

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Jörg Widmann conducts Mendelssohn and his own Second Violin Concerto

Thursday, March 4, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Jörg Widmann, conductor · Carolin Widmann, violin · Jörg Widmann, clarinet

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847 <i>The Hebrides, Overture in B minor, Op. 26 ("Fingal's Cave")</i>	10'
2	WIDMANN b. 1973 <i>Violin Concerto No. 2</i>	35'
3	WIDMANN b. 1973 <i>Fantasie for solo clarinet</i>	7'
4	MENDELSSOHN 1809–1847 <i>Symphony No. 5 in D major, Op. 107 ('Reformation')</i>	30'
	TOTAL MUSIC	82'

Felix Mendelssohn

1809–1847

The Hebrides, Overture in B minor, Op. 26 ("Fingal's Cave")

10 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In the spring of 1829 Felix Mendelssohn, twenty years old and already the composer of the Octet and the Midsummer Night's Dream overture, went to London. When the concert season ended he set off north with his friend Karl Klingemann for a tour of Scotland. In early August they reached the west coast, within sight of the Hebrides. Mendelssohn wrote home at once: 'In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, the following came into my head there.' Beneath the sentence he wrote out twenty-one bars of music, with notes on the orchestration. They are the opening of this overture, almost exactly as we know it.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first bar is the idea Mendelssohn sent home: a short falling figure in the violas, cellos and bassoons, repeated higher, then higher again, while the violins and woodwinds hold long notes above. It sounds like water moving under still air, and nearly everything that follows grows out of it.

The second theme rises out of the cellos and bassoons, in the major: a long, warm melody that the violins then take over. The middle of the piece is stormier, with fanfares in the brass and the wave figure driven hard through the strings. Near the end, listen for the second theme coming back quietly on the clarinets, like a memory, before a last squall and a close that fades to almost nothing.

Jörg Widmann

b. 1973

Violin Concerto No. 2

35 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Jörg Widmann and his younger sister Carolin made music together as children, he on the clarinet and she on the violin. His First Violin Concerto, of 2007, was first played by Christian Tetzlaff. The Second, composed in 2018, was written for his sister and is dedicated to her.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement is called 'Una ricerca', a search. In the composer's words it is the violin's search for itself, for its own voice: sounds, gestures and shapes are tried out one after another, and the orchestra answers only now and then. It lasts about five minutes.

The second movement, 'Romanze', is by far the longest and is the centre of the piece. Widmann calls it a journey inward. Tender, song-like passages stand next to loud and brutal ones, and the mood changes many times, but the violin remains the narrator throughout: listen for how rarely it stops playing.

The finale, 'Mobile', is as short as the first movement. Patterns from the earlier movements are thrown into constant high speed and pushed to extremes, yet the composer asks for the touch to stay light almost to the end.

Jörg Widmann

b. 1973

Fantasie for solo clarinet

7 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Jörg Widmann wrote the *Fantasie* in 1993, when he was about twenty and still a clarinet student. He has called it his first real piece for his own instrument. He played the first performance himself, in March 1994 at the Bavarian Radio in Munich.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The piece begins with a multiphonic, a way of fingering and blowing that makes the clarinet sound several notes at once. It is a knowing nod to the avant-garde, and the piece then heads somewhere else entirely.

After that, follow the characters. Widmann thought of the piece as a scene in which several people talk at once, so listen for the changes of voice: a singing line is cut off by a burst of fast notes, a dance rhythm appears and is dropped, and turns of phrase borrowed from klezmer and jazz slip in and out. Much of the comedy lies in the speed of these changes, as if the players in the scene kept interrupting one another.

It is also a display piece, full of virtuoso flourishes and of the unusual playing techniques that Widmann, as a clarinetist, knew at first hand.

Felix Mendelssohn

1809–1847

Symphony No. 5 in D major, Op. 107 ('Reformation')

30 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Mendelssohn began this symphony on the same journey to Britain that produced *The Hebrides*. In September 1829 he wrote to his family from England that he had a new work in mind, and he decided to start on it in London. The occasion he was aiming at lay the following summer: 25 June 1830 was the three-hundredth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, the statement of faith that Luther's followers presented to Emperor Charles V in 1530, and celebrations were planned in Protestant Germany. Mendelssohn, born into a Jewish family and baptised a Lutheran as a child, wanted to contribute a symphony built on Luther's hymn 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' (A mighty fortress is our God).

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The slow introduction starts with a rising four-note figure in the violas that passes up through the strings, as in old church counterpoint. Fanfares in the winds grow more insistent, and then the strings, very quietly, play a rising cadence known as the Dresden Amen, a formula from the church music of Dresden. Wagner later used the same

phrase for the Grail in Parsifal. The fast main section is in D minor and has a fierce, dotted theme; the Amen returns, just as quietly, before the reprise.

The second movement is a scherzo in B-flat, light on its feet, with a relaxed trio in G major. The third is short: a sad song in G minor for the first violins, more like an aria than a symphonic slow movement.

Then comes the finale. A single flute plays the first line of ‘Ein feste Burg’, alone and unharmonised. Other instruments join in, a few at a time, and fill out the harmony. The Allegro that follows treats the tune in several ways, including passages of fugue, and the weight of the bass is increased by a contrabassoon (Mendelssohn also asked for a serpent, an obsolete bass wind instrument, in this movement). At the very end the full orchestra plays Luther’s hymn in broad, plain chords.

Tonight's artists

Carolyn Widmann *violin*

The concerto was written for Carolyn Widmann and she has played it since its first performance in Tokyo in 2018. Here she brings it to the Netherlands for the first time, with her brother conducting, as he did at the premiere. These concerts are also her first appearances with the Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Carolyn Widmann is a German violinist, the younger sister of the composer and clarinetist Jörg Widmann. Her work ranges from the Classical and Romantic concertos to new pieces written for her, and takes in solo recitals, chamber music and performances in which she directs the orchestra from the violin. She is based in Leipzig, where she has been professor of violin at the University of Music and Theatre since 2006. In 2018 she gave the first performance of her brother's Second Violin Concerto in Tokyo.

Jörg Widmann *clarinet*

After the interval Jörg Widmann puts down the baton and plays his own *Fantasie* for solo clarinet, a piece he wrote at about twenty and first performed himself. He then conducts the ‘Reformation’ Symphony. The orchestra has played several of his works before, but this is the first time he has conducted it.

Jörg Widmann, born in Munich in 1973, works as a composer, a clarinettist and a conductor. He studied the clarinet with Gerd Starke in Munich and with Charles Neidich at the Juilliard School, and began composition lessons at the age of eleven; his later teachers included Hans Werner Henze and Wolfgang Rihm. As a clarinettist he plays the Classical and Romantic repertoire as well as new music, and his chamber music partners have included Daniel Barenboim, Tabea Zimmermann and András Schiff. He was principal conductor of the Irish Chamber Orchestra from 2017 to 2021 and holds conducting posts with the Munich Chamber Orchestra and the NDR Radiophilharmonie in Hanover. He teaches composition at the Barenboim-Said Akademie in Berlin.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-03-04-widmann>

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