

A Classical Joke, a Birthday Present, and Fate

Thursday, January 14, 2027 · 19:30 · Musikverein

Lahav Shani, conductor · Lahav Shani, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	PROKOFIEV 1891–1953 <i>Symphony No. 1 in D major, Op. 25, 'Classical'</i>	15'
2	SHOSTAKOVICH 1906–1975 <i>Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 102</i>	20'
3	TCHAIKOVSKY 1840–1893 <i>Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64</i>	48'
TOTAL MUSIC		83'

Sergei Prokofiev

1891–1953

Symphony No. 1 in D major, Op. 25, 'Classical'

15 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Sergei Prokofiev began his first numbered symphony in 1916 and finished the score on 10 September 1917, in the months between Russia's two revolutions. He spent that summer in the countryside outside Petrograd, away from the street fighting in the city, and set himself an experiment. Until then he had always composed at the piano. This time he decided to write without one, working the music out in his head, on the theory that orchestral colours imagined directly would come out cleaner and more transparent.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro. A rising flourish and the first theme is off, in D major, and within a few bars has already jumped to a key where it has no business being. Notice how light the textures are: nothing is doubled that does not need to be.

II. Larghetto. In A major, a long, high violin melody floats over a gently ticking accompaniment. It is the one place where the symphony stops joking.

III. Gavotte: Non troppo allegro. Where Haydn would have put a minuet, Prokofiev puts an older, heavier-footed court dance. It is over in little more than a minute. Listen for the wide octave leaps in the tune and the way the harmony lurches sideways before landing back in D.

IV. Finale: Molto vivace. The replacement finale, built almost entirely from major chords, races along with scales and repeated notes passed between strings and woodwind. The flutes and the violins have the hardest time of it.

Dmitri Shostakovich

1906–1975

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F major, Op. 102

20 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his Second Piano Concerto at the beginning of 1957 as a nineteenth-birthday present for his son Maxim, who was then a student pianist. Maxim gave the first performance on 10 May 1957 at the Moscow Conservatory. The piece is short, about twenty minutes, in three movements, and its solo part is brilliant without being forbidding: it was made for a young player to shine in.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro. The bassoons set off with a perky march that could accompany toy soldiers, and the piano joins a few bars later with a simple tune in bare octaves, both hands playing the same notes. The movement is in sonata form, and the march keeps returning, louder each time. There is a full solo cadenza before the close.

II. Andante. Muted strings begin alone in C minor with something close to a chorale. Then the piano enters and the key turns to C major: a slow, descending melody over rolling triplets in the left hand. Listen for the gentle rub of two notes in the melody against three in the accompaniment.

III. Allegro. The finale follows without a break. Its first theme is a quick dance in two, and its second is in 7/8 time, with plucked strings that sound a little like a balalaika. Later come pages of scales and patterns in the style of the Hanon finger exercises that piano students are made to practise, a joke between father and son. The ending is a dash for the line in F major.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

1840–1893

Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64

48 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed his Fifth Symphony between May and August 1888, a decade after the Fourth, and conducted the first performance himself in St Petersburg on 17 November of that year. He had begun the work unsure whether he still had a symphony in him, and his opinion of it swung back and forth for months afterwards. After the early performances he decided it was a failure and wondered whether he was written out. Later he warmed to it again. The public never shared his doubts, and the Fifth has been a fixture of the repertoire ever since.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Andante. Allegro con anima. Two clarinets in their lowest register play the fate theme over dark strings. The Allegro that follows grows out of a quiet, dance-like tune for clarinet and bassoon and builds to several climaxes before sinking back into the depths where it began.

II. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza. After a few bars of low string chords, a solo horn sings one of the most famous melodies Tchaikovsky wrote. Oboe and clarinet answer it. Twice the fate theme breaks in at full volume and stops the love song in its tracks.

III. Valse: Allegro moderato. In place of a scherzo there is a waltz in A major, graceful and a little uneasy, with a faster, scurrying middle section. Just before the end the fate theme creeps in quietly on clarinets and bassoons.

IV. Finale: Andante maestoso. Allegro vivace. The fate theme opens the movement, now in the major and with the tread of a solemn march. A turbulent Allegro follows. Near the end the orchestra arrives on a big chord and pauses. The theme then returns in full brass for the final march, and in the closing bars the trumpets and horns blaze out the main tune of the first movement, also turned to the major.

Tonight's artists

Lahav Shani *piano*

Shani trained as a pianist before he turned to conducting, and the orchestra lists him as both conductor and soloist for the Shostakovich concerto, a piece written for a young pianist at the start of his career.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2027-01-14-shani>

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