

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

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

1931–2025

Fairytale Poem

9 minutes

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.

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

30 minutes

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.

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

Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93

52 minutes

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.

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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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

Version 3, 30 September 2026