

Mozart in G Minor, Métaboles, and a Boléro in Linz

Thursday, December 3, 2026 · 19:30 · Brucknerhaus
Alain Altinoglu, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550</i>	32'
2	DUTILLEUX 1916–2013 <i>Métaboles</i>	17'
3	RAVEL 1875–1937 <i>Boléro</i>	15'
TOTAL MUSIC		64'

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

32 minutes

1756–1791

Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550

THE COMPOSER

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart needs little introduction. Born in Salzburg in 1756, he was a prodigy whose talents were cultivated and exhibited across Europe by his father Leopold. By the time he composed this concerto in 1779, the twenty-three-year-old Mozart was restless in provincial Salzburg, dreaming of Vienna and larger stages. Within two years he would make the move that defined his mature career.

Less well known is his sister Maria Anna, called “Nannerl,” five years his senior. She was an equally brilliant pianist as a child, and the siblings toured together as wonders of nature until Nannerl’s touring career ended when she was about seventeen. Following the customs of the time, she stayed at home while Wolfgang continued traveling with their father. The brother and sister remained close, and this concerto was written for the two of them to play.

ABOUT THE WORK

In the summer of 1788 Mozart wrote three symphonies in quick succession: No. 39 in E flat, No. 40 in G minor and No. 41 in C, the “Jupiter”. He kept a catalogue of his finished works, so the dates are exact: he entered the G minor Symphony on 25 July 1788, between

the other two. Nobody knows for certain what occasion he had in mind. Plans for a series of subscription concerts that summer have left little trace, and it is not clear whether they took place.

That uncertainty fed a long-standing romantic myth that Mozart never heard these symphonies and wrote them for posterity. The evidence suggests otherwise, at least for No. 40. It exists in two versions: the original, and a revision in which Mozart added a pair of clarinets and rewrote some of the other wind parts to make room for them. He would hardly have gone to that trouble without a performance in view, and the revised version was probably played at Vienna concerts conducted by his colleague Antonio Salieri.

The G minor Symphony is one of only two Mozart symphonies in a minor key, and both are in G minor. The other, No. 25, was written when he was seventeen. The later work is darker and more concentrated. Mozart left out trumpets and drums, whose ceremonial brilliance had no place here, and he does not end in the major: the finale stays in G minor to the last chord, which to eighteenth-century ears was an unusually stark way to finish.

The symphony has been heard very differently over the centuries: some found mostly grace and charm in it, others a work of pain and grief. It has become the most famous of Mozart's symphonies. Its intensity is held in check by Classical proportions: the passion is real, but it is expressed through balanced phrases and clear forms.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Molto allegro. There is no slow introduction. The symphony begins with a murmuring accompaniment in the lower strings, and over it the violins whisper the famous main theme, a sighing figure of two short notes and a longer one, repeated with urgent insistence. The second theme, in B flat major, is smoother and passed between strings and woodwinds. In the development Mozart takes the sighing figure through remote keys and sets it against itself in counterpoint.

II. Andante. The slow movement moves to E flat major and to a gentle 6/8 time. It opens with the violas and violins entering one after another on repeated notes, building up a soft chord step by step. The mood is calm on the surface, but chromatic turns and unexpected changes of key keep it uneasy.

III. Menuetto: Allegretto. This is not a courtly dance. The minuet is gruff and heavily accented, with phrases that cut across the three-beat bar and make it hard to dance to. The trio in G major offers a brief, gentle release, with strings and winds taking turns, before the minuet returns.

IV. Allegro assai. The finale opens with a theme that leaps up through a chord like a rocket, followed by a loud, rushing answer from the whole orchestra. A more lyrical second theme gives brief contrast, but the development is one of the most turbulent passages Mozart wrote, twisting the opening figure through harsh harmonies. The movement ends as it began, in G minor.

Henri Dutilleux

17 minutes

1916–2013

Métaboles

THE COMPOSER

Henri Dutilleux (1916–2013) was one of the most refined and individual voices in twentieth-century French music, a composer who stood apart from every passing school, working slowly, revising endlessly, and leaving a small but exceptionally polished body of work. Born in Angers into a family with artistic roots (his great-grandfather had been close to the painters of the Barbizon school), he trained at the Conservatoire de Paris and won the Prix de Rome in 1938. Rather than aligning himself with the serialist avant-garde that dominated post-war Paris, or retreating into neo-classicism, Dutilleux forged a personal language that drew on the sensuous orchestral colour of Debussy and Ravel, the harmonic richness of Roussel, and an admiration for jazz and for the music of Bartók and Stravinsky. His hallmark techniques, ‘progressive growth’ (in which themes are revealed only gradually) and a fluid sense of memory and transformation, give his music a dreamlike, evolving quality. A perfectionist who withdrew works he found unworthy, he produced relatively few scores, but those that survive (the two symphonies, the cello concerto *Tout un monde lointain...*, the string quartet *Ainsi la nuit*, and *Métaboles*) are treasured for their craftsmanship, imagination, and luminous orchestration. He continued composing into his nineties, honoured as a quiet master of his art.

ABOUT THE WORK

Henri Dutilleux worked slowly and threw a great deal away, and his catalogue is small as a result. *Métaboles* took him years. It was commissioned by George Szell for the Cleveland Orchestra’s fortieth an-

niversary season in 1958 and 1959, but Dutilleux did not finish it until 1964. Szell conducted the Cleveland Orchestra in the first performance on 14 January 1965.

The title explains the method. In rhetoric, a “métabole” is a figure in which the same words are repeated in a different order or from a different angle, so that their meaning shifts. Dutilleux described his intention like this: “to present one or several ideas in a different order and from different angles, until, by successive stages, they are made to change character completely.” A musical idea (a melody, a chord, a rhythm) is gradually transformed until it has turned into something new, and that new idea then becomes the starting point for the next stage. Dutilleux was interested in forms that grow from the logic of a particular piece rather than following a standard pattern, and *Métaboles* is his clearest demonstration of it.

The work is in five sections played without a break, each with a French title that describes its character. In the first four, one section of the orchestra takes the lead in turn: woodwinds, then strings, then brass, then percussion. In the fifth, everyone joins together. That has led people to call the piece a concerto for orchestra in miniature, a showcase for the players as much as a study in transformation.

Dutilleux stood apart from the main currents of French music after the Second World War. He kept his distance from the serialist avant-garde of the postwar years without writing in an old-fashioned style either. His music descends from Debussy and Ravel in its fascination with colour and resonance, and on this programme it sits naturally between Mozart and Ravel’s *Boléro*, another piece about transformation, though of a very different kind.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Incantatoire. The piece opens with a series of pungent chords in the woodwinds, circling around the note E, punctuated by plucked strings and harp. It has an incantatory, ritual quality, and many listeners hear an echo of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.

Linéaire. The strings, divided into many parts, spin out long, slow lines in a luminous, otherworldly texture. Listen for how the idea has grown out of something the strings touched on briefly in the first section.

Obsessionnel. The brass take over with clipped, aggressive figures that keep coming back in altered forms, as the title suggests.

Torpid. A slow, drowsy section led by the percussion, a slowed-down memory of what came before, with shimmering, fragmentary sounds.

Flamboyant. The full orchestra gathers the threads of the earlier sections. Near the end, the chords from the very opening return, and the piece rushes to a brilliant, exhilarating close.

Maurice Ravel

1875–1937

Boléro

THE COMPOSER

Maurice Ravel was born on March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, a small town in the French Basque Country near the Spanish border. His mother was Basque and his father a Swiss-born engineer and inventor, a heritage that would profoundly shape his musical identity. From an early age, Ravel showed exceptional musical talent and entered the Paris Conservatoire at fourteen, where he studied with Gabriel Fauré and absorbed the harmonic innovations of his time.

Often paired with Claude Debussy under the “Impressionist” label, Ravel himself rejected this categorization. Where Debussy was spontaneous and atmospheric, Ravel was a meticulous craftsman, obsessed with formal perfection and clarity. This perfectionism produced some of the most beloved works in the orchestral repertoire: the hypnotic *Boléro*, the shimmering *Daphnis et Chloé*, and the virtuosic *Gaspard de la nuit*.

By the late 1920s, Ravel was France’s most celebrated living composer, yet he remained restless, constantly seeking new sounds and influences. A triumphant four-month tour of North America in 1928 brought him face to face with jazz, which impressed him deeply. These experiences would flow directly into his final orchestral works.

ABOUT THE WORK

Boléro began as a practical solution. In 1928 the dancer Ida Rubinstein asked Ravel for music for a ballet, and he decided to write something new, based on the bolero, a Spanish dance in triple time. On holiday in the resort of Saint-Jean-de-Luz he found the tune: a long, sinuous melody with an insistent quality that he planned to repeat again and again without developing it, changing only the orchestration and building the volume.

The ballet opened at the Paris Opéra later in 1928, with Rubinstein dancing, and was a sensation. Within two years the piece had been recorded and conducted by leading conductors of the day, among them Serge Koussevitzky in Boston and Willem Mengelberg in Amsterdam,

15 minutes

as well as by Ravel himself. It soon became a concert work far more often than a ballet, and by the mid-1930s it had even lent its name to a Hollywood film.

Ravel was strict about the tempo. When Arturo Toscanini conducted it with the New York Philharmonic in Paris in 1930, taking it much faster than the composer wanted, Ravel objected afterwards, and the dispute became famous. For Ravel the effect depended on a steady, unhurried pulse, maintained without speeding up from beginning to end.

On this programme Boléro makes a pointed partner for Dutilleux's *Métaboles*. Both are about transformation. In *Métaboles* the ideas themselves change shape until they become something new. In Boléro almost nothing changes except the instruments playing: the melody, the rhythm and the tempo stay the same, and the whole drama lies in the way the sound grows.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The rhythm. A snare drum begins, very quietly, with a two-bar rhythmic pattern that it will repeat throughout the piece. Listen to how it grows from a whisper to a roar without ever changing.

Two tunes, many colours. Over the drum and plucked strings, a flute plays the first melody. It is followed by a second melody, with a more jazzy, bluesy inflection. The two alternate, each passed to a new instrument or combination of instruments: clarinet, bassoon, the high E flat clarinet, oboe d'amore, then tenor and soprano saxophones, and on to trombone and full sections. Listen for the passage where horn, celesta and piccolos play the tune together in different keys, creating an organ-like, slightly eerie sound.

The crescendo. The whole piece is one long crescendo from *pi-anissimo* to *fortissimo*, all in C major and all at the same tempo. Only at the very end does Ravel break the pattern: the music lurches suddenly into E major, then back, and the whole orchestra collapses in a final crash.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Mozart: The Reign of Love**

Jan Swafford, Harper Perennial 2021

A readable modern life of Mozart that sets the G minor Symphony No. 40 in the summer of 1788, when he wrote his last three symphonies.

ACCESSIBLE **Ravel**

Roger Nichols, Yale University Press 2013

Nichols's Ravel biography tells how Boléro began as a ballet for Ida Rubinstein and grew into Ravel's best-known score.

DEEPER **Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Works**

Caroline Potter, Routledge 2016

The main English study of Dutilleux, covering his life and his music including *Métaboles*, written for the Cleveland Orchestra.

SOURCES

1. Concert in Linz, 3 December 2026, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/concert-in-linz/10930/>
2. Brucknerhaus, Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brucknerhaus>
3. Brucknerhaus Linz, Brucknerhaus Linz. <https://www.brucknerhaus.at/en>
4. Symphony No. 40 (Mozart), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._40_\(Mozart\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._40_(Mozart))
5. Mozart: Symphony No. 40, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/symphony-no-40>
6. Mozart: Symphony No 40, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.indianapolissymphony.org/backstage/program-notes/mozart-symphony-no-40/>
7. Métaboles, Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9taboles>
8. Dutilleux: Métaboles, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/metaboles>
9. Métaboles, Henri Dutilleux, Hollywood Bowl / Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.hollywoodbowl.com/musicdb/pieces/2337/metaboles>
10. Boléro, Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bol%C3%A9ro>
11. Ravel: Boléro, Classic FM. <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/ravel/music/bolero/>
12. Ravel Archives, California Symphony. <https://www.californiasymphony.org/category/composer/ravel/>
13. Mozart: The Reign of Love, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780062433619>
14. Ravel, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300187762>
15. Henri Dutilleux: His Life and Works, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781138279193>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-12-03-altinoglu>

Version 2, 30 September 2026