

Pichon's French Baroque: From Chaos to Rameau and Gluck

Friday, May 1, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Raphaël Pichon, conductor · Julie Roset, soprano · Stéphane Degout, baritone

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	REBEL 1666–1747 <i>Le Chaos, from 'Les Éléments'</i>	8'
2	RAMEAU 1683–1764 <i>Excerpts from the operas (Dardanus, Les Indes galantes, Les Boréades and others)</i>	35'
3	GLUCK 1714–1787 <i>Scenes from 'Orfeo ed Euridice' and 'Iphigénie en Tauride'</i>	18'
TOTAL MUSIC		61'

Jean-Féry Rebel

1666–1747

Le Chaos, from 'Les Éléments'

8 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Everything is in the very first sound. Listen for the opening chord: not a clear, consonant harmony but a thick, grinding cluster of clashing notes, all the notes of the scale piled on top of one another, held by strings, bassoon and harpsichord. To ears expecting Baroque elegance it is genuinely startling, almost like something from a modern score.

Then follow the process of creation: listen for how, out of that chaos, individual lines and clearer harmonies gradually emerge, the music sorting itself into order, with dance-like sections representing the different elements taking shape (brilliant violin runs for fire, piccolo trills for air, flowing flute lines for water, sustained bass notes for earth). The journey from that first dissonant shock to the eventual establishment of clear, ordered harmony is the whole drama of the piece in miniature: the birth of cosmos from chaos, painted in sound three centuries ago.

Jean-Philippe Rameau

35 minutes

1683–1764

Excerpts from the operas (Dardanus, Les Indes galantes, Les Boréades and others)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is a sequence of mostly short, contrasting numbers, so enjoy the sheer variety and colour. Listen above all for Rameau's astonishing orchestral imagination: the rhythmic snap of his dances (gavottes, tambourins, rigaudons, chaconnes), the vivid 'special effects' (rushing string figures for storms and winds, rumbling basses for earthquakes), and the wonderful wind writing: piccolos, bassoons and the haunting musette evoking a pastoral world.

Listen, too, for the dramatic range: stately, noble music for gods and kings; tender, sensuous airs for the lovers (sung here by the soprano and baritone soloists); and exuberant, foot-tapping dances for celebrations and exotic scenes. Notice how modern much of it sounds: the boldness of the harmony (Rameau the theorist at work), the brilliance of the orchestration. Rather than following a single story, let this wash over you as a kaleidoscope of eighteenth-century French theatre: elegant, dramatic, sensuous and endlessly inventive.

Christoph Willibald Gluck

18 minutes

1714–1787

Scenes from 'Orfeo ed Euridice' and 'Iphigénie en Tauride'

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for Gluck's hallmark: noble simplicity. Where Rameau dazzles with colour and dance, Gluck moves us with directness: pure, beautifully shaped melodies that go straight to the heart, with nothing superfluous. The most famous example is the radiant 'Dance of the Blessed Spirits' from Orfeo, with its serene, consoling flute solo evoking the Elysian Fields; listen for its heavenly calm.

In the vocal scenes, listen for how the music serves the drama: Orpheus's grief made almost unbearably plain and affecting (the great lament 'Che farò senza Euridice'), and the taut, continuous tension of Iphigénie en Tauride, where the orchestra storms and broods and the singing flows seamlessly out of it. Notice

how the orchestra and (where used) chorus carry the drama, and how Gluck achieves overwhelming emotion through restraint rather than display. Set against the kaleidoscopic brilliance of Rameau, this is opera distilled to its essence.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-05-01-pichon>

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