

Programme Notes

**Honeck conducts
Beethoven's Fifth**

Fri 26 May 2023 · 20.15

PROGRAMME

conductor **Manfred Honeck**
cello **Kian Soltani**

James MacMillan 1959
Larghetto for orchestra (2009/2017)

Robert Schumann 1810–1856
Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129
(1850)
• Nicht zu schnell –
• Langsam –
• Sehr lebhaft

Reza Vali 1952
The Girl from Shiraz for cello
and orchestra (2021, European
Premiere)
• Adagio
• Allegro scherzando

intermission

Ludwig van Beethoven 1770–1827
Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67
(1804–1808)
• Allegro con brio
• Andante con moto
• Scherzo (allegro)
• Allegro - Presto

Concert ends at around 22.35

Most recent performances by our orchestra:

MacMillan Larghetto: first performance
Schumann Cello Concerto: Nov 2018, cello Alisa Weilerstein, conductor Lahav Shani
Vali The Girl from Shiraz: first performance
Beethoven Symphony No. 5: Nov 2018, conductor Nathalie Stutzmann

One hour before the start of the concert, Maartje Stokkers will give an introduction (in Dutch) to the programme, admission €5. Tickets are available at the hall, payment by debit card. The introduction is free for Vrienden.

Cover: Photo Adam Kring



*Robert Schumann in Hamburg, March 1850.
Daguerreotype by Johann Anton Völlner*



Invincible

MacMillan's *Larghetto* is an orchestrated plea for mercy; within Schumann's *Cello Concerto* madness lurks and Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* presents a struggle with ill-fated deafness. Nevertheless, amongst all the calamity, this music glows with something indestructible, an unexpected power that conquers all. Could this be the power of love?

Celebratory depth

The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra is regarded as one of the finest orchestras in the USA. Thanks to icons such as André Previn, Lorin Maazel, Mariss Jansons and, since 2008, the Austrian Manfred Honeck as its principal conductors, the orchestra has ascended to unprecedented heights. To commemorate Honeck's ten years with the orchestra, Scottish composer James MacMillan was commissioned to compose a celebratory work.

In the same way that the commissioner of the Rothko Chapel in Houston must have surely swallowed hard when the artist, renowned for his vibrant colour fields, appeared at that very same time to have entered his darker period and came up with fourteen black-painted canvases, the Pittsburghers no doubt furrowed their brows when MacMillan delivered this *Larghetto*. This piece is actually an orchestral version of the choral work *Miserere* (2009), MacMillan's setting of the Penitential Psalm of King David (Psalm 51:3-21), made famous in the version by Gregorio Allegri. 'Desolate and cold' are

the words written by MacMillan above the opening notes of the score; there is little to celebrate here. However, just as the Rothko Chapel has over time become widely loved, the *Larghetto* has proved to be anything but a bad investment. The string section, which initially sounds desolate, becomes warm and glowing, whilst the brass section, occasionally 'interrupting' with Gregorian church melodies, give the piece a feeling of immensity, combining simplicity with depth in a way that is reminiscent of two classic American works: Barber's *Adagio for Strings* and Ives's *The Unanswered Question*.

Insane genius

Much has been speculated about the medical history of Robert Schumann. More has been written about whether the composer suffered from syphilis, manic depression, or other sickness, than has been written about some of his compositions. Perhaps that is not so surprising: Schumann could compose for days on end like a man possessed, followed by long periods when he was unable to write a thing. He wrote to Felix Mendelssohn about

his depressions. Three years after completing his *Cello Concerto* he leaped into the chilly Rhine and spent the remainder of his days in an institution.

Schumann's *Cello Concerto* was the result of such a short period of frenzied work. He needed just six days to sketch out the work; a week later it was completed. Sick or not, composing in a manic fit or just monomaniacal determination, Schumann delivered in his *Cello Concerto* a work that is unique, innovative, and one of the best cello concertos of the romantic period. 'A concert piece for cello and orchestral accompaniment', is what Schumann wrote at the top of the score, rather than 'Cello Concerto'. Firstly, that has something to do with the form: Schumann dispenses with the traditional three separate movements by welding them together. And whilst they are notably consistent in terms of style and atmosphere, a diverse range of emotions are there to be discovered. Secondly, Schumann indicates with this title the role of the cello as *first amongst equals*, rather than as an opponent of the orchestra. This is apparent not just from the embedding of the soloist within the orchestra, but also, for example, from the duet in the second movement between the cello soloist and the first cello in the orchestra. It has been suggested that such an effect – one rarely used in a concerto for solo instrument – depicts a duet between Schumann and his wife Clara. In any event, Clara showed great enthusiasm for the *Cello Concerto*. In her diary she wrote: 'This concerto is romantic, fresh, and even contains humorous elements'.

Persian love

In common with MacMillan's *Larghetto*, *The Girl from Shiraz* was another work commissioned

by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. The Iranian-American composer Reza Vali wrote the piece for the orchestra and cellist Kian Soltani. It is based on two Persian folk songs from the Iranian city of Shiraz. Persian Music, according to Vali, can best be compared to jazz: much of it is improvised. Vali has discovered a unique way of combining this Oriental sound world with the western classical musical tradition.

The first song, 'The Girl from Shiraz', explores the sensual and spiritual sides of love; the yearning of two lovers. The song's melodies, played by the solo cello, are accompanied by quotes from the Christmas carol *Silent Night*, Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, and Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. The second song, 'Love Drunk', describes the experience of intoxicating pleasure shared by two lovers.

Glorious victory

Everyone knows the first four notes of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*: 'Ta-ta-ta-taa!'. Notes that are immediately grabbing, and at the same time so enigmatic: there has been so much speculation as to what they are supposed to represent. Beethoven's first biographer heard in these ominous notes the sound of fate banging at the door. They represent – as is often claimed – Beethoven's approaching deafness, which was indeed already making an impact. The V for Victory is how the Allies heard it during WW2; the rhythm of the notes representing the letter V in Morse code. Others heard unrelenting hammer blows. Beethoven's student, Carl Czerny, however, claimed that his teacher came across the theme in Vienna's Prater Park, where he heard the song of the yellowhammers: Chirp, chirp, chirp, chiiiiirrrrrp...

But the chirp of a small bird or the approach of fate, those sound like two different things. The same when you actually look at the notes. Because the symphony doesn't begin with those famous first notes at all. Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* begins with a brief moment of silence. A quaver note of peace. So the first note does not fall on the beat, but after it. So: 'Hm-m-ta-ta-ta-taa'. And strangely enough, it does make a difference. The sound is lighter. It's true that Beethoven stipulates 'ff' (fortissimo – very loud), but they suddenly are no longer sledgehammer blows, but notes that dissolve into the air. Like the jump from a diving board: the quaver rest is the moment when the diving board has bent to the lowest point, and then, 'whoosh'. The summersaults that follow are the first three notes, and the longer fourth note the plunge into the pool. It begins with expectation, a brief moment of silent anticipation.

These famous four notes are followed by a powerful and stormy *Allegro con brio* in the key of C minor. The tempo of the second movement is *Andante con moto*: sometimes like an astronaut floating round in space and then purposefully marching forward. The following *Allegro* is a scherzo trio full of contrasts, which changes in an amazing transition of accent and tempo in the final movement. In a glorious C major key, Beethoven ends the symphony full of hope. Because whether the symphony begins with the chirping of the yellowhammer, or the hammer of fate, it ends in triumphant victory. And for that reason the 'V for Victory' is perhaps quite apt.

Alexander Klapwijk

Manfred Honeck - conductor

Born: Nenzing, Austria

Current position: Music Director Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Education: Vienna University of Music

Awards: European Conducting Prize (1993)

Orchestra experience: as a violist in the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic

Subsequently: assistant to Claudio Abbado at the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra, founder and director Vienna Jeunesses Orchestra, Music Director Zurich Opera House; Music Director Norwegian National Opera; Principal Guest Conductor Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra; Chief Conductor Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra; General Music Director Stuttgart State Opera

Guest appearances: Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Staatskapelle Dresden, London Symphony Orchestra, Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra

Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 1995



Photo: Felix Broede

Kian Soltani - cello

Born: Bregenz, Austria, in a family of Persian musicians

Education: Basel Music Academy with Ivan Monighetti; Kronberg Academy (Germany); International Music Academy Liechtenstein

Orchestra experience: principal cellist in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

Awards: International Paulo Cello Competition Helsinki (2013); Leonard Bernstein Award (2017), Credit Suisse Young Artist Award (2017), Opus Klassik Innovative Listening Experience Award (2022)

Breakthrough: 2011, debut at age 19 in Vienna Musikverein

Subsequently: Vienna Philharmonic, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (artist in residence), Residentie Orkest (artist in residence); multi-year commitment as Junge Wilde at the Dortmund Konzerthaus

Instrument: 'London-ex-Boccherini'-Stradivari from 1694

Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 2020



Photo: Marco Borggreve

Agenda

Sun 4 June 2023 • 10.30

Music for Breakfast No. 6

with **Charlotte Potgieter** and **Letizia Sciarone** (Violin), and colleagues from the orchestra
Chamber Music by **Borodin**, **Dvořák**, and **Martinů**

Fri 9 June 2023 • 17.00

piano **Daniil Trifonov** and **Lahav Shani**

percussion **Danny van de Wal** and **Martijn Boom**

Rachmaninov Suite No. 2 for two pianos

Bartók Sonata for two pianos and percussion

Fri 9 June 2023 • 20.15

Sun 11 June 2023 • 14.15

conductor **Lahav Shani**

piano **Daniil Trifonov**

Copland Fanfare for the Common Man

Gershwin Piano Concerto

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6 'Pathétique'

Fri 8 September 2023 • 20.15

conductor **Manoj Kamps**

soprano **Katherine Dain**

voice **Diamanda La Berge Dramm**

Van Veldhuizen unde imber et ignes

Debussy Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

Debussy From Nocturnes: Fêtes

Björk Songs

Sondheim Songs

Fri 15 September 2023 • 20.30

conductor **Tarmo Peltokoski**

violin **Simone Lamsma**

Hermann Vertigo: Suite

Korngold Violin Concerto

Williams Star Wars: Suite

Musicians

Chief Conductor

Lahav Shani

Honorary Conductor

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Principal Assistant Conductor

Bertie Baigent

First Violin

Marieke Blankestijn, leader

Quirine Scheffers

Hed Yaron Meyerson

Saskia Otto

Arno Bons

Mireille van der Wart

Cor van der Linden

Rachel Browne

María Dingjan

Marie-José Schrijner

Noëmi Bodden

Petra Visser

Sophia Torrenga

Hadewijch Hofland

Annerien Stuker

Alexandra van Beveren

Koen Stapert

Second Violin

Charlotte Potgieter

Cecilia Ziano

Frank de Groot

Laurens van Vliet

Tomoko Hara

Elina Staphorius

Jun Yi Dou

Bob Bruyn

Letizia Sciarone

Eefje Habraken

Maija Reinikainen

Wim Ruitenbeek

Babette van den Berg

Melanie Broers

Viola

Anne Huser

Roman Spitzer

Galahad Samson

Kerstin Bonk

Lex Prummel

Janine Baller

Francis Saunders

Veronika Lénártová

Rosalinde Kluck

León van den Berg

Olffe van der Klein

Cello

Emanuele Silvestri

Eugene Lifschitz

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

Flute/Piccolo

Beatriz Da Baião

Oboe

Remco de Vries

Karel Schoofs

Anja van der Maten

Oboe/Cor Anglais

Ron Tjihuis

Clarinet

Julien Hervé

Bruno Bonansea

Clarinet/ Bass Clarinet

Romke-Jan Wijmenga

Bassoon

Pieter Nuytten

Lola Descours

Marianne Prommel

Bassoon/ Contrabassoon

Hans Wisse

Horn

David Fernández

Alonso

Wendy Leliveld

Richard Speetjens

Laurens Otto

Pierre Buizer

Trumpet

Alex Elia

Simon Wierenga

Jos Verspagen

Trombone

Pierre Volders

Alexander Verbeek

Remko de Jager

Bass Trombone

Rommert Groenhof

Tuba

Hendrick-Jan Renes

Timpani

Danny van de Wal

Percussion

Ronald Ent

Martijn Boom

Adriaan Feyaerts

Harp

Charlotte Sprenkels