



ROTTERDAMS
PHILHARMONISCH
ORKEST

Programme Notes

**Remembrance concert
chamber music**

Sat 14 May 2022 • 13.27

The Hoogstraat after the bombing of 14 May 1940.

PROGRAMME

piano **Lahav Shani**
violin **Michael Barenboim**
cello **Daniel Petrovitsch**

Arnold Schoenberg
Verklärte Nacht, op. 4 [1899],
(arr. piano trio Eduard Steuermann)
Sehr langsam - Breiter - Schwer
betont - Sehr breit und langsam -
Sehr ruhig

piano **Lahav Shani**
violin **Cecilia Ziona** and **Saskia Otten**
viola **Galahad Samson**
cello **Pepijn Meeuwis**

Dmitri Shostakovich
Piano Quintet in G minor, op. 57
[1940]
• Prelude. Lento
• Fugue. Adagio
• Scherzo. Allegretto
• Intermezzo. Lento
• Finale. Allegretto

Concert ends at about 14.40



Independent spirits

When a composer swims against the current, it is usually easy to hear. The works of Dmitri Shostakovich alternate between a haunted sound and forced jollity: a direct consequence of his continuous struggle with the Soviet regime. And with his shocking and extremely dissonant tonal palette, Arnold Schoenberg declared war on the established musical life in Vienna, which he regarded as being 'sick to the core'.



However, these independent spirits were not constantly in battle, as you can hear in this concert. Indeed, Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet* is characterised by musicianship and the pleasure of making music, whilst Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* presents the composer as no foaming-at-the-mouth modernist, but as a late-romanticist able to produce sumptuous sounds.

Tension lurking beneath the surface

Verklärte Nacht remains closely aligned with the sonorous palette of his great inspiration Johannes Brahms – something striking enough in the original scoring for string sextet, but even more pronounced in the adaptation for piano trio – a very Brahms-like scoring. However, whilst Brahms was still firmly anchored in the classical major-minor tonality, Schoenberg is pushing the boundaries: his harmonic palette is more modern and 'stranger'. A couple of years later he would cross the bridge to atonality and create a great stir. In this work, however, he limits himself to the suggestion of tension lurking beneath the surface.

And the music therefore fits perfectly with the cultural climate of Vienna in around 1900. There were still palaces, and the coffee houses were doing good business, but everything was losing its shine. Poverty, exploitation and anti-Semitism were taking hold, even as the bourgeoisie were consumed by the nostalgic image of the old empire and Viennese waltz. It was in this city where Sigmund Freud explored the darker side of the human psyche and architect Adolf Loos provoked the public with buildings lacking any ornamentation. And it was in this city where

Schoenberg felt an increasing need to give nineteenth century beautification a jagged edge.

Moonlight

The composition is inspired by a poem by Richard Dehmel about an extra-marital pregnancy – something considered scandalous and decadent in the Vienna of those times, yet a common occurrence amongst the upper classes.

The ominous start to the piece depicts a moonlit landscape in which a woman confesses to her husband that she is carrying another man's child. However, the threatening atmosphere dissolves into an impassioned plea for 'universal love'.

Schoenberg follows the detail of the text pretty closely. Some lines of the poem are set literally to music, resulting in melodic lines of irregular length. Together with the wry harmonies, they sound sometimes as though they were composed by Brahms whilst in a drug-induced state, or suffering dementia, although to our contemporary sensibilities the work nevertheless has a rich and friendly sound.

In any event, amongst the more conservative wing of Schoenberg's public alarm bells were rung: mission accomplished. Even a relatively adventurous composer like Gustav Mahler had reservations, albeit that he expressed them a polite way: 'I do not like *Verklärte Nacht*,' he wrote, 'but it may be that I just don't understand the work.'

Some twenty years later, Schoenberg had fulfilled his calling as a musical innovator and organised his own concert series in order to promote the work of kindred spirits. It was his resident pianist, Eduard Steuermann, who scored *Verklärte Nacht* effectively

for piano trio to make the piece known amongst a wider audience. Surprisingly, this version sounds more melodious than the original: a mellifluous piano part replaces the coarseness of the original string sextet. However, this does not make the music any less successful.

The power in the music

Dmitri Shostakovich excels in a different kind of friction: here it is not the composer in opposition, but his environment. During Stalin's grip on power, for sure, the Soviet regime dictated what composers could and could not write – turning artists effectively into puppets of the state. Had Shostakovich meekly accepted such a role, he would perhaps now be lying in a nameless grave beneath the enormous pile of Soviet kitsch that everyone was composing in those days. Instead, his music painfully voiced the tension between artistic freedom and state control, and he became famous throughout the world. To this day, the extent to which he was a dissident or follower is debated - did he celebrate or mock the Soviet ideal with all those triumphant marches? – and as a consequence the value of his music as a document of those times has only increased. The downside is that you may begin to see Shostakovich more as a chronicler than as a composer, voyeurism getting the better of you. When you dissect each piece for ulterior motives and secret agendas you risk failing to hear the power in the music, which would be a pity, certainly in the case of the *Piano Quintet* dated 1940 – an infectious piece within which the trappings of Soviet Russia dissolve away.

Circus

The work was commissioned by the Moscow-based Beethoven Quartet, following on from the success of Shostakovich's *First String Quartet*, a fresh, spring-like work which made no reference to the blow that had recently fallen upon the composer: an official reprimand for his modern style of composition.

With his *Piano Quintet* Shostakovich took no risks, avoiding references to current affairs and adhering gratefully to accepted musical tradition. Whilst the quintets of Schumann, Brahms and others could have served as templates, he went even further back, using Bach in particular as a reference point, especially in the first two movements. Each of these movements takes the tired and tested form of a prelude or fugue. The third movement is a flamboyant scherzo and – as became apparent from the work's premiere – the highlight of the entire piece. If there is any moment in which Shostakovich gives voice to personal grievance, it is in the plaintive *Lento*. But slow movements lend themselves in any event to outpourings of emotion, especially from a Russian.

There was an additional reason for the immediate success of the *Finale*: the first theme played by the strings is a traditional tune associated with the Russian circus. For one party member, it was all too western, too decadent, and too frivolous, and he urged everyone to boycott the work. But he convinced no one. The *Piano Quintet* proved so irresistible that Shostakovich received an award from the state and suddenly found himself a substantial sum of money richer.

Michiel Cleij



Agenda

Sun 15 May 2022 • 14.15

conductor **Lahav Shani**
violin **Michael Barenboim**
Mahler Tenth Symphony (Adagio)
Roustom First Violin Concerto
Ben-Haim First Symphony

Thu 19 May 2022 • 20.15

Fri 20 May 2022 • 20.15
conductor **Tarmo Peltokoski**
piano **Yuja Wang**
Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 1
Rachmaninoff Paganini Rhapsody
Sibelius Symphony No. 2

Sun 29 May 2022 • 10.30

Jurriaanse Hall
violin **Eefje Habraken** and **Victor Andrey**
viola **Rosalinde Kluck**
cello **Daniel Petrovitsch**
presentation **Milou Adjanga**
Ravel Sonate for Violin and Cello
Debussy String Quartet

ICCR: Opera

Wed 1 June 2022 • 10.00 and 19.00

conductors **Finalists ICCR**
soprano **Kelly Poukens**
mezzo-soprano **Claire Barnett-Jones**
mezzo-soprano **Florieke Beelen**
tenor **Anton Kuzenok**
baritone **Raoul Steffani**
choir **Laurens Collegium**
Rotterdam
Bizet Carmen (parts)

ICCR: Symphonic

Fri 3 June 2022 • 10.00 and 19.00

conductors **Finalists ICCR**
Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6
'Pathétique' (part III and IV)
Mahler Symphony No. 4 (part I)
Roukens Symphony No. 1
'Kaleidoscope' (part III)
Shostakovich Symphony No. 5
(part I)

Musicians

Chief Conductor

Lahav Shani

Honorary Conductor

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

First violin

Igor Gruppman,
concertmaster
Marieke Blankestijn,
concertmaster
Quirine Scheffers
Hed Yaron Meyerson
Saskia Otto
Arno Bons
Mireille van der Wart
Shelly Greenberg
Cor van der Linden
Rachel Browne
Maria Dingjan
Marie-José Schrijner
Noëmi Bodden
Petra Visser
Sophia Torrenza
Hadewijch Hofland
Annerien Stuker
Alexandra van Beveren
Koen Stapert

Second violin

Charlotte Potgieter
Cecilia Ziano
Frank de Groot
Laurens van Vliet
Tomoko Hara
Elina Staphorsius
Jun Yi Dou
Bob Bruyn
Letizia Sciarone
Eefje Habraken
Maija Reinikainen
Sumire Hara
Wim Ruitenbeek
Babette van den Berg
Melanie Broers

Viola

Anne Huser
Roman Spitzer
Maartje van Rheeden
Galahad Samson
Kerstin Bonk
Lex Prummel
Janine Baller
Francis Saunders
Veronika Lénártová
Rosalinde Kluck
León van den Berg

Cello

Emanuele Silvestri
Joanna Pachucka
Daniel Petrovitsch
Mario Rio
Gé van Leeuwen
Eelco Beinema
Carla Schrijner
Pepijn Meeuws
Yi-Ting Fang

Double bass

Matthew Midgley
Ying Lai Green
Jonathan Focquaert
Robert Franenberg
Harke Wiersma
Arjen Leendertz
Ricardo Neto

Flute

Juliette Hurel
Joséphine Olech
Désirée Woudenberg

Oboe

Remco de Vries
Karel Schoofs
Hans Cartigny
Anja van der Maten

Oboe/cor anglais

Ron Tijhuis

Clarinet

Julien Hervé
Bruno Bonanse
Jan Jansen

Clarinet/ bass clarinet

Romke-Jan Wijmenga

Bassoon

Pieter Nuytten
Lola Descours
Marianne Prommel

Bassoon/contra bassoon

Hans Wisse

Horn

David Fernández
Alonso
Wendy Leliveld
Richard Speetjens
Laurens Otto
Pierre Buizer

Trumpet

Giuliano
Sommerhalder
Alex Elia
Simon Wierenga
Jos Verspagen

Trombone

Pierre Volders
Alexander Verbeek
Remko de Jager

Tuba

Hendrik-Jan Renes

Timpani/ percussion

Randy Max
Danny van de Wal
Ronald Ent
Martijn Boom
Adriaan Feyaerts

Harp

Charlotte Sprenkels