

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

Oberon's Horn to the Dance

Wednesday, March 18, 2026 · 19:30 · Wiener Konzerthaus

Zubin Mehta, conductor · Pinchas Zukerman, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	WEBER 1786–1826 <i>Overture to Oberon, J. 306</i>	9'
2	BRUCH 1838–1920 <i>Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26</i>	25'
3	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92</i>	37'
TOTAL MUSIC		71'

Carl Maria von Weber

1786–1826

Overture to Oberon, J. 306

9 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The overture to Oberon is among the last music Weber wrote, and he composed it under the shadow of his own death. Oberon, or The Elf King's Oath was commissioned by the actor-

manager Charles Kemble for Covent Garden in London, set to an English libretto by James Robinson Planché after Christoph Martin Wieland's verse romance, itself drawing on the medieval tale of Huon of Bordeaux and threaded through with characters from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The plot turns on a quarrel between Oberon, king of the fairies, and his queen Titania: the two will not be reconciled until they find a pair of human lovers faithful through every trial. The opera is a sprawling 'English Romantic opera' of spoken dialogue, songs and grand spectacle, a form that sat awkwardly with Weber's symphonic gifts. It is the only opera he ever set in English.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The seed of the whole work is sown in the very first bar: a soft, unaccompanied horn-call, Oberon's magic horn, three rising notes that conjure the fairy realm out of silence. Listen to how quietly the piece begins, the hushed strings and answering woodwinds (a little march for muted brass, a stirring in the violins) painting an enchanted twilight before the music has properly started. This slow introduction is all atmosphere and expectancy.

Then the Allegro bursts in, and the overture becomes a swift, brilliant sonata movement. Two ideas dominate: a darting, scurrying string theme full of fairy quicksilver, and a broad, soaring clarinet melody, followed by a theme from the heroine Reiza's great aria 'Ocean! thou mighty

monster', that swells into the overture's emotional high point. Listen for the contrast between the gossamer fairy music and this full-throated Romantic ardour. Weber's orchestration is the real marvel: the writing for horns and woodwinds, the way the orchestra glints and shimmers, points directly toward Mendelssohn's fairy music (Mendelssohn even quoted Oberon in his *Midsummer Night's Dream* overture) and Wagner's instrumental colour. The coda gathers everything into a headlong, glittering rush to a triumphant close: nine minutes that open the evening with pure enchantment.

Max Bruch

1838–1920

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

25 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Max Bruch's First Violin Concerto is one of the most beloved works in the entire violin repertoire, and a piece that, to its composer's lasting irritation, came to overshadow everything else he wrote. Bruch began it as a young man in his early twenties and laboured over it for years; the first version was performed in Koblenz in April 1866, with Otto von Königsłow as soloist, but he was dissatisfied and undertook a thorough revision with the help of the greatest violinist of the age, Joseph

Joachim. Joachim advised Bruch on the solo writing and on the work's unusual form, and the definitive version he premiered in Bremen on 7 January 1868 became an instant and permanent success. Bruch dedicated the concerto to Joachim in gratitude.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens not with a flourish but with a question: soft, brooding timpani and woodwind phrases, answered each time by the solo violin in free, almost improvisatory recitative: a true 'prelude' that feels like a singer warming up before the aria. From these murmured exchanges the violin launches the movement's two great themes, passionate and full-throated, before the music dies away and slides, without pause, straight into the slow movement.

The Adagio is the heart of the concerto and the reason so many violinists love it: an outpouring of long-breathed, deeply Romantic melody, three song-like themes layered over one another, that lets the soloist simply sing. Listen for the warmth of the violin's middle and lower register here; Bruch keeps the orchestra subdued so the line can soar. It is one of the most lyrical slow movements in the literature.

The Finale wakes the music from that reverie. A quiet, expectant build-up in the orchestra sets up the soloist's entry with a bold, gypsy-flavoured main theme in double-stops: fiery, dance-like and brilliantly virtuosic. Listen for the broad second theme that the orchestra takes up grandly, and for the steadily accelerating drive to the close, the solo line blazing ever higher until the whole concerto ends in a jubilant rush. After the Vorspiel's questions and the Adagio's song, the Finale is pure release.

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

37 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony was written in 1811–12, during a summer the composer spent taking the waters at the Bohemian spa town of Teplitz, hoping to repair his ruined health and his failing hearing. It belongs to one of the most fertile stretches of his life, the same period that produced the Eighth Symphony and the famous, unsent 'Immortal Beloved' letter, and it overflows with an energy that betrays no trace of the personal crisis surrounding it. If the Fifth Symphony is fate

and the Sixth is nature, the Seventh is pure, propulsive rhythm: it is the symphony in which Beethoven made rhythm itself the principal subject.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony opens with a long slow introduction, grand, spacious and full of rising scales, before it quietly gathers itself onto a single repeated note that turns into a skipping dotted rhythm. That dotted figure is the engine of the whole first movement (*Vivace*): once it starts, it never stops, driving forward with an almost obsessive joy. Listen for how the entire movement is generated from this one bounding rhythmic idea.

The second movement (*Allegretto*) is the symphony's most famous music, and it was the hit of the premiere. It is not a true slow movement but a steady, processional tread: a solemn theme built on a simple long-short-short rhythm that repeats hypnotically, growing from a bare whisper in the low strings into a great chorale and back again. Mournful yet strangely consoling, it has been borrowed by countless films; listen for the way the haunting melody is passed up through the orchestra and for the gentler major-key episode that offers a glimpse of light.

The third movement is a lightning-fast scherzo, twice interrupted by a broad, hymn-like Trio said to derive from an Austrian pilgrims' hymn. Beethoven brings the Trio back an extra time, then cuts it off with comic abruptness. The Finale (*Allegro con brio*) is a whirlwind: a stamping, almost Bacchanalian dance of unstoppable force, propelled by hammered accents and a churning bass line that drives the symphony to one of the most exhilarating conclusions Beethoven ever composed. By the end, Wagner's 'apotheosis of the dance' feels exactly right.

Tonight's artists

Pinchas Zukerman *violin*

In the Bruch G minor Concerto, Pinchas Zukerman brings exactly the gifts the work most rewards: a singing, golden tone built to fill the Adagio's long Romantic lines, and the temperament to relish the Finale's fiery gypsy dance. Few living players have lived longer or more deeply inside this repertoire.

Pinchas Zukerman, born in Tel Aviv in 1948, is one of the defining string players of his generation: a violinist, violist and conductor of rare versatility. The son of Holocaust survivors, he began on recorder and clarinet before switching to the violin at eight, and his gifts were spotted by Isaac Stern and Pablo Casals, who arranged for him to study in New York at the Juilliard School under the legendary teacher Ivan Galamian. He shared the Leventritt Competition prize with Kyung-wha Chung in 1967 and launched an international career that has now spanned more than half a century. Equally celebrated on the viola, Zukerman has long been admired above all for the warmth, breadth, and effortless beauty of his tone, qualities that make him an ideal interpreter of the great Romantic concertos of Bruch, Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Tchaikovsky. He has also built a substantial parallel career as a conductor, as Music Director of the National Arts Centre Orchestra of Canada from 1998 to 2015, and is a devoted teacher.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-03-18-mehta>

Version 3, 30 September 2026