

Minnesota Orchestra

Gemma New, conductor

Sunwook Kim, piano

Thursday, April 28, 2022, 11 am	Orchestra Hall
Friday, April 29, 2022, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall
Saturday, April 30, 2022, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall

*With this concert we gratefully recognize C. Curtis Dunnavan
for his generous contribution to the Minnesota Orchestra.*

Vivian Fung	<i>Aqua</i>	ca. 5'
Samuel Barber	Symphony No. 1, Opus 9	ca. 20'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		ca. 20'
Johannes Brahms	Concerto No. 1 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 15 Maestoso Adagio Rondo: Allegro non troppo	ca. 44'

pre-concert

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley
Thursday, April 28, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, April 29, 7 pm, Auditorium
Saturday, April 30, 7 pm, Auditorium

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#), including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.





Gemma New, conductor

New Zealand-born conductor Gemma New, who makes her Minnesota Orchestra debut this week, is music director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and the recipient of the prestigious 2021 Sir George Solti Conducting Award. The 2020-21 season saw her make notable debuts with the Seattle Symphony, Atlanta Symphony and Basque National Orchestra of Spain. Her 2021-22 season includes subscription appearances with National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, Baltimore Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Atlanta Symphony and Kansas City Symphony. She will also make debuts with the WDR Sinfonieorchester, BBC Philharmonic,

Hallé Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and Orchestre National d’Ile de France. In June 2022, New will make her debut with the Los Angeles Opera for the West Coast Premiere of Kevin Puts’ *The Brightness of Light* with soprano Renée Fleming and baritone Rod Gilfry.

More information on Gemma New can be found at gemmanew.com.
Management for Gemma New: Primo Artists, New York, NY www.primoartists.com.



Sunwook Kim, piano

South Korean pianist Sunwook Kim performs his Minnesota Orchestra debut in these performances. He came to international recognition when he won the prestigious Leeds International

Piano Competition in 2006, aged just 18, becoming the competition’s youngest winner for 40 years, as well as its first Asian winner. Since then, he has established a reputation as one of the finest pianists of his generation, appearing as a concerto soloist in the subscription series of some of the world’s leading orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden (Asia Tour conducted by Myung-Whun Chung), NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, Finnish Radio Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Radio-France Philharmonic, NHK Symphony, Hallé Orchestra, and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra for his BBC Proms debut in summer 2014. Kim’s debut recital recordings on the Accentus label include three discs of Beethoven sonatas, Franck’s *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* and Brahms’s *Sonata No. 3*. More: askonasholt.com, sunwookkim.com.

one-minute notes

Fung: Aqua

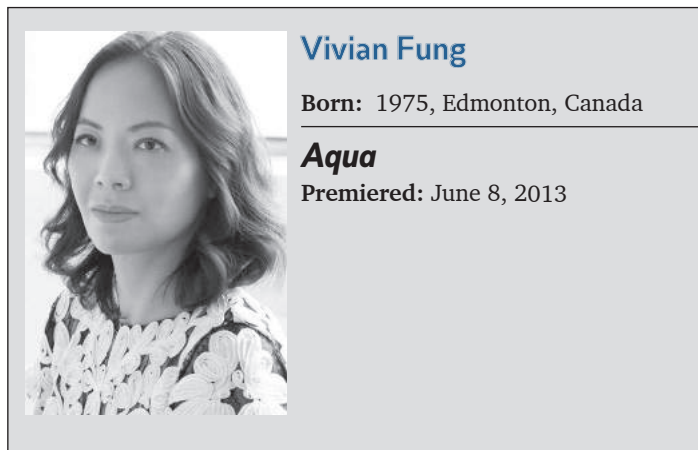
Inspired by and emulating Chicago’s Aqua Tower, *Aqua* is divided in two parts, the first representing the building’s ebbing and flowing balconies—with music first gentle and then violent—and the second depicting its dipping and swelling vertical pools, spotlighting solo harp and a climactic pandemonium of sound that dissipates into the ether.

Barber: Symphony No. 1

Long, singing lines and memorable themes show Barber’s considerable melodic gift in this early work, written when the composer was just shy of 26. Rich orchestral color is provided by every instrument family as tunes change from soaring to jagged, from quiet to intensely powerful.

Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 1

Many see in this work the young composer’s reaction to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and to the turmoil that followed the attempted suicide of Brahms’ dear friend, Robert Schumann. The concerto, dramatic and emotional, gives the orchestra an aggressive role, assigning more lyrical music to the piano. Of note: the second movement’s “lovely portrait” of Clara Schumann and, in the bold finale, cadenzas leading to a majestic conclusion.



Vivian Fung

Born: 1975, Edmonton, Canada

Aqua

Premiered: June 8, 2013

The debatable quip “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture” has been attributed to Elvis Costello, Thelonious Monk, Martin Mull, Frank Zappa and others, but none of them are on the record regarding the topic of writing music about architecture—the intriguing assignment given to Vivian Fung in 2012, when she was one of four composers commissioned by the Chicago Sinfonietta to write music inspired by iconic Chicago buildings for the ensemble’s ChiScape project.

a sculptural skyscraper

A native of Edmonton, Canada, Fung selected as her subject Aqua Tower, which at the time was one of Chicago’s newest skyscrapers, completed in 2010. The mixed-use, primarily residential building has several unique features, most notably the irregular curved balcony slabs that give the façade an undulating sculptural quality. The building also stands out on the conceptual side: at the time of its opening, it was the world’s tallest building designed by a female-led firm—Studio Gang Architects, headed by Jeanne Gang. Although it is eye-catching, Aqua Tower doesn’t



dominate the Windy City’s skyline—at 876 feet tall, it is only three-fifths the size of the Willis Tower—but it would loom over all of Minnesota’s skyscrapers, including the 792-foot-high IDS Center in downtown Minneapolis.

Drawing inspiration from the building, Fung composed the evocative five-minute score *Aqua*,

which received its premiere on June 8, 2013, with Mei-Ann Chen conducting the Chicago Sinfonietta in a performance that also introduced the other three ChiScape commissions by Armando Bayolo, Jonathan Bailey Holland and Chris Rogerson—who like Fung were handpicked for the project by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon.

The score’s non-traditional notation at times indicates that notes may be played in an order of the performers’ choosing, with the work’s first half making extensive use of “feather-beamed” rhythms that grow progressively faster but not at a precise rate, as instruments enter and exit in overlapping layers. The emphasis is on instrumental timbres, brief rising and falling gestures, and imaginative special effects—such as in the closing measures, when the pianist is instructed to sweep their fingers across the strings inside the piano, and a percussionist plays a bowed waterphone.

the composer’s note

Fung has provided the following comments on *Aqua*:

“[Aqua Tower’s] design juxtaposes horizontal waves, created by a rippling array of balcony slabs, with a vertical landscape of pools, hills, and valleys. Based on those conceptual elements, my work is structured in two parts: ‘Grand Wave No. 1 – Liquid Balconies’ represents the horizontal ebb and flow with divisi string parts that weave in and out of a colorful texture of undulating harmonies, starting gently and quickly becoming increasingly urgent and violent. Following a powerful climax, ‘Grand Wave No. 2 – Vertical Pools’ ensues with a solo harp line interjected with musical gestures depicting the dips and swells on the façade of the building. The musical work culminates in a complex chord that begins with a hum from nothingness and swells into a pandemonium of sound before disappearing into the ether of the stratosphere.”

about the composer

Described by National Public Radio as “one of today’s most eclectic composers,” Vivian Fung has a unique talent for combining idiosyncratic textures and styles into large-scale works, reflecting her multicultural background. Among her notable works are the clarinet quintet *Frenetic Memories*, a reflection on her travels to visit minority groups in China’s Yunnan province; *Earworms*, commissioned by Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra, which musically depicts today’s diverted attention spans and multi-tasking lives; and *The Ice Is Talking* for solo percussion and electronics, commissioned by the Banff Centre, using three ice blocks to illustrate the beauty and fragility of our environment.

Winner of the 2013 JUNO Award for Classical Composition of the Year for her Violin Concerto, Fung has a varied catalog that includes 18 orchestral works, among them seven concertos, as well as a

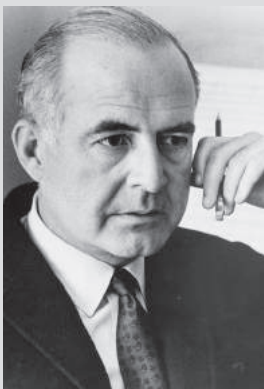


wide array of works for chamber groups, vocalists, soloists, wind ensembles and gamelan, along with two operas. Highlights of her upcoming performance calendar include the digital world premiere of two operatic scenes based on her oral family history in Cambodia with librettist Royce Vavrek, part of Edmonton Opera's The Wild Rose Opera Project; a U.K. tour of a new work with the Tangram Collective; the premiere of her fifth String Quartet by Canada's Lafayette String Quartet; the French premiere of *Earworms* by the Orchestre de Paris; and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's U.K. premiere of String Sinfonietta. In addition, Mary Elizabeth Bowden tours her Trumpet Concerto and records it with the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras for future release on Cedille Records. She is currently at work on a new project about identity with soprano Andrea Nunez and librettist Royce Vavrek, an expanded version of her Flute Concerto, and upcoming percussion works for Katie Rife and for Ensemble for These Times.

Fung began her composition studies with composer Violet Archer and received her doctorate from the Juilliard School in New York, where her mentors included David Diamond and Robert Beaser. She is now based in California, where she serves on the composition faculty of Santa Clara University.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, finger cymbals, ratchet, tamtam, waterphone, glockenspiel, chimes, marimba, harp, piano and strings

Program note by **Carl Schroeder**.



Samuel Barber
Born: March 9, 1910,
West Chester, Pennsylvania
Died: January 21, 1981,
New York City
Symphony No. 1, Opus 9
Premiered: December 13, 1936

Can this wonderful symphony—still so fresh and youthful—really be 86 years old? Barber completed it in February 1936, a few days before his 26th birthday, while spending a year in Europe on a Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship and as a Prix de Rome winner. The symphony was premiered in December of that year in Rome by the Augusteo Orchestra and quickly

repeated by the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras, New York Philharmonic and other orchestras in this country. When Artur Rodziński conducted this music with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival in July 1937, it was the first work by an American ever performed at that festival. Bruno Walter recorded it in 1945, and it remains one of the best-known symphonies ever composed by an American. Its numerous recordings include several by European orchestras.

This popularity is easy to understand. Throughout, the symphony's long, singing lines and memorable themes show Barber's considerable melodic gift. This is also one of those pieces that just sound good. Barber had a terrific ear for instrumental color, and this music rings through a concert hall, its sonority dominated by the sound of soaring violins, piercing trumpets and thunderous timpani. And finally, the symphony is effective formally. Only 20 minutes long, it is in one movement made up of four sections that conform to the movements of the traditional symphony. As many have noted, Barber's model for such a form was Sibelius' Seventh Symphony (and some may hear a touch of Sibelius in his orchestral sound), but the youthful energy and imaginative evolution of themes are entirely Barber's own.

melodies, soaring and spiky

The symphony gets off to a terrific *Allegro ma non troppo* start on a series of terraced brass attacks—a rippling wash of bright sound—and immediately Barber introduces his first subject in the strings. This jagged shape will reappear in a variety of forms. Other themes follow quickly—a long-lined melody for English horn and violas and a soaring, intense closing subject—and these three ideas contain all the material Barber will use across the span of his symphony. Now he plays them up to a tremendous climax, but does not recapitulate them, and this opening section collapses on fragments of its first theme.

Out of the silence, the *Allegro molto* leaps to life on the strings' dancing 6/8 meter, a pulse felt in virtually every measure of this energetic section. Based on a variation of the symphony's opening string theme, this section conforms to the scherzo of the traditional symphony. It too rises to a spiky, sonorous climax, then falls away on the sound of muttering bassoons and clarinets and—over quiet timpani strokes—flows directly into the *Andante tranquillo*. This section is derived primarily from the long melody originally introduced by English horn and violas. Over murmuring strings, solo oboe transforms that melody into an expressive cantilena, and this too builds up to a climax of considerable power. The concluding section, marked *Con moto*, begins very quietly in the cellos and basses. Their simple tune is yet a further derivation of the symphony's opening theme, and now Barber employs it as the ground bass for a passacaglia. As it repeats, he weaves variants of the symphony's themes above its

quiet progression, slowly at first, then gathering intensity as the symphony drives to its powerful close.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, harp and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.



Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833,
Hamburg, Germany
Dies: April 3, 1897,
Vienna, Austria

Concerto No. 1 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 15

Premiered: January 22, 1859

Johannes Brahms was still just a rosy-cheeked boy of 20 when Robert Schumann met him, immediately recognized his talent and became his enthusiastic champion. He proclaimed Brahms “a young eagle” and said: “When he holds his magic wand over the massed resources of chorus and orchestra, we shall be granted marvelous insights into spiritual secrets.” But Schumann went into steep mental decline, attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine and died two years later in a mental asylum.

It was natural for the young composer to try to register his feelings in music, and in March 1854, only weeks after his friend’s suicide attempt, he set out to create that most dramatic and challenging of forms, a symphony. He had never written anything for orchestra, so he sketched this work first as a sonata for two pianos—and soon realized that he was not ready to compose a symphony. He decided to transform the first movement into the opening movement of a piano concerto. Then he composed a new slow movement and a new rondo-finale. Still desperately uncertain of his abilities, Brahms worked on the piano concerto for four years before, in March 1858, he was willing to try it out in a private performance. The public premiere came the following January.

the music: catastrophe, relief and heroism

maestoso. Despite the marking *Maestoso*, the first movement feels less majestic than catastrophic. This violent opening, Brahms told Joseph Joachim, was a depiction of his feelings when he learned of Schumann’s suicide attempt. After the initial sound

and fury, the piano makes a deceptively understated entrance, which points to a remarkable feature of this movement: in general, the orchestra has the more aggressive material, the piano the friendlier music. To call this a “symphony-concerto,” as some have done, goes too far, but such a description does indicate the unusually dramatic character of this music. The huge exposition leads to a relatively brief development that includes a shimmering, dancing episode in D major. The recapitulation offers no emotional release, no modulation into a major key, and the movement drives unrelentingly to its close.

adagio. Relief arrives with the second movement. In a letter from December 1856 Brahms wrote to Schumann’s widow Clara, a superb pianist who was to be Brahms’ lifelong friend: “I am also painting a lovely portrait of you; it is to be the *Adagio*.” In D major, it has a quiet expressiveness, an almost consoling quality after the furies of the first movement. It rises to a gentle climax before a brief cadenza leads to a quiet close.

rondo: allegro non troppo. The finale returns to the mood and D-minor tonality of the opening. The piano’s initial theme makes few literal returns but is skillfully transformed on each reappearance, including one used as the subject for a brief but lithe fugue. Brahms offers two cadenzas in this movement, the first almost Bachian in its keyboard writing, and at the very end the rising shape of the rondo theme helps propel the movement—finally in D major—to a heroic conclusion.

Early reaction to this concerto was harsh. After a performance in Leipzig, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann: “You have probably already heard that it was a complete fiasco; at the rehearsal it met with total silence, and at the performance (where hardly three people raised their hands to clap) it was actually hissed.” It must have given Brahms particular pleasure when, 35 years later, in 1894, he conducted a program in Leipzig that included both his piano concertos—and heard this product of his youth cheered in the same hall where it had been reviled so many years before.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.