

Gabetta's Rococo Variations and Mozart's 39th

Wednesday, December 23, 2026 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Klaus Mäkelä, conductor · Sol Gabetta, cello

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	ARENSKY 1861–1906 <i>Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky, Op. 35a</i>	15'
2	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33</i>	18'
3	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543</i>	30'
TOTAL MUSIC		63'

Anton Arensky

1861–1906

15 minutes

Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky, Op. 35a

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First, fix the theme in your ear: after a brief introduction, the strings present Tchaikovsky's 'Legend' melody (simple, hymn-like and a little melancholy), which will underlie everything that follows. Then enjoy how Arensky transforms it across the variations.

Listen for the changing characters: hushed and prayerful in some variations, light and dancing in others, with passages of rich, warm harmony that show off the velvety sound of a good string orchestra. Notice how he varies the mood and texture as well as the melody: now a delicate filigree above the tune, now a darker, more impassioned treatment, now a return to the theme's original serenity. The whole is short, beautifully proportioned and deeply felt, ending as gently as it began, a quiet act of remembrance before the programme's brighter music.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

18 minutes

1840–1893

Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

After a brief orchestral introduction, the cello presents the elegant ‘Rococo’ theme, poised, courtly and Mozartean, and from it the variations unfold, each a different character study. Listen for the way Tchaikovsky (and his cellist-collaborator) make ever greater demands on the soloist: rippling runs, high lyrical singing, rapid passagework, and graceful ornamentation, all wrapped in light, transparent orchestration that never covers the solo line.

Keep your ear out for the contrasts between variations, some brisk and brilliant, others tender and songful. The slow, minor-key variation near the heart of the work is especially beautiful, a moment of real Tchaikovskian melancholy amid the Classical sparkle. And listen for the dazzling final variation and coda, where the cello takes off in a display of virtuosity that brings the piece to an exhilarating close. Throughout, this is Tchaikovsky on his best behaviour, charm and brilliance in perfect balance: a Romantic composer’s heartfelt bow to the age of Mozart.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

30 minutes

1756–1791

Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen first to the grand slow introduction (Adagio): stately dotted rhythms and sweeping scales, shadowed by surprising dissonances, that create a sense of expectation before the music relaxes into the flowing, graceful main Allegro, with its gently rocking themes and the warm glow of the oboe-less woodwind.

The second movement (Andante con moto) is serene and songful, but listen for the sudden, dramatic clouding-over in its middle, where the music turns briefly stormy and minor before the calm returns. The third-movement Minuet is robust and genial, and its trio is one of Mozart’s most famous passages: a rustic, Ländler-like dance led by the clarinets, evoking village music-making. The finale (Allegro) is a sparkling, Haydnesque

romp built almost entirely from a single quicksilver theme announced at the start; listen for how Mozart spins the whole movement from this one idea, full of wit and headlong energy, ending the symphony, and our programme, with irrepressible high spirits.



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2026-12-23-makela>

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