

Ehnes Plays Barber, and Beethoven's Eighth

Thursday, June 11, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Fabio Luisi, conductor · James Ehnes, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	VIVALDI 1678–1741 <i>Sinfonia in B minor, 'Al Santo Sepolcro', RV 169</i>	6'
2	BARBER 1910–1981 <i>Violin Concerto, Op. 14</i>	24'
3	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93</i>	26'
TOTAL MUSIC		56'

Antonio Vivaldi

1678–1741

6 minutes

Sinfonia in B minor, 'Al Santo Sepolcro', RV 169

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, in the opening Adagio, for the grinding dissonances and ‘sighing’ suspensions (notes that clash and only slowly resolve), which create the work’s atmosphere of grief and solemnity. This is music of darkness and weight, the strings moving in slow, heavy harmonies, deliberately archaic and intense; it sounds almost nothing like the Vivaldi of the popular concertos.

The second section is a short fugal Allegro, faster and more contrapuntal, the instruments imitating one another, but it too keeps to the prevailing seriousness of B minor rather than breaking into brightness. The whole piece is over in a few minutes, but it leaves a powerful impression: a glimpse of Vivaldi the devout church musician, capable of music as grave and moving as anything in the Baroque. Let its hushed solemnity set the mood before the concert opens out.

Samuel Barber

1910–1981

24 minutes

Violin Concerto, Op. 14

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens immediately with the solo violin singing one of Barber's most beautiful long melodies, warm, lyrical and unhurried, with no orchestral preamble. Listen for the sheer songfulness of the writing, and for the way the music unfolds with romantic generosity, building to passionate climaxes.

The slow movement (Andante) is introduced by a plaintive solo oboe, before the violin enters with music of deep, elegiac tenderness, close in spirit to Barber's famous Adagio. This is the emotional heart of the concerto, rapt and song-like. Then comes the surprise: the finale (Presto in moto perpetuo) is a brief, furious whirlwind: a few minutes of relentless, rapid figuration for the soloist, glittering and breathless, dancing to a sudden, abrupt end. Listen for the dramatic gear-change from the lyrical warmth of the first two movements to this dazzling burst of pure motion, the 'two halves' that once caused such trouble, and that make the concerto so satisfying to hear.

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

26 minutes

Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement bursts straight in, without introduction, on a genial, dancing theme. Listen for its Haydnesque good humour, but also for the sudden, almost violent sforzando accents and dynamic surprises that are pure Beethoven.

The second movement is one of his great musical jokes: a fast, ticking Allegretto scherzando, said to parody the steady tick of the newly invented metronome, a nod to Beethoven's friend Mälzel, its inventor. Listen for the staccato 'tick-tock' chords in the winds under the chattering tune. In place of a slow movement, the third is an old-fashioned, slightly gruff Tempo di Menuetto, with a lovely horn-and-clarinet trio. The finale is a whirlwind of energy. Listen, partway through, for the notorious moment when a single loud, 'wrong' note (a sudden bark of C-

sharp) erupts out of nowhere, derailing the music; Beethoven keeps returning to and ‘explaining’ this joke right up to the riotous, hammered-home ending.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-06-11-luisi>

Version 3, 30 September 2026