

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

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.

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

Le bourgeois gentilhomme, Suite, Op. 60

35 minutes

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 incid-

ental 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.

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

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.

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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2027-05-08-muti>

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