

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

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')

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.

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 an-

swer 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

1770–1827

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

30 minutes

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.

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

58 minutes

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’.

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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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

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