

Gabetta's Martinů, and Ravel's Daphnis

Wednesday, May 13, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Santtu-Matias Rouvali, conductor · Sol Gabetta, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>In Nature's Realm, Op. 91</i>	14'
2	MARTINŮ 1890–1959 <i>Cello Concerto No. 1, H. 196</i>	30'
3	STRAVINSKY 1882–1971 <i>Jeu de cartes</i>	23'
4	RAVEL 1875–1937 <i>Suite No. 2 from 'Daphnis et Chloé'</i>	17'
TOTAL MUSIC		84'

Antonin Dvorak

1841–1904

In Nature's Realm, Op. 91

14 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In 1891 Dvořák conceived a cycle of three concert overtures on the grand theme of 'Nature, Life and Love', meant to be played together as a single arc. He later separated them and gave each its own title and opus number: *In Nature's Realm* (Op. 91), the boisterous *Carnival* (Op. 92), and the dark, jealous *Othello* (Op. 93). The first of the three, heard tonight, is a serene and radiant hymn to the natural world, written at the height of Dvořák's powers, just before he left for his celebrated years in America.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, at the very start, for the quiet, expectant opening over a sustained low note, out of which the 'nature motif' gently emerges, along with little flecks of flute and oboe that suggest birdsong waking in the woods. This rocking motif is the seed of the whole overture; follow it as it returns again and again, passed around the orchestra in different registers and colours.

The theme has a folk-like, call-across-the-valley quality, and the overture grows from its tranquil opening into warm, full-orchestra climaxes before settling back into peace. Enjoy the glowing Dvořákian orchestration (the warm horns, the singing strings, the woodwind birdcalls) and the overall mood of contented communion with nature. It is a short, gracious tone-poem of the outdoors.

Bohuslav Martinů

1890–1959

Cello Concerto No. 1, H. 196

30 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Martinů's First Cello Concerto belongs to his vibrant Paris years and, as the orchestra's own note puts it, 'an irresistible example of 1930s neoclassical music.' He composed it in 1930, in his home town of Polička, at a time when he was deeply fascinated by Baroque music: by the drive and motor-rhythm of the concerto grosso, and that energy courses through the piece. It had a long evolution: Martinů reworked it in Paris in 1939 and revised it again in Nice in 1955, the version usually heard today.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the Baroque-inspired drive of the outer movements: the busy, motoric rhythms, the sense of constant forward motion, and the bracing dialogue between cello and orchestra. Martinů treats the orchestra almost like a Baroque concerto grosso, with the soloist weaving in and out of the texture. Notice his very personal orchestral sound, glittering and syncopated.

The heart of the concerto is its slow movement, a broad, deeply felt song for the cello, lyrical and warm, where Martinů's Czech soul shows through the neoclassical surface. And listen for the soloist's virtuosity throughout, including the cadenza. The cello sings almost continuously; let Gabetta's warm, communicative tone guide you through a concerto that is by turns athletic, tender and exhilarating.

Igor Stravinsky

1882–1971

Jeu de cartes

23 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Jeu de cartes ('The Card Game') is one of the wittiest products of Stravinsky's neoclassical period, a ballet 'in three deals' from 1936, in which the dancers are playing cards in a game of poker. Across three 'deals,' hands are played out on the green baize table, and the action is repeatedly thrown into chaos by the perfidious Joker, who fancies himself invincible because he can become any card he likes, until he is finally defeated by a royal flush. It was choreographed by George Balanchine for the American Ballet and premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1937, with Stravinsky conducting.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the recurring 'shuffling' fanfare, a strutting little march that opens the ballet and announces the start of each new 'deal,' like the cards being dealt afresh. Around it, Stravinsky spins crisp, brilliant, constantly changing music full of rhythmic snap and bright orchestral colour.

Half the fun is catching the musical jokes: listen for sudden quotations and parodies of other composers' music (a flash of Rossini, a whiff of a Strauss waltz), which Stravinsky tosses in with a wink as the Joker plays his tricks. The music is fast, witty and unsentimental, full of unexpected turns and deadpan humour. You don't need to follow the card-game plot in detail; simply enjoy the dazzling craftsmanship, the rhythmic energy, and the sly, knowing wit of Stravinsky the great musical gamesman.

Maurice Ravel

1875–1937

Suite No. 2 from 'Daphnis et Chloé'

17 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Daphnis et Chloé is Ravel's longest score, and many consider it his masterpiece. It is a vast 'choreographic symphony,' composed between 1909 and 1912 for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, retelling an ancient Greek pastoral romance about the shepherd Daphnis and his beloved Chloé. From the full hour-long ballet Ravel drew two concert suites; the Second Suite, published in 1913, gathers the ballet's glorious final scene and has become one of the most beloved showpieces in the orchestral repertoire, a demonstration of Ravel's genius as perhaps the greatest of all orchestrators.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening 'Daybreak' is one of the supreme sunrises in music. Listen for the rippling, rising figures in the woodwinds and harps (flowing water and dripping dew), over which the strings slowly unfurl a great, broad melody as the sun climbs; the music swells in a vast crescendo of pure orchestral light, dotted with flute birdsong. It is gradual, sensuous and overwhelming.

In the central 'Pantomime,' listen for the long, languorous solo flute, representing the panpipes of Pan, one of the most beautiful and demanding flute solos in the repertoire. Then comes the 'Danse générale': listen for the driving, lopsided rhythm (you can almost feel the music tripping over itself), the whirling strings and woodwinds, and the crashing percussion, as the celebration builds to a frenzied, intoxicating close. Throughout, marvel at Ravel's orchestration, the sheer range and subtlety of colour that makes this music shimmer and blaze like nothing else.

Tonight's artists

Sol Gabetta *cello*

Martinů's First Cello Concerto needs a soloist with both athletic brilliance for its driving, Baroque-inspired outer movements and a warm, singing tone for its tender slow movement. Sol Gabetta, celebrated for the communicative joy and richness of her playing, is an ideal advocate for this under-played gem, bringing star charisma to a concerto that deserves to be heard far more often.

Sol Gabetta, born in Argentina in 1981 to a family of French, Argentine and Russian heritage, is one of the most charismatic cellists before the public today. A prodigy who began on the violin before settling on the cello, she won her first competition at ten and rose to international prominence after taking the Crédit Suisse Young Artist Award in 2004. Since then she has appeared with the world's leading orchestras and conductors, recorded extensively for Sony and Deutsche Grammophon, and founded her own acclaimed chamber-music festival, Solsberg, in Switzerland, where she lives and teaches. Admired for the warmth, intensity and communicative joy of her playing, she is also a noted champion of contemporary music, with concertos written for her by composers including Pēteris Vasks. She performs on a 1730 Venetian cello by Matteo Goffriller.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-05-13-rouvali>

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