

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Yunchan Lim plays Liszt, Iván Fischer conducts Schubert's 'Great'

Thursday, January 7, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Iván Fischer, conductor · Yunchan Lim, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	WEBER 1786–1826 <i>Overture to 'Der Freischütz', J. 277</i>	
2	LISZT 1811–1886 <i>Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major, S. 125</i>	22'
3	SCHUBERT 1797–1828 <i>Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944 ('Great')</i>	55'
TOTAL MUSIC		77'

Carl Maria von Weber

1786–1826

Overture to 'Der Freischütz', J. 277

ABOUT THE WORK

Der Freischütz ('The Marksman', or 'The Freeshooter') had its first performance at the Schauspielhaus in Berlin on 18 June 1821, and it is generally counted as the first German Romantic opera. Weber and his librettist Friedrich Kind took the story from a ghost tale by Johann August Apel: a young huntsman, Max, must win a shooting contest in order to marry Agathe, loses his nerve, and lets himself be talked into casting magic bullets in the Wolf's Glen with the help of Samiel, the Black Huntsman, who is the devil under another name. The opera has spoken dialogue between its numbers, in the manner of German popular theatre, but the music that surrounds the supernatural scenes was like nothing audiences had heard. Its success went beyond anything Weber had hoped for. Vienna staged it the same year, and within a short time it had been taken up by theatres across the German lands and well beyond them.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The overture begins with slow swells from the whole orchestra, like a question left hanging. Then comes its best-known passage: a chorale for the horns over quiet strings, the sound of hunting horns softened into something close to a hymn, and an image of the forest at peace.

The peace does not last. The strings begin to shiver in tremolo, the timpani throb softly, and an uneasy diminished seventh chord settles over the music. In the opera that harmony is tied to Samiel. Out of it grows the fast section, agitated music in C minor taken from Max's aria in the first act.

The contrast, when it comes, is a broad and confident melody in the major: the theme of Agathe's aria in the second act. Notice that it does not win at once. The low strings and brass answer the woodwinds with doubt, the storm returns, and there is a long silence before the full orchestra lands on a blazing C major chord and Agathe's melody comes back to carry the overture home.

Franz Liszt

1811–1886

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major, S. 125

22 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Liszt's two piano concertos were both a long time in the making, and the second took longest of all. He drafted it in 1839, in the middle of the touring years that made him the most famous pianist in Europe, and then put the manuscript away for about a decade. When he took it up again he was living in Weimar as court music director and had turned his main attention from playing to composing. He revised the concerto several times over, and the last round of changes was not finished until 1861.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There is no grand entrance. The concerto opens quietly in the woodwinds, with a slow, dreaming phrase led by the clarinet that drifts between two unrelated chords. Keep hold of this melody, because nearly everything grows from it. The piano comes in almost shyly, decorating it with arpeggios.

The calm is broken by a fast, agitated section that does the job of a scherzo, full of hammered octaves and driving rhythm. When it burns out, listen for one of the loveliest

pages in the work: a solo cello sings the opening theme while the piano accompanies, in a style that owes a good deal to Italian opera.

The energy builds again, and the opening melody returns in its most surprising form, as a full-blooded march for the whole orchestra. Some critics have found this transformation vulgar. Others hear it as the masterstroke of the piece, the moment that brings the music firmly back to its home key of A major after a long journey away from it. From there the concerto presses on to a fast and brilliant close, with the pianist finally given room for glittering runs up and down the keyboard.

Franz Schubert

1797–1828

Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944 ('Great')

55 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

For a long time this symphony was thought to be a work of Schubert's last year, and the manuscript does carry the date March 1828. Scholars now agree that he began it in the summer of 1825 and had it fully scored by 1826. In a letter of 1824 he had already said that he meant to prepare the way to 'a grand symphony', and this is that work. The nickname 'Great'

was not his. It was first used simply to tell the piece apart from his earlier and shorter Symphony No. 6, the ‘Little’ C major, though it has long been understood as a description of the music’s scale and majesty. The numbering is unsettled too: English-speaking countries call it No. 9, while the current edition of the Deutsch catalogue of Schubert’s works lists it as No. 8.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony begins with two horns alone, in unison, playing a broad, calm melody. Its first three notes simply rise through a major third, and that small figure runs through the whole movement. The slow introduction is unusually long and complete in itself. It quickens without a break into the main Allegro, and at the very end of the movement the horn theme comes back in triumph with the full orchestra behind it.

The second movement, in A minor, moves at a steady walking pace over a march-like tread in the strings. It alternates twice with a warmer, more consoling theme in the major. Listen for the moment when the march builds to a harsh climax, breaks off into silence, and has to begin again quietly.

The Scherzo is on the same large scale as everything else: a stamping, energetic dance worked out at full length, with themes that keep slipping into waltz time. Its central Trio is a broad, swaying song for the woodwinds.

The finale starts with a fanfare of dotted rhythms and triplets and hardly pauses for breath afterwards. The second theme is announced by four repeated notes on the horns, which then become a marching tune over endlessly circling strings. A little later, at the start of the development, the woodwinds play a phrase that recalls the 'Ode to Joy' from Beethoven's Ninth. The four repeated notes return in the coda, hammered out by the whole orchestra, to bring the symphony to its close in C major.

Tonight's artists

Yunchan Lim *piano*

Yunchan Lim made his debut with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in January 2026 in Schumann's Piano Concerto, and returns a year later with a very different kind of Romantic concerto. Liszt's Second gives the soloist plenty to do, but much of it is listening work: accompanying a clarinet or a solo cello, taking over a melody from the orchestra and changing its character. It suits a pianist whose playing has been noticed as much for its imagination as for its technique, and who became the youngest winner of the Van Cliburn Competition in 2022.

Yunchan Lim, born in South Korea in 2004, became an international sensation in 2022 when, at the age of eighteen, he became the youngest ever winner of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The triumph, crowned by a now-legendary performance of Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto, was watched by millions online and announced a major new talent. Since then he has appeared with leading orchestras and in major recital halls around the world, and his debut studio album of Chopin's Études won a Gramophone Award. Admired for a maturity, seriousness and depth of musicianship well beyond his years, as well as for formidable technical command, he is widely regarded as one of the most exciting pianists to have emerged in a generation. This concert marks his debut with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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