

Dawidiuk Conducts Debussy, Poulenc and Tchaikovsky's Fourth

Friday, April 10, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Aurel Dawidiuk, conductor · Leo van Doeselaar, organ

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DEBUSSY 1862–1918 <i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune</i>	10'
2	POULENC 1899–1963 <i>Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani in G minor, FP 93</i>	23'
3	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36</i>	44'
TOTAL MUSIC		77'

Claude Debussy

1862–1918

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

10 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

It is hard to overstate the importance of this short, dreamy orchestral piece. Composed in 1894 and inspired by a symbolist poem by Stéphane Mallarmé (in which a faun, drowsing in the afternoon heat, recalls or imagines his encounters with nymphs), Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* is often called the work that opened the door to modern music. The conductor Pierre Boulez claimed that with 'the flute of the faun,' music drew 'new breath.' What was so new was its freedom: instead of building from clear themes developed by Classical rules, Debussy lets the music drift and shimmer, following sensation and atmosphere rather than argument, with colour, harmony and timbre becoming ends in themselves. This is the founding masterpiece of musical 'Impressionism.'

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, above all, to the very opening: a solo flute, alone and unaccompanied, winding sinuously downward and back, one of the most famous and evocative beginnings in all music, the languid voice of the faun himself. From this single thread the whole piece unfolds.

Notice how Debussy avoids strong beats and clear cadences, so the music seems to float free of time, drifting through shifting harmonies and exquisite orchestral colours: the warmth of horns, the glint of harps, the antique shiver of small cymbals near the close. Rather than developing themes in the German manner, he keeps returning to the flute's melody, each time re-coloured and transformed, as if the faun's reverie circles back on itself. Let the music wash over you: this is not a story to follow but an atmosphere to inhabit: heat, languor, desire and dream, captured in sound.

Francis Poulenc

1899–1963

Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani in G minor, FP 93

23 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The critic Claude Rostand famously described Francis Poulenc as half monk, half rascal: a composer who could write music of deep religious feeling and impish, café-society wit, often within the same piece. His *Organ Concerto*, composed between 1934 and 1938, is the perfect embodiment of that double nature. It was commissioned by the great Parisian patron Princess Edmond de Polignac, originally as a modest piece with an easy organ part that the Princess could probably play herself;

Poulenc, however, soon abandoned the modest idea for something far grander and more dramatic. Scored for the unusual combination of solo organ, string orchestra and timpani (no other winds or brass), it is cast as a single continuous movement that runs through several sharply contrasting sections.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen to the opening: a series of huge, dramatic organ chords, grave and grand, consciously recalling Bach's great G-minor organ fantasia, an arresting, almost theatrical start that sets a tone of dark solemnity. Then follow how Poulenc keeps changing the mood, often abruptly: the music swings between this Gothic grandeur and lighter, more lyrical or even jaunty episodes, the 'monk' and the 'rascal' alternating without warning.

Keep your ear on the interplay of the three forces: the organ by turns commanding and delicate, the strings warm and singing, and the timpani adding dramatic punctuation and drive. There are passages of real tenderness and others of nervous energy and bustle, even a touch of the dance hall. The single-movement structure means there is no break to relax in: the music carries you continuously through its contrasts to the return of the solemn opening material and a powerful close. It is a piece that shows off both the colossal range of the organ and the many faces of Poulenc.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–1893

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36

44 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony is one of the most nakedly emotional of all symphonies, written at the most turbulent period of his life. In 1877 he made a disastrous, impulsive marriage that collapsed within weeks and brought him to the brink of breakdown; at the same time he entered into one of the strangest and most fruitful relationships in musical history, with the wealthy widow Nadezhda von Meck, who became his patroness and confidante through years of intimate correspondence, on the express condition that they never meet. The Fourth Symphony is dedicated to her (discreetly, 'to my best friend'), and in a famous letter he laid out for her a detailed emotional 'programme' of the work.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony opens with the 'Fate' motto: a blaring, ominous fanfare for horns and bassoons. Fix it in your mind: it is the seed of the whole work, and it will return at crucial moments to crush the music's hopes. The first movement that follows is anxious and waltz-haunted,

surging between despair and fleeting tenderness, and it is interrupted, climactically, by the return of the Fate fanfare.

The second movement (Andantino) is a melancholy, songful lament, introduced by a plaintive solo oboe, music of wistful loneliness and reminiscence. The third movement is the symphony's famous trick: a scherzo played almost entirely in pizzicato, the strings plucking throughout, conjuring a flickering, fantastical world (with a contrasting wind-band episode in the middle, like a passing military parade). Then the finale erupts: a blazing, festive movement built around a Russian folk song ('In the field stood a birch tree'), depicting the rough joys of a village holiday. Listen for how, near the end, the dreaded Fate fanfare bursts in once more, but this time the music refuses to be cowed, sweeping it aside and driving to a hard-won, exhilarating conclusion.

Tonight's artists

Leo van Doeselaar *organ*

Poulenc's Organ Concerto demands a soloist who can command both the thunderous, Bach-like grandeur of the great instrument and the quicksilver shifts of mood (solemn one moment, playful the next) that make the piece so characteristic. Leo van Doeselaar, titular organist of the Concertgebouw and a celebrated Bach player, brings exactly the authority and stylistic range the concerto needs, on the hall's magnificent organ.

Leo van Doeselaar, born in Goes in 1954, is one of the Netherlands' most distinguished organists. He studied at the Amsterdam Sweelinck Conservatory, winning the Prix d'Excellence, and has built an international career both as a recitalist on the great historic organs of Europe and as an orchestral soloist. He has worked with many of the leading Baroque ensembles and conductors, is titular organist of the Concertgebouw (his Decca recording of Hindemith's Kammermusik No. 7 with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly won a Grammy), and was professor of organ at the Berlin University of the Arts. A renowned Bach interpreter, he is the ideal soloist for Poulenc's Bach-haunted concerto.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-04-10-dawidiuk>

Version 3, 30 September 2026