

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Hadelich's Tchaikovsky and Brahms's Fourth

Thursday, May 7, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Nathalie Stutzmann, conductor · Augustin Hadelich, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	GLINKA 1804–1857 <i>Overture to 'Ruslan and Lyudmila'</i>	5'
2	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35</i>	35'
3	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98</i>	40'
TOTAL MUSIC		80'

Mikhail Glinka

1804–1857

Overture to 'Ruslan and Lyudmila'

5 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The Overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila* is one of the most exhilarating curtain-raisers in the entire orchestral repertoire: five minutes of pure, breakneck energy. It opens Glinka's second opera, a fairy-tale adventure based on a poem by Pushkin in which the knight Ruslan rescues his bride Lyudmila from an evil sorcerer. The opera as a whole is sprawling and was only a qualified success at its 1842 premiere, but its overture instantly became, and has remained, a beloved concert showpiece, a favourite season-opener and encore the world over.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Hold on tight from the first bar: the overture bursts in at a furious tempo with a whirling, joyful tutti that barely pauses for breath. Listen for the headlong rushing string passages, with the cellos and basses scrubbing away at near-impossible speed, which give the piece its famous momentum and brilliance.

Amid the excitement, listen for the broad, warm second theme, a moment of lyrical breadth before the rush resumes. And listen, towards the end, for a strange, sliding descent built on the whole-tone scale: music with no real ‘home’ note, conjuring the magic and menace of the sorcerer Chernomor; it would have sounded startlingly novel in 1842. The whole thing rockets to a jubilant close. It is short, dazzling and irresistible: the perfect concert opener.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–1893

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35

35 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto is now one of the best-loved of all concertos, but it was born in crisis and greeted with abuse. He wrote it with astonishing speed in the spring of 1878, by the shores of Lake Geneva at Clarens, where he had fled to recover from the catastrophe of his brief, disastrous marriage. He was helped and inspired by his former pupil, the violinist Iosif Kotek, and by the example of Lalo’s *Symphonie espagnole*, and the concerto poured out of him in less than a month, music of irrepressible melodic generosity and high spirits that gives no hint of the misery surrounding its composition.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

After a brief orchestral introduction, listen for the soloist's entrance with the first movement's great main theme, one of Tchaikovsky's most singing, expansive melodies, which the violin then spins into ever more brilliant figuration. The movement is huge and generous, building to a formidable solo cadenza (written by Tchaikovsky himself) before a thrilling close.

The slow movement (Canzonetta) is a tender, slightly melancholy song, muted and intimate, framed by gentle woodwind, a moment of Slavic wistfulness. It leads without a break, via a sudden surge, straight into the finale: a wild, foot-stamping rondo on Russian dance themes, full of whirling energy and earthy high spirits (this is the movement Hanslick found vulgar; listen and judge for yourself!). Throughout, savour the combination Tchaikovsky balances so perfectly: heart-on-sleeve melody, glittering virtuosity, and the irrepressible pulse of Russian dance, driving to an exhilarating finish.

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

40 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Brahms's Fourth is his last symphony and, for many, his greatest, a work of autumnal grandeur and tragic power that crowns the symphonic tradition he had inherited from Beethoven and carried forward. He wrote it in 1884 and 1885 at Müzzschlag in the Austrian Alps, and conducted the premiere himself in October 1885 with the famous court orchestra of Meiningen. Beforehand he tried it out on close friends in a two-piano arrangement, unsure whether it was worth an orchestra, but it was warmly received and its stature was soon recognised, and it is now seen as the summit of his art.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens with one of Brahms's most beautiful and immediately affecting themes: a gently falling, sighing melody in the violins that seems to begin in mid-thought. Listen for its autumnal lyricism, and for how Brahms builds from it a movement of great sweep and, by the end, tragic power.

The second movement (Andante) opens with a haunting, archaic-sounding horn call and unfolds as a noble, song-like meditation. The third movement is the surprise: a genuine boisterous scherzo (rare for Brahms), brilliant and exuberant, with triangle and piccolo adding sparkle: a burst of almost rowdy energy. Then comes the extraordinary finale: listen for the stern theme stated at the very start by the wind and brass, and then for how Brahms repeats its bass pattern over and over, some thirty times, building an ever-changing set of variations above it. Listen for the desolate central section with its great flute solo, and for the way the music gathers itself and drives, with mounting intensity, to a shattering close in the minor, one of the most powerful and uncompromising endings in all of symphonic music.

Tonight's artists

Augustin Hadelich *violin*

Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto asks for everything at once: soaring lyricism, dazzling virtuosity, and the earthy energy of Russian dance, all delivered with a beautiful tone that can ride above a full orchestra. Augustin Hadelich, renowned for the warmth and refinement of his sound as much as for his formidable technique, is an ideal advocate, able to make the concerto sing as well as sparkle, and to give its once-derided finale all its exhilarating drive.

Augustin Hadelich, born in Italy in 1984 to German parents and now an American citizen, is one of the most acclaimed violinists in the world. After a childhood on a Tuscan farm, and recovery from a serious fire injury in his teens, he trained at the Juilliard School and rose to international prominence by winning the gold medal at the 2006 Indianapolis Competition. A Grammy Award winner with a vast repertoire and a celebrated discography, he is admired for the beauty and refinement of his tone, his flawless technique and his deep musical intelligence. He joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music in 2021. His combination of brilliance and lyricism makes him an ideal interpreter of the great Romantic concertos.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-05-07-stutzmann>

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