

Stutzmann: Beethoven's Third Concerto, Rienzi and Der Rosenkavalier

Thursday, May 14, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Nathalie Stutzmann, conductor · Leif Ove Andsnes, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37</i>	33'
2	WAGNER 1813–1883 <i>Rienzi, Overture</i>	12'
3	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Der Rosenkavalier, Suite</i>	21'
TOTAL MUSIC		66'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37

THE COMPOSER

Beethoven needs little introduction, but the period in which he wrote his Second Symphony does. Born in Bonn in 1770 and trained in Vienna under Haydn, by 1800 he was already one of the most talked-about pianist-composers in Vienna. Around the same time, Beethoven had to face an alarming truth: his hearing was deteriorating, and would never recover. By 1802 he had retreated to the village of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna, where, in a state of suicidal despair, he wrote the famous letter to his brothers known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he confessed his condition and his agony. The letter, never sent in his lifetime, was found among his papers after his death.

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto marks a decisive turning point: the work in which he stepped out of the long shadow of Mozart and Haydn and found his own heroic, dramatic voice in the concerto form. Composed around 1800–1803 and premiered in Vienna in 1803 with the composer himself as soloist (famously playing from a barely-notated score, turning pages that were mostly blank to all but him), it is the only one of his five piano concertos in a minor key. That key, C

33 minutes

minor, was for Beethoven the key of struggle, fate and tragedy, the same as his Fifth Symphony and the 'Pathétique' Sonata, and it gives the concerto a new seriousness, power and emotional weight.

The model is clearly Mozart's own great C minor concerto (No. 24), which Beethoven admired enormously, but the Third pushes further: the orchestra is a fuller, more symphonic partner, the piano writing more powerful and rhetorical, the drama more personal. It balances stormy intensity with passages of profound lyrical beauty, and ends, characteristically, by turning from minor-key turbulence to major-key triumph. It is one of the cornerstones of the concerto repertoire, and in the hands of an artist of Leif Ove Andsnes's stature, a Beethoven interpreter of the highest distinction, it is a deeply rewarding experience.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens not with the soloist but with a long orchestral exposition built on a terse, marching C minor theme; listen for its quiet, ominous beginning and the way it grows in power. When the piano finally enters, it does so dramatically, with rising scales, and then takes command. Listen for the interplay of stormy drama and lyrical tenderness, and for the big cadenza near the end (Beethoven's own), after which the movement closes with a mysterious, hushed timpani-and-piano passage before a final flourish.

The slow movement (Largo) is a sublime surprise: it moves to the remote, glowing key of E major, far from the home key, and unfolds as a serene, hymn-like meditation of great beauty and stillness. Listen for the rapt, song-like piano writing and the magical, almost sacred atmosphere. The finale is a vigorous rondo that returns to C minor with a spiky, energetic main theme; listen for its rhythmic drive, its wit and its episodes of contrasting lyricism, and for the thrilling coda, where Beethoven shifts at last into a bright, fast C major (Presto), turning struggle into exuberant triumph to bring the concerto to a joyous close.

Richard Wagner

1813–1883

Rienzi, Overture

THE COMPOSER

Richard Wagner transformed opera more radically than any composer before or since. Born in Leipzig in 1813, he grew up in a family steeped in theater and from an early age was drawn to the dramatic rather than the purely musical. Apart from a spell of lessons with the Leipzig cantor Theodor Weinlig, he was largely self-directed as a composer, absorbing Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller alongside Beethoven, developing a vision of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a “total work of art” synthesizing poetry, drama, music, and visual spectacle.

Wagner’s path was turbulent. An active participant in the 1849 Dresden uprising, he spent years in political exile, fleeing creditors and nursing turbulent love affairs. Yet his genius attracted patrons, most notably the eccentric King Ludwig II of Bavaria, whose financial support made possible Wagner’s ultimate achievement: the construction of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, a theater designed specifically for his works. There, in 1876, his monumental four-opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung* received its first complete performance.

Wagner’s musical innovations (the seamless orchestral flow, the system of *leitmotifs* or recurring themes associated with characters, objects, or ideas, and the extreme chromaticism that strained the boundaries of tonality) influenced virtually every composer who followed, from Strauss and Mahler to Schoenberg and beyond.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Overture to *Rienzi* comes from the opera that made the young Richard Wagner famous, and it sounds quite unlike the mature ‘music dramas’ for which he is now best known. *Rienzi, der Letzte der Tribunen* (‘*Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*’), composed in the late 1830s and premiered in Dresden in 1842, was Wagner’s first real success: a big, old-fashioned grand opera in the spectacular French style of Meyerbeer, full of crowds, processions, ballets and political drama, telling the story of Cola di Rienzo, a medieval Roman demagogue who rises to power as a champion of the people and is then destroyed by the mob. Wagner was still in his twenties, ambitious and hungry for a hit, and *Rienzi* gave him one: its grand spectacle and stirring tunes were exactly what audiences of the day wanted.

The Overture is the opera’s calling card and the part that has stayed firmly in the concert repertoire. It is a thrilling curtain-raiser: a sweeping potpourri of the opera’s main themes, including the noble, prayer-like melody of *Rienzi*’s great Act V prayer, stirring martial music, and a brilliant, energetic conclusion. It shows Wagner the master

orchestrator and melodist already in full command of grand effect, even before he revolutionised opera. After the interval, it makes a rousing, big-boned opening to the concert's second half.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen at the very start for the famous slow build: a single sustained trumpet note, swelling out of silence, which heralds the broad, hymn-like melody that is the heart of the Overture: the noble tune of Rienzi's prayer ('Allmächt'ger Vater'), one of Wagner's most heartfelt early inspirations. Listen for how this great melody is introduced gently and then returns later in full, glowing orchestral splendour.

Around it, listen for the contrasting material: stirring, martial rhythms and fanfares evoking the opera's political and military drama; surging, energetic string writing; and a gradual building of excitement. The Overture follows the classic 'grand opera' pattern of stitching together the opera's best themes into an exciting orchestral showpiece, and it builds, through accelerating energy and brilliant orchestration, to a rousing, triumphant conclusion. Enjoy it as a vivid glimpse of the young Wagner, writing to dazzle and to please, already a master of the orchestra and not yet the revolutionary he would become.

Richard Strauss

21 minutes

1864–1949

Der Rosenkavalier, Suite

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

Der Rosenkavalier ('The Knight of the Rose') is Richard Strauss's most beloved opera, a glorious, bittersweet comedy of love, time and renunciation, set in an idealised, gilded vision of eighteenth-century Vienna. First staged in 1911, with a brilliant libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, it tells of the aristocratic Marschallin, her young lover Octavian, and the way she nobly gives him up when he falls for the young Sophie, all wrapped in a glittering, sentimental world of waltzes, intrigue and aristocratic comedy (presided over by the boorish Baron Ochs). Though set in the era of Maria Theresa, the opera is suffused with the lilting Viennese waltz, an affectionate anachronism that has become inseparable from its charm.

Strauss's score is among the most ravishing he ever wrote, overflowing with soaring melody, sumptuous orchestration and those intoxicating waltzes. The orchestral Suite (published in 1945, the arrangement usually credited to the conductor Artur Rodziński, who gave its first performance in New York in 1944) gathers the opera's most glorious orchestral moments into a continuous twenty-minute showpiece, from the passionate opening to the great waltzes and the sublime final trio, letting the orchestra alone tell the essence of the story in pure, gorgeous sound. It brings the concert to a warm, glowing and irresistibly Viennese close.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen at the very opening for the music depicting the night of love between the Marschallin and Octavian: surging, ardent strings and whooping horns (Strauss's famously vivid, unmistakable evocation of passion). Then listen for the magical music of the 'Presentation of the Silver Rose,' one of the opera's most exquisite moments: shimmering, otherworldly high writing (celesta, harps, high violins) conjuring the silvery glint of the rose, as young Octavian and Sophie fall instantly in love.

The heart of the Suite is its waltzes. Listen for the sequence of lilting, swaggering Viennese waltz tunes (associated especially with the comic Baron Ochs), full of charm, swing and nostalgia. Then listen for the music drawn from the opera's sublime final scene: the great trio in which the Marschallin, with aching tenderness, gives up Octavian to Sophie, and the radiant closing

love duet, some of the most beautiful music Strauss ever composed. The Suite ends with a final, energetic waltz flourish. Throughout, savour Strauss's opulent orchestration and his gift for melody: a glowing, sentimental, utterly captivating farewell to the evening.

Tonight's artists

Leif Ove Andsnes *piano*

Beethoven's Third Concerto, the only one in a minor key, balances stormy drama with profound lyricism and demands an interpreter of both power and refinement. Leif Ove Andsnes, whose acclaimed 'Beethoven Journey' surveyed all five concertos, is one of the great Beethovenians of our day, bringing his celebrated clarity, structural intelligence and unforced poetry to this cornerstone of the repertoire.

Leif Ove Andsnes, born on the Norwegian island of Karmøy in 1970, is one of the most admired pianists of his generation, celebrated for the clarity, intelligence, refinement and complete lack of showy excess in his playing. He studied with Jiří Hlinka at the Bergen Music Conservatory and made his Oslo debut in 1987, going on to a major international career as a recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician. Among his most acclaimed projects are his complete survey of the Beethoven piano concertos (his 'Beethoven Journey,' which he directed from the keyboard) and his Mozart and Sibelius recordings, as well as his lifelong championing of his compatriot Grieg. A musician of probing seriousness and patrician taste, he is an ideal interpreter of Beethoven's dramatic Third Concerto.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph**

Jan Swafford, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014

A vivid modern life of Beethoven that follows him through the years around 1800 when he wrote the Third Piano Concerto.

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Richard Strauss**

Bryan Gilliam, Cambridge University Press 1999

A short, readable life of Richard Strauss, with a clear account of Der Rosenkavalier and his partnership with the librettist Hofmannsthal.

DEEPER **Beethoven: The Music and the Life**

Lewis Lockwood, W. W. Norton 2005

A study of Beethoven's music and life by a leading Beethoven scholar, with discussion of the concertos and of his working methods.

SOURCES

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3. Piano Concerto No. 3 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._3_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._3_(Beethoven))
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9. Der Rosenkavalier Suite, Hollywood Bowl. <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/1529/der-rosenkavalier-suite>
10. Suite from Der Rosenkavalier, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/suite-from-der-rosenkavalier>
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13. Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780544245587>
14. The Life of Richard Strauss, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521570190>
15. Beethoven: The Music and the Life, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393326383>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-05-14-stutzmann>

Version 3, 30 September 2026