

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

Jazz, Metamorphosis, and a Boléro

Saturday, November 28, 2026 · 15:30 · Musikverein

Alain Altinoglu, conductor · Rudolf Buchbinder, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	GERSHWIN 1898–1937 <i>Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra</i>	32'
2	DUTILLEUX 1916–2013 <i>Métaboles</i>	17'
3	RAVEL 1875–1937 <i>Boléro</i>	15'
TOTAL MUSIC		64'

George Gershwin

1898–1937

Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra

32 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

The Concerto in F is George Gershwin's most ambitious purely orchestral statement, and a deliberate answer to the question raised by his sudden fame. In February 1924 *Rhapsody in Blue* had made him the most talked-about young composer in America, but that piece had been a collaboration: Gershwin wrote it for two pianos, and Ferde Grofé orchestrated it for Paul Whiteman's band. Critics and friends wondered aloud whether Gershwin, the self-taught Tin Pan Alley songwriter, could handle the larger forms of the concert hall on his own. The conductor Walter Damrosch settled the matter by commissioning a full-scale piano concerto for the New York Symphony Society, to be played by the composer himself.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens not with the piano but with a rap of the timpani and a swinging orchestral introduction in Charleston rhythm. Listen for that dance pulse, which sets the movement's restless energy. The piano enters with a brooding, bluesy theme, and the two ideas are tossed, combined, and built toward a grand restatement before the close.

The slow movement is the heart of the concerto and its most famous page. It opens with a smoky, nocturnal blues led by a solo muted trumpet over softly sighing woodwinds, a sound straight out of a late-night club, evoking an empty city street. When the piano enters it brings a brighter, more songful melody, and the movement alternates between that lyrical warmth and the trumpet's bluesy melancholy. Listen for the muting on the brass, which gives the whole movement its veiled, intimate colour.

The finale erupts without pause: a fast, hammering toccata in driving rhythm, packed with the syncopations and brassy outbursts of the dance hall. Gershwin brings back themes from the earlier movements, including the trumpet blues, so that the whole concerto seems to gather and recapitulate itself, racing to a brilliant, emphatic close that brings the soloist and orchestra together in full cry.

Henri Dutilleux

1916–2013

Métaboles

17 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Métaboles is, alongside his two symphonies and the cello concerto, one of the works on which Henri Dutilleux's reputation as a master orchestrator rests. It was commissioned by the Cleveland Orchestra and its conductor George Szell to mark the orchestra's fortieth anniversary, and the Cleveland players gave the premiere in January 1965. Dutilleux, true to his exacting nature, had laboured over the score for several years, and the result is a tautly organised, brilliantly coloured single span lasting around seventeen minutes, a piece that has become one of his most frequently performed orchestral works.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The five movements run together without pause, so the most rewarding way to listen is to follow how the music changes colour and character as it passes from one to the next, and to notice that each section spotlights a different part of the orchestra.

Incantatoire opens the work with the woodwinds to the fore, weaving a hushed, ritual, spell-like music, incantatory in the literal sense, as if summoning something into being. Listen for the small thematic cell introduced here, because it will be handed on and transformed throughout.

Linéaire turns to the strings, spinning a long, sustained, singing line of great expressive warmth, the most lyrical and flowing of the five. Obsessionnel then shifts the spotlight to the brass, with an insistent, driving, repetitive figure that lives up to its name: a fixed idea hammered and circled obsessively.

Torpide ('torpid', sluggish) is the strange, brooding heart of the piece, dominated by percussion and dark, slow-moving sonorities: heavy, drowsy, faintly menacing. Out of this torpor bursts Flamboyant, the dazzling finale for full orchestra: fast, brilliant, and ablaze with colour, it gathers the work's transformed material and drives it to a glittering climax, recalling the very opening before the final, incandescent close.

Maurice Ravel

1875–1937

Boléro

15 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Boléro is the most famous thing Maurice Ravel ever wrote, and the work he liked least to be remembered by. He composed it in 1928 not as a concert piece but as a ballet, on a commission from the dancer Ida Rubinstein, who wanted a Spanish-flavoured number for her company. Ravel, ever the meticulous craftsman, set himself a deliberately austere problem: to write a piece consisting of one idea, repeated without variation, sustained for a quarter of an hour by orchestration and a single, unbroken crescendo. He described it, with characteristic dryness, as ‘orchestral tissue without music’, an experiment in pure sound and colour rather than thematic development. To his own surprise, and somewhat to his irritation, it became the runaway popular hit of his career, played far more often than the subtler works he prized.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen first for the snare drum. From the very opening it taps out the rhythmic pattern that will continue, utterly unchanged, for the whole piece, quiet at first, almost sub-

liminal, and inexorably more present as the music grows. It is the spine of the entire work; once you hear it, you will never lose it.

Over that rhythm, follow the melody as it is handed from instrument to instrument. It begins on a solo flute, low and soft, then passes to clarinet, bassoon, and onward through the orchestra, including unusual soloists like the soprano saxophone and the high, piercing E-flat clarinet. The tune never changes; what changes is who plays it, and in what combination. Notice how Ravel adds instruments in ever-richer layers, doubling the melody in startling colours.

The single great event is the crescendo. Resist the urge to wait for a 'theme' to develop; there isn't one. Instead, attend to the slow, almost imperceptible swell from near-silence to overwhelming force, and to the discipline with which the conductor holds the tempo steady so the build never lurches. Then, in the final bars, comes the one surprise Ravel allows himself: the music lurches abruptly into a new key, a sudden harmonic swerve after fifteen minutes of unwavering C major, before three hammered chords bring the whole hypnotic machine crashing to its end.

Tonight's artists

Rudolf Buchbinder *piano*

There is something deliciously unexpected about hearing Rudolf Buchbinder, the quintessential Viennese Classicist and a pianist whose name is almost synonymous with Beethoven, turn to the jazz-tinged swagger of Gershwin's Concerto in F. The pairing invites us to listen freshly: to hear what a master of structure and long line makes of the blues and the Charleston, and to enjoy the meeting of old-world Vienna and 1920s New York in a single pair of hands.

Rudolf Buchbinder, born in 1946 in Litoměřice (then Czechoslovakia) and raised in Vienna, is one of the senior statesmen of Austrian pianism and a fixture of the city's musical life for more than half a century. He entered the Vienna Academy of Music at the age of five, its youngest-ever student, and has long been regarded as a leading interpreter of the Viennese Classical repertoire, above all Beethoven, whose complete piano sonatas and concertos he has performed and recorded many times over, and whose music he has championed in marathon cycles around the world. A scholar as well as a player, Buchbinder owns a large collection of historical editions and writings on the works he plays, and brings to them a combination of structural clarity, unfussy directness, and deep idiomatic authority. He appears regularly with the Vienna Philharmonic and the great orchestras of Europe and is closely associated with the Musikverein, where Viennese audiences have followed his playing across generations.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-11-28-altinoglu>

Version 3, 30 September 2026