

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

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

Lotta Wennäkoski

b. 1970

Flounce

5 minutes

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.

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)

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 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

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

23 minutes

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.

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 rest-

less 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

12 minutes

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'.

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 viol-

ence. 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 Interna-

tional 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.

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