

Ólafsson's 'Emperor' and Prokofiev's Triumph

Wednesday, August 26, 2026 · 20:00 · Concertgebouw
Santtu-Matias Rouvali, conductor · Víkingur Ólafsson, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 ('Emperor')</i>	40'
2	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 100</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		85'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

40 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 ('Emperor')

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is unmistakable. Three weighty orchestral chords, each crowned by a sweeping solo flourish, throw the door open before the movement proper has even begun, a gesture of breathtaking confidence that frames the entire work. When the orchestra finally settles into the main theme, listen for its martial, dotted rhythms and the way Beethoven keeps the music striding forward; the piano, when it returns, decorates and extends rather than merely competes.

The slow movement (Adagio un poco mosso) is one of Beethoven's most rapt creations: a hushed, hymn-like melody in the remote key of B major, the orchestra muted and prayerful, the piano entering with music of extraordinary tenderness. Then comes the magical hinge of the whole concerto: as the slow movement dies away, the harmony sinks by a semitone, the piano quietly tries out a fragment of a new tune, hesitates, and then suddenly bursts into the exuberant Rondo finale without a break. That dancing, off-beat main theme, hurled out by the soloist, drives the rest of the piece. Keep your ear on the very end,

where the music seems to wind down to almost nothing over quiet repeated timpani strokes before the piano and orchestra leap back to life for a jubilant final flourish.

Sergei Prokofiev

45 minutes

1891–1953

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, Op. 100

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony opens not with fireworks but with breadth: a spacious Andante in which a long, noble theme unfolds on flute and bassoon, gradually drawing in the whole orchestra. Listen for how Prokofiev builds to a shattering brass-and-percussion climax at the movement's close: the 'grandeur of the human spirit' made audible.

The second movement is a glittering, mechanical scherzo (Allegro marcato), its restless clockwork theme driven by an insistent ostinato. It is brilliant and slightly sinister, full of the toccata-like motion Prokofiev loved, with a quicker central section before the machine grinds back into gear. The slow movement (Adagio) is the symphony's emotional core, a grieving, wide-spanning lament whose beauty repeatedly clouds over into something darker and more anguished; here the war's cost seems to be felt directly.

The finale begins with a hushed backward glance at the symphony's opening before launching a bustling, good-humoured Allegro giocoso, the cellos setting off a jaunty tune. Keep listening past the high spirits: in the closing pages the music accelerates and the orchestra's gleam takes on a harsh, almost manic glint, strings whirring and percussion clattering, so that the final triumph arrives with a steely, ambiguous edge entirely characteristic of Prokofiev.



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