

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Mäkelä's Bruckner Eighth

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor

approximately 80 minutes

Anton Bruckner

1824–1896

Symphony No. 8 in C minor, WAB 108

80 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Bruckner's Eighth is the last symphony he completed, and for many listeners the summit of his life's work: a vast, cathedral-like structure of around eighty minutes that travels, as the orchestra's own programme puts it, 'from darkness into light.' Bruckner, a devout Catholic and a former village organist who came late and painfully to symphonic fame, conceived his symphonies as acts of worship on the largest possible scale, building them from great blocks of sound, long silences, and slow, inexorable crescendos that suggest the architecture of a Gothic church rendered in time. The Eighth is the grandest of them all.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The key to Bruckner is patience: let the long spans unfold, and listen for the great waves that build, recede, and build again toward overwhelming climaxes.

The **first movement** grows from a quiet, ominous string tremor and a brooding theme; it gathers toward shattering brass climaxes but, in a famously bleak stroke, sinks at the end into near-silence, a dying close that Bruckner's own letters connect with death. The **Scherzo** that follows is massive and earthy, driven by an insistent, stamping theme (Bruckner associated it with a good-natured peasant figure he called 'German Michel'); listen for its contrasting trio, gentler and graced for the first time by the harps.

The **Adagio** is the heart of the work and one of the supreme slow movements ever written: a vast, glowing meditation, with soaring string melody, solemn Wagner tubas and shimmering harp, building to a colossal cymbal-crowned climax before subsiding into peace. The **Finale** opens with a blazing fanfare (Bruckner spoke of cosaks, of a meeting of emperors) and proceeds through tremendous contrasts of power and stillness. Listen, at the very end, for Bruckner's masterstroke: the main themes of all four movements are stacked together and

sound simultaneously, the whole symphony gathered into a single overwhelming blaze of C major, darkness finally and gloriously resolved into light.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-02-04-makela>

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