

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

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

1810–1856

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

31 minutes

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.

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

20 minutes

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.

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

Praga, Op. 26

22 minutes

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.

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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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

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