May 2, 2026

7:30 pm

"Andrey Returns"

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15
Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

I. Maestoso
II. Adagio
III. Rondo: Allegro non troppo

Andrey Gugnin, piano

INTERMISSION

"March of the Toreadors" from *Carmen*
Georges Bizet (1838 - 1875)

Marche Militaire Française
Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 - 1921)

Wannabe Conductors

A Song of Summer
Frederick Delius (1862 - 1934)

Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2
Maurice Ravel (1875 - 1937)

I. Daybreak
II. Pantomime
III. General Dance

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Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15

Johannes Brahms (b. Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833; d. Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1987)

I. Maestoso
II. Adagio
III. Rondo: Allegro non troppo

Andrey Gugnin, piano

The orchestration of this work is two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings, with solo piano.

Johannes Brahms gave the work's public debut in Hanover, Germany in 1859; he was just 25 years old. It was his first-performed orchestral work, and his first orchestral work performed to audience approval. During the course of composition, the work passed through different forms. In 1854 it began as a sonata for two pianos. By July 27 of that year, it was being transformed into a four-movement symphony. He ultimately decided to make the work a concerto for piano, his favored instrument, in 1855–56, still consulting friends about the orchestration.

In his book *Johannes Brahms, A Biography*, Jan Swafford describes how composer Robert and his wife, pianist, Clara Schumann, close friends of Brahms, frequently reviewed with interest the progress of this concerto. Clara Schuman wrote 'This again seemed to me very powerful, quite original, on a grand scale, and at the same time clearer than the earlier things.'" Swafford continues, "In Brahms's early music, especially this piano concerto, he would find great difficulty reconciling the demands of personal expression and absolute form."

In 1862 Rieter-Biedermann, a music publishing firm that published *Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor*," requested that Brahms write a piano four-hands arrangement. Publishers liked piano four-hands arrangements, which could be sold to customers owning only one piano.

The work reflects Brahms's effort to combine the piano with the orchestra as equal partners in a symphonic-scale structure, in emulation of the classical concertos of Mozart and Beethoven. It thus differs from earlier Romantic concertos, where the orchestra effectively accompanied the pianist. He enlisted both orchestra and soloist in the service of musical ideas; technically difficult passages in the concerto are never gratuitous but extend and develop the thematic material. Such an approach is thoroughly in keeping with Brahms's artistic temperament but also reflects the concerto's symphonic origins and ambitions. His effort drew on both chamber music techniques and the pre-classical Baroque concerto grosso.

Although composed during Brahms's youth, this concerto is a mature work that points forward to his later concertos. Most notable are its scale and grandeur, as well as the thrilling technical difficulties it presents.

Pianist Stephen Hough (b. 1961) in his book *Rough Ideas*, writes, "Both of the Brahms piano concertos are two of the greatest pillars of the Romantic repertoire. The *First Piano Concerto* is like a symphony where piano and orchestra seem involved at times in a titanic struggle. The *First Concerto* opens with its ferocious drum roll, a clap of thunder pinning the audience back in its seats. I find myself overwhelmed by it. The *First Piano Concerto* is work enough for me to play in one evening!"

As time passed, the work grew in popularity until it was recognized as a masterpiece. Alfred Brendel (b. January 5, 1931; d. June 18, 2025), a Czech-born Austrian classical pianist considers this piano concerto to be among the "purest Brahms - particularly the *D-Minor Concerto*, goes my love."

<u>What to Listen For</u>

First Movement
"The turbulent, dramatic nature of the piece is evident immediately," writes Jonathan Kramer in his book *Listen to the Music: A Self-Guided Tour Through the Orchestral Repertoire*. "The forceful opening motive casts its spell over the work. Yet particularly beautiful is the second theme, first heard in the piano alone."

Michael Steinberg describes it in his book *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide,* "The darkness of Brahms's sound here is emblematic of something else mysterious. Later, the orchestral section is spacious and full of events. The first tumultuous section is succeeded by a lyric theme that seeks to appease." Steinberg continues, "There is the rich material for this huge movement. It is a long piano solo."

Second Movement
This section takes a quieter, steadier turn. "The second movement shows expansive gentleness, and the steadfast rhythm suggests a hymn," writes Kramer.

Says Steinberg, "The *Concerto* has a solemn Adagio. This music holds everything that he felt about his dear friends Robert and Clara Schumann."

Third Movement
A lively, spirited energy fills this section. "The finale is a gypsy rondo, with several themes, two cadenzas, and a fugue," writes Kramer. "Lastly, there is a slow march in the coda." Steinberg continues, "There is a pithy, bold spirit of the first theme and the intimate and soft passage. The ending coda, with its sequence of cadenzas and awakenings, is one of the most inspired inventions in this great concerto."

Johannes Brahms

INTERMISSION

"March of the Toreadors" from *Carmen*

Georges Bizet (b. Bougival, France, October 25, 1838 – June 3, 1875)

"*Carmen* by Georges Bizet is an opera in four acts," writes Louis Biancolli and Robert Bagar in *The Victor Book of Operas*. "It received its world premiere in Paris on March 3, 1875. Because of *Carmen*, Bizet has come to be ranked among the greatest of operatic composers." This "Entrance of the Toreadors" (oftentimes called "March of the Toreadors") comes in Act II of the opera. It is performed as the bullfighter enters the ring; the bullfighter then sings his "Toreador Song." The music is celebratory and confident in character. The 'song' and 'march' are among the most popular and best-known of all operatic arias. It is interesting to note that the 'Toreador Song,' is also known as the 'Toreador March' or 'March of the Toreadors.'

Georges Bizet

Marche Militaire Française

Camille Saint-Saëns (b. Paris, France, October 9, 1835; d. Algiers, Algeria, December 16, 1921)

The work is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, bass drum, and strings. The approximate performance time is four minutes.

This work is the fourth and final movement of the *Algerian Suite*. The stirring finale, however, turns to the French army for inspiration. The suite was composed about 1879, during the period after the Franco-Prussian War, the era that dominated French music.

In 1871 Saint-Saëns became one of the founders of the Societe Nationale de Musique, a group designed to encourage instrumental composers. This, along with his many compositions, had much to do with the progress of symphonic music in France. The entire *Algerian Suite* had its first performance in Paris on December 19, 1880. The audience loved it, and the composition was published the next year.

A musical prodigy, Saint-Saëns studied at the Paris Conservatoire and became a church organist, and later a pianist and composer. He then turned to teaching, and among his students was composer and teacher Gabriel Fauré (whose own student was Maurice Ravel). He enjoyed a long and productive career – he composed music for 83 years, according to *Listen to the Music* by Jonathan Kramer.

Camille Saint-Saëns

Wannabe Conductors

A Song of Summer

Frederick Delius (b. Bradford, England, January 29, 1862; d. Grez-sur-Loing, Franz, June 10, 1934)

Frederick Delius composed this work for orchestra, in 1931. Later, *A Song of Summer* lent its title to a TV film and part of this piece is heard in the film, along with other works by Delius. In the early years of the 20th century, Delius composed some of his most popular works including *In a Summer Garden* and *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*. He also wrote this work, *A Song of Summer,* having dictated it to an assistant. Edvard Grieg was, perhaps, the composer who influenced Delius the most; they both found their inspiration in nature and in folk melodies. Early in his career, Delius also drew inspiration from Frédéric Chopin, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Richard Wagner, and Richard Strauss.

"Imagine that we are sitting on the cliffs in the heather, looking out over the sea." ***Delius***

Frederick Delius

Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2

Maurice Ravel (b. Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875; d. Paris, France, December 28, 1937)

I. Daybreak
II. Pantomime
III. General Dance

The Second Suite is orchestrated for three flutes (2nd, 3rd on piccolo), alto flute, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, castanets, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, tambourine, and triangle), two harps, celesta, and strings.

"Ravel had a carefully guarded personal life as the great French musician he was to become," writes author Victor I. Seroff in *Maurice Ravel: A Biography*. "Born in the Basque village of Ciboure near the border of Spain, Ravel was raised in the Montmartre district of Paris and became the epitome of the sophisticated, elegant Parisian. But he studied and worked and developed as a fastidious resplendent little man who delighted in Parisian night life, and in travels to Spain, Africa, England, and the United States."

Paul Riley writes in the *BBC Music Magazine* of March 2025, "Like the man himself – exquisitely tailored – Ravel's music betrays an artfulness that so often cultivates a surface simplicity while harboring depths in no hurry to make themselves known." Riley continues, "Who were Ravel's models? Above all, Mozart."

Ravel's undeniable gifts as a musical innovator were later inspired by his French composition teachers, Gabriel Fauré and Erik Satie. He developed his style during one of the most artistically productive periods of the twentieth century. Ravel was among the first composers to recognize the potential of recording to bring their music to a wider audience. During the 1920s, he took part in recordings of several of his works; others were made under his supervision.

At the peak of his career in the 1920s and '30s, Ravel was considered the greatest living composer in France. A pianist and conductor as well as composer, Ravel attended the Paris Conservatoire but found it hindering and left it to develop his own style blending modernism, neoclassicism, and baroque.

Writing in *Lectures on Modern Music*, internationally acclaimed composer, music professor, and lecturer Nadia Boulanger states, "Whatever task he sets for himself – whether it is a virtuoso work for full orchestra, an unaccompanied piece, a song, or piano solo – Maurice Ravel accomplishes it with astonishing ease and mastery. Moreover, his command over the manifold resources of the orchestra is prodigious and he moves with facility and evident delight in the most 'dangerous' realms of orchestral virtuosity." Boulanger concludes, "Ravel tends to be objective, and the beauty of his music resides in the style itself."

In his Ravel biography, Seroff writes that Ravel's father was a mechanical engineer holding several patents for "a steam generator heated by oil and applicable to automotive locomotion on regular roads." The senior Ravel was certainly one of the pioneers in the automotive industry. His invention consisted of a two-cylinder reciprocating steam engine, similar to the present automobile gasoline engine – the internal combustion engine. The two cylinders activated the rear axle of the car. Clearly, Maurice Ravel inherited the true engineering traits of creativity, problem solving, analytical ability, logical thinking, and attention to detail and applied them to the composition of music!

"Maurice Ravel was a French composer whose orchestral works are admired for his skill in handling instrumental colors, and his extraordinary aural imagination," reads *Composers and Their Lives and Works.* "He was a master of orchestration and made a point of studying the characteristics of all the orchestral instruments to make the most of the palette of different instrumental colors for expressive effect. Surprisingly, most of these works were written as piano pieces that he later orchestrated."

Ravel extracted music from *Daphnis et Chloé* to make two orchestral suites, which can be performed with or without the wordless chorus. *The Second Suite* was issued in 1913 and is particularly popular. When the complete work is performed it is more often in concert than staged.

We will hear *Suite No. 2* without a chorus. Initially, there is a dance scenario which had been adapted by choreographer Michel Fokine from a pastoral romance by the Greek writer Longus thought to date from the 2nd century AD, recounting the love between the goatherd Daphnis and the shepherdess Chloé.

Ravel began to write the score in 1909 after a commission from impresario Sergei Diaghilev for his Ballets Russes, completing it some months before the premiere of the staged work. This took place at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on June 8, 1912, with sets designed by Léon Bakst, choreography by Fokine, and the Orchestre Colonne conducted by Pierre Monteux -- soon to become the conductor of

the Boston Symphony Orchestra, (1919–24) and later the San Francisco Symphony, (1936–52). Famous ballet dancers Tamara Karsavina and Vaslav Nijinsky, danced roles of the shepherdess and goatherd.

The music, some of the composer's most passionate, is widely regarded as nearly his best, with extraordinarily lush harmonies typical of the Impressionist movement; commentators described it as his masterpiece for orchestra. The score remains a flawless gem of Impressionistic art and is certainly one of Ravel's supreme achievements. Even the austere Stravinsky called *Daphnis* "not only Ravel's best work, but also one of the most beautiful products of all French music."

What to Listen For

Daybreak
"The music imitates the sounds of the early morning; the sun rises," notes George Balanchine and Francis Mason in their book *Balanchine's Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*.

"Ravel's description of the peaceful beginning of a new day is masterful," writes Jonathan D. Kramer in his book *Listen to the Music: A Self-Guided Tour Through the Orchestral Repertoire*. "The shimmering of harps and winds accompanies a slowly unfolding melody in the low strings. Gradually daylight comes. Soon birdsongs are heard in three violins and a piccolo. An ornamented piccolo tune indicates that a shepherd is passing in the distance with his flock. A melody on the E-flat clarinet portrays a second shepherd. The music for strings becomes more definite, and Daphnis anxiously looks for the maiden Chloé, his beloved. The strings become more passionate as they embrace."

Pantomime
Kramer continues, "This scene begins with a trio for oboes and English horn. Daphnis and Chloé are miming the adventures of the god Pan and Syrinx, a beautiful wood nymph. Daphnis makes a flute from the stem of a rose and plays a melancholy air. Chloé appears as Syrinx and dances to the music. The music becomes energetic, and the dance becomes more animated. Suddenly, Chloé falls into the arms of Daphnis. After a silence, the music is slow. As the music becomes animated again, more dancers arrive. The music builds to a brief climax and then dies down, as the *General Dance* begins."

General Dance
"This final scene is the conclusion of the story about the goatherd Daphnis and the shepherdess Chloé. The main characters move into a sweeping dance that rises to a stunning climax: a celebration of physical love," concludes Kramer.


Maurice Ravel