

A Summer Night at Schönbrunn 2026

Friday, June 19, 2026 · 20:45 · Schloss Schönbrunn

Lorenzo Viotti, conductor · Bryn Terfel, bass-baritone

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	SUPPÈ 1819–1895 <i>Light Cavalry (Leichte Kavallerie), Overture</i>	8'
2	BOITO 1842–1918 <i>'Son lo spirito che nega' (Mefistofele, Act I)</i>	4'
3	PUCCINI 1858–1924 <i>Intermezzo from Manon Lescaut</i>	5'
4	VERDI 1813–1901 <i>Falstaff's monologue 'Ehi! paggio!... L'onore! Ladri!' (Falstaff, Act I)</i>	5'
5	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Trepak (Russian Dance) from The Nutcracker, Op. 71</i>	1'
6	PRICE 1887–1953 <i>Adoration (orch. Elaine Fine)</i>	4'
7	KORNGOLD 1897–1957 <i>Straussiana (Polka, Mazurka, Waltz)</i>	7'
8	WAGNER 1813–1883 <i>'Abendlich strahlt der Sonne Auge' (Wotan's address, Das Rheingold, Scene 4)</i>	5'
9	MASSENET 1842–1912 <i>Méditation from Thaïs</i>	6'
10	RAVEL 1875–1937 <i>Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2</i>	17'
11	BOCK 1928–2010 <i>'If I Were a Rich Man' from Fiddler on the Roof</i>	5'
	TOTAL MUSIC	67'

Franz von Suppè

1819–1895

Light Cavalry (Leichte Kavallerie), Overture

THE COMPOSER

Franz von Suppè, born in 1819 in Split (then part of the Austrian Empire, now Croatia), was a pioneer of Viennese operetta and one of the most gifted theatre composers of his age. Of Italian and Austrian descent (the old story of Belgian ancestry is unfounded), he came to Vienna as a young man and spent his career working in its theatres as a conductor and house composer, producing a vast quantity of incidental music, farces, operettas, and full operas. Drawing on Italian melodic grace and Viennese charm, he helped establish the operetta as a distinctively Viennese art form in the decades before Johann Strauss II turned to the stage. Today he is remembered above all for a handful of dazzling overtures, among them *Dichter und Bauer* ('Poet and Peasant'), *Leichte Kavallerie* ('Light Cavalry') and *Die schöne Galathée*, which have outlived the stage works they introduced and become beloved orchestral showpieces. Suppè died in Vienna in 1895, his sparkling, tuneful overtures securing him a permanent place in the popular orchestral repertoire.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Summer Night Concert (*Sommernachtskonzert*) is one of Vienna's great public rituals: each June the Wiener Philharmoniker plays a free open-air gala in the Schönbrunn Palace gardens, the Baroque façade and the hilltop Gloriette floodlit behind them, before a crowd of tens of thousands stretched across the lawns. Tonight Lorenzo Viotti opens that party with a piece tailor-made for it. Franz von Suppè, the Dalmatian-born 'father of Viennese operetta', wrote his two-act operetta *Leichte Kavallerie* (Light Cavalry) in 1866 for the Carltheater, and while the operetta itself has faded, its overture has become one of the most instantly recognizable curtain-raisers in the repertoire. Its galloping cavalry rhythms and brass fanfares have lived a second life in cartoons, films, and advertisements, so that listeners often know the tune long before they know its name. Compact, theatrical, and irresistibly tuneful, it is the ideal flourish to launch an evening of operatic and orchestral fireworks under the stars.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

After a brisk military fanfare from the brass, the famous 'galloping' main theme breaks out: trotting horns and snapping rhythms that paint a cavalry on the move. Listen for the sudden mood-swing at the centre: a broad, almost mournful cantilena, an operetta tune of real tenderness that interrupts the bustle before the gallop returns. Suppè builds his overture as a string

of contrasting episodes rather than a symphonic argument, so the pleasure is in the swerves: fanfare, gallop, song, and a whip-cracking dash to the close.

Arrigo Boito

1842–1918

4 minutes

'Son lo spirito che nega' (Mefistofele, Act I)

THE COMPOSER

Arrigo Boito, born in Padua in 1842, was that rare figure who shaped Italian opera from both sides of the footlights, as composer and as poet. In his youth he belonged to the Scapigliatura, the bohemian Milanese avant-garde that wanted to drag Italian art toward German and northern models, and he made his name as a fierce polemicist against the complacency of Italian opera. Yet his own creative life was dominated by a single, decades-long obsession: Goethe's *Faust*, which he turned into his opera *Mefistofele* (premiered disastrously at La Scala in 1868, then revised into lasting success in 1875). A further opera, *Nerone*, occupied him for decades and was left unfinished at his death. Boito's most enduring legacy, however, may be as a librettist: his literary brilliance and deep Shakespearean knowledge made possible the two crowning masterpieces of Verdi's old age, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, for which he wrote the texts. He died in Milan in 1918, equally honoured as composer and as the man who coaxed Verdi back to the stage.

ABOUT THE WORK

This is the calling-card aria of Boito's devil. In the Prologue and opening act of *Mefistofele*, the title character, Boito's version of Goethe's Mephistopheles, introduces himself to Faust with a self-portrait that is at once philosophical and gleefully malevolent. 'Son lo spirito che nega sempre tutto' ('I am the spirit that denies everything always') is a near-direct setting of Goethe's famous line, 'Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint.' The devil declares himself the eternal negator, the enemy of creation, the force that wills evil and (to his own annoyance) sometimes does good. Boito caps the aria with a notorious theatrical effect: a sharp, mocking whistle, as Mefistofele pierces the air with a derisive *fischio*. Written for a true basso cantante with menace and swagger, it is a gift to any great bass-baritone: a chance to be charming, sardonic, and frightening within four minutes.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the swagger in the vocal line. Boito gives the devil a rolling, almost dance-like buoyancy that makes his nihilism sound like fun. The orchestra needles him with sardonic little figures, and everything builds toward the whistle, the moment the audience waits for: a literal whistle that turns metaphysics

into music-hall. Note too how the laughter is built into the phrasing, the voice sliding mockingly between registers as the devil relishes his own wickedness.

Giacomo Puccini

5 minutes

1858–1924

Intermezzo from Manon Lescaut

THE COMPOSER

Giacomo Puccini, born in Lucca in 1858, was the last of a long dynasty of church musicians and the composer who carried Italian opera triumphantly into the twentieth century. After studies at the Milan Conservatory, he found his footing with *Manon Lescaut* (1893), the work that made him famous and effectively anointed him heir to Verdi. There followed the three operas on which his global popularity still rests, *La Bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madama Butterfly* (1904), and later the more adventurous *La fanciulla del West*, *Il trittico*, and the unfinished *Turandot*, left incomplete at his death in Brussels in 1924. Puccini's gift was for melody that goes straight to the heart, for orchestration of cinematic warmth and precision, and for an unerring instinct for the theatre: he chose subjects about ordinary people caught in love and loss, and gave them tunes that the whole world came to know. More than any composer of his era, he understood how music could make an audience weep on cue.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Intermezzo from *Manon Lescaut* is a purely orchestral interlude placed between the second and third acts, and it carries the emotional weight of the opera's tragic turn. In the score Puccini headed it with lines from the Abbé Prévost's novel and the subtitle 'The Imprisonment. The Journey to Le Havre': Manon has been arrested as a courtesan and is about to be deported to the penal colony of Louisiana, and her lover Des Grieux follows her into exile. The Intermezzo bridges that catastrophe wordlessly, gathering up melodies associated with the lovers and lifting them into a surging symphonic meditation on doomed passion. It was with *Manon Lescaut*, his third opera, that Puccini first found his fully personal voice, and this interlude, composed when he was in his early thirties, is one of the earliest places to hear the lush, aching lyricism that would define him. Outside the opera house it has become a beloved concert piece in its own right.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for a long-breathed cello and string melody that climbs in great waves toward an impassioned climax: Puccini at his most openly Romantic, with no voices to share the spotlight. The themes are drawn from the lovers' music, so the Intermezzo

plays as a wordless love duet. Notice how Puccini withholds and then releases the full orchestra, and how the harmonies darken as the passion peaks, foreshadowing the desolate desert death that ends the opera.

Giuseppe Verdi

1813–1901

5 minutes

Falstaff's monologue 'Ehi! paggio!... L'onore! Ladri!' (Falstaff, Act I)

THE COMPOSER

Giuseppe Verdi, born near Busseto in 1813, is the towering figure of Italian opera and, in his lifetime, a symbol of the Italian nation itself. The son of an innkeeper, he was famously rejected by the Milan Conservatory, yet he rose through grinding early labour, and a private tragedy (the deaths of his first wife and both children), to international fame with *Nabucco* (1842), whose chorus of Hebrew slaves became an unofficial anthem of the Risorgimento. The 'galley years' that followed produced a torrent of operas; the trio of *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, and *La traviata* (1851–53) secured his immortality. In maturity he deepened and refined his art in *Aida*, *Don Carlos*, and the Requiem. Then, after a long near-retirement, he crowned his career in old age with two Shakespearean masterpieces on librettos by Arrigo Boito: the tragedy *Otello* (1887) and, at nearly eighty, the comedy *Falstaff* (1893). He died in Milan in 1901, mourned as a national hero.

ABOUT THE WORK

Falstaff was Verdi's farewell to the stage: a sparkling comedy written when he was nearly eighty, his only comic opera since a youthful failure half a century earlier, and a score of dazzling lightness and wit. Boito's libretto draws on Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* and the *Henry IV* plays to build it around Sir John Falstaff, the fat, vain, impoverished old knight. In this Act I monologue, Falstaff's cronies Bardolfo and Pistola have refused, on grounds of 'honour', to deliver his love letters. Falstaff explodes: first with 'Ehi! paggio!' as he summons his page to carry them instead, then into the celebrated tirade on honour ('L'onore! Ladri!'). What, he demands, is honour? Can it fill an empty belly, mend a leg, set a broken arm? It is a mere word, a puff of air. The monologue is Shakespeare's cynicism (from *Henry IV*) set to music of astonishing nimbleness, ending as Falstaff chases the rogues out with a broom.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the conversational speed of the writing. Verdi at eighty composes patter that turns on a dime, the orchestra darting and commenting like a fourth character. There are no set-

piece arias here; the music follows every shrug and snort of Falstaff's reasoning. Savour the mock-philosophical grandeur Verdi lends to 'L'onore!', inflated then instantly pricked, and the whirlwind of the final chase. It is comedy as orchestral filigree, sung by a bass-baritone who must act with his voice.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1 minutes

1840–1893

Trepak (Russian Dance) from The Nutcracker, Op. 71

THE COMPOSER

Tchaikovsky was Russia's first truly international composer and, in his own lifetime, one of the most beloved figures in European music. Born in 1840 in Votkinsk, he trained as a civil servant before turning to music in his early twenties, studying composition at the newly founded St. Petersburg Conservatory. He began teaching harmony at the newly opened Moscow Conservatory in 1866, and over the following twenty-five years produced six symphonies, three ballets (*Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*), a string of operas, numerous concertos, and a wealth of chamber and song repertoire that has never left the international stage.

Tchaikovsky was a man of intense feeling, much of it conflicted. Homosexual in an unforgiving Russian society, often paralysed by depression and self-doubt, he poured the full weight of his emotional life into his music. He died in St. Petersburg in 1893, days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony. The official cause was cholera, though the precise circumstances of his death have been debated ever since.

ABOUT THE WORK

The Trepak is one of the 'character dances' that fill the Kingdom of Sweets in Act II of *The Nutcracker*, Tchaikovsky's last and most popular ballet, premiered in St Petersburg in 1892. As Clara and her Nutcracker prince are entertained by a parade of treats, each nationality dances its own number (Spanish chocolate, Arabian coffee, Chinese tea), and the Trepak is the 'Russian' dance, named after a traditional Cossack folk dance from Ukraine and Russia. It is the briefest and most explosive of the suite: barely a minute long, built on stamping accents and a melody that accelerates to a breathless finish. Tchaikovsky, drawing on the squatting, kicking energy of the real trepak, compresses an entire crowd-pleasing dance into sixty seconds of pure adrenaline, making it a favourite encore and gala number quite apart from the ballet.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the relentless acceleration: the tune starts fast and only gets faster, whipped along by hammered downbeats. The whole orchestra stamps in unison, evoking the squat-and-kick of the Cossack dancer, and Tchaikovsky times the final headlong rush so that the piece ends almost before you expect it, over in a flash, designed to bring the house down.

Florence Price

1887–1953

Adoration (orch. Elaine Fine)

4 minutes

THE COMPOSER

Florence Price, born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1887, was an American composer who made history as the first African-American woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra, when the Chicago Symphony premiered her Symphony No. 1 in E minor in 1933. Trained at the New England Conservatory, she built a career as a pianist, organist, and teacher before settling in Chicago, where she came to prominence amid the cultural flowering of the era. Her music fuses the forms and idioms of European Romanticism with the spirituals, dances, and rhythms of African-American tradition, producing a warm, lyrical, and distinctly American voice. Long neglected after her death in 1953, Price has undergone a dramatic rediscovery in recent years, spurred by the 2009 discovery of a trove of her manuscripts in an abandoned house near St. Anne, Illinois, and is now celebrated as a major figure in American music. Her appearance at the New Year's Concert, a first for an American woman in this Viennese stronghold, reflects the orchestra's recent broadening of its programming.

ABOUT THE WORK

Adoration is a short, devotional miniature by Florence Price, the first Black American woman to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra. She wrote it in 1951, late in her life, as an organ piece: music conceived for worship, with the unhurried warmth of a hymn or a quiet prayer. Like much of Price's catalogue, it slipped into obscurity after her death in 1953, only to be rediscovered in the great Price revival of the past two decades, after a trove of her manuscripts was found in 2009 in her abandoned former summer home in Illinois. Its gentle, song-like character has made it a magnet for arrangers, and it now exists in many arrangements. The orchestration heard tonight is by the American composer Elaine Fine, who has clothed Price's intimate organ lines in glowing string-orchestra sound. At Schönbrunn it offers a moment of stillness and tenderness amid the gala's brilliance.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the lyrical, hymn-like main melody, sung by the strings with a singer's phrasing and breath. Price's harmonies are warm and unhurried, touched here and there by the inflections of the African-American spiritual and the salon Romanticism she grew up with. Notice how Fine's orchestration keeps the texture transparent. This is music of devotion, not display, and its power lies in its quiet sincerity and the long, arching line that swells gently and then settles back into peace.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

1897–1957

7 minutes

Straussiana (Polka, Mazurka, Waltz)

THE COMPOSER

Erich Wolfgang Korngold, born in Brünn (today Brno) in 1897, was the most spectacular child prodigy of his generation: a boy whose ballet *Der Schneemann*, written at eleven, became a sensation in Vienna, whom Mahler called a genius, and who by his early twenties had written the international operatic hit *Die tote Stadt* (1920). His was a late-Romantic idiom of opulent harmony and soaring melody, unfashionable in an age turning toward modernism. In 1934 Max Reinhardt invited him to Hollywood, and Korngold went on to become a founder of the symphonic film score, winning Oscars for *Anthony Adverse* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and bringing full Viennese Romanticism to the cinema. As a Jew, he found that the rise of the Nazis turned that move into exile, and it very likely saved his life. After the war he tried to return to concert composition with a violin concerto and a symphony, but felt out of step with musical fashion. He died in Los Angeles in 1957; the rehabilitation of his concert music came decades later.

ABOUT THE WORK

Straussiana is Korngold's affectionate bouquet of Johann Strauss, and a fitting choice for a Viennese open-air gala. He composed it in 1953, his last complete orchestral work, commissioned by an American publisher as a piece for school orchestras, arranging little-known melodies by Johann Strauss II into a three-movement suite: a Polka, a Mazurka, and a Waltz. The piece looks back, with both nostalgia and craft, to the dance music of the city Korngold had been forced to leave, filtering Strauss's tunes through his own lush, cinematic orchestral imagination. Though written for young players, it is no mere teaching piece: Korngold's harmonic richness and orchestral colour transform the Strauss melodies into something that glows with Hollywood warmth while keeping the lilt and sparkle of the Viennese ballroom. Heard in the Schönbrunn gardens, it is a knowing wink: a Hollywood master conjuring the spirit of old Vienna.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the three contrasting dance characters: the crisp, bouncing Polka; the swaying triple-time lilt of the Mazurka; and the grand, lilting Waltz that crowns the set. Throughout, hear how Korngold's orchestration upgrades Strauss: richer harmonies, fuller strings, glints of harp and woodwind colour that belong as much to a film score as to a ballroom. It is Strauss seen through a golden, slightly nostalgic lens.

Richard Wagner

1813–1883

5 minutes

'Abendlich strahlt der Sonne Auge' (Wotan's address, Das Rheingold, Scene 4)

THE COMPOSER

Richard Wagner transformed opera more radically than any composer before or since. Born in Leipzig in 1813, he grew up in a family steeped in theater and from an early age was drawn to the dramatic rather than the purely musical. Apart from a spell of lessons with the Leipzig cantor Theodor Weinlig, he was largely self-directed as a composer, absorbing Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller alongside Beethoven, developing a vision of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk*: a “total work of art” synthesizing poetry, drama, music, and visual spectacle.

Wagner's path was turbulent. An active participant in the 1849 Dresden uprising, he spent years in political exile, fleeing creditors and nursing turbulent love affairs. Yet his genius attracted patrons, most notably the eccentric King Ludwig II of Bavaria, whose financial support made possible Wagner's ultimate achievement: the construction of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, a theater designed specifically for his works. There, in 1876, his monumental four-opera cycle *The Ring of the Nibelung* received its first complete performance.

Wagner's musical innovations (the seamless orchestral flow, the system of *leitmotifs* or recurring themes associated with characters, objects, or ideas, and the extreme chromaticism that strained the boundaries of tonality) influenced virtually every composer who followed, from Strauss and Mahler to Schoenberg and beyond.

ABOUT THE WORK

This is the radiant close of *Das Rheingold*, the ‘preliminary evening’ of Wagner's four-opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The gods have recovered their gold and built their fortress; now Wotan, their chief, stands before the completed castle as evening falls. In ‘Abendlich strahlt der Sonne Auge’ (‘The sun's eye shines at evening’), he greets the stronghold gleaming in the sunset and names it Walhall (Valhalla). A rainbow bridge appears, and the gods prepare to cross into

their new home in triumphant procession. Yet Wagner laces the splendour with foreboding: we have just heard the dwarf Alberich's curse on the ring, and the music's very grandeur is shadowed by the knowledge that this divine glory is built on theft and will end in ruin. Sung by a bass-baritone of authority and beauty of tone, Wotan's address is one of the great moments of noble Wagnerian declamation: majestic, conflicted, and quietly tragic.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the broad, hymn-like sweep of Wotan's vocal line, set against shimmering orchestral light as the fortress catches the sunset. Wagner's leitmotifs do the storytelling: hear the gleaming 'Valhalla' theme in the brass, the cascading 'rainbow bridge' music and, crucially, the dark glint of the curse and the sword motif slipping in beneath the splendour. The triumph is real but hollow, and a great singer lets you hear Wotan's unease inside the grandeur.

Jules Massenet

1842–1912

6 minutes

Méditation from Thaïs

THE COMPOSER

Jules Massenet, born near Saint-Étienne in 1842, was the dominant figure of French opera in the late nineteenth century, the man who, more than any other, defined the elegant, sensuous, melodically generous style of the Belle Époque stage. Trained at the Paris Conservatoire, where he won the Prix de Rome in 1863, he became a hugely successful and prolific composer of operas, among them *Manon* (1884) and *Werther* (1892), which remain repertoire staples, as well as *Thaïs*, *Le Cid*, and *Don Quichotte*. He was also an influential professor of composition at the Conservatoire, teaching a generation that included Gustave Charpentier and Reynaldo Hahn. Massenet had an unerring instinct for the long, caressing vocal line and for orchestral colour of refined sweetness, and though some later critics dismissed his charm as sentimentality, his finest music marries genuine craft to irresistible lyricism. He died in Paris in 1912, the most performed French opera composer of his age.

ABOUT THE WORK

The *Méditation* is the most famous page Massenet ever wrote, and one of the best-loved violin solos in all music, yet it began life as an orchestral interlude inside an opera. *Thaïs* (1894) tells the story of a beautiful courtesan in fourth-century Alexandria and the monk Athanaël who sets out to convert her to Christianity, only to fall hopelessly in love with her himself. The *Méditation* is placed between the two scenes of Act II, at the very moment of *Thaïs*'s spiritual trans-

formation: as she wrestles alone with her conscience, a solo violin, accompanied by harp and strings, sings a melody of melting tenderness that represents her conversion and the dawning of grace within her. Its serene, prayer-like beauty has made it a concert and recital staple far beyond the opera house, beloved at weddings, memorials, and galas alike. At Schönbrunn it offers the orchestra's concertmaster a moment in the spotlight.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the solo violin's long, arching melody, rising and falling like a sung prayer over rippling harp arpeggios. The tune unfolds in serene waves, building to a passionate climax, the soul reaching toward grace, before subsiding into hushed peace. Notice the dialogue between the soloist and the gentle orchestra, and how Massenet sustains an almost unbroken line of melody from first note to last.

Maurice Ravel

17 minutes

1875–1937

Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2

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*.

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 second suite from *Daphnis et Chloé* is the dazzling finale of Ravel's largest score, the ‘choreographic symphony’ he wrote for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and premiered in Paris in 1912. The ballet

retells an ancient Greek pastoral romance of the shepherd Daphnis and the shepherdess Chloé, and Ravel poured into it some of the most sumptuous orchestration ever written. The composer himself drew the concluding portion of the ballet into this concert suite, which has since far outstripped the stage work in popularity. It comprises the three final scenes: 'Lever du jour' (Daybreak), the reunion-dance 'Pantomime', and the explosive 'Danse générale'. Ravel called the whole work a 'vast musical fresco', and these final pages are its glory: a sunrise of unmatched orchestral splendour followed by a Bacchic dance of mounting frenzy. The original ballet uses a wordless chorus, and Ravel's suites can be performed with or without it, though tonight's open-air setting under the Schönbrunn sky is exactly the grand canvas the music craves.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, in 'Daybreak', for one of music's great sunrises: trickling streams in the woodwinds and harps, mist lifting from the strings, and a long melodic swell as the sun floods the stage, a slow, ecstatic crescendo of pure orchestral colour. The 'Pantomime' centres on a famous flute solo, the god Pan wooing the nymph Syrinx, sinuous and tender. Then the 'Danse générale' erupts in a whirling, asymmetrical 5/4 rhythm, driving the whole orchestra to a delirious, pounding close.

Jerry Bock

5 minutes

1928–2010

'If I Were a Rich Man' from Fiddler on the Roof

THE COMPOSER

Jerry Bock, born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1928, was one of the great melodists of the American musical theatre. Working chiefly with the lyricist Sheldon Harnick, he created a string of Broadway scores marked by warmth, character, and a remarkable gift for capturing a show's world in song. The partnership won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama with the political satire *Fiorello!* (1959), but their masterpiece, and one of the most beloved musicals ever written, is *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), set among the Jewish villagers of Tsarist Russia and infused with the melodies and modes of Eastern European Jewish music. Bock and Harnick also wrote *She Loves Me* and *The Apple Tree* before their partnership ended after *The Rothschilds* (1970). Bock's melodies have an enduring, folk-like directness that has carried songs like 'Sunrise, Sunset' and 'If I Were a Rich Man' far beyond the theatre and into the standard repertoire of singers worldwide. He died in Mount Kisco, New York, in 2010.

ABOUT THE WORK

'If I Were a Rich Man' is the show-stopping number of Tevye, the poor dairyman at the heart of Fiddler on the Roof, and one of the most famous songs in the Broadway canon. Bock and Harnick wrote it for the 1964 musical, drawing on the Sholem Aleichem stories of Jewish village life in early-twentieth-century Russia. Alone with his thoughts and with God, Tevye daydreams about the life he would lead if he were wealthy: a big house, a fat wife, idle hours for prayer and study, the deference of his neighbours. Bock built the melody on the sounds of Jewish liturgical and folk music, complete with passages of wordless, cantorial-style vocalizing ('Yidl-diddle-diddle...') that imitate the ecstatic improvisation of a synagogue cantor. The result is at once comic and deeply touching, a poor man's wishful prayer that has become a gala favourite for the great bass-baritones, who relish its blend of humour, character, and full-throated singing.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the cantorial vocalise, the wordless 'biddy-biddy-bum' passages where Tevye's voice swoops and trills like a synagogue cantor lost in song. The melody leans on the distinctive intervals of Eastern European Jewish music, giving it its instantly recognizable flavour. Notice how the mood shifts between broad comedy and sudden tenderness, especially when Tevye imagines time to study the holy books: the dream of dignity beneath the dream of riches.

Tonight's artists

Bryn Terfel *bass-baritone*

Bryn Terfel is the gala's human centre, and his four numbers trace the full range of a great bass-baritone. As Boito's Mefistofele he is the sardonic, whistling devil; as Verdi's Falstaff he turns from menace to comic philosopher, demolishing the idea of honour with Shakespearean wit. Then, as Wagner's Wotan greeting Valhalla in *Das Rheingold*, he summons noble grandeur shadowed by foreboding, in a role Terfel has sung at the Metropolitan Opera and Covent Garden. Finally he sets opera aside for Broadway, becoming Tevye in 'If I Were a Rich Man', where his vocal heft and warm humour bring the dairy-man's wishful prayer vividly to life. Four characters, one unmistakable voice.

Sir Bryn Terfel, born on a farm in Pant Glas, North Wales, in 1965, is one of the most celebrated bass-baritones of his era, a singer whose enormous, dark-hued voice and magnetic stage presence have made him equally at home in Wagner, Mozart, Verdi, and the popular song repertoire. He came to international attention in the early 1990s and quickly became a leading interpreter of roles such as Wotan in Wagner's *Ring*, the title role in Verdi's *Falstaff*, Mozart's Figaro and Don Giovanni, Scarpia in *Tosca*, and Sweeney Todd. A proud Welshman who sings in his native language and champions Welsh music, he is also a beloved concert and crossover artist, bringing operatic weight to musical theatre and folk song alike. Knighted in 2017, Terfel combines vocal grandeur with a warm, often humorous personality that makes him an ideal gala performer, at ease addressing a stadium-sized crowd as readily as an opera-house audience.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof**

Alisa Solomon, Picador 2014

The story of how Bock and Harnick's Fiddler on the Roof was made and how it travelled the world, the show behind 'If I Were a Rich Man'.

ACCESSIBLE **Verdi's Shakespeare: Men of the Theater**

Garry Wills, Penguin Books 2012

A short, lively book on Verdi's Shakespeare operas and the collaboration with Boito that produced Falstaff; both men are on tonight's programme.

DEEPER **A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years**

Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker, W. W. Norton 2015

Two leading opera scholars trace four centuries of the art form, with room for Boito, Verdi, Puccini, Wagner and Massenet, the opera composers heard tonight.

SOURCES

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