ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Klaus Mäkelä in Las Palmas: Schumann's 'Spring' Symphony and the Symphonie fantastique

Tuesday, February 2, 2027 · 19:30 · Auditorio Alfredo Kraus

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	**SCHUMANN** 1810–1856 *Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38 "Spring"*	33′
2	**BERLIOZ** 1803–1869 *Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14*	50′
	TOTAL MUSIC	83′

Robert Schumann

1810–1856

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38 "Spring"

33 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Until he was thirty Robert Schumann was known almost entirely as a composer for the piano. Then, in 1840, the year he married Clara Wieck after a long legal fight with her father, he wrote songs: well over a hundred of them in a few months. Clara wanted more. She thought his imagination needed a larger canvas than the keyboard, and wrote in her diary that her highest wish was to see him compose for orchestra.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Andante un poco maestoso, Allegro molto vivace. Trumpets and horns open with the summons, a short fanfare that has traditionally been linked with the last lines of Böttger's poem. The slow introduction that follows grows steadily brighter and faster until the fanfare, speeded up, turns into the main theme of the Allegro. Almost the whole movement is driven by that one rhythm. Near the end Schumann holds back a surprise: a new, songful melody that has not been heard before.

II. Larghetto. A long song for the violins, which the composer of so many recent songs lets unfold without hurry. It returns on the cellos and later on oboe and horn, each time with richer decoration around it. In the closing bars the trombones enter quietly with a solemn phrase. It turns out to be a preview of the next movement, which follows without a break.

III. Scherzo: Molto vivace. The trombones' phrase becomes a stamping dance in D minor. Schumann gives the movement two contrasting middle sections instead of one: the first a quick exchange between strings and wind in two beats to the bar, the second built on running scales. The ending slows and fades away instead of closing with a bang.

IV. Allegro animato e grazioso. A bold rising scale from the full orchestra introduces a light, tripping theme for the violins. The movement has the grace of a dance and something of Mendelssohn's quickness. Just before the opening music returns, everything stops for horn calls and a short flute cadenza, like birdsong heard out of doors. The coda gathers speed and ends the symphony in high spirits.

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14

50 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

On 11 September 1827 a company of English actors played Hamlet in Paris. In the audience was Hector Berlioz, twenty-three years old. He was overwhelmed twice over: by Shakespeare, and by the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, who played Ophelia. He wrote her letters, which went unanswered. She left Paris in 1829 without having met him.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Rêveries, Passions. A slow introduction of muted, sighing strings stands for the vague longings of the artist before he has seen his beloved. When the Allegro begins, violins and flute play the idée fixe almost unaccompanied: a long melody that climbs by stages and keeps falling back. Fix it in the ear here, since everything later depends on recognising it.

II. Un bal. Harps and shimmering strings set the scene for a waltz. In the middle of the dance the idée fixe drifts in on flute and oboe, as if the artist had caught sight of her across the room, and it returns once more, on a clarinet, before the brilliant close.

III. Scène aux champs. A cor anglais calls, and an oboe answers from offstage: two shepherds piping to each other. The long, calm movement that follows is troubled at its centre, when the beloved's theme returns over agitated low strings. At the end the cor anglais calls again. There is no answer, only distant thunder from four timpani.

IV. Marche au supplice. The artist dreams that he has killed his beloved and is being led to the scaffold. Muffled drums and growling low brass alternate with a blazing march for the full band. At the last moment a solo clarinet begins the idée fixe, his final thought of her, and a single crashing chord cuts it off.

V. Songe d'une nuit du sabbat. He sees his own funeral, attended by witches and monsters. The beloved's theme arrives squealing on the small clarinet, turned into a vulgar jig. Bells toll, and bassoons and tubas intone the Dies irae, the chant from the Mass for the Dead. A witches' round dance starts up as a fugue in the strings, and near the end Berlioz plays both at once. Listen too for the dry clatter when the violins strike the strings with the wood of their bows.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-02-02-makela

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