

# Karina Canellakis conducts Shostakovich's Fifth, with Alina Ibragimova in Mozart

Wednesday, June 16, 2027 · 20:15 · Concertgebouw  
Karina Canellakis, conductor · Alina Ibragimova, violin

| TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME |                                                                                      | MIN |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1                   | <b>BORISOVA-OLLAS</b> b. 1969<br><i>The Kingdom of Silence</i>                       | 15' |
| 2                   | <b>MOZART</b> 1756–1791<br><i>Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major, K. 219 'Turkish'</i> | 30' |
| 3                   | <b>SHOSTAKOVICH</b> 1906–1975<br><i>Symphony No. 5 in D minor, op. 47</i>            | 45' |
| TOTAL MUSIC         |                                                                                      | 90' |

## Victoria Borisova-Ollas

15 minutes

b. 1969  
*The Kingdom of Silence*

### THE COMPOSER

Victoria Borisova-Ollas was born in Vladivostok in 1969. She studied at the Central School of Music in Moscow and at the Moscow Conservatory, moved to Sweden in the early 1990s, and continued her composition studies at the Malmö Academy of Music and at the Royal College of Music in London. She came to international notice in 1998, when her orchestral piece ‘Wings of the Wind’ won second prize in the Masterprize competition in Britain. Most of her output is for orchestra: it includes two symphonies, the clarinet concerto ‘Golden Dances of the Pharaohs’, and ‘Angelus’, written for the Munich Philharmonic. For the stage she has written ‘The Ground Beneath Her Feet’, after Salman Rushdie’s novel, first given at the Manchester International Festival in 2007, and the opera ‘Dracula’, staged at the Royal Swedish Opera in 2017. She has been a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music since 2008, and her music is published by Universal Edition.

## ABOUT THE WORK

Victoria Borisova-Ollas wrote 'The Kingdom of Silence' in 2003, and the title names a place rather than a mood. In her own note on the piece she writes that the mysterious country we all go to after our lifetime has many different names, and that this is one of them. She has said that the words come from a line in Psalm 94, which she translated freely from the Russian Bible. It is one of several orchestral pieces of hers that start from a psalm: 'Wings of the Wind' drew on Psalm 104, and 'Before the Mountains Were Born' on Psalm 90.

The score is a memorial. It is written in memory of Nikolai Korndorf (1947 to 2001), whom the composer calls an extraordinary personality among his generation of Russian composers. Korndorf taught her at the Moscow Conservatory, and the lexicon of women composers at the Hamburg Hochschule für Musik und Theater describes him as her instrumentation teacher and a strong influence on her work. He died two years before the piece was written.

The commission came from the Gothenburg Art Sounds festival of 2003 together with Rikskonserter in Sweden, and the piece was first performed that year. European American Music Distributors, in a notice of a later American performance, names the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and the conductor Peter Eötvös for the premiere. Universal Edition publishes the score and lists it at fifteen minutes, for a large orchestra with three percussionists, harp, and a piano whose player also takes the celesta.

The piece has travelled slowly but steadily since. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra played it under Andrey Boreyko in 2016, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra recorded it under Martyn Brabins in 2019 for an album of her orchestral music on BIS, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra programmed its first British performance in January 2022 with Karina Canellakis conducting. The Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Concertgebouw both list these June concerts as the Dutch premiere.

Borisova-Ollas does not describe a programme in the narrative sense. She describes a dream: a lullaby, a slow sinking into sleep, a succession of scenes, and the lullaby again. Whether the dream is that of a child, of the person remembered or of the listener is left open, and her note ends on a question: with the return of the lullaby a long chain of events is finished, but does the dream itself ever end?

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is the thing to hold on to, because it comes back. Glockenspiel and celesta play what the composer calls a rather simple melody, a lullaby, and the strings wrap it in an echo. The sound is bright and small, like a musical box in a large room.

From there, in her words, we gradually sink into a dream. The middle of the piece is a chain of separate scenes. Some are joined to their neighbours by a shared tempo, so that one seems to grow out of another. Others are cut off by a sudden change of mood. The reviewer for Arcana, writing about the BIS recording, heard the whole as the journey of a life, moving from stillness through episodes of anguish and of resolve to a serene close.

When the bell sounds of the opening return, the shape closes: a critic quoted on the composer's website calls it an arc form that begins and ends with subtle playing from the percussion section, with a kind of narrative unfolding in between. Listen to how the lullaby sounds the second time, after everything that has passed, and to how the music stops without quite answering the composer's question.

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

30 minutes

1756–1791

### *Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major, K. 219 'Turkish'*

#### THE COMPOSER

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart needs little introduction. Born in Salzburg in 1756, he was a prodigy whose talents were cultivated and exhibited across Europe by his father Leopold. By the time he composed this concerto in 1779, the twenty-three-year-old Mozart was restless in provincial Salzburg, dreaming of Vienna and larger stages. Within two years he would make the move that defined his mature career.

Less well known is his sister Maria Anna, called “Nannerl,” five years his senior. She was an equally brilliant pianist as a child, and the siblings toured together as wonders of nature until Nannerl's touring career ended when she was about seventeen. Following the customs of the time, she stayed at home while Wolfgang continued traveling with their father. The brother and sister remained close, and this concerto was written for the two of them to play.

#### ABOUT THE WORK

Mozart was nineteen when he wrote this concerto, and it is the last of the five violin concertos he composed in Salzburg. The Fifth is dated December 1775; the note written by Keith Horner for Rockport Music

gives the day as 20 December, a few weeks before his twentieth birthday. Four of the five concertos belong to that one year, and after it he wrote no more of them.

Nobody knows for certain who was meant to play it. Mozart was a court musician in Salzburg and a far better violinist than his later fame as a pianist suggests, so he may well have played it himself. Antonio Brunetti, a violinist of the Salzburg court orchestra, certainly played these concertos, and for him Mozart later wrote a separate Adagio in E major, K. 261, as a substitute slow movement for this one. Brunetti is said to have found the original too studied. Violinists since have disagreed with him, and the original Adagio is the one normally played.

The orchestra is the small Salzburg band of two oboes, two horns and strings. What Mozart does with it is less modest. The concerto is full of moments where the expected thing does not happen, and the first of them comes when the soloist walks on.

The nickname 'Turkish' belongs to the finale. In the middle of a polite minuet, the music breaks into a loud, fast episode in A minor in a different metre. 'Turkish' music was a fashion in eighteenth-century Europe, on the stage and in military bands, and Mozart returned to it in the opera 'The Abduction from the Seraglio' and in the Rondo alla Turca that ends one of his piano sonatas. Writers on the concerto point out that the style he had in mind was closer to Hungarian music from the borders of the Ottoman world than to anything actually Turkish. He has no drums or cymbals here, so he imitates them with the instruments he has.

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**I. Allegro aperto.** The orchestra begins alone with a brisk introduction ('aperto' means open). Then the violin enters, and instead of taking up the tune it plays six bars of Adagio, slow and sweet, as if the piece had started again somewhere else. When the Allegro resumes, the soloist has a new melody, and the orchestra's opening theme turns out to be its accompaniment.

**II. Adagio.** The slow movement is in E major and is the most extended in any of Mozart's violin concertos, laid out in full sonata form. The violin sings a long, unhurried line above the orchestra almost without interruption. This is the movement Brunetti wanted replaced.

**III. Rondeau: Tempo di Menuetto.** The refrain is a graceful minuet that keeps returning. Halfway through, the ‘Turkish’ episode arrives: the key turns to A minor, the three-beat minuet gives way to a quick two, and the music is suddenly all sharp accents and chromatic scales that swell and vanish. Listen for the cellos and double basses striking their strings with the wood of the bow, Mozart’s stand-in for percussion. Then the minuet comes back as though nothing had happened.

## Dmitri Shostakovich

45 minutes

1906–1975

### *Symphony No. 5 in D minor, op. 47*

#### THE COMPOSER

Dmitri Shostakovich was born on September 25, 1906, in St. Petersburg (then still the Russian capital) into a cultured family. His father was an engineer, and it was his mother who gave him his first piano lessons. The young Dmitri showed exceptional talent, entering the Petrograd Conservatory at thirteen and graduating at nineteen with his First Symphony, whose triumphant premiere in 1926 soon brought him international fame.

Shostakovich’s life thereafter became inseparable from the tortured history of the Soviet Union. His 1934 opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was initially a sensation, but in 1936 a devastating Pravda editorial, widely taken to reflect Stalin’s own displeasure, condemned it as “muddle instead of music.” Shostakovich lived for years in fear of arrest, at one point waiting at night on the landing outside his flat so that his family would not be disturbed if the knock came.

Yet under this shadow, Shostakovich composed a stream of masterpieces. His fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets constitute one of the twentieth century’s greatest artistic achievements: music that bears witness to its era’s terrors while transcending them through its humanity and craft. He died in Moscow on August 9, 1975.

#### ABOUT THE WORK

In January 1936 Stalin went to see Shostakovich’s opera ‘Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District’, which had been running with great success for two years. A few days later Pravda printed an unsigned article, ‘Muddle Instead of Music’, that condemned the opera and its composer. A second attack followed, on his ballet ‘The Limpid Stream’. Shostakovich was twenty-nine. People around him were being arrested, and he had reason to think he might be next. He withdrew his Fourth Symphony, which was being prepared for its premiere in Leningrad, and it stayed unperformed for many years.

The Fifth Symphony, written in 1937, was his next move. Just before it he had set four poems by Pushkin as songs, and the first of them, ‘Re-birth’, about a work of art that outlives the barbarian who paints over it, left traces in the symphony. The new piece had to be many things at once. The authorities expected a sign that he had changed. He returned to four movements, a normal orchestra and clear tonal outlines, and wrote music that is direct in a way the Fourth is not.

Yevgeny Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra in the first performance on 21 November 1937. The ovation is reported to have lasted half an hour. Officials were satisfied: the writer Alexei Tolstoy published a review describing the symphony as the story of a personality formed by its epoch, ending in optimism, and the work came to carry the label of a Soviet artist’s creative reply to just criticism. Many in the hall seem to have heard something else, an expression of what they themselves had been living through.

The argument has never been settled. ‘Testimony’, the memoirs published in 1979 by Solomon Volkov and attributed to Shostakovich, says of the finale that the rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as if someone were beating you with a stick and telling you that your business is rejoicing. The book’s authenticity has been disputed ever since, and the Pushkin quotation near the end points in a less bitter direction: perhaps the claim is that the music itself will survive. The Concertgebouw Orchestra’s own introduction to these concerts puts the question as plainly as anyone: when does a heroic march become a caricature? The symphony does not say, and each performance has to decide how the last pages should sound.

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**I. Moderato.** A stark, jagged figure passed between low and high strings opens the symphony, and a lamenting melody for the violins follows. The second theme, over a steady pulse, is spare and tender. Then the piano enters in its lowest register, the tempo quickens, and the same lyrical material is turned into a brutal march with brass and drums. After the climax the second theme returns, and the movement ends with a solo violin and the cold chime of the celesta.

**II. Allegretto.** A short scherzo with heavy boots: gruff cellos and basses, shrill woodwind, mock-military fanfares. In the middle a solo violin plays a tipsy little tune that the flute then repeats. The humour has an edge to it.

**III. Largo.** The centre of the work. The brass are silent throughout, and the strings carry a long lament. At its heart are lonely woodwind solos over almost nothing. The music rises once to an anguished climax and then subsides; harp and celesta close it very quietly.

**IV. Allegro non troppo.** Brass and timpani break in with a march. It drives to a crisis, then the music turns inward, and over repeated harp figures comes the reference to the Pushkin song 'Rebirth'. From there a slow build leads to D major, with the brass pealing above hammered timpani. Whether that ending is a victory or something forced out of the players is the question the whole symphony leaves with you.

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## Tonight's artists

### Alina Ibragimova *violin*

Alina Ibragimova is the soloist in Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 on both nights, Wednesday 16 and Thursday 17 June 2027, each at 20:15 in the Main Hall of the Concertgebouw. Her agency lists the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra among the orchestras she returns to in the 2026/27 season, with Karina Canellakis among the conductors. She is at home in this repertoire on period instruments as well as modern ones, which suits a concerto that depends on lightness and quick changes of character. For Canellakis, chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, this is a return to the orchestra she first conducted in October 2024, and she brings a piece she has championed before: she was the conductor when the London Philharmonic Orchestra programmed the first British performance of 'The Kingdom of Silence' in January 2022. The orchestra's page heading also mentions 20 June, but no concert on that date is listed by the orchestra or the hall.

Alina Ibragimova was born in Russia in 1985 and moved to England as a child. She attended the Gnessin School in Moscow, the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal College of Music in London. She plays on both modern and period instruments, in music from the Baroque to newly written works. She is a founding member of the Chiaroscuro Quartet, which plays on gut strings, and has a long-standing duo with the pianist Cédric Tiberghien. A former BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist, she records for Hyperion; her recording of Shostakovich's two violin concertos won a Gramophone Award. She was appointed MBE in the 2016 New Year Honours.

## FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Shostakovich: A Life Remembered**

*Elizabeth Wilson, Princeton University Press 2006*

Elizabeth Wilson assembles the recollections of people who knew Shostakovich, including those who lived through 1936 and 1937 with him, which is the best way to feel what was at stake when the Fifth Symphony was first played.

ACCESSIBLE **Mozart: The Reign of Love**

*Jan Swafford, Harper Perennial 2021*

Jan Swafford's life of Mozart is good on the Salzburg years and on Mozart the violinist, the background to the five concertos he wrote there as a teenager.

DEEPER **Shostakovich: A Life**

*Laurel E. Fay, Oxford University Press 2005*

Laurel Fay's documentary biography is the careful account to read on the Pravda attacks, the withdrawn Fourth Symphony and the reception of the Fifth, and it treats the disputed memoirs with caution.

## SOURCES

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## CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-06-16-canellakis>

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