

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Mind the Gap: Marsalis, Dawson and the Black American Voice

Thursday, June 18, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Antony Hermus, conductor · Miro Petkov, trumpet · Davóne Tines,
bass-baritone

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	NABORS b. 1991 <i>Pulse</i>	12'
2	MARSALIS b. 1961 <i>Trumpet Concerto</i>	35'
3	TRADITIONAL <i>I'm Troubled in Mind (orch. Thomas Beijer)</i>	5'
4	KERN 1885–1945 <i>Ol' Man River (orch. Thomas Beijer)</i>	5'
5	DAWSON 1899–1990 <i>Negro Folk Symphony</i>	35'
TOTAL MUSIC		92'

Brian Raphael Nabors

b. 1991

Pulse

12 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Pulse, composed in 2017 and expanded for full orchestra in 2019 (when the Nashville Symphony gave the premiere), is a vivid orchestral curtain-raiser by the young American composer Brian Raphael Nabors. As its title suggests, the piece is all about rhythm: Nabors describes it as ‘an episodic rhapsody’ exploring different phases and colourful variants of rhythm, all held together by a single, unwavering pulse that runs through the whole work like a heartbeat. Each episode, he says, is meant to evoke a different scene of life: a buzzing modern city, a teeming wilderness, the endless depths of the ocean.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the pulse itself, the steady, driving rhythmic engine that underpins the entire piece and never lets up. Around it, Nabors spins a sequence of contrasting ‘episodes,’ so listen for the changes of scene: bustling, syncopated passages full of urban energy; broader, more atmospheric stretches; and the colourful, jazz- and gospel-

tinged harmonies that flavour his orchestral writing. It is bright, kinetic and immediately engaging, music designed to grab the ear and set the body moving.

Wynton Marsalis

b. 1961

Trumpet Concerto

35 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Wynton Marsalis's Trumpet Concerto is a major recent addition to the repertoire from a musician uniquely placed to write it, one of the supreme trumpeters of our age, equally at home in jazz and classical music. Written for the principal trumpet of the Cleveland Orchestra, Michael Sachs, and co-commissioned by the Cleveland Orchestra, the Verbier Festival and the London Symphony Orchestra, it received its premiere in Cleveland in April 2023. It is a large, ambitious work (six movements, around thirty-five minutes) in which Marsalis pours his whole musical world into the classical concerto form: New Orleans jazz, the blues, bebop, Louis Armstrong and the French trumpet tradition all rub shoulders with symphonic development and virtuoso display.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is a big, multi-movement journey, so settle in and follow its changing moods. Listen for the way Marsalis blends idioms: passages of bluesy, vocal lyricism (the trumpet ‘singing’ or ‘crying’ in the manner of a great jazz soloist) set against more formal, classically-developed orchestral writing; bright, swinging, syncopated music alongside reflective, soulful slow movements.

Keep your ear on the solo trumpet’s astonishing range of expression, from brilliant, high-flying virtuosity to muted, intimate, almost speech-like phrases, and the bent notes and growls of the jazz tradition. Marsalis asks the soloist to be both a classical virtuoso and a jazz storyteller. Listen, too, for echoes of New Orleans, of the blues and of Louis Armstrong woven into the symphonic fabric. It is a concerto that celebrates the trumpet in all its guises, and the deep common roots of America’s classical and vernacular music.

Traditional

I'm Troubled in Mind (orch. Thomas Beijer)

5 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

'I'm Troubled in Mind' is an African American spiritual, one of the sacred folk songs born among enslaved people in the American South, whose simple, profound melodies and texts of suffering and hope are among the deepest roots of American music. Like all spirituals it is credited to 'Traditional': its original creators are unknown, the song handed down through generations before being written down and arranged for the concert platform.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

This is a short, deeply felt song, so simply let the melody and the voice carry you. Listen for the plain, aching beauty of the spiritual's tune, and for the weight of feeling the bass-baritone brings to its words of trouble and faith. Beijer's orchestration will frame the voice in warm instrumental colour; the art here is in restraint and sincerity rather than display: a moment of intimate, sorrowing song amid the larger orchestral canvases of the evening.

Jerome Kern

1885–1945

Ol' Man River (orch. Thomas Beijer)

5 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

‘Ol’ Man River’ is the great anthem of Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II’s groundbreaking 1927 musical *Show Boat*, and one of the most famous songs in the American theatre. Sung in the show by a Black dockworker, it contrasts the unending, indifferent flow of the Mississippi (‘he just keeps rollin’ along’) with the suffering and toil of the people who labour on its banks. With its hymn-like melody and its undertow of weariness and quiet protest, it transcended its origins to become a song of endurance and dignity, indelibly associated with the great bass-baritone Paul Robeson, who made it his own.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the broad, rolling melody, which seems to flow like the great river it describes, in long, sweeping phrases that build to the famous climactic line. The power of ‘Ol’ Man River’ lies in its combination of nobility and sorrow: a tune of hymn-like grandeur carrying words of hardship and endurance. In the hands of a great bass-baritone like Davóne Tines, heir to the Robeson tradition, listen for the

dignity, depth and quiet defiance he brings to it: a show tune that, sung this way, becomes something close to a sacred song.

William L. Dawson

1899–1990

Negro Folk Symphony

35 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

William L. Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* is a landmark of American music, and its rediscovery in recent years has been one of the happier stories in the concert hall. Composed in 1934, it was given a triumphant premiere that year by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, with a performance at Carnegie Hall soon after. Audiences broke with convention to applaud after the second movement and gave standing ovations at the end, and the work made Dawson one of the very first African American composers (after William Grant Still and Florence Price) to have a symphony championed by a major orchestra. Yet it then fell into neglect for decades, and is only now reclaiming its place.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, throughout, for the spirituals at the symphony's heart, folk melodies that surface in the orchestra, sometimes plainly, sometimes grandly developed. Dawson described a motif representing the link 'taken out of a human chain when the first African was taken from the shores of his native land'; listen for it in the horn at the very start of the first movement.

The first movement, 'The Bond of Africa,' moves from darkness and longing to surging energy. The slow movement, 'Hope in the Night,' is the emotional core, brooding and sorrowful, evoking the suffering of the enslaved, with a long, aching central song. The finale bursts out in jubilation, driving the symphony to an exuberant, life-affirming close; listen for the African-inspired rhythmic vitality Dawson added after his travels. It is music of great sweep and heart, and a moving end to an evening celebrating the Black American voice.

Tonight's artists

Miro Petkov *trumpet*

There is a special pleasure in hearing a concerto soloist drawn from within the orchestra's own ranks. Miro Petkov, the Concertgebouw Orchestra's principal trumpet, takes on Wynton Marsalis's hugely demanding concerto, a work that asks for classical polish and jazz-inflected expressiveness in equal measure, bringing an insider's blend with the orchestra to a piece written to show off everything the trumpet can do.

Miro Petkov is the principal trumpet of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, one of the most coveted brass chairs in the world. As principal he leads the orchestra's trumpet section and takes its most exposed solo lines; here he steps forward from the ranks of the orchestra to take the demanding solo part in Wynton Marsalis's Trumpet Concerto.

Davóne Tines *bass-baritone*

Davóne Tines is the ideal voice for the heart of this programme. A bass-baritone who has made the spiritual and the legacy of Paul Robeson central to his artistry (his album Robeson is a direct homage), he brings depth, dignity and dramatic power to ‘I’m Troubled in Mind’ and to ‘Ol’ Man River,’ the song Robeson made immortal. In his hands these become not period pieces but living statements, connecting the festival’s symphonic works to the human voice at the source of the tradition.

Davóne Tines, born in 1986, is an American bass-baritone celebrated as one of the most compelling and original artists of his generation: a singer, creator and curator who has redefined what a recital and an opera role can be. A Harvard and Juilliard graduate, he has created roles in new operas by composers including John Adams, Terence Blanchard and Matthew Aucoin, and has worked closely with the director Peter Sellars. His acclaimed 2024 album Robeson pays tribute to the pioneering bass-baritone and activist Paul Robeson, and his work consistently engages with Black history, spirituals and social justice. He was awarded the Chanel Next Prize in 2024.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-06-18-hermus>

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