

Zimmermann's Frank Martin and Shostakovich's Tenth

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Rafael Payare, conductor · Frank Peter Zimmermann, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	GUBAIDULINA 1931–2025 <i>Fairytale Poem</i>	9'
2	MARTIN 1890–1974 <i>Violin Concerto</i>	30'
3	SHOSTAKOVICH 1906–1975 <i>Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93</i>	52'
TOTAL MUSIC		91'

Sofia Gubaidulina

9 minutes

1931–2025

Fairytale Poem

THE COMPOSER

Sofia Gubaidulina (1931–2025) was one of the most important and individual composers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Born in the Tatar Republic of the Soviet Union and trained in Kazan and Moscow, she belonged, with Schnittke and Denisov, to the generation of Soviet composers whose adventurous, spiritually-charged music was viewed with suspicion by the authorities, and for years her work met with official disapproval. A deeply religious artist, she understood composition as something close to a sacred act, and her music is marked by an intense concern with symbolism, with the expressive weight of individual sounds, and with the structuring of time, often built on stark oppositions of dissonance and consonance, tension and release. After settling in Germany in 1992 she gained the international recognition long denied her at home, and she remained widely performed until her death in 2025.

ABOUT THE WORK

Gubaidulina's Fairytale Poem (Märchenpoem) is an early orchestral work, written in 1971, and it is one of her milder and more accessible pieces. It comes from the years when she was still largely an outsider in Soviet musical life. Official figures such as Tikhon Khrennikov

found her music ‘mistaken’, and her most important early encouragement came from Shostakovich, who told her in 1959: ‘My wish for you is that you should continue along your mistaken path.’ She did, and in the meantime, like many Soviet composers of her generation, she was able to explore her more adventurous ideas in commissioned and applied music, including film scores.

Fairytale Poem belongs to that world of colourful, imaginative orchestral storytelling. It is short, vivid and gently melancholy, and it already shows the concerns that would define her mature music: a fascination with the character of individual sounds and timbres, and a way of building a piece out of contrasts rather than conventional themes. Heard today, after the great spiritual works of her later career, it offers a glimpse of the young composer’s orchestral imagination in miniature.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is a brief, picturesque orchestral fable, so listen above all for colour. Gubaidulina is a master of orchestral sound, and even in this early, approachable piece you can hear her setting glowing, shimmering, dreamlike passages against drier and more earthbound music.

Listen for the composer’s fascination with individual sounds (a single instrumental colour held up to the light, a texture that thins and thickens) and for the way she builds the music from oppositions: bright against dull, soaring against earthbound. It makes an evocative, atmospheric opening to the concert, a miniature with a tender and slightly wistful character.

Frank Martin

1890–1974

Violin Concerto

THE COMPOSER

Frank Martin (1890–1974) was the most important Swiss composer of the twentieth century. Born in Geneva, the youngest of ten children of a Calvinist pastor of Huguenot descent, he was profoundly marked as a boy by hearing Bach’s St Matthew Passion, and a deep, questioning spirituality runs through much of his music. He came to his mature style relatively late and after long reflection, eventually forging a highly personal language that absorbed the chromatic intensity and even the twelve-note technique of Schoenberg into a music that nevertheless remained rooted in tonality and rich in lyrical feeling. The result is instantly recognisable: refined, subtly coloured, harmonically piquant, and often suffused with a grave, mysterious

30 minutes

beauty. Works such as the oratorio *Le Vin herbé*, the *Petite symphonie concertante* and the *Mass for double choir* secured his reputation. He spent much of his later life in the Netherlands, and is remembered as a composer of rare integrity and quiet originality.

ABOUT THE WORK

Frank Martin's *Violin Concerto*, written in 1950–51, is one of the most beautiful and rewarding violin concertos of the twentieth century, though it remains less often heard than it deserves. It was commissioned by the Pro Helvetia foundation to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Basel Chamber Orchestra, and dedicated to that orchestra's visionary founder-conductor Paul Sacher, one of the great patrons of modern music. The premiere was given in Basel on 24 January 1952 by the violinist Hansheinz Schneeberger with Sacher conducting.

Martin came to the concerto directly after his *Five Songs of Ariel*, choral settings from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and he said the concerto kept something of that music's 'mysterious and somewhat magical atmosphere.' That is the key to its character. This is not a flashy display vehicle but a lyrical, atmospheric and deeply expressive work, cast in the classical three-movement form but speaking in Martin's own subtle harmonic language, tonal at its core yet coloured with the chromatic richness he had absorbed from Schoenberg. The solo violin sings, muses and soars rather than merely dazzles, woven into refined, transparent orchestral textures. For a soloist of real musical depth it is a treasure, and for listeners willing to follow its mysterious, slowly unfolding beauty it is among the rewarding discoveries of twentieth-century music.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Come to this expecting atmosphere and lyricism rather than fireworks. Listen for the 'mysterious and magical' quality Martin spoke of: the way the solo violin emerges from and floats above shimmering, finely-spun orchestral textures, in music that is harmonically rich and subtly shaded without ever losing its tonal warmth or its singing line.

The concerto follows the classic fast–slow–fast plan. In the outer movements, listen for the interplay of the violin's long lyrical lines with the orchestra, and for Martin's distinctive harmony, chromatic and piquant but never harsh. The slow movement is the expressive heart, a grave, song-like meditation of real beauty, the soloist spinning out long melodies of quiet intensity. Throughout, notice how Martin keeps the orchestra transparent

so the violin can always be heard, and how the music's mood is contemplative and inward even at its most animated. It is a concerto that rewards close, patient listening with a beauty that is all its own.

Dmitri Shostakovich

1906–1975

52 minutes

Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93

THE COMPOSER

Dmitri Shostakovich was born on September 25, 1906, in St. Petersburg (then still the Russian capital) into a cultured family. His father was an engineer, and it was his mother who gave him his first piano lessons. The young Dmitri showed exceptional talent, entering the Petrograd Conservatory at thirteen and graduating at nineteen with his First Symphony, whose triumphant premiere in 1926 soon brought him international fame.

Shostakovich's life thereafter became inseparable from the tortured history of the Soviet Union. His 1934 opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was initially a sensation, but in 1936 a devastating Pravda editorial, widely taken to reflect Stalin's own displeasure, condemned it as "muddle instead of music." Shostakovich lived for years in fear of arrest, at one point waiting at night on the landing outside his flat so that his family would not be disturbed if the knock came.

Yet under this shadow, Shostakovich composed a stream of masterpieces. His fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets constitute one of the twentieth century's greatest artistic achievements: music that bears witness to its era's terrors while transcending them through its humanity and craft. He died in Moscow on August 9, 1975.

ABOUT THE WORK

Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony is one of the towering symphonies of the twentieth century, and one of the most personal. Its timing is everything: Stalin died in March 1953, and Shostakovich, who had twice been publicly denounced by the Soviet regime and who lived for years in fear of arrest, completed the symphony (by his own account) that summer and autumn, his first symphony in eight years. Whether or not he consciously intended it, many have heard the work as a response to the dictator's death and to the years of terror: a vast drama moving from oppression and grief toward a hard-won, defiant assertion of the self.

That 'self' is literally inscribed in the music. Shostakovich signs the symphony with his personal musical monogram, the DSCH motif: the notes D, E-flat, C, B, which in German notation spell D-S-C-H, the initials of his name (D. Schostakowitsch). This four-note cell satur-

ates the later movements, the composer stamping his own identity onto the work again and again. The symphony's most notorious movement is its brutal, hurtling second-movement scherzo, often interpreted as a savage musical portrait of Stalin himself, a whirlwind of violence over in a few terrifying minutes. The symphony was premiered by the Leningrad Philharmonic under Yevgeny Mravinsky on 17 December 1953 and sparked fierce debate, but quickly took its place among Shostakovich's greatest works.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony begins in darkness: a long, brooding first movement (Moderato) that grows from the low strings, gathering through anxious climaxes and desolate woodwind solos: music of enormous span and bleak intensity, the sound of years of fear.

Then comes the shock: the second movement, a ferociously fast and violent scherzo, hammering and relentless, over almost before you can catch your breath. This is the supposed 'portrait of Stalin', brutal and terrifying. The third movement is the most personal: listen here for the DSCH motif (a falling-and-rising four-note figure) emerging in the strings, and for a second code, a horn call repeated twelve times that spells the name 'Elmira' (for Elmira Nazirova, a young composer close to Shostakovich), the two themes circling each other in a strange, haunted nocturne.

The finale opens with a slow, mournful introduction before breaking into a fast, almost manic Allegro. Listen for how the DSCH motif fights its way to the foreground and finally rings out in triumph, the composer's own signature blazoned across the close, hammered out by the timpani, asserting the survival of the individual voice over everything that tried to crush it.

Tonight's artists

Frank Peter Zimmermann *violin*

Frank Martin's Violin Concerto is a connoisseur's concerto (atmospheric, harmonically subtle, and lyrical rather than flashy) and it asks for a soloist of musical depth and refinement rather than mere virtuosity. Frank Peter Zimmermann, long admired for the clarity, integrity and unforced beauty of his playing, is exactly such an artist. In a work that rewards patience and inwardness, his thoughtful, singing approach is ideally suited to draw out the 'mysterious and magical atmosphere' Martin himself described.

Frank Peter Zimmermann, born in Duisburg in 1965, is one of the most respected violinists of his generation, a musician prized for the purity, intelligence and lack of affectation in his playing rather than for showmanship. A prodigy who gave his first concerto performance at ten, he has for decades been a fixture with the world's leading orchestras and conductors, with a vast repertoire and a discography to match. He is a devoted chamber musician, founding the Trio Zimmermann with violist Antoine Tamestit and cellist Christian Poltéra. He plays the 1711 'Lady Inchiquin' Stradivarius once played by Fritz Kreisler. His combination of technical command, musical seriousness and clarity of mind makes him an ideal interpreter of a thoughtful, inward concerto like Frank Martin's.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century

Alex Ross, Picador 2008

A lively history of twentieth-century music that tells the story of Shostakovich under Stalin and after, the background to the Tenth Symphony.

ACCESSIBLE How Shostakovich Changed My Mind

Stephen Johnson, Notting Hill Editions 2018

A short, personal book by a BBC broadcaster on what Shostakovich's music can mean to a listener, a good companion to the Tenth Symphony.

DEEPER The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich

Pauline Fairclough, David Fanning, Cambridge University Press 2008

Scholarly essays on Shostakovich's music and its context, including the symphonies, for a deeper look at the Tenth.

SOURCES

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3. Rafael Payare, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafael_Payare
4. Sofia Gubaidulina, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sofia_Gubaidulina
5. List of compositions by Sofia Gubaidulina, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_compositions_by_Sofia_Gubaidulina
6. Concerto pour violon et orchestre, Frank Martin Society. <https://www.frankmartin.org/work/concerto-pour-violon-et-orchestre/>
7. Frank Martin (composer), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Martin_\(composer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Martin_(composer))
8. Symphony No. 10 (Shostakovich), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._10_\(Shostakovich\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._10_(Shostakovich))
9. Frank Peter Zimmermann, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Peter_Zimmermann
10. Antoine Tamestit, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_Tamestit
11. The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780312427719>
12. How Shostakovich Changed My Mind, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781912559206>
13. The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521603157>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-02-18-payare>

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