

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

Strauss's Oboe Concerto and Schoenberg's Pelleas

Friday, June 4, 2027 · 19:30 · Musikverein

Christian Thielemann, conductor · Sebastian Breit, oboe

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	STRAUSS 1864–1949 <i>Oboe Concerto in D major, TrV 292</i>	25'
2	SCHOENBERG 1874–1951 <i>Pelleas und Melisande, Op. 5</i>	42'
TOTAL MUSIC		67'

Richard Strauss

1864–1949

Oboe Concerto in D major, TrV 292

25 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

When American troops reached Garmisch in the spring of 1945, Richard Strauss was eighty years old and living in his villa there. Some of the soldiers who cared about music sought

him out. One was John de Lancie, a professional oboist in his twenties who would later become principal oboe of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The three movements are played without a break and last about twenty-five minutes.

Allegro moderato. The cellos begin with a murmured figure of four quick notes, rocking between two pitches. It sounds like a mere preparation, but Strauss builds a good deal of the concerto from it. The oboe enters almost at once with a long, winding melody, and this opening makes heavy technical demands on the player. Listen for the way the flute and clarinet answer the soloist: much of this movement behaves like chamber music, and Strauss is more interested in the oboe's singing voice than in display.

Andante. The rocking figure from the opening returns in the strings and becomes the accompaniment to a slow melody in B-flat major. This is the vein of the late operas, tender and a little nostalgic, with the harmony coloured by passing chromatic notes. A cadenza, punctuated by chords from the strings, leads directly into the finale.

Vivace, then Allegro. The last movement is quick and playful, with something of the high spirits of the tone poems Strauss wrote as a young man. After a second cadenza Strauss adds a surprise: a lilting, dance-like Allegro in 6/8 that works almost as a short fourth movement, and the horns help to see the piece out with good humour.

Arnold Schoenberg

1874–1951

Pelleas und Melisande, Op. 5

42 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Schoenberg was in his late twenties and living in Berlin when he wrote *Pelleas und Melisande*, between 1902 and February 1903. It was his first completed work for orchestra. The subject came from Richard Strauss, who pointed the younger man towards Maurice Maeterlinck's play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, first staged in 1893. Schoenberg did not know that Debussy's opera on the same play was about to reach the stage in Paris.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The work plays without a break for a little over forty minutes. Schoenberg's pupil Alban Berg showed that its four main sections correspond to the movements of a symphony, and that is the easiest way to keep your bearings.

First part: the forest. The quiet opening, in a swaying 12/8, belongs to Melisande; Schoenberg himself linked this motif to her. A short, ominous “fate” motif follows at once and will return at every turn of the story. Golaud's theme is heard first in the horns. Pelleas arrives later with a youthful, knightly theme that is often given to the trumpet.

Scherzo. The music lightens for the scene at the fountain, where Melisande plays with her wedding ring and loses it. Schoenberg called this passage “the game with the ring”. Darker episodes follow before the music slows.

Slow movement. Schoenberg's own list of landmarks for this part names “the scene with Melisande's hair” and the love scene. It is the broad, passionate centre of the work, the lovers' farewell, and it ends when Golaud kills Pelleas.

Finale. The themes of the opening come back in what Berg described as a recapitulation, and the love theme is recalled. Schoenberg's summary of this last part names the dying Melisande, the entrance of the ladies in waiting and her death.

Tonight's artists

Sebastian Breit *oboe*

The soloist comes from inside the orchestra: Breit is one of the Philharmonic's own principal oboes, and he plays the concerto at all three concerts. He plays the Viennese oboe, the instrument the orchestra has kept while the rest of the world moved to the French model, so this is a chance to hear Strauss's solo line in the particular colour of the Vienna woodwind.

Sebastian Breit, born in 1998, is a principal oboe of the Vienna State Opera orchestra and of the Vienna Philharmonic, whose members are drawn from it; the magazine *Rondo* dates his appointment to 2019. He began his musical training at six and took up the oboe at eight with Peter Mayrhofer. From 2015 to 2017 he attended the preparatory course at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, and he went on to study in Harald Hörth's oboe class there. He plays the Viennese oboe, an instrument used almost nowhere outside the city, which differs from the oboe played elsewhere in its construction, its fingering and its sound. With the pianist Stephanie Timoschek-Gumpinger he recorded *The Viennese Oboe* for the Supreme Classics label, an album of sonatas written for the instrument by Alexander Wunderer, Hans Gál and Karl Pilss. The project was produced by the American oboist Abby Yeakle Held of Ohio State University.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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