

Faun, Asylum, and a Sacrifice

Saturday, December 19, 2026 · 15:30 · Musikverein
Klaus Mäkelä, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	DEBUSSY 1862–1918 <i>Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, L. 86</i>	10'
2	ADÈS b. 1971 <i>Asyla, Op. 17</i>	25'
3	STRAVINSKY 1882–1971 <i>The Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du printemps)</i>	33'
TOTAL MUSIC		68'

Claude Debussy

1862–1918

10 minutes

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune, L. 86

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Everything begins with the flute. Alone and unaccompanied, it traces a sinuous, chromatic line that slips downward and curls back on itself, suspended over silence with no clear sense of key or metre: the faun stirring in the afternoon heat. This melody is the seed of the whole piece; listen for how it returns again and again, each time reharmonised, recoloured, handed to different instruments, never quite the same twice.

Notice how Debussy avoids momentum of the old kind. There are no driving sequences, no hammered climaxes building inexorably to a peak; instead the music drifts, pools, and evaporates, its phrases ending in soft exhalations rather than firm cadences. The harp glissandos and the antique cymbals' delicate, ringing strokes add a glint of cool light to the warm woodwind colours.

There is one moment of fuller feeling: roughly midway, the strings rise into a broad, ardent melody, the closest the piece comes to passion, before it too subsides back into reverie. Toward the end, the muted horns and a last appearance of the

flute theme bring the music to a hushed, suspended close, the antique cymbals chiming faintly as the faun sinks back into sleep. Let the piece wash over you rather than tracking signposts; its whole art lies in seeming to have no edges at all.

Thomas Adès

25 minutes

b. 1971

Asyla, Op. 17

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Asyla unfolds in four movements that together form a single arc. The first opens with delicate, glinting percussion and that quarter-tone-flat upright piano, establishing a soundworld of bells, tuned metals, and uncertain tuning; listen for how the music seems to assemble itself out of glittering fragments, tentative and searching, before gathering into something more urgent.

The second movement is the work's slow heart: brooding, lyrical, dominated by a long, keening melody on the bass oboe, an instrument so rarely heard that its dark, plangent voice is unmistakable. There is grief here, and a strange tenderness, the sound of a refuge that is also a confinement.

The third movement, 'Ecstasio,' is the one to wait for. Out of nothing a pounding dance beat materialises, four square beats to the bar, and the orchestra is transformed into a vast nightclub: synthesised-sounding riffs, surging crescendos, sudden 'drops,' the whole machinery of techno rendered by acoustic instruments. It is thrilling and a little frightening, euphoria with an edge of loss of control.

The finale brings the comedown. The dance dissolves, and the music gropes its way back toward stillness, recalling fragments of earlier movements before settling into a fragile, exhausted calm. Listen for the way Adès lets the brilliance ebb away, ending not in triumph but in a quiet that feels both like sanctuary and like emptiness: the two faces of asylum, held in balance to the last.

Igor Stravinsky

1882–1971

The Rite of Spring (Le Sacre du printemps)

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Rite falls into two parts. Part One, ‘The Adoration of the Earth,’ opens with one of the strangest sounds in the repertoire: a solo bassoon, pushed to the very top of its register, spinning out an archaic, plaintive folk-like melody that seems to come from before history. Around it other woodwinds gather, the texture thickening into a dawn chorus of birdcalls and twittering, until the orchestra abruptly cuts off.

Then comes the moment everyone remembers: the ‘Augurs of Spring,’ where the strings, reinforced by horns, pound out a single dissonant chord again and again, with savage, irregular accents stamping down where you do not expect them. This relentless rhythmic violence is the heart of the work; let the displaced accents knock you off balance, as they are meant to. Listen, too, for the way Stravinsky builds from short repeated fragments (a tune, a rhythm, a gesture), layering and colliding them rather than developing them in the old symphonic way.

Part Two, ‘The Sacrifice,’ begins in mystery, a cold and shadowy nocturnal landscape, before mounting through the ‘Glorification of the Chosen One’ toward its terrifying climax. The work ends with the ‘Sacrificial Dance,’ in which the chosen maiden dances herself to death: a movement of jagged, convulsive rhythms in constantly shifting metres, almost impossible to count, driving to a final, shattering orchestral lurch, a single brutal chord that drops like an axe. After it, silence.



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