

Mitsuko Uchida plays Beethoven, Vladimir Jurowski conducts Bruckner's Third

Thursday, April 8, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw
Vladimir Jurowski, conductor · Mitsuko Uchida, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	HAYDN 1732–1809 <i>Symphony No. 26 in D minor, Hob. I:26 ('Lamentatione')</i>	17'
2	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19</i>	30'
3	BRUCKNER 1824–1896 <i>Symphony No. 3 in D minor, WAB 103</i>	58'
TOTAL MUSIC		105'

Joseph Haydn

1732–1809

Symphony No. 26 in D minor, Hob. I:26 ('Lamentatione')

THE COMPOSER

Joseph Haydn was born in 1732 in the Lower Austrian village of Rohrau, the son of a wheelwright, and rose from rural poverty to become the most famous composer in Europe. After years as a chorister at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna and a precarious freelance youth, he entered in 1761 the service of the immensely wealthy Esterházy princes, for whom he would work for nearly three decades, much of it at the remote palace of Eszterháza in rural Hungary. There, as he later put it, he was 'cut off from the world' and 'forced to become original'. Out of that isolation came the body of work that effectively defined the Classical style: he is rightly called the father of both the symphony and the string quartet, having brought each to maturity over a long, experimental career of more than a hundred symphonies and almost seventy quartets. Genial, witty, and deeply professional, Haydn was admired across Europe, befriended and influenced the young Mozart, and taught the young Beethoven. After his prince's death in 1790 he travelled twice to London, where his late 'London' symphonies and the oratorio *The Creation* made him a celebrity. He died in Vienna in 1809, having lived through, and shaped, an entire era of music.

17 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

In the late 1760s Joseph Haydn, then in his mid-thirties and in charge of the music at the Esterházy court, began to write symphonies in minor keys, something he had hardly done before. They are restless, abrupt pieces, and later writers borrowed a label from German literature for them: *Sturm und Drang*, storm and stress. The Symphony No. 26 in D minor is one of the earliest. Haydn's manuscript is lost, so the date cannot be fixed, but the scholar H. C. Robbins Landon placed it in 1768 or perhaps 1769.

The nickname, which was in use in Haydn's lifetime but probably did not come from him, points to what makes the piece unusual. It seems to have been written for Holy Week, and Haydn built old church melodies into it. In Austria at the time the Passion story was chanted in the days before Easter to traditional plainsong formulas, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah were sung to chant as well. Haydn quotes the Passion chant in his first movement and returns to chant in the second. Some scholars, Landon among them, have gone further and heard the first two movements as a kind of illustration of the Passion story, with separate phrases for the narrating Evangelist, for Christ and for the crowd. Others doubt that Haydn meant anything so literal and point out how freely he treats the borrowed tunes. For a long time the Easter connection was forgotten altogether, and an early twentieth-century edition called the piece a Christmas symphony.

The orchestra is small: two oboes, two horns and strings, with a bassoon and perhaps a harpsichord joining the bass line. The symphony has three movements and lasts a little over a quarter of an hour.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens in a rush, with driving syncopations in the strings that seem all rhythm and no tune. Then the music brightens abruptly into F major, and under a busy line of running notes in the first violins the first oboe and the second violins play the chant: plain, even notes that sound like something from another world dropped into the middle of a symphony. Listen for the loud, declaiming phrases and the quiet, slow-stepping answer between them. When this music comes back at the end of the movement it is in D major, with the horns added, which gives it a blaze it did not have before.

The Adagio is built on chant in the same way. The oboe and second violins carry the melody in long notes, like the tune in a chorale prelude, while the first violins walk gently around it. It is calm, consoling music, and the simplest thing in the symphony.

Haydn then ends, unusually, with a minuet and no fast finale. It is no courtly dance. The minuet returns to D minor and is full of sharp contrasts of loud and soft and phrases of irregular length, and the trio in the major, with its offbeat accents, gives only brief relief. The symphony closes in the minor.

Ludwig van Beethoven

30 minutes

1770–1827

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19

THE COMPOSER

Beethoven needs little introduction, but the period in which he wrote his Second Symphony does. Born in Bonn in 1770 and trained in Vienna under Haydn, by 1800 he was already one of the most talked-about pianist-composers in Vienna. Around the same time, Beethoven had to face an alarming truth: his hearing was deteriorating, and would never recover. By 1802 he had retreated to the village of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna, where, in a state of suicidal despair, he wrote the famous letter to his brothers known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he confessed his condition and his agony. The letter, never sent in his lifetime, was found among his papers after his death.

ABOUT THE WORK

The numbering is misleading. The Concerto in B-flat was the first of Beethoven's five piano concertos to be composed and the second to be printed. He began it in Bonn in the late 1780s, while still in his teens, and went on revising it for more than a decade as he carried it with him through the first years of his career in Vienna. It was his own display piece. Having made his name in the private salons of the Viennese nobility, he appeared before the wider public as a pianist for the first time at the Burgtheater on 29 March 1795, and the concerto he played there was most probably this one, though it may have been the Concerto in C. He played the B-flat again in Prague in 1798, and it was finally published in December 1801 as Op. 19, by which time the later Concerto in C had already come out as No. 1.

Beethoven is reported to have told a publisher that the piece was not one of his best, and by 1801 it must have seemed old-fashioned to a composer who had by then written his First Symphony and begun his

Third Piano Concerto. It is the smallest of his concertos, with no clarinets, trumpets or drums in the orchestra, and the one that stands closest to Mozart, whose piano concertos Beethoven knew and admired. Yet he cared enough about it to write out a cadenza for the first movement, by most accounts well after the concerto itself. That cadenza, a dense and rather stern piece of counterpoint, is in a noticeably later style than the music around it, and hearing the two side by side is one of the pleasures of the work.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement begins with a brisk call to attention, a dotted fanfare figure on the notes of the B-flat chord, answered at once by a soft, smooth phrase in the violins. That pairing of bluntness and grace sets the tone. The orchestra lays out the themes, and the piano then slips in not with the fanfare but with a quiet idea of its own. Much of the solo writing is quick, glittering passagework of the kind Beethoven was famous for improvising. Near the end comes the cadenza: listen for the way it starts like a fugue, a far more severe sound than anything else in the movement.

The Adagio is the heart of the concerto. Its theme is a slow, hymn-like melody for the strings, which the piano decorates with increasingly elaborate lines. Just before the end the orchestra falls silent and the piano is left almost alone, playing a halting line of single notes through a haze of pedal. It is a strikingly bare and personal moment in so early a work.

The finale is a rondo with a joke in its main tune: the accents fall in the wrong places, short note first, so that the theme seems to hiccup. A stormier episode in the minor comes in the middle. Near the end, just when the movement appears to be heading home, the piano tries the tune gently in a quite unrelated key before the orchestra puts things right, and the concerto finishes lightly.

Anton Bruckner

1824–1896

Symphony No. 3 in D minor, WAB 103

THE COMPOSER

Anton Bruckner was among the most unlikely of great composers. Born in 1824 in the small Austrian village of Ansfelden, the son of a schoolteacher, he seemed destined for provincial obscurity. After his father's death, the thir-

58 minutes

teen-year-old Bruckner became a choirboy at the monastery of St. Florian, where he would eventually serve as organist. He trained as a schoolteacher, since the family was too poor for a musical career, and for years divided his time between teaching and organ playing in small towns.

Bruckner was a late bloomer. He did not begin serious composition studies until his thirties, spending some six years studying harmony and counterpoint with the Viennese theorist Simon Sechter, much of it by correspondence. He completed the course in 1861, at thirty-seven, with such mastery that one examiner, Johann Herbeck, remarked: "If I knew one tenth of what he knows, I'd be happy." Soon afterwards his next teacher, Otto Kitzler, introduced him to the music of Wagner, which Bruckner studied intensively from 1863 onwards.

In 1868 Bruckner moved to Vienna, where he would spend the rest of his life teaching at the Conservatory and, later, the University. But Vienna was hostile territory. The city's musical life was dominated by the critic Eduard Hanslick, a champion of Brahms who despised Wagner, and Bruckner, by aligning himself with Wagner, made a powerful enemy. His symphonies were mocked, rejected by orchestras, or subjected to humiliating premieres. The Vienna Philharmonic rehearsed his Third Symphony in 1874 and declined to perform it; when it was finally premiered in 1877, with Bruckner himself conducting, most of the audience walked out.

Recognition came late. Bruckner was sixty when his Seventh Symphony, premiered in Leipzig in 1884, brought him the first genuine triumph of his career. He died in 1896, aged seventy-two, leaving his Ninth Symphony unfinished. He was buried, as he had wished, beneath the organ at St. Florian.

ABOUT THE WORK

In September 1873 Anton Bruckner called on Richard Wagner, whom he revered, with two symphonies under his arm and asked him to accept the dedication of whichever he preferred. Wagner chose the one in D minor, the still unfinished Third. A much-repeated story adds that the two men drank so much beer that Bruckner could not remember the next morning which had been picked, and had to send a note asking whether it was the symphony 'where the trumpet begins the theme'. Bruckner finished the score soon afterwards. In its first form it included quotations from Wagner's operas, and it has been known ever since as the 'Wagner Symphony'.

Getting it played was another matter. By most accounts the Vienna Philharmonic tried the piece in rehearsal and turned it down. Bruckner shortened and revised it, and a performance was at last arranged for 16 December 1877 under Johann Herbeck. Herbeck died shortly before the concert and Bruckner, an inexperienced orchestral conductor, had to direct it himself. The evening was the worst humili-

ation of his life: the audience drifted away during the performance, and at the end only a small group of supporters remained, the seventeen-year-old Gustav Mahler among them.

Bruckner kept returning to the score. He removed most of the Wagner quotations and cut the outer movements heavily, and in 1888 and 1889 he reworked the whole symphony again, shortening the finale still further. In that last form Hans Richter conducted it with the Vienna Philharmonic on 21 December 1890, to great success. The result is that there is no single Third: three versions are in regular use today, the long original of 1873, the version of 1877 and the tauter one of 1889. The orchestra's announcement does not say which of them Vladimir Jurowski has chosen. Whichever it is, the work is where Bruckner first sounds wholly like himself.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is one of Bruckner's most characteristic. The strings set up a soft, circling pattern over a held bass note, and out of this mist a solo trumpet plays a plain, signal-like theme built from the simplest intervals. The music swells in two great waves to a jagged statement for the whole orchestra in unison. That trumpet theme is the motto of the symphony. A second, gentler group of themes follows in the strings, and it uses the rhythm Bruckner made his own, two even notes followed by three. The movement ends starkly, on a bare open fifth, neither major nor minor.

The slow movement, in E-flat major and marked 'solemn', begins as a warm string hymn and alternates it with a more flowing melody first given to the violas. The scherzo is short and fierce: a whirling figure in the violins grows from a murmur to a stamping dance for full orchestra, while the trio in the middle is a relaxed country waltz, the sound of Bruckner's Upper Austrian home.

The finale sets off in a storm, but its most famous passage is the second theme, where two kinds of music are heard at once: the strings play a light, skipping dance while the horns and brass intone a slow chorale beneath it. After many struggles and sudden silences the key turns to D major, and the trumpet theme from the first bars returns in triumph to end the symphony.

Tonight's artists

Mitsuko Uchida *piano*

Mitsuko Uchida is best known in the Viennese classics, in Mozart, Schubert and Beethoven, and the orchestra notes that it is more than eight years since she last played with it. She has chosen the earliest and lightest of Beethoven's concertos, the one that stands closest to Mozart. She plays it on 8 and 9 April, and again on Saturday 10 April in the orchestra's shorter Essentials concert, which starts at 21:00 with a spoken introduction in Dutch by Thomas Vanderveken and consists of the Haydn symphony and the concerto only, without the Bruckner.

Mitsuko Uchida, born in Atami, Japan, in 1948, is among the most revered pianists of her generation, celebrated above all as one of the supreme interpreters of the Viennese classics. She moved to Vienna as a child when her father was posted there as a diplomat, and studied at the city's Academy of Music, absorbing the tradition at its source. International recognition came through major competitions, including a prize at the 1970 Chopin Competition in Warsaw, but it was her profound affinity for Mozart, Schubert, and Beethoven that defined her career. Her recordings of Mozart's piano sonatas and concertos, among them concertos directed from the keyboard, are landmarks of the discography, as are her searching accounts of Schubert's late sonatas. Equally devoted to Schoenberg and Berg, she brings the same clarity and seriousness to twentieth-century music. Named a Dame of the British Empire in 2009, Uchida is admired for a playing of rare refinement, intellectual rigour, and luminous tone.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Faber Pocket Guide to Haydn**

Richard Wigmore, Faber and Faber 2009

A compact guide to Haydn's life and to every major work, with entries on the Sturm und Drang symphonies that put the 'Lamentatione' in its place among them.

ACCESSIBLE **Bruckner**

Derek Watson, Oxford University Press 1996

A clear life-and-works study of Bruckner that follows the Third Symphony from the visit to Wagner through its failure in 1877 and its many revisions.

DEEPER **Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance**

Leon Plantinga, W. W. Norton 2008

The standard study of all Beethoven's concertos, with a detailed account of the long and tangled genesis of the B-flat Piano Concerto.

SOURCES

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2. Mitsuko Uchida plays Beethoven (9 April 2027), Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/calendar/mitsuko-uchida-plays-beethoven-2027-04-09/>
3. Essentials: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 (10 April 2027), Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/calendar/essentials-beethovens-piano-concerto-no-2-2027-04-10/>
4. Mitsuko Uchida and Concertgebouw Orchestra play Beethoven, Het Concertgebouw. <https://www.concertgebouw.nl/en/concerts/45900870-mitsuko-uchida-concertgebouw-orchestra-play-beethoven>
5. Concertgebouw Orchestra Essentials: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2, Het Concertgebouw. <https://www.concertgebouw.nl/en/concerts/45901019-concertgebouw-orchestra-essentials-beethovens-piano-concerto-no.-2>
6. Symphony No. 26 (Haydn), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._26_\(Haydn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._26_(Haydn))
7. 26. Sinfonie (Haydn), Austria-Forum. https://austria-forum.org/af/AustriaWiki/26._Sinfonie_%28Haydn%29
8. Symphony No. 26 in D minor, 'Lamentatione', All Classical Radio. <https://research.allclassical.org/composer/haydn-joseph/symphony-no-26-in-d-minor-lamentatione/>
9. Piano Concerto No. 2 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._2_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._2_(Beethoven))
10. Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19, Runyan Program Notes. <https://runyanprogram-notes.com/node/511>
11. Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 2, Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.myhso.org/blog/beethoven-piano-concerto-no-2>
12. Symphony No. 3 (Bruckner), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._3_\(Bruckner\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._3_(Bruckner))
13. Bruckner Complete Edition: Symphony No. 3 in D minor, Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag Wien. <https://mwv.at/en/content/show/28-SymphonyNo3inDminor>
14. Vladimir Jurowski, conductor, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/orchestra/conductors/vladimir-jurowski/>
15. Vladimir Jurowski, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Jurowski
16. The Faber Pocket Guide to Haydn, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780571234127>
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CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-04-08-jurowski>

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