejected this categorization. Where Debussy was spontaneous and atmospheric, Ravel was a meticulous craftsman, obsessed with formal perfection and clarity. This perfectionism produced some of the most beloved works in the orchestral repertoire: the hypnotic *Boléro*, the shimmering *Daphnis et Chloé*, and the virtuosic *Gaspard de la nuit*.

By the late 1920s, Ravel was France’s most celebrated living composer, yet he remained restless, constantly seeking new sounds and influences. A triumphant four-month tour of North America in 1928 brought him face to face with jazz, which impressed him deeply. These experiences would flow directly into his final orchestral works.

ABOUT THE WORK

Ravel described *Tzigane* as a virtuoso piece in the style of a Hungarian rhapsody. It came out of an evening in London. The Hungarian violinist Jelly d’Arányi had played his Sonata for Violin and Cello at a private gathering, and afterwards Ravel asked her for some of the gypsy-style melodies of her homeland. She played for hours. Ravel decided to write her a showpiece that, as he put it, could not be anything but Hungarian.

He prepared carefully, studying Paganini’s Caprices and Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsodies, and finished only just in time. D’Arányi, to whom the work is dedicated, gave the first performance in London in April 1924. The original accompaniment was for piano, optionally fitted with a luthéal, a recently invented attachment that could make the instrument sound something like a cimbalom, the hammered dulcimer of Hungarian bands. The luthéal soon fell out of use. The version that has lasted is the one Ravel made for violin and orchestra later the same year.

The title is simply a French word for “gypsy”. The piece is a Frenchman’s knowing take on a popular style, a late addition to the line of gypsy-themed showpieces that includes the *Zigeunerweisen* of Sarasate, who is also on tonight’s programme.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The violin begins entirely alone, and stays alone for a long time: the opening cadenza takes up nearly half the piece. It starts low and dark, on the instrument’s bottom string, and gradually works through a catalogue of virtuoso devices.

Like a csárdás, the piece moves from slow to fast. When the orchestra finally enters, listen for the harp and celesta, which give the accompaniment its glitter. From there a chain of short, dance-like episodes follows, getting quicker and quicker until the breathless close.

Johann Strauss II

1825–1899

Csárdás from Ritter Pásmán, Op. 441

THE COMPOSER

Johann Strauss II, born in Vienna in 1825, was the most celebrated member of a whole dynasty of dance composers and remains, more than any other figure, the musical embodiment of imperial Vienna. His father, Johann Strauss I, forbade him a musical career, hoping to spare him a precarious life; the boy studied the violin in secret and in 1844 made his debut at the head of his own orchestra. He soon eclipsed his father and his brothers Josef and Eduard, touring Europe, Russia, and the United States, and earning the title ‘the Waltz King.’ Over a long career he produced some five hundred waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and marches, raising the Viennese waltz to a peak of melodic richness and orchestral colour, and turning to the operetta stage with *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*. His *An der schönen blauen Donau* (The Blue Danube) is often called Austria’s unofficial anthem. He died in 1899, and his music has formed the heart of the Vienna Philharmonic’s New Year’s Concert ever since.

ABOUT THE WORK

Johann Strauss wrote many operettas and a single opera. *Ritter Pásmán* (Knight Pásmán), a comic opera in three acts, had its first performance at the Vienna Court Opera on New Year’s Day 1892. The libretto, by Ludwig Dóczi, is based on a narrative poem by the Hungarian poet János Arany. Its plot turns on a kiss: a hunter kisses the knight’s wife on the forehead, the jealous Pásmán goes to the king to demand redress, and the king reveals that the hunter was himself, so that Pásmán is granted a kiss from the queen in return.

Vienna had awaited the premiere with great curiosity, since this was Strauss's first opera. The result was a disappointment. The reviews blamed the banal libretto, and the opera did not last long on the stage. Even the critics who disliked the piece, though, found things to praise in the orchestration, and in particular in the Csárdás. The orchestra's listing gives it under the opera's English title, *Knight Pazman*, and its opus number, 441.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The story is set in Hungary, and here Strauss writes in the Hungarian national style. A csárdás is a Hungarian dance in two parts, the first slow, the second fast, and that is the plan to listen for here: a slow opening section, then a quick dance.

It is worth comparing with the Ravel just heard. *Tzigane* follows the same slow-to-fast pattern, a generation later and from a greater distance.

Igor Stravinsky

1882–1971

22 minutes

Suite from 'The Firebird' (1919)

THE COMPOSER

Igor Stravinsky was, more than any other figure, the composer who reinvented twentieth-century music, and he did it three times. Born near St. Petersburg in 1882, he came to international fame in his late twenties through his collaborations with the impresario Sergei Diaghilev, whose Ballets Russes commissioned the three early scores (*The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*) that made Stravinsky perhaps the most talked-about composer alive. The 1913 Paris premiere of *The Rite of Spring* provoked a near-riot and changed the course of music history.

Then, almost as soon as he had perfected the explosive, primitivist style of his early ballets, Stravinsky abandoned it. From 1920 onward he spent some three decades writing music in what came to be called his “neoclassical” period: works of cool elegance, reduced forces, and sly references to the music of the past. After the Second World War, he reinvented himself yet again, embracing the rigorous serial techniques pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg and his school. Few composers have demonstrated such restless, lifelong curiosity.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Firebird made Stravinsky's name. Early in 1909 the impresario Serge Diaghilev and his circle had settled on the Russian legend of the Firebird as the subject for a new ballet for the Ballets Russes, with Michel Fokine as choreographer. Finding a composer proved harder.

Diaghilev's first choice, Anatoly Liadov, was notoriously slow, and in the autumn of that year he turned to Stravinsky, who was twenty-seven and little known. Stravinsky saw the opportunity and began composing before the commission was even confirmed. The ballet was first danced in Paris on 25 June 1910, and its success was immediate. *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring* followed within three years.

The story combines several Russian fairy tales. Prince Ivan strays into the enchanted garden of the sorcerer Kashchei, where he captures the Firebird and lets it go again in exchange for a magic feather. He falls in love with one of thirteen princesses held captive there. When Kashchei's monsters seize him, he summons the Firebird with the feather. The bird sets the sorcerer's followers dancing and shows Ivan how to destroy Kashchei's soul, which is hidden in an egg. The spell is broken.

Stravinsky drew three concert suites from the ballet. The second, made in 1919 for a smaller orchestra than the original, is the one played tonight and the one heard most often.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Stravinsky separates the two worlds of the story by musical means. The humans get simple, folk-like melodies; the supernatural beings get slithering chromatic music.

Introduction. Low strings creep through a dark, winding figure: Kashchei's garden at night.

The Firebird and its Dance, Variation of the Firebird. The bird appears in a shimmer of strings and woodwinds, and dances to quick, darting music.

The Princesses' Khorovod. A slow round dance, on a melody introduced by the solo oboe.

Infernal Dance of King Kashchei. Wild syncopations and startling accents, as the Firebird forces Kashchei's followers to dance.

Lullaby. The calm after the dance.

Finale. A quiet, folk-like phrase begins the celebration and grows, repetition by repetition, into a blaze of sound for the whole orchestra.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

Salome, Op. 54: Dance of the Seven Veils

THE COMPOSER

Richard Strauss was the heir to Wagner and Liszt, the composer who carried the late Romantic tradition into the twentieth century. Born in Munich in 1864, the son of the principal horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra, he received a conservative musical education before an encounter with Alexander Ritter, a violinist married to one of Wagner's nieces, converted him to the "music of the future."

Between 1889 and 1898, Strauss composed a series of tone poems that made him the most famous composer in Germany: *Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ein Heldenleben*. Each pushed the orchestra to new extremes of virtuosity and expression. Then he turned to opera, creating the scandalous *Salome* (1905), the shattering *Elektra* (1909), and the nostalgic masterpiece *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).

Strauss lived long: through two world wars, the Nazi era, and the destruction of the German musical culture he had embodied. His late works, including the *Metamorphosen* for strings and the *Four Last Songs*, are elegies for a lost world. He died in 1949, shortly after completing those final songs.

ABOUT THE WORK

Strauss saw Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* in Berlin in November 1902, in a German translation, and turned that translation into the libretto of a one-act opera. *Salome* had its first performance in Dresden on 9 December 1905. The mixture of biblical subject, eroticism and murder shocked audiences from the start and made the opera a sensation. At the Metropolitan Opera in New York the run was cancelled after a public outcry. Kaiser Wilhelm II is said to have worried that the piece would do Strauss a great deal of damage; the damage, the composer is reported to have remarked later, enabled him to build his villa at Garmisch.

The dance comes near the climax. Salome, princess of Judea, is obsessed with the prophet Jochanaan (John the Baptist), who has rejected her. Her stepfather Herod, who cannot keep his eyes off her, begs her to dance for him and swears to give her whatever she asks in return. She dances. Then she names her price: the prophet's head on a silver dish.

Even the first Salome balked. The soprano Marie Wittich refused to perform the dance herself, and a dancer took her place for those few minutes, an arrangement that many productions have followed since.

In the concert hall the question does not arise, and the Dance of the Seven Veils has long had a separate life as an orchestral showpiece of about nine minutes.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is the opera's huge orchestra let off the leash. Listen for the exotic colouring Strauss gives the music: winding, heavily ornamented melodies, and a percussion section that includes tambourine and castanets.

The shape is a long, calculated build-up. Strauss works by crescendo and by a gradual quickening of the pace, so that the excitement mounts by stages until the final headlong rush.

Pablo de Sarasate

12 minutes

1844–1908

Carmen Fantasy, Op. 25

THE COMPOSER

Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908) was a Spanish virtuoso violinist and composer. Born in Pamplona, he began the violin at five and gave his first public concert at eight. At twelve he entered the Paris Conservatoire, where he won its first prize, and while still young he began the career of a touring soloist that took him across Europe and to North and South America. The leading composers of his time wrote for him: Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* and Saint-Saëns's Third Violin Concerto were all written for or dedicated to him. His own works are showpieces designed around his technique, among them *Zigeunerweisen*, the *Carmen Fantasy* and several books of Spanish Dances. He was one of the few great players of his era to live into the age of the gramophone, and made a small number of recordings in 1904. He died in Biarritz.

ABOUT THE WORK

When a nineteenth-century violin virtuoso wanted a new piece for his own concerts, the obvious thing to do was to take the hit tunes of a popular opera and decorate them. Pablo de Sarasate wrote fantasies of this kind on operas from *Don Giovanni* and *Der Freischütz* to Gounod's *Faust*. The best known is the one on Bizet's *Carmen*.

The opera was still recent. *Carmen* had its premiere in Paris in 1875, to a cool and in part scandalised reception, and began its conquest of the world's stages only after a production in Vienna later that year. Sarasate composed his fantasy in 1881 and published it the following year. For a Spanish violinist the attraction was obvious, and he chose precisely the numbers with the strongest Spanish flavour.

The Carmen Fantasy is among the best known of his works and is considered one of the most demanding pieces in the violin repertoire.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There are five sections, played without a break, each based on a different number from the opera. You will recognise most of them.

First comes the **Aragonaise**, the entr'acte before the last act. Then the **Habanera**, Carmen's entrance song, lavishly ornamented. A slower section follows, built on the mocking "Tra la la" with which Carmen defies the officer Zuniga; it ends in ghostly high harmonics. Next is the **Seguidilla** from the first act. The finale is the **Gypsy Dance** from the opening of the second act, where Carmen and her friends entertain the officers. It ends with a virtuoso acceleration, the soloist adding racing passages in thirds and arpeggios that sweep the whole range of the instrument.

Johann Strauss II

1825–1899

Künstlerleben, Waltz, Op. 316

THE COMPOSER

Johann Strauss II, born in Vienna in 1825, was the most celebrated member of a whole dynasty of dance composers and remains, more than any other figure, the musical embodiment of imperial Vienna. His father, Johann Strauss I, forbade him a musical career, hoping to spare him a precarious life; the boy studied the violin in secret and in 1844 made his debut at the head of his own orchestra. He soon eclipsed his father and his brothers Josef and Eduard, touring Europe, Russia, and the United States, and earning the title 'the Waltz King.' Over a long career he produced some five hundred waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, and marches, raising the Viennese waltz to a peak of melodic richness and orchestral colour, and turning to the operetta stage with *Die Fledermaus* and *Der Zigeunerbaron*. His *An der schönen blauen Donau* (The Blue Danube) is often called Austria's unofficial anthem. He died in 1899, and his music has formed the heart of the Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's Concert ever since.

ABOUT THE WORK

Künstlerleben (Artist's Life) is a close contemporary of the most famous waltz of all. Johann Strauss wrote it for the ball of the Hesperus, the Viennese artists' association to which all three Strauss brothers belonged, and it was first played on 18 February 1867, only a few days after the first performance of *The Blue Danube*.

It was not a cheerful moment in Vienna. In 1866 Austria had lost the war against Prussia at the battle of Königgrätz, and many of that year's balls and concerts had been cancelled. For the carnival season of 1867 the Strauss brothers supplied a whole series of new pieces between them, and waltzes like this one helped to lift the city's mood. *Künstlerleben* quickly became popular, and was soon regarded as a twin to *The Blue Danube*. It has never quite matched its sibling's worldwide fame, but it has remained a repertoire piece.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

A Strauss concert waltz is a chain: a slow introduction, a sequence of five waltzes and a coda that looks back over what has been heard.

Here the introduction is especially fine. It begins pensively, with a foretaste of the waltz melody, and is cut short by two loud chords before the dance proper begins. The first waltz is high-spirited. The second and third are more wistful, the last two brighter again. The coda is long, reprising what has come before, and ends in triumph.

Keep these sounds in mind for what comes next. Ravel's *La Valse* takes exactly this world, and exactly this form, and looks at it through a darker glass.

Maurice Ravel

12 minutes

1875–1937

La Valse

THE COMPOSER

Maurice Ravel was born on March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, a small town in the French Basque Country near the Spanish border. His mother was Basque and his father a Swiss-born engineer and inventor, a heritage that would profoundly shape his musical identity. From an early age, Ravel showed exceptional musical talent and entered the Paris Conservatoire at fourteen, where he studied with Gabriel Fauré and absorbed the harmonic innovations of his time.

Often paired with Claude Debussy under the “Impressionist” label, Ravel himself rejected this categorization. Where Debussy was spontaneous and atmospheric, Ravel was a meticulous craftsman, obsessed with formal perfection and clarity. This perfectionism produced some of the most beloved works in the orchestral repertoire: the hypnotic *Boléro*, the shimmering *Daphnis et Chloé*, and the virtuosic *Gaspard de la nuit*.

By the late 1920s, Ravel was France's most celebrated living composer, yet he remained restless, constantly seeking new sounds and influences. A triumphant four-month tour of North America in 1928 brought him face to face with jazz, which impressed him deeply. These experiences would flow directly into his final orchestral works.

ABOUT THE WORK

The evening closes with a waltz to end all waltzes. Ravel called *La Valse* a kind of homage to the great Strauss: “not Richard, the other one, Johann”. The idea went back a long way. Well before the First World War he had planned a symphonic poem to be called *Wien* (Vienna), and he had begun to work on it when war broke out; a piece with that title, he felt, no longer suited the times. He returned to it only in 1919, when Serge Diaghilev commissioned a ballet from him for the Ballets Russes.

He completed the score in 1920 and played it through to Diaghilev on two pianos with the pianist Marcelle Meyer. Diaghilev's verdict has become famous: it was a masterpiece, he said, but it was not a ballet; it was the portrait of a ballet. He declined to stage it, and the two men's friendship did not survive. *La Valse* was therefore first heard in the concert hall, in Paris on 12 December 1920, and although it has since been choreographed it is still far more often played than danced.

Ravel prefaced the score with a scene. Through whirling clouds, waltzing couples can be glimpsed. The clouds scatter to reveal a vast hall filled with a turning crowd, and the light of the chandeliers blazes out. The setting is an imperial court, about 1855.

Many listeners have heard in the piece a picture of old Europe dancing towards catastrophe. Ravel denied any such meaning and said one should see in it only what the music expresses. Even so, as one annotator puts it, the violence of the climax hints at far more than a social dance.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The form is that of the Strauss waltz just played, an introduction, a chain of waltzes and a closing section, but nothing behaves as it should.

The opening. A barely audible rumble in the double basses, a pulse like a heartbeat, scraps of melody in the bassoons. Out of this mist the three-in-a-bar rhythm takes shape, and finally the violins sweep in with the first full waltz tune.

The waltzes. A series of episodes follows, some sweet and hesitant, some brassy and grand, with swooping string glissandos and glittering harps. This is the ballroom Ravel described, at full brilliance.

The unravelling. In the second half the same tunes come back, but they collide, pile up and distort. The long crescendo is broken off and started again, each time more violently. The final pages hurl the waltz to pieces.

Tonight's artists

Augustin Hadelich *violin*

Augustin Hadelich is the guest of the evening and plays twice, once in each half: Ravel's *Tzigane* before the interval and Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* after it. The two pieces make a pair. Both are portraits of a national style painted by a virtuoso's brush, one Hungarian as imagined in Paris, the other Spanish as imagined by a Spaniard working from a French opera, and both finish at top speed. He appears with Daniel Harding, whose association with the Berliner Philharmoniker, the orchestra notes, goes back three decades.

Augustin Hadelich, born in Italy in 1984 to German parents and now an American citizen, is one of the most acclaimed violinists in the world. After a childhood on a Tuscan farm, and recovery from a serious fire injury in his teens, he trained at the Juilliard School and rose to international prominence by winning the gold medal at the 2006 Indianapolis Competition. A Grammy Award winner with a vast repertoire and a celebrated discography, he is admired for the beauty and refinement of his tone, his flawless technique and his deep musical intelligence. He joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music in 2021. His combination of brilliance and lyricism makes him an ideal interpreter of the great Romantic concertos.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Last Waltz: The Strauss Dynasty and Vienna***John Suchet, Elliott and Thompson 2017*

A brisk, readable account of the Strauss family and the city that danced to their music: the background to the overture, the csárdás and the waltz on this programme, and to what Ravel does with the form in La Valse.

ACCESSIBLE **Ravel***Roger Nichols, Yale University Press 2013*

A detailed modern biography of Ravel, covering the years of Tzigane and La Valse and his dealings with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Ravel***Deborah Mawer (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2000*

Essays by Ravel scholars on his style and his works, including his music for dance; the place to go further into what La Valse does with the waltz.

SOURCES

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CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-06-26-harding>

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