

Chailly's Prokofiev: Fourth Symphony and Alexander Nevsky

Wednesday, March 4, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Riccardo Chailly, conductor · Marie-Nicole Lemieux, contralto · Netherlands
Radio Choir, choir · Chorus of Dutch National Opera, choir

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Symphony No. 4 in C major, Op. 112 (1947 version)</i>	37'
2	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78 (cantata)</i>	40'
TOTAL MUSIC		77'

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Symphony No. 4 in C major, Op. 112 (1947 version)

37 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Keep in mind the symphony's roots in *The Prodigal Son*: much of its melodic material has the vivid, characterful quality of ballet music: themes that seem to depict scenes and gestures. Listen for Prokofiev's unmistakable fingerprints throughout: the bittersweet, wide-leaping lyrical melodies, the biting wit, the propulsive 'motoric' rhythms, and the brilliant, slightly acid orchestration.

The four movements follow a broadly classical plan, but on the expanded 1947 scale they feel grander and more heroic than the lithe original. Listen for the warm, expansive lyricism of the slow music (drawn from the ballet's most tender pages), for the energetic outer movements with their driving momentum, and for the way Prokofiev builds the finale toward a big, affirmative close, the kind of broad, public ending he had perfected in the Fifth Symphony. It is a rare chance to get to know an unjustly neglected work by a great symphonist.

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78 (cantata)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Follow the seven scenes. The cantata opens with a desolate orchestral evocation of **‘Russia under the Mongolian Yoke’**: bleak, frozen, empty. The chorus then enters with the noble **‘Song about Alexander Nevsky,’** recalling an earlier Russian victory. Listen, in **‘The Crusaders in Pskov,’** for the chilling, mechanical Latin chant of the Teutonic Knights, brassy, brutal and inhuman, set against the warm, suffering music of the Russian people; and in **‘Arise, Ye Russian People’** for the rousing, bell-clanging call to arms.

The great central movement is **‘The Battle on the Ice’**: a long, astonishing build from icy stillness to a furious, hammering clash between the Knights’ chant and the Russians’ themes, the orchestra depicting cavalry charges, cracking ice and chaos, one of the most exciting battle-pieces in all music. After the storm comes the cantata’s most moving page, **‘The Field of the Dead,’** where the solo contralto sings a heartbreaking lament over the fallen. Finally, **‘Alexander’s Entry into Pskov’** brings blazing, bell-crowned rejoicing, the chorus and orchestra united in triumphant celebration of the victory.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-03-04-chailly>

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