

Sheku's Saint-Saëns and 'Pictures at an Exhibition'

Thursday, December 17, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Semyon Bychkov, conductor · Sheku Kanneh-Mason, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	ADAMS b. 1947 <i>Frenzy</i>	19'
2	SAINT-SAËNS 1835–1921 <i>Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33</i>	19'
3	MUSSORGSKY 1839–1881 <i>Pictures at an Exhibition (orchestration Ravel)</i>	33'
TOTAL MUSIC		71'

John Adams

b. 1947

Frenzy

19 minutes

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Frenzy lives up to its name: come ready for momentum and brilliance. Listen for the relentless rhythmic energy that drives the piece forward, and for Adams's dazzling, kaleidoscopic orchestration: the way ideas are tossed around the orchestra, woodwinds and brass flashing against churning strings and busy percussion.

Though continuous, the work has the shape of a compact symphony, so listen for its changes of pace and character: passages of headlong drive giving way to broader, more lyrical or mysterious episodes before the energy regathers. Adams is a master of the long build, and of sudden shifts of harmonic colour that light the music up from within. Simply follow the surging, restless energy and the sheer orchestral dazzle of one of today's most communicative composers writing at full tilt.

Camille Saint-Saëns

19 minutes

1835–1921

Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There is no orchestral introduction: after a single crisp chord, the cello bursts straight in with the surging, agitated main theme, one of the great concerto openings, immediately gripping. Listen for how this restless A-minor music drives the first section forward, the soloist rarely silent.

The magic of the piece is its seamlessness. Notice how the agitation gives way, without a real break, to the central section: a delicate, courtly minuet, the orchestra playing a graceful, slightly antique dance under which the cello muses and decorates, a moment of poise and charm at the work's heart. Then the music gathers itself again and the opening energy returns, leading to new material and a broad, singing melody before the finale. Keep your ear on the cello line throughout: Saint-Saëns keeps it almost continuously in song, and the whole concerto unfolds as a single, beautifully paced arc from its stormy opening to its triumphant close.

Modest Mussorgsky

33 minutes

1839–1881

Pictures at an Exhibition (orchestration Ravel)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece is a gallery walk, and the recurring **Promenade** is your guide, first heard at the very start on solo trumpet, then returning between several pictures, changing mood and colour to reflect the composer's state of mind as he moves on.

Follow the pictures themselves, each a vivid character study: **Gnomus**, a lurching, grotesque dwarf; **The Old Castle**, a melancholy troubadour's song carried by the alto saxophone; the chattering children of the **Tuileries**; the heavy, trudging ox-cart **Bydło**; the **Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks**, all twittering pizzicato and trills; the two Jewish figures of '**Samuel**' **Goldenberg and Schmuyle**, one pompous, one whining; the bustling **Marketplace at Limoges**; the eerie **Catacombs**; the witch **Baba Yaga** tearing through the air in her flying mortar. Listen for how this last picture drives without a break straight into the finale,

The Great Gate of Kiev, where Hartmann's design for a grand city gate becomes a blazing, bell-crowned hymn, the Promenade theme transformed into overwhelming splendour to bring the work to its magnificent close.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-12-17-bychkov>

Version 3, 30 September 2026