

On Tour at Carnegie Hall: Beethoven's Triple Concerto and Ein Heldenleben

Sunday, March 14, 2027 · 14:00 · Carnegie Hall
Antonio Pappano, conductor · Maxim Vengerov, violin · Alisa Weilerstein,
cello · Kirill Gerstein, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Triple Concerto in C major, Op. 56</i>	36'
2	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		81'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Triple Concerto in C major, Op. 56

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 wrote this concerto in 1803 and 1804, the years of the 'Eroica' Symphony and the 'Waldstein' Sonata, and it is the odd one out among his concertos: the only one for more than a single soloist, and the only one in which he gave a solo part to the cello. The three soloists make up a piano trio, and putting that ensemble in front of

36 minutes

an orchestra seems to have had no precedent. There were plenty of earlier concertos for several instruments, but not for this combination.

Why he chose it is not certain. His early biographer Anton Schindler claimed that the piano part was meant for Archduke Rudolph of Austria, who was then in his mid-teens and became Beethoven's pupil and one of his most loyal patrons. That would explain why the piano part is the least demanding of the three, with two professional string players to carry the weight. There is no record that Rudolph ever played it, however, and scholars have doubted the story. What is clear is that the cello part was written for a virtuoso, a member of the Kraft family (the sources disagree on whether it was Anton or his son Nikolaus). It leads off almost every theme, and cellists still count it among the hardest things in their repertoire.

The parts were published in 1807 with a dedication to another patron, Prince Lobkowitz, and the first known public performance took place in May 1808 at the summer concerts in Vienna's Augarten. The concerto has never had the standing of Beethoven's others. Three soloists each need their turn with every theme, which makes for length and a certain amount of repetition, and the piece is genial where its neighbours are dramatic. Heard on its own terms, as chamber music on a grand scale, it has a great deal of charm, and its breadth looks ahead to the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro. The concerto begins very quietly, with cellos and basses alone muttering the main theme, and builds from there. When the soloists enter it is the cello that goes first, as it will in the other two movements. The movement is spacious and unhurried, and much of its pleasure lies in the way the three soloists pass ideas among themselves, in the manner of chamber music.

Largo. The slow movement is short, more an introduction than a movement in its own right. The cello sings a long melody in A flat major, the violin joins it, and the piano does little more than decorate. The music does not come to an end: it leads straight into the finale.

Rondo alla polacca. The cello slips into the main theme of the finale, a polonaise, the courtly Polish dance in triple time that was fashionable across Europe at the time. The mood is festive and good-humoured to the end.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40

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

Ein Heldenleben ('A Hero's Life') is the largest of the tone poems Richard Strauss wrote in the 1890s, and he was 34 when he finished it. In July 1898 he wrote from a Bavarian mountain resort that, since Beethoven's 'Eroica' was so unpopular with conductors and so rarely played, he was filling the gap with a long tone poem on a similar subject: 'It is entitled A Hero's Life, and while it has no funeral march, it does have lots of horns, horns being quite the thing to express heroism.' The joke tells you a good deal about the tone of what followed. He completed the score at the end of December and conducted the first performance himself in Frankfurt on 3 March 1899. The dedication went to the young Willem Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam.

Strauss worked on the piece alongside *Don Quixote* and thought of the two as companions: one a comic study of a deluded knight, the other a portrait of a hero taken, at least on the surface, at his own valuation. Who that hero is has been argued over ever since. Strauss gave no programme beyond titles for the six sections, and he was evasive when asked whether he had painted himself. The music is less discreet. The hero's companion is a portrait of the composer's wife, Pauline; his adversaries are plainly the critics; and when the hero looks back on his 'works of peace', what we hear are themes from

Strauss's own earlier scores. Early reviewers took the point and some were furious, one calling the piece 'as revolting a picture of this revolting man as one might ever encounter'. Later writers have been more inclined to hear irony in it, and to notice that this hero ends by turning away from the world towards private life.

It asks for an enormous orchestra, with eight horns, five trumpets, two tubas and two harps, and it plays without a break for about three quarters of an hour.

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.

Tonight's artists

Maxim Vengerov *violin*

The Sunday matinee at Carnegie Hall closes the LSO's 2027 tour of the United States with Sir Antonio Pappano, and it brings the tour's two string soloists onto the same stage. Maxim Vengerov played Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the orchestra in the same hall the evening before; here he takes the violin part in the same composer's Triple Concerto, in the bicentenary year of Beethoven's death.

Maxim Vengerov, born in Novosibirsk in 1974, is a Soviet-born Israeli violinist and conductor. The son of an oboist and a choir director, he began the violin at five with Galina Turchaninova and went on to study with Zakhar Bron. At ten he won the junior Wieniawski competition, and in 1990, at fifteen, the Carl Flesch Competition in London, which opened the way to an international career and a long series of recordings; these have brought him a Grammy and two Gramophone Awards among other prizes. In 1997 he became the first classical musician to be named an International Goodwill Ambassador by UNICEF. He has also built a second career as a conductor, becoming the first chief conductor of the Menuhin Festival Gstaad Orchestra in 2010. Teaching occupies much of his time: he is a professor at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg and, since 2016, Polonsky Visiting Professor of Violin at the Royal College of Music in London.

Alisa Weilerstein *cello*

Alisa Weilerstein has spent the tour playing Elgar's Cello Concerto with the LSO. For its last concert she moves to the Triple Concerto, where the cello has the most exposed of the three solo parts and introduces nearly every theme.

Alisa Weilerstein, born in Rochester, New York, in 1982, is an American cellist. She grew up in a family of musicians: her father, Donald Weilerstein, is a violinist, her mother, Vivian Hornik Weilerstein, a pianist, and her brother Joshua a conductor. She took up the cello at four and at thirteen made her professional debut with the Cleveland Orchestra in Tchaikovsky's Rococo Variations. She studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and, unusually for a touring soloist, also took a degree in history at Columbia University, graduating in 2004. In 2011 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. Her recordings include the Elgar and Elliott Carter concertos with Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin and Bach's six solo suites. She is a committed advocate of new music and has given the first performances of concertos written for her by Pascal Dusapin, Matthias Pintscher, Joan Tower and others. Her solo project Fragments interleaves the movements of the Bach suites with newly commissioned pieces. She is married to the conductor Rafael Payare.

Kirill Gerstein *piano*

Kirill Gerstein joins the tour's two string soloists to complete the trio. The piano part of the Triple Concerto is the lightest of the three, closer to chamber music than to the solo role in Beethoven's piano concertos.

Kirill Gerstein, born in Voronezh in 1979, is a Russian-born American pianist. He studied classical piano at a special music school and taught himself jazz from his parents' record collection. A meeting with the vibraphonist Gary Burton led to a place at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he arrived at fourteen as the youngest student the college had admitted. He then returned to classical music, studying with Solomon Mikowsky at the Manhattan School of Music, where he had taken both his bachelor's and master's degrees by the age of twenty, and later with Dmitri Bashkurov in Madrid and Ferenc Rados in Budapest. He won first prize at the Arthur Rubinstein Competition in Tel Aviv in 2001 and in 2010 became the sixth recipient of the Gilmore Artist Award, using the prize to commission new works from Timo Andres, Chick Corea, Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen and Brad Mehldau. He taught in Stuttgart from 2007 to 2017 and since 2018 has been a professor at the Hanns Eisler academy in Berlin and at the Kronberg Academy.

FURTHER READING**ACCESSIBLE Beethoven: The Music and the Life**

Lewis Lockwood, W. W. Norton 2005

Lockwood's life-and-works study is the best single guide to Beethoven's middle period, where the Triple Concerto sits beside the 'Eroica' and the 'Waldstein' Sonata.

ACCESSIBLE Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma

Michael Kennedy, Cambridge University Press 2006

A warm and readable life of Strauss by a writer who knew the music from the inside, with a full account of Ein Heldenleben and of the marriage to Pauline that it portrays.

DEEPER Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance

Leon Plantinga, W. W. Norton 2008

The standard study of all Beethoven's concertos, with a chapter on the Triple Concerto that weighs the Archduke Rudolph story and explains how the piece is built.

SOURCES

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CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-03-14-pappano>

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