

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

Two Symphonies in D

Tuesday, November 3, 2026 · 15:00 · Takasaki City Theatre

Riccardo Muti, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Symphony No. 2 in D major, op. 36</i>	33'
2	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73</i>	42'
TOTAL MUSIC		75'

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Symphony No. 2 in D major, op. 36

33 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven's Second Symphony is the sunniest of his nine, and it was finished in the darkest months of his life. He began it in 1801 and completed most of it in 1802, much of the work done during a long summer stay in Heiligenstadt, then a village on the edge of Vienna, at a time when his deafness was growing worse and he had begun to fear it could not be cured. On 6 Oc-

tober 1802, at the end of that stay, he wrote a long letter to his brothers Carl and Johann, meant to be read after his death, in which he described the humiliation of standing beside someone who could hear a distant flute when he could hear nothing, and admitted that only his art had held him back from ending his life. The letter was never sent. He kept it among his private papers, where it was found after he died, and it is known today as the Heiligenstadt Testament.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Adagio molto; Allegro con brio. The symphony opens with a long slow introduction. A loud unison is answered by soft woodwind phrases, and the music then wanders through distant keys before a long crescendo launches the fast music. Once the Allegro starts, the main theme is given to violas and cellos rather than violins, and the movement runs on nervous energy: listen for the sudden loud chords, the abrupt silences, and the trumpet and timpani calls that end the exposition. The coda is long and exuberant.

II. Larghetto. One of Beethoven's longest slow movements, and one of his most gentle. The strings play the long, songlike main theme first, and then the woodwinds repeat it, like a serenade. The mood is calm and contented, with only passing shadows when the music moves into minor keys in the middle section.

III. Scherzo: Allegro. Short and full of jokes. Tiny three-note figures leap from instrument to instrument and from soft to loud, as if the orchestra were passing a ball. In the trio section, oboes and bassoons play a simple tune, and the strings keep interrupting with a gruff, loud outburst in the wrong key before backing down.

IV. Allegro molto. The finale opens with its most famous gesture: a quick two-note slur followed by a trill, which sounds like a stumble followed by a burst of laughter. That little figure drives the whole movement. Listen for the lyrical second theme in the woodwinds, and then for the enormous coda, with its false endings, hammered chords and sudden hushes, before trumpets and timpani finally bring the symphony home in blazing D major.

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 ex-

traordinary speed, during a holiday at Pörtschach 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 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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-11-03-muti>

Version 2, 30 September 2026