

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

Poetry and Pastoral in Taipei

Friday, October 16, 2026 · 19:45 · National Concert Hall

Tugan Sokhiev, conductor · Lang Lang, 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

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

34 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, composed largely in 1805 and 1806, belongs to the same astonishing burst of creativity that produced the Fourth Symphony, the Violin Concerto, and the three 'Razumovsky' string quartets. It stands at the heart of what is often called Beethoven's 'heroic' middle period, yet it is anything but heroic in the conventional sense. Where the

Third Concerto had been dramatic and stormy, and the later ‘Emperor’ would be all blazing grandeur, the Fourth is intimate, lyrical, and inward, a work that achieves its effects through poetry rather than force. It is, for many listeners and pianists alike, the most beautiful of the five.

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

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

42 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

If Brahms's First Symphony had cost him more than two decades of struggle (haunted by the shadow of Beethoven, it was famously not completed until 1876), his Second came almost as a release. He wrote it in the summer of 1877, with extraordinary speed, during a holiday at Pörttschach am Wörthersee, a lakeside village in southern Austria whose Alpine beauty he adored. 'So many melodies fly about here,' he wrote to a friend, 'that one must be careful not to tread on them.' Where the First had been a hard-won victory, the Second seemed to flow from the landscape itself, and it has been loved ever since as Brahms's sunniest, most genial symphony, the one most often, and not unjustly, called his 'pastoral.'

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 encores 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.

Tonight's artists

Lang Lang *piano*

Lang Lang is best known for virtuoso fireworks, but Beethoven's Fourth Concerto asks for something else entirely. It is the most inward of Beethoven's concertos: the piano begins alone, quietly, before the orchestra has spoken, and in the slow movement the soloist must calm the orchestra's stern unison strings with nothing but soft, singing phrases. Hearing a pianist of such outsize brilliance in a work that rewards restraint, tonal beauty and a feeling for silence is the interest of this Taipei evening, which also opens the orchestra's Asian tour with Tugan Sokhiev. Later on the tour the same programme returns with a different soloist: in Seoul on 25 October and Busan on 26 October, Seong-Jin Cho takes the solo part.

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 ad-

vocate of music education, he launched the Lang Lang International 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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