

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Kavakos Plays Korngold; Wagner and Respighi

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Jaap van Zweden, conductor · Leonidas Kavakos, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	ZARIÑA b. 2000 <i>Bloom</i>	8'
2	KORNGOLD 1897–1957 <i>Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35</i>	25'
3	WAGNER 1813–1883 <i>Prelude and Liebestod from 'Tristan und Isolde'</i>	18'
4	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Pini di Roma</i>	22'
TOTAL MUSIC		73'

Annija Anna Zariņa

b. 2000

Bloom

8 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The programme opens with a world premiere: Bloom, a new work by the young Latvian composer Annija Anna Zariņa. Placing a brand-new piece by a composer born in 2000 at the head of an evening that runs through Korngold, Wagner and Respighi is a deliberate gesture: a reminder that the orchestra is not only a museum of the past but a living instrument for the music of now.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Come to this one with open ears and no preconceptions: there are no famous tunes to wait for, because no one has heard it before. With music in this vein, the rewards usually lie in process and texture: listen for how sound emerges and grows, how the orchestra's colours shift and combine, how a small amount of material is patiently transformed. The title invites you to hear the music as a kind of blossoming, a gradual unfolding from something simple toward something fuller. Let it set the ear, and the mind, before the great Romantic statements that follow.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

1897–1957

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35

25 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was a child prodigy of almost Mozartean precocity (Mahler called him a genius when he was nine) who became a celebrated opera composer in 1920s Vienna. Then history intervened: a Jewish artist, he found refuge in Hollywood in the 1930s and became one of the founders of the symphonic film score, winning Oscars for swashbucklers like *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. After the war, with the Nazis defeated, he turned back to the concert hall, and the *Violin Concerto* of 1945 was his glorious re-entry. Famously, he built it from melodies drawn from his own film scores, themes from *Another Dawn*, *Juarez* and *Anthony Adverse* among them, repurposing music written for the screen as the material of a full Romantic concerto. Far from cheapening it, this gives the work its lush, soaring, unashamedly emotional character.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

From the soloist's very first phrase, this is music of soaring, golden lyricism. Listen for the gorgeous opening theme (lifted from the film *Another Dawn*) that the violin sings high above shimmering orchestral colour. The

whole first movement luxuriates in big, cinematic melodies and lush harmony, with a brilliant cadenza for the soloist.

The slow movement (Romance) is the concerto's heart: a tender, dreamy nocturne built on a melody from Anthony Adverse, the violin spinning long, rapt lines over a glowing accompaniment touched with celesta and vibraphone: pure Hollywood enchantment. Then the finale bursts in, a fast, jaunty, jig-like romp full of bravura fireworks and high spirits. Listen for the dazzling virtuosity Korngold demands (rapid runs, leaps and double-stops) and for the way the movement drives to a brilliant, exhilarating close. Throughout, savour the sheer unembarrassed beauty of the writing: this is Romanticism that survived into the twentieth century and went to the movies.

Richard Wagner

1813–1883

Prelude and Liebestod from 'Tristan und Isolde'

18 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Few works changed music as profoundly as *Tristan und Isolde*. Wagner's opera of 1865, the story of two lovers bound by a magic potion to a passion that can only be consummated in

death, pushed harmony to the very edge of tonality and, in doing so, helped open the door to the music of the next hundred years. Its very first bars announce the revolution: the famous ‘Tristan chord,’ a dissonance that aches to resolve but does not, setting up a state of yearning that the music sustains, almost unbearably, across the whole four-hour opera, and only fully releases at the very end.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, right at the start, for the Tristan chord, the very first sustained harmony, which seems to lean forward, asking to resolve, and then slips instead into another unresolved chord. This refusal to settle is the engine of the whole piece. The Prelude builds in great waves of rising, surging melody, each climbing higher and pulling back, generating an almost physical sense of longing and frustration that mounts to a shattering climax before subsiding.

Then, without the opera’s intervening hours, Wagner gives us the Liebestod. Listen for how Isolde’s transfiguration theme rises, gradually and inexorably, through the orchestra: the same kind of surging phrases as the Prelude, but now flooding toward fulfilment rather than frustration. The music swells to an overwhelming peak and then, finally, melts into a long, glowing resolution, the harmonic release withheld since the opera’s first bar.

After so much yearning, the effect of that final, peaceful chord is profound: desire consummated, at last, in death and transcendence.

Ottorino Respighi

1879–1936

Pini di Roma

22 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Pines of Rome (*Pini di Roma*), completed in 1924, is the most famous of Respighi's 'Roman trilogy' and one of the great orchestral showpieces of the twentieth century. Where his earlier *Fountains of Rome* had painted the city's waters at different hours, *Pines* uses the umbrella pines that line Rome's avenues and ruins as a frame for four vivid scenes spanning different places and, remarkably, different eras of the city's long history. It is music of spectacular orchestral imagination, building to one of the most overwhelming climaxes in the repertoire.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The four movements run without a break, each a vivid picture. '**The Pines of the Villa Borghese**' bursts in with brilliant, chattering energy: children playing and shouting in a Roman park, the orchestra glittering and boisterous. Then, abruptly, '**Pines Near a Catacomb**': the mood

turns dark and solemn, with hushed, chant-like brass evoking ancient subterranean worship; listen for the music swelling from the depths and receding.

‘The Pines of the Janiculum’ is a moonlit nocturne, opening with a rippling piano cadenza and a long, dreamy clarinet melody; at its close, listen for the famous recorded nightingale, singing over the quiet orchestra. Then comes the finale, **‘The Pines of the Appian Way.’** It begins almost inaudibly, with a low, throbbing tread in the basses and a steady drumbeat, depicting a Roman legion approaching from far off along the ancient road at misty dawn. Listen for how Respighi builds, with extraordinary patience and cumulative power, from that distant rumble to a blazing, brass-drenched march (with extra brass often placed around the hall), the legion advancing in overwhelming triumph as the sun rises over Rome. It is one of the most spine-tingling crescendos in all music.

Tonight's artists

Leonidas Kavakos *violin*

Korngold's Violin Concerto pairs Hollywood glamour with formidable technical demands, and it asks for a soloist who can pour out its soaring, golden melodies without ever tipping into mere sentimentality. Leonidas Kavakos, celebrated for the aristocratic refinement and depth of his tone, brings exactly that combination of warmth and seriousness, able to honour the concerto's unashamed Romantic beauty while giving it the dignity and finish of a master. In his hands the film-score themes become genuine concert poetry.

Leonidas Kavakos, born in Athens in 1967, is one of the most revered violinists in the world. He swept the major competitions early, winning the Sibelius, Paganini and Naumburg prizes, and made his name with a sensational recording of the original version of the Sibelius Concerto, long withheld from performance, which won Gramophone's Concerto of the Year. Trained in Greece and with Josef Gingold in the United States, he is admired for the depth, integrity and aristocratic poise of his playing, a sound of great refinement and inner intensity rather than mere flash. He performs and records widely with the world's leading orchestras, is increasingly active as a conductor, and plays the 1734 'Willemotte' Stradivarius.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-01-21-van-zweden>

Version 3, 30 September 2026