

On Tour in Boston: Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Maxim Vengerov, and Ein Heldenleben

Thursday, March 11, 2027 · 19:30 · Symphony Hall
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Maxim Vengerov, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61</i>	42'
2	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		87'

Ludwig van Beethoven

42 minutes

1770–1827

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement. Four soft taps on the timpani, alone, begin the concerto, and the woodwind answer with a serene hymn-like phrase. That drum rhythm is the seed of the whole movement: listen for it passing to the violins, the horns and the trumpets, sometimes as a whisper and sometimes with the full orchestra's weight. The orchestra sets out all the themes before the soloist plays a note. When the violin does enter it rises from the depths in broken octaves, as if improvising, and climbs to the top of its range. The quietest and most affecting passage comes in the middle of the movement, where the violin muses in the minor over soft drum-taps from the horns. After the cadenza the soloist plays the second theme very simply, low on the instrument, over plucked strings.

Second movement. Muted strings state a short, grave theme, and what follows is a set of variations in which the theme mostly stays with the orchestra while the violin embroiders around it. Midway the soloist introduces a new melody of its own, one of the stillest moments in Beethoven. The movement does not end: a sudden loud gesture from the strings and a brief cadenza lead straight into the finale.

Third movement. The violin announces the rondo theme on its lowest string, a bouncing tune like a hunting call, and repeats it at once two octaves higher. The episodes between its returns include a plaintive minor-key melody shared with the bassoon. After the final cadenza Beethoven plays games with the theme, sending it through distant keys before two abrupt chords end the piece.

Richard Strauss

45 minutes

1864–1949

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.



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