

Grace and Grandeur

Saturday, October 10, 2026 · 15:30 · Musikverein
Riccardo Muti, conductor · Mitsuko Uchida, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58</i>	34'
2	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73</i>	42'
TOTAL MUSIC		76'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

34 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen, first, for the very opening. Before any orchestra is heard, the solo piano alone plays a soft, tender phrase: five gentle chords resolving into a quiet melody. This is the work's signature, and it asks you to lean in rather than be swept up. Notice how the orchestra then replies not in the home key but a step away, in a warmer, more distant colour, before the music settles. From this first exchange, the whole first movement unfolds as a dialogue of give and take: the piano rarely dominates, more often it muses, decorates, and converses, weaving filigree around the orchestra's themes. Listen for the cadenza near the movement's end (the soloist's extended solo flight) and for how the music sinks back to quietness afterward rather than ending in a blaze.

The slow movement (*Andante con moto*) is the heart of the concerto, and it works as a piece of wordless drama. Track the two characters carefully. The strings enter alone, playing in harsh, clipped, dotted rhythms: stern, even menacing, all in unison. The piano answers, every time, with soft, flowing, beseeching phrases. Follow this alternation as a contest: the strings stern, the piano gentle. Hear how, little by little, the piano's tenderness wears the strings down. Their phrases grow quieter, shorter, less aggressive, until they are subdued altogether and the

movement dissolves into a hushed stillness. This is the Orpheus-taming-the-Furies effect, and once you hear it as a dialogue you will not forget it.

The finale follows immediately, without a break, and the change of mood is delicious. A bright, bouncing rondo theme springs up in the strings, soon caught by the piano, and the music turns playful, dancing, full of rhythmic spring. Listen for trumpets and timpani entering here for the first time in the concerto, adding a festive sparkle the earlier movements deliberately withheld. Enjoy the wit of the exchanges between piano and orchestra, the surprising harmonic side-steps, and the gathering energy toward a brilliant, high-spirited close that crowns the whole work with joy.

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

42 minutes

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

From the opening, listen for the three-note figure low in the cellos and basses, a small, rocking motif that Brahms will turn into the seed of the entire first movement. Almost at once, notice the soft, dark intrusion of the timpani roll and the low trombones beneath the gentle horn melody: this is the ‘black border’ Brahms joked about, a shadow slipping across an otherwise sunlit scene. Listen, too, for the second main theme, a warm, swaying tune in the cellos and violas; many listeners recognise in it the contours of Brahms’s famous Lullaby. The whole movement breathes with an unhurried, expansive ease; let it stretch out rather than waiting for drama, and savour the long-spanned melodies and the gentle, dancing triple-time pulse beneath them.

In the slow movement (Adagio), shift your attention to weight and seriousness. This is the symphony’s gravest music: a noble, song-like theme launched by the cellos that develops in long, complex lines. The texture is dense and the harmony restless; this is Brahms at his most inward and searching, and it provides the necessary counterweight to the warmth around it. Don’t expect easy tunes here; follow instead the rich, conversational unfolding of the strings and winds.

The third movement is the easiest to love, and was encored at the premiere. Listen for the graceful, slightly wistful oboe melody that opens it, supported by gently plucked cellos, a relaxed, almost rustic dance. Then notice how Brahms twice quickens the pace into faster, scampering episodes (in duple and triple time) before the oboe tune returns, each time subtly transformed. It is a movement of charm and wit, light on its feet throughout.

Save your full attention for the finale. It begins, surprisingly, almost in secret: a hushed, hurrying theme murmured low in the strings, holding its energy in reserve. Then comes the release: the orchestra erupts into bright, surging motion, and from here the music drives forward with mounting exhilaration. Track the build toward the coda, and listen for the trombones, the very instruments that cast the symphony's opening shadow. Here, at the close, they blaze out triumphantly, crowning the work with a brilliant, joyous fanfare in D major. The shadow of the beginning is answered, and dispelled, in a final burst of light.



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