

ORF Unveils Opening and Interval Acts, Mascot Auri and Further Programme Highlights at Eurovision Song Contest Media Briefing

At a media briefing held on 19 March 2026 at the Wiener Stadthalle, ORF presented new details about the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest in Vienna. Under the motto “The Big Show!”, specially developed opening and interval acts will deliver a spectacular entertainment programme across both Semi-Finals and the Grand Final. The briefing also marked the first official appearance of the Eurovision Song Contest 2026 mascot, Auri. In addition, ORF presented new initiatives linked to the contest’s 70th anniversary.

Interim ORF Director General Ingrid Thurnher: “I am very pleased that preparations for the Eurovision Song Contest are fully on schedule as we approach the move into the Wiener Stadthalle, and that we are now able to present our show elements. I am confident that we will bring nine outstanding shows to the stage – including three live TV shows – and that we will more than do justice to the 70th anniversary of the world’s largest television entertainment event.”

ORF Program Director Stefanie Groiss-Horowitz: “It is wonderful to see how initial ideas and creative brainstorming are now turning into concrete show elements for the Eurovision Song Contest in Vienna, with everything gradually taking shape step by step. I am looking forward to a grand celebration for the 70th anniversary, held under the motto “The Big Show!”. I promise a spectacular celebration for Austria, Europe, and the whole world.”

Michael Krön, Executive Producer of the Eurovision Song Contest: “At the Head of Delegation Meeting at the beginning of this week, we presented the current status of preparations to all participating countries. I am delighted that our plans were met with very positive feedback. The same is true for our new mascot Auri, who will bring the warmth and openness of the Eurovision Song Contest from Vienna out into the world.”

Opening and Interval Acts: A Journey Through Time, Humour and Major Musical Moments

The First Semi-Final will open with “70 Years of Love”, a film-led sequence tracing the evolution of the Eurovision Song Contest over seven decades. This will transition into a live performance by a 70-piece choir, paying tribute to the classic “L’amour est bleu”, originally performed at the 1967 contest hosted in Vienna.

A light moment follows in the interval programme, where presenters Victoria Swarovski and Michael Ostrowski are joined by Australia’s previous entrant, the

“Milkshake Man” Go-Jo, in a humorous segment playing on the long-standing confusion between Austria and Australia.

The Second Semi-Final begins with the hosts performing “Wasted Love”, the winning song of 2025, originally performed by JJ. Later in the show, JJ will return to the stage to debut a new track.

Grand Final: A Major Show Marking the 70th Anniversary

The ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra plays a central role in the Grand Final with contributing extensively to the production and appearing live on stage.

The opening sequence builds on a visual motif from the previous year: a small paper boat from JJ’s winning performance is reimagined as it travels across Europe—from Switzerland along the Rhine and Danube—before arriving in Vienna. This narrative leads into the opening performance, “The Queen of the Night”, where JJ blends classical influences inspired by Mozart with his own musical style, accompanying the on-stage introduction of all 25 finalists.

During the voting break, three high-profile interval acts will follow: in “Celebration!”, Eurovision Allstars such as Verka Serduchka, Erika Vikman and Lordi perform legendary songs from seven decades in new versions. This is followed by electro-swing icon Parov Stelar, who brings the arena to life with his signature sound. César Sampson then provides the musical transition to the final voting segment with a soul version of Billy Joel’s “Vienna”.

Throughout the Grand Final, presenters Victoria Swarovski and Michael Ostrowski will run an on-air challenge, attempting to weave as many past Eurovision-winning song titles as possible into their commentary.

Recurring features across all three live shows include “Professor Eurovision”, which tackles unusual questions about the contest, and the “Eurovision Quiz”, where contestants are tested using archive material from 69 previous editions.

Auri Arrives in Vienna: ORF Launches Marketing Campaign for Eurovision’s 70th Anniversary

As part of its wider campaign, ORF has introduced Auri as the official mascot of Eurovision 2026, representing creativity, connection and shared experience.

Auri will feature together with author Yvonne Lacina prominently in promotional activities across Austria, including appearances during Eurovision week, at the Vienna City Marathon and within ORF’s children’s programming. An official Eurovision cookbook will also be released to mark the anniversary, showcasing dishes from all 35 participating countries.

Extended Programme at the ORF RadioKulturhaus

The Eurovision Song Contest will also be accompanied by a cultural programme at the ORF RadioKulturhaus, featuring panel discussions, quiz formats and a concert by the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna, reinterpreting well-known Eurovision songs in a new musical context.

It's All About the Show! Opening and Interval Acts at the 70th Eurovision Song Contest

A total of 35 artists will compete at the Eurovision Song Contest 2026, performing across three live shows – two semifinals and the Grand Final – in the race for the coveted glass trophy. However, the shows offer more than just a competition between songs from different countries: they also feature spectacular opening acts and entertaining, humorous and impressive interval performances. Everything follows this year's motto: "The Big Show" - Austria, the world, and 70 years of the Eurovision Song Contest. The anniversary celebrations will take on a particularly prominent role this year.

"70 Years of Love" and a Kangaroo in the First Semifinal

The first semifinal opens with a journey through time, showing that the history of this show also represents "70 Years of Love": a film portraying the life of a couple set against the backdrop of the world's biggest live music show.

A 70-member choir then launches the first show with a tribute to "L'amour est bleu" – one of the greatest Eurovision hits of all time, originally performed nearly sixty years ago at the Eurovision Song Contest 1967 in Vienna's Hofburg.

With a wink, the interval act "Kangaroo" sees Victoria Swarovski and Michael Ostrowski combine humour and glamour. In a light-hearted musical performance, they finally settle how to easily distinguish Austria from Australia. They are joined by the "Milk Shake Man" Go-Jo, Australia's act from the previous year, and a kangaroo whose role remains entirely mysterious.

Off-Key Notes and a New Song by JJ in the Second Semifinal

The hosting duo also opens the second semifinal together – this time with a performance of the 2025 winning song, JJ's "Wasted Love". However, everything goes wrong – not just the notes. What remains is the realization that it is quite a challenge to climb out of a shipwreck and then continue hosting. Naturally, this is a task the presenters handle with ease.

In the interval act of the second semifinal, JJ will also present a new song.

A Spectacular Show Programme in the Grand Final

There is also plenty at stake in the Grand Final, as Victoria Swarovski and Michael Ostrowski place a bet on who can casually incorporate more Eurovision winning song titles into their moderation. In doing so, they may quickly face their personal "Waterloo".

At the beginning of the Grand Final, the small paper boat that opened JJ's performance in Basel is accidentally left behind in Switzerland and must travel along the Rhine and the Danube, crossing much of the Eastern Alps, before finally arriving in Vienna just in time for the spectacular opening.

In the opening act "The Queen of the Night", JJ once again showcases his remarkable vocal abilities, especially in the highest registers, while seamlessly blending Mozart-inspired elements with his own music. More than 40 dancers as well as acrobats accompany the performance, which also includes last year's winning song "Wasted Love". At the same time, the 25 finalists will enter the Wiener Stadthalle.

A special role is played by the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna, which has recorded music for the opening and many other show elements and will also appear live on stage during the final.

The voting break—when audiences across Europe and beyond cast their votes for their favourite song and anticipation builds for the result—is elevated by no fewer than three standout interval acts: in "Celebration!", Allstars such as Verka Serduchka, Erika Vikman and Lordi perform legendary songs from the contest's history in entirely new versions, forming the highlight of the 70th anniversary celebrations. Austria's electro-swing icon Parovoz then brings not only his distinctive sound to the arena, but also striking visual moments. A soul version of Billy Joel's "Vienna", performed by Cesár Sampson, provides the transition to the suspense-filled finale: the voting of the juries and the public.

In all three shows, "Professor Eurovision" – bearing a striking resemblance to host Victoria Swarovski – answers questions about the Eurovision Song Contest that no one has ever asked. Meanwhile, in the "Eurovision Quiz", Michael Ostrowski tests contestants' knowledge with surprising clips from the 69 previous shows.

Eurovision-Themed Programme at the ORF RadioKulturhaus

A diverse supporting programme for the Eurovision Song Contest will also be offered at the ORF RadioKulturhaus in 2026. Several music-inspired ORF programme formats invite audiences to explore the world of the Eurovision Song Contest and actively participate.

As early as 17 April, Christian Reichhold and Regina Nassiri, together with Marianne Mendt, Gary Lux, Timna Brauer and César Sampson, will examine Austria's Eurovision Song Contest entries from past decades in the programme series "Aus dem Archiv". The programme from the ORF RadioKulturhaus will be recorded for broadcast at a later date on ORF III.

The programme series "gehört.gewusst" invites knowledge enthusiasts on 19 April at 12:45 to take part in the Ö1 celebrity quiz ahead of the singing competition. As part of a Eurovision special quiz, participants will have the opportunity to explore the fascination of this music competition together with prominent guests and to dive into the history of this long-standing, glamorous spectacle. Judith Hoffmann and Bernhard Fellinger will pose challenging questions and expect original answers from, among others, "Mr. Song Contest" Andi Knoll, singers Elisabeth Engstler and Beatrix Neundlinger, and singer César Sampson. The programme will be broadcast live on Ö1 from 13:10.

A particular highlight will take place when the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra presents a special concert celebrating 70 years of the Eurovision Song Contest. The dress rehearsal will take place on Thursday, 23 April, at 20:00 at the ORF RadioKulturhaus, while the concert on Friday, 24 April, at 20:00 will invite audiences to a major musical event. At the heart of the concert evenings is the idea of placing those songs that have accompanied audiences for decades in front of their television screens into a symphonic context: orchestral colours, dramatic development and surprising musical perspectives make familiar melodies newly accessible and demonstrate how rich this musical heritage truly is. The concerts will be conducted by Christian Kolonovits. The main concert evening will be recorded and broadcast at a later date.

ORF RadioKulturhaus: A Cross-Media Cultural Hub in Argentinierstraße

Located in the heart of the city, the ORF RadioKulturhaus is a vibrant cultural meeting place for programme makers, artists and audiences, as well as the home of the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna. With its listed Great Hall, two studios and the RadioCafe, the RadioKulturhaus is a historical and architectural jewel of the city. It not only provides a platform for emerging artists, but is also a place where new programmes are created and social issues are discussed. The

RadioCafe hosts Ö1 literature and discussion formats, while new music and jazz are presented in the two studios, and symphonic and pop concerts take place in the Great Hall.

The figures from the past year underline its importance: 247 events, 500 cultural contributors and 20,000 visitors highlight the cultural and social significance of the venue. These events also generate cross-media cultural content for all ORF channels, including 200 hours of radio, 90 hours of television and 70 video streams.

Auri – The Official ORF Mascot for the Eurovision Song Contest 2026

With Auri, ORF presents an official mascot for the Eurovision Song Contest 2026 in Vienna that is far more than just a friendly figure: Auri is a symbol of unity, creativity and the power of shared experiences. As a colourful ambassador, Auri welcomes delegations and fans from around the world and conveys openness, respect and the joy of togetherness – “United by Music”.

Auri encourages people of all ages - especially children - to believe in themselves and to pursue their dreams with the support of friends and family. From the end of March, Auri will appear at numerous events throughout Austria, serving as a unifying presence. He is, of course, always available for a souvenir photo.

Auri on Tour Across Austria

Auri will go on a reading tour: together with author Yvonne Lacina-Blaha, he will visit children and families across the country, inviting them to enjoy inspiring storytelling moments. Auri will also appear during Eurovision Song Contest week, at the Vienna City Marathon including children’s events, and in ORF children’s programming. The aim is to enable cultural participation for children and to introduce them to the creative world of the Eurovision Song Contest.

A Taste of Eurovision: Recipes from 35 Countries in the Official Cookbook

Good Evening, Europe! Since 1956, the Eurovision Song Contest has brought millions of viewers to their screens each year. As the world's largest music competition, participating countries compete under the motto "United by Music". Extravagant outfits, glitter and wind machines are just as much a part of the show as unique performances, global careers and unforgettable moments.

Created in collaboration with Brandstätter Verlag and ORF, the official cookbook marking the 70th anniversary of the Eurovision Song Contest brings typical and popular dishes from the 2026 participating countries to the table. A selection of quirky fun facts adds further flavour.

The hardcover book (184 pages) will be published in both German and English and is now available in bookshops across Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

The author of the official cookbook celebrating the 70th anniversary, Manuela Tiefnig, is an entertainment and culture editor and a long-standing board member of OGAE Austria, the official Austrian Eurovision fan club. As a Eurovision expert, she has attended numerous shows live on site, enjoying not only the musical performances and unique atmosphere in cities such as Stockholm, Lisbon and Liverpool, but also the local cuisine and its culinary specialities.

Press Contact:

Roman Horacek

Head of Communications

(01) 87878 - DW 13869

roman.horacek@orf.at

<https://presse.ORF.at>