

Buchbinder at Eighty: Haydn, Beethoven, Schumann

Tuesday, December 1, 2026 · 19:30 · Musikverein
Rudolf Buchbinder, conductor · Rudolf Buchbinder, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	HAYDN 1732–1809 <i>Keyboard Concerto in D major, Hob. XVIII:11</i>	20'
2	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37</i>	33'
3	SCHUMANN 1810–1856 <i>Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54</i>	31'
TOTAL MUSIC		84'

Joseph Haydn

1732–1809

Keyboard Concerto in D major, Hob. XVIII:11

THE COMPOSER

Joseph Haydn was born in 1732 in the Lower Austrian village of Rohrau, the son of a wheelwright, and rose from rural poverty to become the most famous composer in Europe. After years as a chorister at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna and a precarious freelance youth, he entered in 1761 the service of the immensely wealthy Esterházy princes, for whom he would work for nearly three decades, much of it at the remote palace of Eszterháza in rural Hungary. There, as he later put it, he was 'cut off from the world' and 'forced to become original'. Out of that isolation came the body of work that effectively defined the Classical style: he is rightly called the father of both the symphony and the string quartet, having brought each to maturity over a long, experimental career of more than a hundred symphonies and almost seventy quartets. Genial, witty, and deeply professional, Haydn was admired across Europe, befriended and influenced the young Mozart, and taught the young Beethoven. After his prince's death in 1790 he travelled twice to London, where his late 'London' symphonies and the oratorio *The Creation* made him a celebrity. He died in Vienna in 1809, having lived through, and shaped, an entire era of music.

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Haydn wrote a number of keyboard concertos (some of the works once published under his name are now thought to be by others), and most of them are heard only occasionally today. The Concerto in D major, Hob. XVIII:11, is the exception. It was his last keyboard concerto, composed in the early 1780s and published in 1784, and it became the most popular of the set, both in his lifetime and since. Today it is, for most listeners, simply “the Haydn piano concerto”.

It was written for harpsichord or fortepiano, a sign of a period when the two instruments shared the same repertoire and a publisher wanted to sell to owners of either. The writing, though, points forward. The solo part is full of quick repeated notes, crisp articulation and contrasts of loud and soft that suit the newer, touch-sensitive piano, and that is the instrument on which it is usually played now. The orchestra is small: two oboes, two horns and strings. There are no flutes, no clarinets and no trumpets or drums, so the colour comes from the bright D major string sound, the reedy oboes and the horns holding long notes underneath.

Writers on the concerto often compare it with Mozart. It is closer in manner to the piano concertos Mozart was writing in the same years than to Haydn’s own earlier keyboard concertos. Whether Haydn was consciously learning from the younger composer is hard to prove, but the resemblance is there in the way soloist and orchestra trade material as partners rather than taking turns.

Tonight the work has a particular resonance. Rudolf Buchbinder made his early name with recordings of Haydn’s complete piano sonatas and other keyboard works, and here he directs the orchestra from the piano.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Vivace. The orchestra opens with a bright, clipped theme built from short repeated notes. When the piano enters it takes up the same idea, and the whole movement grows out of that opening figure, passed between the soloist and different sections of the orchestra. Listen for the way the piano sometimes leads and sometimes decorates what the strings are playing, and for the cadenza near the end, the moment the orchestra falls silent and the soloist improvises (or seems to) on the movement’s themes.

II. Un poco adagio. The slow movement moves to A major and slows the pace right down. The strings introduce a lyrical melody, and the piano answers by ornamenting it: trills, turns and running figures that spin out a single, song-like idea rather than introduce new ones. It is laid out in three parts, the opening music returning after a contrasting middle section.

III. Rondo all'Ungarese: Allegro assai. This is the movement that made the concerto famous. The piano launches a quick, stamping tune, the orchestra answers, and the ball is thrown back and forth at speed. “All'Ungarese” means “in the Hungarian style”, and Haydn signals it with offbeat accents, snapping rhythms and a switch into the minor for the first episode. The main tune keeps coming back between the episodes, each time with fresh energy, and the movement ends abruptly, with a flick rather than a flourish.

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

33 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37

THE COMPOSER

Beethoven needs little introduction, but the period in which he wrote his Second Symphony does. Born in Bonn in 1770 and trained in Vienna under Haydn, by 1800 he was already one of the most talked-about pianist-composers in Vienna. Around the same time, Beethoven had to face an alarming truth: his hearing was deteriorating, and would never recover. By 1802 he had retreated to the village of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna, where, in a state of suicidal despair, he wrote the famous letter to his brothers known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he confessed his condition and his agony. The letter, never sent in his lifetime, was found among his papers after his death.

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto sits on a threshold. Sketched from about 1800 and first played in 1803, it is the work in which his concertos stop sounding like brilliant continuations of Mozart and start sounding like Beethoven. It is in C minor, and its outer movements are stormy and restless.

The debt to Mozart is still audible, and seems deliberate. Mozart had written his own C minor piano concerto, K. 491, and Beethoven's concerto shows a keen awareness of it. Both works open quietly in the

strings with a rising theme, and both let the storm gather before the soloist arrives. Where Mozart's darkness stays veiled, Beethoven's piano enters with forceful rising scales, as if pushing the door open.

The premiere, on 5 April 1803 in Vienna, was one of the long benefit concerts Beethoven organised for himself. The same programme also brought the first performances of his Second Symphony and his oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. Beethoven was the soloist, and the solo part was not finished. Ignaz von Seyfried, who turned pages for him that evening, later recalled seeing "almost nothing but empty pages", with a few scribbles he described as Egyptian hieroglyphs to serve as clues. Beethoven played most of it from memory, nodding to Seyfried each time a page needed turning, and was greatly amused afterwards by his page-turner's anxiety. The written-out solo part came later, and the concerto was published in 1804.

For all its drama, the concerto is also a work of great tenderness. Its slow movement is set in E major, a key so far from C minor that the first entry of the piano sounds like a door opening onto another room.

Rudolf Buchbinder has recorded all five Beethoven concertos more than once, including with the Vienna Philharmonic.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro con brio. A long orchestral introduction lays out the main themes: a quiet, marching C minor figure in the strings, answered by the winds, and a gentler second theme that arrives in the major. When the piano finally enters, it does so with a flurry of rising scales, and from then on soloist and orchestra argue over the same material. Keep an ear on the short rhythmic motif of the opening theme; Beethoven hammers it home throughout. After the cadenza, instead of the expected orchestral full stop, the piano prolongs its final trill and keeps going with rippling arpeggios before the orchestra returns and the movement closes resolutely in C minor.

II. Largo. The piano opens alone in E major, playing a slow, hymn-like melody with detailed pedal markings that let the chords blur and resonate. The orchestra, with muted strings, answers in the same hushed tone, and as the movement unfolds the piano's arpeggios curl around the melody when the orchestra takes it up.

III. Rondo: Allegro. The piano sets off alone with an agitated, off-balance tune back in C minor, and the orchestra takes it up with force. The rondo alternates this theme with contrasting episodes, some full of humour, others blunt and dramatic. At the very end the music shakes off the minor key: a quick coda, marked Presto, turns the main theme into a cheerful C major romp.

Robert Schumann

31 minutes

1810–1856

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

THE COMPOSER

Robert Schumann was born on June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Saxony, into a literary household. His father was a publisher and bookseller, and throughout his life, Schumann remained as devoted to literature as to music, editing an influential music journal and writing eloquent criticism that championed Chopin, Berlioz, and the young Brahms.

After abandoning law studies in Leipzig, Schumann pursued a career as a concert pianist, but a growing weakness in the fingers of his right hand forced him to focus on composition. His piano works of the 1830s, including *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, and *Kinderszenen*, established him as a leading voice of musical Romanticism. In 1840, after a long legal battle with her father, he married the celebrated pianist Clara Wieck, and their union sparked an extraordinary creative outburst: more than half of all Schumann's songs date from that single year.

Schumann's later years were shadowed by mental illness, which had plagued him intermittently since youth. In 1854, after attempting suicide, he was confined to an asylum near Bonn, where he died on July 29, 1856, at the age of forty-six.

ABOUT THE WORK

Schumann's Piano Concerto began life as something else. In May 1841, in the first year of his marriage to Clara Wieck, he wrote a single-movement Fantasy in A minor for piano and orchestra. Clara, one of the great pianists of the age, tried it out with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra that August, but no publisher wanted a one-movement piece of that kind and it went into a drawer. Four years later, in the summer of 1845, Schumann revised the Fantasy and added two more movements, an Intermezzo and a finale. Clara was the soloist at the premiere of the full concerto in Dresden on 4 December 1845, with Ferdinand Hiller, the work's dedicatee, conducting. It was performed in Leipzig on New Year's Day 1846, and it has been one of the most loved concertos in the repertoire ever since.

Schumann had made several attempts at a piano concerto in his twenties and abandoned them all. He was wary of the kind of concerto then in fashion, written mainly as a vehicle for a travelling virtuoso's fireworks. What he produced instead is a conversation. The piano has a demanding part, including a large cadenza, but it often accompanies the orchestra rather than dominating it, supporting a clarinet or oboe solo, or weaving figuration around a melody in the strings. Early reviewers noticed this, some praising the independent and colourful orchestral writing and others remarking that the piano sometimes seemed to recede into the background.

The music is also, unmistakably, about Clara. The wistful oboe melody that dominates the first movement begins with the notes C, B, A, A. In German notation B natural is written H, so the notes can spell C-H-A-A, a shortened form of "Chiara", the Italian version of Clara's name that Schumann used for her in his writings. Whether he meant it as a cipher is debated, but the theme returns in so many guises, tender, urgent, dreamy and finally triumphant, that it is hard not to hear it as a portrait.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro affettuoso. The concerto opens with a single sharp stroke from the orchestra, and the piano answers with a cascade of loud chords tumbling downward. Then the mood switches at once: the oboe sings the gentle main theme, and the piano repeats it. Almost everything in the movement grows from that melody. Listen for it speeded up and agitated, for a slow, dreamy version in a distant key in the middle of the movement, and for the passages where a solo clarinet takes the lead and the piano becomes its accompanist. The large written-out cadenza near the end is followed by a fast coda built, once again, on the main theme.

II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso. A short, intimate movement in F major. The piano and strings exchange a delicate little figure, almost a dialogue of polite remarks, and in the middle section the cellos take over with a broad, warm melody while the piano accompanies. At the end, the winds recall the first movement's main theme, and without a break the music slides straight into the finale.

III. Allegro vivace. The finale bursts in, in a bright A major, with a vigorous, waltz-like theme. Schumann plays tricks with the rhythm here: in places the music seems to switch into

slower, broader beats that cut across the written time, and a good performance lets you feel the ground shift. The movement is long and exuberant, and it builds to an extended coda that ends in unambiguous celebration.

Tonight's artists

Rudolf Buchbinder *piano*

Rudolf Buchbinder turns 80 on 1 December 2026, the date of the first of these two concerts, and he marks it with the Vienna Philharmonic, an orchestra that has made him an honorary member, in the Musikverein's Golden Hall. He both plays and directs from the keyboard. The programme traces a line through the repertoire he has lived with longest: Haydn, whose piano sonatas and other keyboard works he recorded complete; Beethoven, whose five concertos he has recorded more than once, including with this orchestra; and Schumann's A minor Concerto, the most Romantic of the three and the one written most openly as a conversation between soloist and orchestra.

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.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph**

Jan Swafford, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014

Swafford's Beethoven biography covers the C minor Third Piano Concerto and the concert of 1803 at which Beethoven first played it.

ACCESSIBLE **Schumann: The Faces and the Masks**

Judith Chernaik, Vintage 2019

A recent life of Schumann that follows the Piano Concerto from its origins as a single Fantasie written for Clara, who gave its premiere.

DEEPER **Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance**

Leon Plantinga, W. W. Norton 2008

A detailed study of Beethoven's concertos, with a chapter on the Third that suits tonight's programme of three piano concertos from Haydn to Schumann.

SOURCES

1. Concert of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna, 1 December 2026, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/concert-of-the-society-of-friends-of-music-in-vienna/10896/>
2. Concert of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna, 2 December 2026, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/concert-of-the-society-of-friends-of-music-in-vienna/10897/>
3. Keyboard Concerto No. 11 (Haydn), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keyboard_Concerto_No._11_\(Haydn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keyboard_Concerto_No._11_(Haydn))
4. Haydn: Concerto for Piano in D Major, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.indianapolissymphony.org/?p=2930>
5. Keyboard Concerto in D major, Hob.XVIII:11 (Haydn, Joseph), IMSLP. [https://imslp.org/wiki/Keyboard_Concerto_in_D_major,_Hob.XVIII:11_\(Haydn,_Joseph\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Keyboard_Concerto_in_D_major,_Hob.XVIII:11_(Haydn,_Joseph))
6. Haydn: Keyboard Concertos Nos. 3, 4 & 11, Brilliant Classics. <https://www.brilliantclassics.com/articles/h/haydn-keyboard-concertos-nos-3-4-11/>
7. Piano Concerto No. 3 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._3_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No._3_(Beethoven))
8. Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37, Ludwig van Beethoven, Hollywood Bowl / Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/2773/piano-concerto-no-3-in-c-minor-op-37>
9. On This Day, 5 April: Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 was premiered, Interlude. <https://interlude.hk/on-this-day-5-april-beethovens-piano-concerto-no-3-was-premiered/>
10. Piano Concerto (Schumann), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_\(Schumann\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_(Schumann))
11. Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 54, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/schumann-piano-concerto-in-a-minor-opus-54>
12. Rudolf Buchbinder, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Buchbinder
13. Rudolf Buchbinder: Biography, Deutsche Grammophon. <https://www.deutschegrammophon.com/en/composers/rudolf-buchbinder/biography>
14. Biography, Rudolf Buchbinder (official site). <https://www.buchbinder.net/en/biography>
15. Rudolf Buchbinder: Grafenegg 2025, News.at. <https://www.news.at/menschen/rudolf-buchbinder-grafenegg-2025>
16. Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780544245587>
17. Schumann: The Faces and the Masks, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781101974254>
18. Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393333459>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-12-01-buchbinder>

Version 2, 30 September 2026