WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

Mozart's Shadow, Tchaikovsky's Fate

Thursday, November 5, 2026 · 19:00 · Festival Hall

Riccardo Muti, conductor

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	**MOZART** 1756–1791 *Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550*	32′
2	**TCHAIKOVSKY** 1840–1893 *Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36*	44′
	TOTAL MUSIC	76′

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

1756–1791

32 minutes

Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement (Molto allegro) begins without any introduction or call to attention. The violas start a soft, murmuring accompaniment, and over it the violins enter almost mid-thought with the famous main theme: a falling two-note sigh, repeated, that gives the whole movement its breathless urgency. Listen for how rarely the music settles. Even the gentler second theme, passed between strings and woodwinds in a major key, is short-lived, and in the development section Mozart drives the sighing motif through a chain of distant keys with an intensity that sounds, for a moment, like genuine anguish. When the second theme returns in the recapitulation, it comes back not in the major but in G minor, and the movement closes in the shadow in which it began.

The Andante, in E-flat major and a lilting 6/8 time, offers relief but not quite calm. Its opening builds up gradually, one string section entering after another. Listen for the tiny, fluttering pairs of quick notes that pass through the woodwinds and strings: they give the movement a restless, glinting surface, and in the middle section they darken as the harmony moves into minor-key territory.

The Menuetto is no courtly dance. Its main theme is written so that the strong beats fall across the bar lines, producing a stubborn, lurching three-against-two feeling, and its counterpoint is tight and severe. Everything changes in the Trio, which turns to G major: here the horns, silent or in the background until now, come forward in a warm, open-air passage, one of the few moments of unclouded sunlight in the symphony.

The finale (Allegro assai) opens with a rising arpeggio that shoots up like a rocket and a quiet, answering phrase. The movement is swift and compact, but wait for the start of the development section. The orchestra suddenly breaks off into a harsh unison figure, leaping angularly through a whole series of unrelated notes, as if the music has lost its footing. From there Mozart spins a passage of dense, argumentative counterpoint before finding his way back to the opening material. The symphony ends as it began, in G minor, with no consoling turn to the major: a close as terse and unsentimental as anything in Mozart.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

44 minutes

1840–1893

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The symphony opens with the Fate motif: a stark, blazing call in the horns and bassoons, taken up by the trumpets, hammering on a single repeated rhythm. Remember its shape, because it returns at every crucial turning point. After it fades, the strings begin the main theme of the first movement, a sighing, syncopated melody in 9/8 that sways uneasily, never quite settling on the beat. Listen for the contrasting music that follows: a gentle, rocking tune introduced by the clarinet, with delicate answers in the woodwinds, which is Tchaikovsky's dream of happiness. Each time the music seems to relax into it, the Fate fanfare breaks in with brutal force. Towards the end of the movement the orchestra builds to shattering climaxes, and the close is fierce and abrupt.

The second movement (Andantino in modo di canzona) begins with a long, plaintive song for solo oboe over soft pizzicato strings. It is music of memory and loneliness, and it is taken up in turn by the cellos and the full strings. In the middle, a more

animated passage briefly lifts the mood, before the song returns, now decorated by the woodwinds, and the movement fades away into silence.

The Scherzo is a delight and an ingenious experiment. For its outer sections the string players put down their bows and play pizzicato throughout, producing a rapid, whispering, plucked texture that swells and recedes like a breeze. In the central Trio the woodwinds take over with a jaunty, rustic tune, and then the brass enter with a distant, quiet march, as if a military band were passing in the street. Listen, near the end, for all three groups (plucked strings, woodwinds and brass) trading brief fragments with one another.

The finale (Allegro con fuoco) erupts without warning in a cascade of the full orchestra. Soon the woodwinds introduce the folk song 'In the field there stood a birch tree', a plain, slightly melancholy tune that Tchaikovsky treats to increasingly hectic variations, set against the returning whirlwind of the opening. Just as the celebration reaches its height, the Fate fanfare returns from the first movement, loud and unmistakable, halting everything. The music falls quiet, and then gathers itself again, the festive energy sweeping back in for a coda of tremendous, almost defiant brilliance.

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