

# Lang Lang plays Saint-Saëns, Klaus Mäkelä conducts Ravel and a Lindberg premiere

Friday, May 7, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor · Lang Lang, piano

|   | TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME                                                            | MIN |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | <b>WENNÄKOSKI</b> b. 1970<br><i>Flounce</i>                                    | 5'  |
| 2 | <b>LINDBERG</b> b. 1958<br><i>New work (world premiere)</i>                    |     |
| 3 | <b>SAINT-SAËNS</b> 1835–1921<br><i>Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22</i> | 23' |
| 4 | <b>RAVEL</b> 1875–1937<br><i>La Valse</i>                                      | 12' |
|   | TOTAL MUSIC                                                                    | 40' |

## Lotta Wennäkoski

5 minutes

b. 1970

### *Flounce*

#### THE COMPOSER

Lotta Wennäkoski was born in Helsinki in 1970. She studied the violin in Budapest before turning to composition at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and she completed her studies in the Netherlands with Louis Andriessen. A concert of her music at the Musica nova Helsinki festival was an early landmark, and orchestral commissions followed, among them 'Sakara', written for the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen, and the flute concerto 'Soie', which was one of the recommended works at the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers. Her music is known for its transparent, carefully imagined sound, and she has described herself as working between adventurous timbres and more traditional gestures such as fragments of melody.

## ABOUT THE WORK

‘Flounce’ is a concert opener of about five minutes, and it was written for one of the most watched concerts in the calendar. BBC Radio 3 commissioned it for the Last Night of the Proms, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Sakari Oramo gave the first performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 9 September 2017. Lotta Wennäkoski wrote it in the spring of that year, and she has said that knowing who would play it first, and where, was a great source of inspiration.

In her own note on the piece she explains that this time the title came first and steered the music. She was taken with the different meanings of the English word ‘flounce’, as a verb and as a noun: the abrupt, impatient movement of someone flouncing out of a room, and the gathered strip of fabric that trims a skirt or a sleeve. The piece has both. Much of it, she writes, is made of brisk gestures that are ‘non troppo serio’, not too serious, and these alternate with passages of lace-like ornament in a lighter, more lyrical mood.

Few Proms commissions have a long life after their first night, and this one has. Her publisher, Fennica Gehrman, describes it as a curtain-raiser that became an international hit, and Music Finland counted fourteen performances around the world within two years of the premiere. That same spring it was on the programme of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and Susanna Mälkki when their tour brought them to this hall. Wennäkoski is no stranger to Amsterdam: according to Music Finland the Concertgebouw Orchestra programmed the Dutch premiere of her flute concerto ‘Soie’ in March 2019. For these concerts the orchestra places ‘Flounce’ at the head of a Finnish first half, before the new work by Magnus Lindberg.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Wennäkoski describes a double character in the writing as well as in the title. On one side there is an energetic pulse that keeps the music moving forward; on the other there are timbres that she calls sometimes non-conventional, and a feeling of space in the orchestration. So listen for the way the sound is laid out as much as for any tune. The quick, slightly comic gestures tend to arrive suddenly and break off just as suddenly, while the ornamental passages are finer-grained and seem to hang in the air. The orchestra’s own description of the piece speaks of light, clarity and movement, as if the composer wanted to escape the pull of gravity. Five minutes is not long, and the piece does not waste any of them.

## Magnus Lindberg

b. 1958

### *New work (world premiere)*

#### THE COMPOSER

Magnus Lindberg was born in Helsinki in 1958. He studied the piano and then composition at the Sibelius Academy, where his teachers included Einojuhani Rautavaara and Paavo Heininen, and continued his studies in Paris with Vinko Globokar and Gérard Grisey. Around 1980 he was one of the young Finnish musicians, with Kaija Saariaho and Esa-Pekka Salonen, who formed the Ears Open Society to make modernist music better known in Finland, and he founded the experimental ensemble Toimii, in which he played himself. His breakthrough came with 'Kraft' (1983-85), a huge and abrasive score for that ensemble and orchestra. From the late 1980s his style changed, becoming more concerned with harmony and orchestral colour. He has written mostly for orchestra, including concertos for clarinet, violin, cello and piano. He was composer-in-residence of the New York Philharmonic from 2009 to 2012 and of the London Philharmonic Orchestra from 2014 to 2017.

#### ABOUT THE WORK

This is a first performance, and at the time of writing very little about the piece has been made public. The orchestra and the Concertgebouw both list it simply as a new work by Magnus Lindberg, commissioned by the Concertgebouw Orchestra and receiving its world premiere in these concerts. No title, duration or scoring has been announced. Lindberg's publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, describes it as a new large-scale orchestral work, to be premiered by the orchestra and Klaus Mäkelä in Amsterdam on 7 May 2027.

What can be said is where it comes from. Lindberg is best known for his orchestral music, and the orchestra writes of a special bond with him built up over the years; his publisher's work list includes 'Era', written for the 125th anniversary of the Concertgebouw. Here he is in Finnish company: Mäkelä, the orchestra's chief conductor designate, opens the concert with Lotta Wennäkoski's 'Flounce' and follows it with the new piece, before the programme turns to France after the interval.

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

With no score or description available, any detailed guide would be guesswork. In general terms, Lindberg's publisher names energy, colour and a thrilling density of material as the hallmarks of his recent style, and Music Finland describes a composer who has moved from the hard-edged modernism of his early years towards an idiom in which melody matters more. The orchestra's announcement adds that he always manages to draw new

sounds from an orchestra. It is reasonable to expect a piece that uses the full ensemble and keeps it busy. This note will be updated when the orchestra publishes more.

## Camille Saint-Saëns

1835–1921

23 minutes

### *Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22*

#### THE COMPOSER

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921) was one of the most gifted and versatile musicians France ever produced: a child prodigy to rival Mozart, a brilliant pianist and organist, and a composer of effortless craft across every genre. Liszt called him the greatest organist in the world; as a composer he gave France some of its best-loved works, including the opera *Samson et Dalila*, the Third ‘Organ’ Symphony, the *Carnival of the Animals* and a series of elegant, superbly written concertos. A central figure in French musical life (he co-founded the *Société Nationale de Musique* to promote French composers), he was also a restless intellectual with a lifelong interest in philosophy and astronomy, and an inveterate traveller. Conservative in his later years and sometimes dismissed as merely facile, he is better seen as a consummate craftsman whose clarity, elegance and melodic generosity define a certain ideal of French music.

#### ABOUT THE WORK

Camille Saint-Saëns wrote his Second Piano Concerto in a hurry. In the spring of 1868 the Russian pianist and composer Anton Rubinstein was in Paris and wanted to appear there as a conductor, with Saint-Saëns as his soloist. The date that suited was about three weeks off. Saint-Saëns agreed to write a new concerto for the occasion and finished it in seventeen days. He played the solo part himself at the first performance, in the Salle Pleyel on 13 May 1868, with Rubinstein conducting.

The speed showed on the night. Saint-Saëns had had little time to practise what he had written, and the reception was mixed, though the second movement was liked at once and Liszt, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s account, admired the work. It went on to become the most popular of his five piano concertos.

Its shape is unusual. A concerto normally runs fast, slow, fast. This one begins with a broad, serious movement, puts a scherzo in second place and ends with a very fast finale, so that it has been described as a symphony with its first movement missing. Each movement is quicker and lighter than the last, which is why the concerto can seem to change character completely between its first page and its final one. Saint-Saëns was thirty-two, organist of the Madeleine in Paris

and one of the finest pianists of his day, and the piece draws on both careers. The main theme of the first movement is said to have been borrowed from his pupil Gabriel Fauré, from a ‘Tantum ergo’ that Fauré had set aside.

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**I. Andante sostenuto.** The piano begins alone, with a long passage that sounds improvised, in the manner of a Bach organ fantasia. It is easy to imagine a held pedal note with the hands roaming above it. The orchestra enters with force, and the piano then gives out the restless main theme. The movement builds to a loud return of that theme and a solo cadenza, and the Bach-like opening comes back at the end, now with the orchestra beneath it.

**II. Allegro scherzando.** A soft chord and a tapping figure on the timpani set the pace. The piano’s first tune is light and quick; a second, broader tune appears low down, in the bassoons and lower strings. This was the movement the first audience liked best, and it ends as lightly as it began.

**III. Presto.** A headlong dance in the rhythm of a tarantella, back in G minor. The piano starts it with a rumble low in the keyboard and scarcely stops afterwards. A second idea, marked by a trill and repeated many times, gives a brief change of texture before the rush to the close.

## Maurice Ravel

1875–1937

### *La Valse*

#### THE COMPOSER

Maurice Ravel was born on March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, a small town in the French Basque Country near the Spanish border. His mother was Basque and his father a Swiss-born engineer and inventor, a heritage that would profoundly shape his musical identity. From an early age, Ravel showed exceptional musical talent and entered the Paris Conservatoire at fourteen, where he studied with Gabriel Fauré and absorbed the harmonic innovations of his time.

Often paired with Claude Debussy under the “Impressionist” label, Ravel himself rejected this categorization. Where Debussy was spontaneous and atmospheric, Ravel was a meticulous craftsman, obsessed with formal perfection and clarity. This perfectionism produced some of the most beloved works in the orchestral repertoire: the hypnotic *Boléro*, the shimmering *Daphnis et Chloé*, and the virtuosic *Gaspard de la nuit*.

12 minutes

By the late 1920s, Ravel was France's most celebrated living composer, yet he remained restless, constantly seeking new sounds and influences. A triumphant four-month tour of North America in 1928 brought him face to face with jazz, which impressed him deeply. These experiences would flow directly into his final orchestral works.

#### ABOUT THE WORK

The idea for 'La Valse' was older than the piece by more than a decade. From about 1906 Maurice Ravel had in mind an orchestral work in honour of the Viennese waltz and of Johann Strauss, which he called 'Wien' (Vienna). Nothing came of it before the First World War, in which Ravel served in the French army. He came back to the plan afterwards, when Serge Diaghilev asked him for a score for the Ballets Russes, and he wrote the piece between early 1919 and 1920 under a new title: 'La Valse, poème chorégraphique'.

Diaghilev turned it down. When Ravel played it through to him on two pianos, the impresario is reported to have called it a masterpiece but not a ballet: the portrait of a ballet. Ravel took offence, and the two never worked together again. The first performance was therefore a concert one, in Paris on 12 December 1920, with the Lamoureux Orchestra conducted by Camille Chevillard. Stage productions followed later in the decade, in Antwerp in 1926 and by Ida Rubinstein's company in 1928.

Ravel printed a short scenario at the head of the score. Through whirling clouds, waltzing couples can be glimpsed. The clouds scatter to reveal an immense hall filled with a turning crowd; the scene grows lighter, and the chandeliers blaze out at the first fortissimo. The setting is an imperial court, about 1855.

What the scenario does not mention is how the piece ends, and that has occupied listeners ever since. The waltz gathers speed and weight until it tears itself apart. Coming so soon after 1918, this has often been heard as a picture of the old Europe dancing towards its own ruin, and the orchestra's own note takes that line: every waltz, it says, may be the last. Ravel himself is reported to have resisted the idea, saying that one should see in the piece only what the music expresses, a rising progression of sound. Both things can be true of the same twelve minutes.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The beginning is the clouds. Double basses rumble very quietly, and fragments of waltz rhythm and melody drift past without settling. A first tune takes shape low in the bassoons and violas. The harps sweep the mist aside, and the violins lead the orchestra into the main waltz in full light.

A chain of waltzes follows, as in a set by Johann Strauss, each with its own character and each scored differently: some mild and a little shy, with oboe, violins and flutes to the fore, others loud and sweeping. Ravel's orchestra is large, with two harps and a good deal of percussion, and much of the pleasure is in the detail.

Taken as a whole, the piece is one long crescendo, interrupted and begun again. Each time the dance regathers it is louder and less polite than before, and the elegance of the early waltzes gives way to something closer to violence. The final climax is hard to resist and hard to hear as a mere ballroom scene, which is where the arguments about what Ravel meant begin.

## Tonight's artists

### **Lang Lang** *piano*

Lang Lang returns to the Concertgebouw Orchestra for these two concerts, on Friday 7 May at 20:15 and Sunday 9 May 2027 at 14:15, both in the Main Hall of the Concertgebouw. The orchestra says that the concerto calls for a versatile pianist, because its three movements have so little in common: an opening like an organ improvisation, a light-footed scherzo and a finale at full tilt. Klaus Mäkelä, who becomes the orchestra's chief conductor in September 2027, conducts. He has built the programme in two halves, music from his native Finland before the interval, including a first performance, and French music after it.

Lang Lang, born in Shenyang, China, in 1982, is one of the most widely known classical musicians in the world. He began piano lessons at the age of three, studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, and in 1997 moved to the United States to study with Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. His breakthrough came in 1999 at the Ravinia Festival, when, still a teenager, he stepped in at the last moment for the ailing André Watts to play Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a performance that made him famous almost overnight. He has since appeared with the world's leading orchestras, including the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics, and recorded widely for Deutsche Grammophon and Sony Classical. A committed advocate of music education, he launched the Lang Lang International Music Foundation in 2008 to bring music to children, and in 2013 was designated a United Nations Messenger of Peace with a special focus on global education.

## FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Ravel**

*Roger Nichols, Yale University Press 2013*

A modern, readable biography of Ravel, the place to read about his war years, the making of ‘La Valse’ and the break with Diaghilev.

ACCESSIBLE **The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century**

*Alex Ross, Picador 2008*

A history of twentieth-century music for the general reader, useful for both halves of this programme: Paris in the years around the First World War, and a chapter on Sibelius and the Finnish music that came after him.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Ravel**

*Deborah Mawer (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2000*

Essays by Ravel scholars on his style, his orchestral writing and his ballets, the place to go further into ‘La Valse’ and how it has been interpreted.

## SOURCES

1. Lang Lang performs Saint-Saëns, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/calendar/lang-lang-performs-saint-saens-2027-05-07/>
2. Lang Lang performs Saint-Saëns (9 May 2027), Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/calendar/lang-lang-performs-saint-saens-2027-05-09/>
3. Lang Lang, Klaus Mäkelä and the Concertgebouw Orchestra: Saint-Saëns, Het Concertgebouw. <https://www.concertgebouw.nl/en/concerts/45901153-lang-lang-klaus-makela-and-the-concertgebouw-orchestra-saint-saens>
4. Lang Lang, Klaus Mäkelä and the Concertgebouw Orchestra: Saint-Saëns (9 May 2027), Het Concertgebouw. <https://www.concertgebouw.nl/en/concerts/45901322-lang-lang-klaus-makela-and-the-concertgebouw-orchestra-saint-saens>
5. Klaus Mäkelä, chief conductor designate, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. <https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/en/orchestra/conductors/klaus-makela/>
6. Flounce, Lotta Wennäkoski. <https://lottawennakoski.com/?p=4777>
7. BBC commissions Lotta Wennäkoski for Proms, Music Finland. <https://musicfinland.com/en/news/bbc-commissions-lotta-wennakoski-for-proms>
8. Amsterdam's Concertgebouw presents composer Lotta Wennäkoski this spring, Music Finland. <https://musicfinland.fi/en/news/amsterdams-concertgebouw-presents-composer-lotta-wennakoski-this-spring>
9. Wennäkoski, Lotta, Fennica Gehrman. <https://fennicagehrman.fi/?p=2325>
10. Lotta Wennäkoski, Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotta\\_Wenn%C3%A4koski](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lotta_Wenn%C3%A4koski)
11. Magnus Lindberg, Boosey & Hawkes. <https://www.boosey.com/composer/Magnus+Lindberg>
12. Magnus Lindberg: Biography, Boosey & Hawkes. [https://www.boosey.com/pages/cr/composer/composer\\_main?composerid=2974&tttype=BIOGRAPHY](https://www.boosey.com/pages/cr/composer/composer_main?composerid=2974&tttype=BIOGRAPHY)
13. Magnus Lindberg, Music Finland. <https://core.musicfinland.fi/composers/magnus-lindberg>
14. Magnus Lindberg, Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus\\_Lindberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus_Lindberg)
15. Piano Concerto No. 2 (Saint-Saëns), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano\\_Concerto\\_No.\\_2\\_\(Saint-Sa%C3%ABns\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._2_(Saint-Sa%C3%ABns))
16. Saint-Saëns: Piano Concerto No. 2, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/piano-concerto-no-2-saint-saens>
17. Piano Concerto No. 2, Camille Saint-Saëns, Hollywood Bowl (Los Angeles Philharmonic). <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/2750/piano-concerto-no-2>
18. La valse, Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La\\_valse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_valse)
19. Ravel: La Valse, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/la-valse>

20. Programme note: La Valse, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/maurice-ravel-la-valse>
21. Ravel, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300187762>
22. The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780312427719>
23. The Cambridge Companion to Ravel, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521648561>
- 



#### CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-05-07-makela>

*Version 1, 8 October 2026*