

Yunchan Lim's Schumann, and Czech Tone Poems

Thursday, January 15, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Jakub Hrůša, conductor · Yunchan Lim, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SCHUMANN 1810–1856 <i>Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54</i>	31'
2	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>The Wild Dove, Op. 110</i>	20'
3	SUK 1874–1935 <i>Praga, Op. 26</i>	22'
TOTAL MUSIC		73'

Robert Schumann

31 minutes

1810–1856

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

THE COMPOSER

Robert Schumann was born on June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Saxony, into a literary household. His father was a publisher and bookseller, and throughout his life, Schumann remained as devoted to literature as to music, editing an influential music journal and writing eloquent criticism that championed Chopin, Berlioz, and the young Brahms.

After abandoning law studies in Leipzig, Schumann pursued a career as a concert pianist, but a growing weakness in the fingers of his right hand forced him to focus on composition. His piano works of the 1830s, including *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, and *Kinderszenen*, established him as a leading voice of musical Romanticism. In 1840, after a long legal battle with her father, he married the celebrated pianist Clara Wieck, and their union sparked an extraordinary creative outburst: more than half of all Schumann's songs date from that single year.

Schumann's later years were shadowed by mental illness, which had plagued him intermittently since youth. In 1854, after attempting suicide, he was confined to an asylum near Bonn, where he died on July 29, 1856, at the age of forty-six.

ABOUT THE WORK

Schumann's Piano Concerto is one of the best-loved of all Romantic concertos, and one of the most personal: a work bound up with his marriage to the great pianist Clara Schumann. Schumann had long been suspicious of the empty virtuoso concertos of his day, all display and little substance, and he wanted to write something different: a true partnership between soloist and orchestra rather than a showpiece. He began in 1841, just after his marriage, with a single-movement 'Fantasy' for piano and orchestra in A minor. No publisher would take it on its own, and in the end he chose to expand it into a full concerto. In 1845 he added two further movements, and the complete work was born.

Clara herself gave the premiere, in Dresden on 4 December 1845, and the concerto is shot through with her presence, most famously in the gentle opening theme, whose notes have been read as a musical cipher for her name. It is music of warmth, intimacy and poetic spontaneity rather than bravura, though it makes real demands on the soloist; what it asks above all is a singing tone and a sense of give-and-take with the orchestra. It remains the model of the Romantic concerto as a meeting of equals, and a love letter in music.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The concerto opens unforgettably: a single arresting chord, a tumbling flourish from the piano, and then, on the oboe answered by the piano, the tender, slightly wistful main theme that will dominate the whole first movement. Listen for how this one melody is endlessly transformed: dreamy, passionate, march-like, and in a magical central episode, slowed and recoloured in a duet between piano and clarinet. Notice how soloist and orchestra truly converse, neither dominating.

The second movement (Intermezzo) is brief and intimate: a delicate, almost conversational exchange between piano and strings, like a tender private dialogue. It leads without a break into the finale, which bursts in with an exuberant, leaping theme in the major; listen for its joyous swing and its famously tricky cross-rhythms, where the music seems to pull against the beat. The whole movement is an outpouring of high spirits, bringing the concerto to a radiant, affirmative close, Schumann and Clara's shared happiness made audible.

Antonin Dvorak

1841–1904

The Wild Dove, Op. 110

THE COMPOSER

Antonin Dvorak was born on September 8, 1841, in Nelahozeves, a small village north of Prague in Bohemia. The eldest of fourteen children, he was expected to follow his father into the butcher's trade, but his unmistakable musical talent led him on a different path. After studying at the Prague Organ School, Dvorak spent years playing viola in theatre orchestras while composing in his spare time, often in conditions of considerable hardship.

His breakthrough came when Johannes Brahms, serving on a jury for a composition prize, recognized Dvorak's exceptional gifts and recommended him to his own publisher, Simrock. The resulting Slavonic Dances (1878) were an immediate international success. Following in the footsteps of Bedrich Smetana, Dvorak went on to achieve worldwide fame as a Czech composer. His time as director of the National Conservatory in New York (1892-1895) produced some of his most beloved works, including the "New World" Symphony and the Cello Concerto.

ABOUT THE WORK

In the last years of his life, having conquered the symphony and the concerto, Dvořák turned to the symphonic poem, orchestral storytelling, with a series of vivid works based on the gruesome folk ballads of the Czech poet Karel Jaromír Erben. The Wild Dove (Holoubek, sometimes called The Wood Dove), composed in 1896, is the finest of them. Erben's ballad is a grim morality tale, and Dvořák follows it closely in four connected scenes.

The story: a young widow weeps as she follows her husband's coffin to the grave, but her grief is a sham, for she has poisoned him. On the way home she meets a handsome young man, and within weeks they are married, celebrating with a noisy village wedding. But on the dead man's grave an oak grows, and in it a wild dove perches and sings, day after day, a song of unbearable sorrow. The sound gnaws at the murderess's conscience until, driven mad by guilt, she throws herself into a river and drowns.

Dvořák's score paints all of this with extraordinary vividness: the funeral march, the seductive meeting, the boisterous wedding, and above all the dove's haunting, obsessive cooing that brings retribution. The work was premiered in Brno on 20 March 1898 under a young Leoš Janáček, and Gustav Mahler thought highly enough of it to conduct it in Vienna the following year. It shows the old master as a born dramatist, his melodic gift now in the service of dark and gripping narrative.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Follow the story through the music's four scenes. It opens with a heavy **funeral march**, slow and grief-laden, but listen for the hollowness beneath the mourning, for the widow's tears are false. The music then brightens and warms as she **meets the young man**: a tender, almost amorous episode.

Next comes the **wedding**: a boisterous, whirling village celebration full of dance rhythms and rustic colour, the music at its most extrovert. But listen for how the festivity is increasingly shadowed. Then the crucial sound: the **wild dove's song**, an obsessive, mournful cooing figure (woodwinds and high strings) that returns again and again, growing more insistent, the voice of conscience that will not be silenced. The music darkens toward the widow's madness and her plunge into the river. Listen then for the quiet, transfigured ending, where Dvořák, departing from Erben's bleakness, seems to offer a glimmer of peace or absolution after the tragedy.

Josef Suk

1874–1935

22 minutes

Praga, Op. 26

THE COMPOSER

Josef Suk (1874–1935) was a leading Czech composer and violinist of the generation after Dvořák, and closely bound to him both as a pupil and as family. The most gifted student in Dvořák's composition class at the Prague Conservatory, Suk later married Dvořák's daughter Otilie, becoming the older master's son-in-law. As a violinist he was a founding member of the celebrated Bohemian (Czech) Quartet, which he served for some forty years. As a composer he began in a sunny, lyrical late-Romantic style close to Dvořák's, but after the shattering deaths of both Dvořák and his wife Otilie within little more than a year (1904–05) his music deepened into something darker, more searching and harmonically adventurous, as in his vast *Asrael* Symphony. He is regarded, alongside Janáček, as one of the most important Czech composers of the early twentieth century, and was the grandfather of the famous violinist of the same name.

ABOUT THE WORK

Praga ('Prague') is Josef Suk's grand symphonic tribute to the golden, hundred-spired capital of his homeland. Composed in 1904, it is a single-movement symphonic poem conceived on the largest scale: a portrait not of a story but of a city and its history, its monuments, its proud and turbulent past. Suk wrote it at a pivotal moment. Its idiom is still largely the warm, confident late Romanticism he had inherited

from his teacher and father-in-law Dvořák, but Dvořák died while Suk was working on it, and the personal tragedies that followed would soon transform his music into something far darker.

The work is patriotic music in the noblest sense. Its emotional and structural climax is built on one of the most potent symbols in all Czech music: the old Hussite battle hymn ‘Ye Who Are God’s Warriors’ (Kdož jste boží bojovníci), the fifteenth-century chorale that had become, for Czechs, an emblem of national defiance and faith, the same melody Smetana had used to crown his cycle *Má vlast*. By weaving this chorale into *Praga*, Suk places his city within the long sweep of Czech history and struggle, and brings the work to a blazing, affirmative conclusion. Richly and brilliantly scored for a large orchestra, it is a splendid showcase both for the composer and for an orchestra steeped, as the Concertgebouworkest is here under a great Czech conductor, in this repertoire.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is a single continuous span, so listen for how Suk builds and releases tension across its twenty-odd minutes, conjuring the grandeur and the moods of a great city. The orchestration is lavish: expect glowing brass, sweeping strings and a real sense of monumental scale, in the warm late-Romantic manner of Dvořák and Richard Strauss.

The key thing to listen for is the gradual emergence of the Hussite chorale ‘Ye Who Are God’s Warriors.’ Suk hints at it, develops the city’s other themes around it, and saves its full, triumphant statement, pealing out in the brass, for the work’s climax, transforming the portrait of Prague into a blazing affirmation of Czech identity and faith. If you know Smetana’s *Má vlast*, you will recognise the same hymn and the same surge of national pride. Let the music carry you through Suk’s vision of his city, from atmospheric reverie to that final, glorious peroration.

Tonight's artists

Yunchan Lim *piano*

Schumann's Concerto is a shrewd choice for Yunchan Lim, and a revealing one. After the fireworks of his Cliburn-winning Rachmaninoff, here is a concerto that rewards not display but poetry, intimacy and the art of listening: a true partnership with the orchestra rather than a vehicle for bravura. For a pianist so often praised for a musical maturity beyond his years, it is a chance to show the tenderness and conversational give-and-take at the heart of Schumann's most personal score, in his first appearance with this orchestra.

Yunchan Lim, born in South Korea in 2004, became an international sensation in 2022 when, at the age of eighteen, he became the youngest ever winner of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The triumph, crowned by a now-legendary performance of Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto, was watched by millions online and announced a major new talent. Since then he has appeared with leading orchestras and in major recital halls around the world, and his debut studio album of Chopin's Études won a Gramophone Award. Admired for a maturity, seriousness and depth of musicianship well beyond his years, as well as for formidable technical command, he is widely regarded as one of the most exciting pianists to have emerged in a generation. This concert marks his debut with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Schumann: The Faces and the Masks**

Judith Chernaik, Vintage 2019

A warm, readable life of Schumann and his marriage to Clara, the pianist for whom he wrote the Piano Concerto.

ACCESSIBLE **Dvořák**

Kurt Honolka, Haus Publishing 2005

A short illustrated life of Dvořák that reaches his last years, when he turned to Czech folk ballads for tone poems such as The Wild Dove.

DEEPER **Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age"**

John Daverio, Oxford University Press 1997

The standard scholarly study of Schumann's life and music, including the A minor Piano Concerto and its origins in the Phantasie of 1841.

SOURCES

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2. Jakub Hrůša, conductor, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/orchestra/conductors/jakub-hrusa/>
3. Concertgebouw Orchestra plays Schumann's Piano Concerto with Yunchan Lim, Het Concertgebouw. <https://www.concertgebouw.nl/en/concerts/10159646-concertgebouw-orchestra-plays-schumanns-piano-concerto-with-yunchan-lim>
4. RCO: Hrusa conducts Schumann, Dvořák and Suk, C Major Entertainment. <https://www.cmajor-entertainment.com/programs/rco-hrusa-conducts-schumann-dvorak-and-suk/>
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6. Jakub Hrůša, Lucerne Festival. https://www.lucernefestival.ch/en/program/directory-of-artists/jakub_hrusa/3010
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10. The Wild Dove (Holoubek), Op. 110, B198, antonin-dvorak.cz. <https://www.antonin-dvorak.cz/en/wild-dove>
11. Josef Suk: Praga, Op. 26 (preface), Musikproduktion Höflich, Repertoire Explorer. https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/wp-content/uploads/vorworte_prefaces/616.html
12. Josef Suk's Prague and A Summer's Tale (BBCSO, Bělohávek), Classical Source. <https://www.classicalsource.com/cd/josef-suks-prague-and-a-summers-tale-bbcso-blohlavek-chandos/>
13. Josef Suk (composer), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Suk_\(composer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Suk_(composer))
14. Yunchan Lim, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yunchan_Lim
15. Schumann: The Faces and the Masks, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781101974254>
16. Dvořák, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781904341529>
17. Robert Schumann: Herald of a "New Poetic Age", Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780195091809>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-01-15-hrusa>

Version 3, 30 September 2026