

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Time's Echo Live: Schoenberg, Weinberg and Shostakovich's 'Babi Yar'

Friday, January 15, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Andrey Boreyko, conductor · Gregor Horsch, cello · Alexander Roslavets, bass · Laurens Symfonisch, choir

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	SCHOENBERG 1874–1951 <i>A Survivor from Warsaw, Op. 46</i>	7'
2	WEINBERG 1919–1996 <i>Fantasia for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 52</i>	19'
3	SHOSTAKOVICH 1906–1975 <i>Symphony No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 113 ('Babi Yar')</i>	60'
	TOTAL MUSIC	86'

Arnold Schoenberg

1874–1951

A Survivor from Warsaw, Op. 46

7 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

A Survivor from Warsaw lasts about seven minutes and is one of the most concentrated pieces Schoenberg ever wrote. He composed it in Los Angeles in August 1947, when he was seventy-two and in poor health, for a narrator, men's chorus and orchestra. The words are his own.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece is written with Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, but there is no need to follow the technique. The orchestra works in short, sharp gestures that illustrate the narrator's words almost as a film score would.

It opens with a trumpet call, the reveille, which returns through the piece like a memory that will not go away. Listen for the fanfares that go with the sergeant, and for the weeping figures in the violins when the narrator speaks of the groans of the beaten.

The narrator's part is neither sung nor simply spoken. Schoenberg wrote out its rhythm and its rise and fall, but asked that it should never settle into definite pitch.

When the prisoners count off, the music accelerates along with them, faster and louder, until the narrator compares the sound to a stampede of wild horses. At its peak the men's chorus enters with the Shema Yisroel. After the fragmented music and broken speech that have gone before, it is the only sustained singing in the piece, and the work ends with it.

Mieczysław Weinberg

1919–1996

Fantasia for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 52

19 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Mieczysław Weinberg knew at first hand the history that the other two works on this programme remember. A Polish Jew from Warsaw, he fled east when Germany invaded in 1939 and spent the rest of his life in the Soviet Union, where Shostakovich became his close friend and supporter. The safety he found there was never complete. The years after 1948 were hard for every serious Soviet composer, and harder for a Jewish one as official antisemitism grew, and early in 1953 Weinberg was arrested on trumped-up charges of Zionist agitation.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Fantasia plays without a break for a little under twenty minutes, and its shape is an arch. It begins slowly, gathers speed step by step to a fast central section, and then retraces its steps to end as quietly as it began.

After a short orchestral introduction of Romantic warmth, the cello enters with the main melody, a long, folk-like tune with a tinge of melancholy. Notice how lightly Weinberg scores the accompaniment, so that the soloist never has to force.

The next section is a little quicker and lighter on its feet, with the lilt of a dance. It leads to the central Allegro con fuoco, robust and vigorous music in which the cello has to work hard against the full orchestra.

The energy drains away into a cadenza for the cello alone, strong in gesture but still melancholy in mood. From there the music goes back the way it came: the lighter dance returns, then the opening melody, now gentler than before, and the piece fades into silence.

Dmitri Shostakovich

1906–1975

Symphony No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 113 ('Babi Yar')

60 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Babi Yar is a ravine on the edge of Kyiv. On 29 and 30 September 1941 the German occupiers shot some 34,000 Jews there, and the killing went on at the site until 1943. For years afterwards the Soviet authorities raised no memorial, and the fact that most of the victims were Jews went unspoken. In September 1961 the young poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko published a poem in the *Literaturnaya gazeta* that began from that absence and turned it into a denunciation of antisemitism, in Russia's past and in its present.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The sound of this symphony is like no other. There are no high voices: one bass soloist and a chorus of basses who sing almost throughout in unison, as a single massive voice, often repeating or answering the soloist. The vocal writing follows the rhythm of speech, in a manner that goes back to Mussorgsky, and the words are always in the foreground.

I. Babi Yar (Adagio). A bell tolls, and the voices begin with the poem's starting point: that no monument stands at Babi Yar. The soloist takes the poet's part, imagining himself in turn as Dreyfus, as a boy in the Białystok pogrom, and as Anne Frank, and the music moves through these scenes like episodes of an opera. Listen for the violence with which the orchestra breaks in on the quiet Anne Frank episode.

II. Humour (Allegretto). A raucous, mocking scherzo. Rulers have tried to buy humour, to kill it and to lock it up, and each time it gets away.

III. In the Store (Adagio). A slow, bare lament for the women who queue patiently in the shops. At its very end the chorus leaves its unison for two soft, harmonised chords, like an amen.

IV. Fears (Largo). The darkest music in the work, harmonically unsettled from its first bars. 'Fears are dying out in Russia', the chorus sings, in tones that suggest they are not dead yet. The mood lifts only once, for a parody of a Soviet marching song.

V. A Career (Allegretto). After so much darkness, two flutes open the finale with a gentle, almost innocent tune. The poem is an ironic attack on careerists and their cynical self-interest, and a tribute to those who do real creative

work whatever it costs them; bassoon and trumpets add their own sarcastic comments. The symphony ends softly and lyrically, with the bell that opened it sounding again in the last bars.

Tonight's artists

Gregor Horsch *cello*

The soloist in Weinberg's Fantasia comes from inside the orchestra. Gregor Horsch has led the Concertgebouw Orchestra's cello section since 1997, and here he steps forward in a piece that asks less for bravura than for a singing line and a feeling for half-lights. It is chamber music on a large scale, and it gains from being played by a cellist among his own colleagues.

Gregor Horsch, born in Germany in 1962, has been principal cellist of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra since 1997. He studied at the Freiburg University of Music and then at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he graduated with honours. Around the end of his studies he won a series of awards: the Pierre Fournier Award in London in 1988, a prize at the Scheveningen International Music Competition in 1989 and the Gaspar Cassadó competition in Florence in 1990. Before joining the Concertgebouw Orchestra he was principal cellist of the Netherlands Ballet Orchestra and of the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague.

Alexander Roslavets *bass*

The solo part of the Thirteenth Symphony is one of the longest and most exposed in the bass repertoire: the singer is on his feet for most of an hour, and has to be storyteller, satirist and mourner by turns. Alexander Roslavets brings to it a voice trained in the Russian operatic tradition and a stage career that takes in both Wagner's giants and Tchaikovsky's kings. The orchestra's announcement singles out his deep voice in both this symphony and Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw*.

Alexander Roslavets is a Belarusian bass. He studied at the Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory in St Petersburg and was a member of the Young Artists Opera Programme of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow from 2014 to 2016. In 2016 he joined the ensemble of the Hamburg State Opera, where his roles have included Fafner in Wagner's *Ring*, Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* and Prince Gremin in *Eugene Onegin*. As a guest he has sung the title role in Cherubini's *Ali Baba* at La Scala in Milan, King René in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and *Vodník* in Dvořák's *Rusalka* at the Glyndebourne Festival.

Laurens Symfonisch *choir*

Only the men of Laurens Symfonisch sing in this concert. In Schoenberg's piece they enter once, at the very end, with the Shema Yisroel. In Shostakovich's symphony they are present from the first line to the last, a chorus of low voices singing in unison as the collective voice beside the soloist.

Laurens Symfonisch is a young Rotterdam-based symphonic choir, formed to sing works that call for large choral forces and known until the 2010s as the Rotterdam Symphony Chorus. It is one of the choirs of Laurens Vocaal, under the artistic direction of Wiecher Mandemaker, and has sung with orchestras including the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-01-15-boreyko>

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