

Dvořák's Seventh and Bartók's Bluebeard

Thursday, November 5, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Klaus Mäkelä, conductor · Gerald Finley, Bluebeard · Jennifer Johnston, Judith

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DVORAK 1841–1904 <i>Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70</i>	40'
2	BARTÓK 1881–1945 <i>Duke Bluebeard's Castle, Op. 11, Sz. 48</i>	60'
TOTAL MUSIC		100'

Antonin Dvorak

1841–1904

Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70

40 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement begins in shadow: a brooding, restless theme stealing in low on violas and cellos (Dvořák said it occurred to him as a train carrying Czech patriots steamed into Prague station). Listen for the tension between this dark first idea and a warmer, more lyrical second theme, and for the movement's tautness. It is among the most concentrated and dramatic Dvořák ever wrote, ending not in triumph but in a quiet, ominous fade.

The slow movement (*Poco adagio*) is a deep, song-like meditation, opening with a serene wind chorale and rising to impassioned climaxes; note the beautiful horn and woodwind solos that grace it. The third-movement Scherzo is the most overtly Czech music here: a lilting, cross-rhythmed dance with the swing of a furiant, framing a gentler, pastoral trio. The finale gathers the symphony's tragic energies and drives them forward with mounting intensity; listen for the hard-won turn, only in the very final bars, from stormy D minor into a blazing D major, a victory wrested, at the last possible moment, from darkness.

Béla Bartók

1881–1945

Duke Bluebeard's Castle, Op. 11, Sz. 48

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opera is built around the opening of the seven doors, and Bartók gives each its own unmistakable music and colour; follow them, and you follow the drama.

Listen first to the dark, brooding opening, rooted in a shadowy F#, and to the spoken or sung prologue's invitation to look 'inward.' As Judith demands the keys, each door reveals a tableau: the **torture chamber** (door one), with shuddering strings and a stabbing dissonance, blood seeping through every vision; the **armoury** (door two); the glittering **treasury** (door three), and notice how a blood-red stain taints even the jewels. The **secret garden** (door four) brings lush, fragrant music; then comes the opera's overwhelming central moment, the **fifth door**: it opens onto Bluebeard's vast domains, and the full orchestra erupts in a blazing, organ-capped C major of shattering brilliance, one of the great coups de théâtre in all opera. Listen for how Judith, even here, sees blood on the clouds.

From this radiant summit the music darkens steadily. The sixth door reveals a still **lake of tears**, hushed and desolate; and behind the seventh, against Bluebeard's pleading, Judith finds his three former wives, not dead but enshrined, and must take her place among them. Listen for the heartbreaking close, as Bluebeard is left utterly alone and the music sinks back into the darkness from which it came, the castle's brief light extinguished forever.



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