

On Tour in Ann Arbor: Maconchy, Elgar's Cello Concerto and Ein Heldenleben

Thursday, March 4, 2027 · 19:30 · Hill Auditorium
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Alisa Weilerstein, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MACONCHY 1907–1994 <i>Nocturne for Orchestra</i>	7'
2	ELGAR 1857–1934 <i>Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85</i>	30'
3	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		82'

Elizabeth Maconchy

7 minutes

1907–1994

Nocturne for Orchestra

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece opens high and still. The upper strings hold a thin, glinting sonority and shift slowly between two chords, and against that background the woodwind play angular, searching lines that overlap one another.

The lower strings are more restless and push the music forward. Listen for the harp, which ushers in a more dream-like passage coloured by tuned percussion, and for the trumpets, whose brief fanfares give way to long melodic lines.

The climax comes in the middle, led by the trombones, in a great swell of warm orchestral sound. It clears quickly. A solo violin is left exposed, and from there the texture thins until the instruments fade into silence one by one.

Edward Elgar

1857–1934

30 minutes

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There are four movements, not the usual three, all of them concise, and the first two are joined.

The cello begins alone with a grand, declamatory flourish of full chords. This recitative is the concerto's signature and will return twice. It dies away, and the violas, unaccompanied, quietly introduce the melody Elgar wrote down in 1918. The cello takes it over and the orchestra slowly gathers behind it, but the movement ends as bare as it began.

A plucked version of the opening recitative leads to the second movement. After several hesitant false starts the cello sets off in rapid repeated notes, a quicksilver scherzo that is over in a few minutes and gives the soloist no rest.

The Adagio is the heart of the work and its simplest music: a single unbroken song for the cello over a reduced orchestra of strings, clarinets, bassoons and horns. It is brief, and it ends on an unresolved harmony, as if the thought were unfinished.

The finale starts with another recitative and then strides out in a robust, march-like main theme, the nearest the concerto comes to the confident Elgar of earlier years. That confidence does not last. Towards the end the pace slackens, the harmony grows more painful, and the cello recalls a phrase from the Adagio. Then the opening recitative of the whole concerto returns in full, and a brusque few bars from the orchestra bring the end.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

45 minutes

Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The six sections run into one another, but each has a clear character.

The Hero. The piece opens with its main theme, a long, striding melody for horns and cellos that climbs through nearly three octaves in E flat major, the key of the 'Eroica'. Other ideas pile up around it until the whole orchestra stops on an expectant, unresolved chord, followed by silence.

The Hero's Adversaries. Into the silence come the critics: thin, chattering woodwind, each instrument carping in its own register, with two tubas grumbling in the parallel fifths that students of harmony are taught to avoid. The hero's theme sinks into the minor before he shakes them off.

The Hero's Companion. A solo violin, played by the orchestra's leader, enters with a long sequence of cadenzas, by turns flirtatious, tender, sulky and scolding. The hero answers in the low strings and horns. Eventually the two come together in a broad love scene, the most richly scored music in the work, with the critics briefly audible in the distance.

The Hero's Deeds of War. Trumpets sound from offstage and the battle begins. Percussion drives the music on, and the hero's theme fights its way through against the adversaries' music, with the companion's at his side. It ends with the opening theme returning in triumph.

The Hero's Works of Peace. Here Strauss quotes himself. Fragments of Don Juan, Also sprach Zarathustra, Death and Transfiguration, Don Quixote and Till Eulenspiegel, among others, drift past, woven together so smoothly that they can be hard to pick out one by one.

The Hero's Retreat from the World and Fulfilment. After a last outburst of anger the music settles. The hero's rising theme is reshaped into a slow, falling melody for the strings, the most touching passage in the score, and the work closes quietly in E flat major, a long way from the swagger with which it began.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/Iso-2027-03-04-pappano>

Version 1, 7 October 2026