

Muti's Bridge from Haydn to Beethoven

Saturday, May 8, 2027 · 15:30 · Musikverein
Riccardo Muti, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	HAYDN 1732–1809 <i>Symphony No. 88 in G major, Hob. I:88</i>	22'
2	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Le bourgeois gentilhomme, Suite, Op. 60</i>	35'
3	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60</i>	34'
TOTAL MUSIC		91'

Joseph Haydn

1732–1809

Symphony No. 88 in G major, Hob. I:88

22 minutes

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.

ABOUT THE WORK

Haydn completed his Symphony No. 88 in 1787. It was the first symphony he wrote after the six he had sent to Paris, and it was composed for the orchestra of the Esterházy court. It has no nickname and belongs to neither of the famous sets, the Paris or the London symphonies, yet it has long been one of the most often played of the 104.

Its route to the public was irregular. Johann Peter Tost, who led the second violins in the Esterházy orchestra, travelled to Paris in 1788 with the scores of this symphony and its companion, No. 89, together with a set of string quartets, and sold them to the publisher Sieber. He also sold Sieber music that Haydn had not written. When the publisher complained, Haydn's reply was brief: "Thus Herr Tost has swindled you."

The orchestra is the standard one of the 1780s: flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings. Haydn does something unusual with it. The trumpets and drums are silent throughout the first movement, where an audience of the day would have expected them, and are held back for the slow movement, where it would not. It was only the second time he had used them in a slow movement.

That slow movement, a *Largo*, has had distinguished admirers. Brahms is reported to have said of it: "I want my Ninth Symphony to sound like this."

Riccardo Muti places the symphony at the head of a programme that runs from Haydn through Richard Strauss's look back at the Baroque to Beethoven's Fourth. The presenters of the Eisenstadt concert quote him calling Haydn "an architect of music" and the true bridge to Beethoven. The programme is given at the Musikverein on 8 and 10 May, and on 13 May in the Haydnsaal of Schloss Esterházy in Eisenstadt, the palace of the family Haydn served.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Adagio, Allegro. A short, ceremonious slow introduction, and then the strings alone start the Allegro with a light, quick theme. Almost everything in the movement is made from that one tune: where a second theme should arrive, Haydn gives a new twist on the first. Listen for accompaniment patterns that turn out to be themes in their own right, and for the solo flute that decorates the main tune when it comes back.

Largo. A solo cello and an oboe together sing a broad melody, and the movement is little more than that melody repeated with a different accompaniment each time. Its calm is broken, without warning, by loud chords for the full orchestra. Here the trumpets and timpani are heard for the first time in the symphony, and the shock is deliberate.

Menuetto: Allegretto. A robust minuet with a rustic accent. In the trio, bassoons and violas hold a drone in bare fifths, like a bagpipe, and the drone then slides down in parallel, a progression that harmony teachers forbid.

Finale: Allegro con spirito. A rondo on a tune of repeated notes that starts on the weak part of the bar, so it always seems to arrive a fraction early. The movement runs like clockwork, with hardly a rest. In the middle Haydn springs a learned surprise, an elaborate canon, and then lets the tune back in as if nothing had happened.

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

35 minutes

Le bourgeois gentilhomme, Suite, Op. 60

THE COMPOSER

Richard Strauss was the heir to Wagner and Liszt, the composer who carried the late Romantic tradition into the twentieth century. Born in Munich in 1864, the son of the principal horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra, he received a conservative musical education before an encounter with Alexander Ritter, a violinist married to one of Wagner's nieces, converted him to the "music of the future."

Between 1889 and 1898, Strauss composed a series of tone poems that made him the most famous composer in Germany: *Don Juan*, *Death and Transfiguration*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Don Quixote*, and *Ein Heldenleben*. Each pushed the orchestra to new extremes of virtuosity and expression. Then he turned to opera, creating the scandalous *Salome* (1905), the shattering *Elektra* (1909), and the nostalgic masterpiece *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).

Strauss lived long: through two world wars, the Nazi era, and the destruction of the German musical culture he had embodied. His late works, including the *Metamorphosen* for strings and the *Four Last Songs*, are elegies for a lost world. He died in 1949, shortly after completing those final songs.

ABOUT THE WORK

No work of Richard Strauss had a more tangled birth than this one. After *Der Rosenkavalier*, he and his librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal wanted to make something for the director Max Reinhardt. Hofmannsthal's idea was to adapt Molière's comedy *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* of 1670, cut it down, give it incidental music by Strauss, and replace its closing entertainment with a short new opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The hybrid was staged in Stuttgart in October 1912 and pleased almost nobody. Theatregoers did not want the opera, operagoers did not want the play, and a house needed two companies to put it on.

The authors pulled the two halves apart. The opera was given a sung prologue in place of the play and reached its familiar form in 1916. The play was revised as a comedy with music in its own right, for which Strauss wrote additional numbers; it was produced by Reinhardt in Berlin in 1918 and had little success. To rescue the music, Strauss chose nine numbers and made them into a concert suite, which he conducted for the first time in Vienna in January 1920. According to one account the orchestra on that occasion was the Vienna Philharmonic.

Molière's hero is Monsieur Jourdain, a rich tradesman who is determined to become a gentleman. He hires a music master, a dancing master, a fencing master and a tailor, is courted by two aristocrats, and gives a grand dinner. The play was written as a *comédie-ballet*, with music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, and Strauss honoured the precedent: some movements of the suite rework dances by Lully, and the rest imitate the manners of the seventeenth century with a straight face and modern harmony.

The scoring is the surprise. The composer of *An Alpine Symphony* uses about three dozen players: woodwind in pairs, two horns, one trumpet, one trombone, percussion, harp, and a string group that the score fixes at six violins, four violas, four cellos and two double basses. A piano sits in the middle and behaves much like a Baroque continuo. The suite, which lasts a little over half an hour, is often named among the first neoclassical scores of the twentieth century.

By a coincidence that the programme's planner can hardly have missed, it shares its opus number, 60, with the Beethoven symphony that follows.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There are nine movements. The **Overture** is a portrait of Jourdain, bustling and self-important, in a pastiche of Baroque gestures. The **Minuet** is his dancing lesson. **The Fencing Master** is a short character sketch, all flamboyant energy. In the **Entry and Dance of the Tailors** the tailors arrive to a gavotte and go on to a polonaise.

The next three movements are the most openly antique. **Lully's Minuet** is an old tune in new clothes. The **Courante** takes up another dance of the seventeenth century. The **Entry of Cléonte** borrows twice from Lully: a grave sarabande frames a livelier dance for the woodwind, punctuated by the triangle.

The **Intermezzo** is a double portrait of the two aristocrats in Jourdain's circle.

The Dinner, the longest movement, is a banquet with a musical joke for every course. The guests enter to a march. The salmon arrives to the wave music of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, since the fish comes from the Rhine. The mutton is served with the bleating sheep from Strauss's own *Don Quixote*. Small roast birds bring birdsong from *Der Rosenkavalier*, and one annotator also hears a snatch of Verdi's "La donna è mobile". A solo cello muses between courses, and the suite ends when a kitchen boy appears with the last dish and dances a lively waltz.

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60

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.

34 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven wrote his Fourth Symphony in the summer and early autumn of 1806, once his long struggle with the first versions of his opera *Fidelio* was behind him. He spent that summer in Silesia at the country estate of Prince Lichnowsky, and from there visited Count Franz von Oppersdorff, who kept a private orchestra at his castle in Oberglogau. The orchestra played Beethoven's Second Symphony for its composer, and the Count commissioned a new one. The Fourth is dedicated to him.

It seems that Beethoven set aside a symphony already in progress, the one in C minor that became the Fifth, to write it. The six months that followed were among the most productive of his life: the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto were finished in the same year, and all three works share a broad, lyrical manner that is far from the heroics of the *Eroica*. The first performance was a private one in March 1807 at the Vienna palace of Prince Lobkowitz. The public heard the symphony at the Burgtheater in April 1808.

Standing between the *Eroica* and the Fifth, the Fourth has always been the least played of the three. Schumann is said to have called it a slender Greek maiden between two Norse giants, a phrase that has done the piece no favours, because slender is the last thing it sounds in performance. Schumann admired it all the same, and so did Berlioz, who heard in it a return to the manner of the Second Symphony, lively and alert in some places and of a celestial sweetness in others.

The orchestra is smaller than the one the *Eroica* needs: there is only one flute, with pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings. The piece lasts a little over half an hour. Its humour, and its habit of building long spans out of scraps, point back to Haydn, who had been Beethoven's teacher and was still alive when it was first played. Heard directly after a Haydn symphony, as it is in this programme, the kinship is hard to miss.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Adagio, Allegro vivace. The symphony in B-flat major begins in B-flat minor, very quietly: a plucked note, a long-held chord in the winds, and strings moving slowly beneath it. Nothing in these thirty-eight slow bars predicts what follows. A few loud chords break the spell and the *Allegro* bursts in at full speed. Its second group is a conversation passed between bassoon, oboe and flute. The most original stroke comes at the return of the main theme, which is prepared by a very long, very soft drum roll that swells until the whole orchestra arrives on top of it.

Adagio. The strings set up a ticking rhythmic figure and the violins lay a long, singing melody over it. That ticking rhythm hardly ever stops; it passes round the orchestra and ends up alone on the timpani in the last bars. The second theme is a wistful solo for the clarinet.

Allegro vivace. A scherzo in all but name, although many printed scores head it Menuetto, and far too fast to dance to. Beethoven extends the usual plan: the trio comes round twice, and the scherzo three times, the last cut short by a call from the horns.

Allegro ma non troppo. A finale in perpetual motion. The bassoon has a famously awkward moment when it has to play the racing main theme alone, and sweetly, to lead back to the reprise. At the very end the tune is slowed to half speed and broken up by pauses, a joke straight out of Haydn, before the orchestra slams the door.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Haydn**

David Wyn Jones, Cambridge University Press 2013

A compact modern biography that sets the symphonies of the 1780s, No. 88 among them, in the working life of the Esterházy court where this programme ends its run.

ACCESSIBLE **Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision**

Lewis Lockwood, W. W. Norton 2017

One chapter for each symphony, written for general readers; the chapter on the Fourth argues for the piece on its own terms instead of as a pause between the Eroica and the Fifth.

DEEPER **The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven**

Charles Rosen, W. W. Norton 1998

The classic study of the musical language Haydn built and Beethoven inherited, and the best account of why wit and surprise are structural in both symphonies on this programme.

SOURCES

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12. Le bourgeois gentilhomme, Suite, Op. 60, Hungarian National Philharmonic. <https://www.filharmonikusok.hu/en/?p=91197>
13. Richard Strauss: Der Bürger als Edelmann, Suite Op. 60 (preface), Musikproduktion Höfflich (Repertoire Explorer). <https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/product/strauss-richard-8/>
14. Der Bürger als Edelmann, Boosey & Hawkes. <https://www.boosey.com/shop/work-info/Der-Burger-als-Edelmann/1250>
15. Symphony No. 4 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._4_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._4_(Beethoven))
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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2027-05-08-muti>

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