

Minnesota Orchestra

Fabien Gabel, conductor

Tai Murray, violin

Friday, December 10, 2021, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, December 11, 2021, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Engelbert Humperdinck	Overture to <i>Königskinder</i> (The King's Children)	ca. 8'
Felix Mendelssohn	Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 64 Allegro molto appassionato Andante Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace <i>Tai Murray, violin</i>	ca. 27'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Hector Berlioz	<i>Symphonie fantastique</i> Reveries–Passions (Largo – Allegro agitato e appassionato assai) A Ball (Valse: Allegro non troppo) In the Country (Adagio) March to the Scaffold (Allegretto non troppo) Dream of the Witches' Sabbath (Larghetto – Allegro)	ca. 49'

pre-concert

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley
Friday, December 10, 7 pm, Auditorium
Saturday, December 11, 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.





Fabien Gabel, conductor

Fabien Gabel's conducting has taken him across the globe to lead top orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Orchestre National de France, Oslo Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic and Warsaw Philharmonic. Gabel began studying trumpet at the age of 6, honing his skills at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris and later at the Musik Hochschule of Karlsruhe. In 2002 he

studied conducting at the Aspen Summer Music Festival with David Zinman, who invited him to appear as a guest conductor at the festival in 2009. In 2020 Gabel was awarded the rank of Chevalier (Knight) by the Conseil de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, a recognition given by France's Ministry of Culture. More: opus3artists.com, fabiengabel.com.



Tai Murray, violin

Winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2004, Tai Murray was subsequently named a BBC New Generation Artist. She has performed as guest soloist on the stages of such halls as the Barbican, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens and Shanghai's Concert Hall, and with ensembles such as the Atlanta Symphony, BBC Scottish

Symphony and Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar. Highlights of her recent performances include engagements at the BBC Proms with BBC National Orchestra of Wales, a tour with the Orchester de Bretagne, and concerts with the Orchester de Picardie, the Chineke! Orchestra and the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. Her critically-acclaimed debut recording for Harmonia Mundi of Ysaÿe's six sonatas for solo violin was released in 2012. Her second recording of works by American composers of the 20th century was released in 2013 by the Berlin-based label eaSonus, and her third disc with the Bernstein Serenade was released in 2014 on the French label Mirare. A 2012 recipient of the Sphinx Organization's Sphinx Medal of Excellence, she is an assistant professor of violin at the Yale School of Music. More: taimurray.com.

one-minute notes

Humperdinck: Overture to *Königskinder*

Like Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, *Königskinder* is a fairy-tale opera involving a witch—but in this case with a central romance between a king's son and a goose girl. Although they meet a tragic end, this is not foreshadowed in the energetic overture, set in triple meter with regal undertones.

Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto

Felix Mendelssohn's exquisite Violin Concerto maintains the transparent textures of a Mozart-Haydn orchestra, but it rings out with a splendor the earlier composers never dreamed possible. The solo violinist's soaring lines, both graceful and impassioned, conclude in an exultant three-octave leap.

Berlioz: *Symphonie fantastique*

In what musicologist Michael Steinberg called "the most remarkable First Symphony ever written," Hector Berlioz breaks the rules and oversteps the boundaries, creating an exhilarating, one-of-a-kind journey: the story of an artist and his obsession with a woman.



Engelbert Humperdinck

Born: September 1, 1854,
Siegburg, Germany

Died: September 27, 1921,
Neustrelitz, Germany

Overture to *Königskinder* (The King's Children)

Premiered: December 28, 1910

If Engelbert Humperdinck, who passed away 100 years ago this fall, were to visit the 21st century, he would surely be delighted that his fairy-tale opera *Hansel and Gretel* enjoys frequent stagings and is loved by audiences around the world, saddened that his other works are almost never performed, and perplexed that his name has been appropriated by the British pop singer born Arnold George Dorsey (a mid-1960s marketing ploy by Dorsey's manager, who felt the singer needed a memorable stage name).

following a stunning debut

Humperdinck, who began his career as an acolyte of Richard Wagner, emerged on the international scene in 1893 with almost unimaginable success: his first opera, *Hansel and Gretel*, was declared a masterpiece by Richard Strauss, and early performances were led by the likes of Gustav Mahler and Cosima Wagner. The opera quickly made its way around the world, and the libretto by the composer's sister Adelheid Wette has been translated into more than a dozen languages. Its popularity grew in the 20th century through historic broadcasts, recordings, and the issuing of arrangements and excerpts that extended the music's reach beyond the opera house.

Humperdinck faced a daunting question—what next?—and forged ahead in 1897 with another fairy-tale stage work, *Königskinder* (German for *The King's Children*). Originally a melodrama using an experimental technique halfway between singing and speaking, it was re-worked in 1910 as a traditional opera. Although its premiere at New York's Metropolitan Opera was a success, *Königskinder* fell out of popularity during World War I and has only rarely returned to the stage. The Minnesota Orchestra—then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra—played three selections from *Königskinder* at a youth concert in 1914, which until this week was the only time the ensemble has played music by Humperdinck not from *Hansel and Gretel*.

Unlike *Hansel and Gretel*, based on the well-known Grimm brothers tale, *Königskinder* has an unfamiliar and complex plot, and ends tragically for its central characters, a “goose girl” and a

king's son. This somber close, however, is not foreshadowed in the energetic overture featured at these concerts, which is set in triple meter with regal undertones befitting the opera's title.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle and strings

Program note by *Carl Schroeder*.



Felix Mendelssohn

Born: February 3, 1809,
Hamburg, Germany

Died: November 4, 1847,
Leipzig, Germany

Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 64

Premiered: March 13, 1845

“I would like to write you a violin concerto for next winter. One in E minor keeps running through my head, and the opening gives me no peace.” So wrote Felix Mendelssohn to his lifelong friend, violinist Ferdinand David, in 1838, and that opening has given millions of music lovers no peace ever since, for it is one of the most perfect violin melodies ever written.

Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto seems so polished, so effortless in its easy flow, that this music feels as if it must have appeared in one sustained stroke of his pen. Yet it took seven years to write. Normally a fast worker, Mendelssohn proceeded very carefully on this concerto, revising, polishing and consulting with David, his concertmaster at the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, at every step of its composition. He completed the score while on vacation in Soden, near Frankfurt, during the summer of 1844, and David gave the premiere in Leipzig on March 13, 1845. Mendelssohn was ill at the time and could not conduct, so his assistant, the Danish composer Niels Gade, led the first performance.

originality and endless beauty

We do not normally think of Mendelssohn as an innovator, but his Violin Concerto is as remarkable for its originality as for its endless beauty. It is deftly scored: he writes for what is essentially the Mozart-Haydn orchestra, and he keeps textures transparent and the soloist audible throughout. But he can also make that orchestra ring out with a splendor that Mozart and Haydn never dreamed of.



allegro molto appassionato. The innovations begin in the first instant. Mendelssohn does away with the standard orchestral exposition and has the violin enter in the second bar with its famous theme, marked *Allegro molto appassionato* and played entirely on the violin's E-string; this soaring idea immediately establishes the movement's singing yet impassioned character. Other themes follow in turn: a transitional figure for the orchestra and the true second subject, a chorale-like tune first given out by the woodwinds.

The quiet timpani strokes in the first few seconds, which subtly energize the orchestra's swirling textures, show the hand of a master. Another innovation: Mendelssohn sets the cadenza where we do not expect it, at the end of the development rather than just before the coda. That cadenza—a terrific compilation of trills, harmonics and arpeggios—appears to have been largely the creation of David, who fashioned it from Mendelssohn's themes. The return of the orchestra is a masterstroke: it is the *orchestra* that brings back the movement's main theme as the *violinist* accompanies the orchestra with dancing arpeggios.

andante. Mendelssohn hated applause between movements, and he tried to guard against it here by tying the first two movements together with a single bassoon note. The two themes of the *Andante* might by themselves define the term “romanticism.” There is a sweetness about this music that could, in other hands, turn cloying, but Mendelssohn skirts that danger gracefully. The soloist has the arching and falling opening melody, while the orchestra gives out the darker, more insistent second subject. The writing for violin in this movement, full of double-stopping and fingered octaves, is a great deal more difficult than it sounds.

allegretto non troppo–allegro molto vivace. Mendelssohn joins the second and third movements with an anticipatory bridge passage that subtly takes its shape from the concerto's opening theme. Resounding fanfares from the orchestra lead directly to the soloist's entrance on an effervescent, dancing melody so full of easy grace that we seem suddenly in the fairyland atmosphere of Mendelssohn's own incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Several other themes appear along the way, some combined in ingenious ways. But it is the sprightly opening melody that dominates as the music seems to fly through the sparkling coda to the violin's exultant three-octave leap at the very end.

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

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.



Hector Berlioz

Born: December 11, 1803,
La Côte-Saint-André, France
Died: March 8, 1869,
Rue de Calais, Paris, France

Symphonie fantastique, Opus 14

Premiered: December 5, 1830

hector Berlioz composed *Symphonie fantastique* in 1830, when much that was new and forward-looking was in the air, particularly in the social, political and scientific spheres. The Parisians had torn up their cobblestones and gotten rid of a king who believed in Divine Right; the British parliament would soon enact the first in a series of reform bills designed to enfranchise the middle class; the United States experienced the Nat Turner revolts and the first effective moves towards the abolition of slavery.

the “new music” of Berlioz

It would be surprising if music had not exploded as well. From today's vantage point we can see fairly easily that the beginnings of a new kind of classical music were to be found in the works of Beethoven. And the better we know the *Symphonie fantastique*, the more clearly we can sense in it the presence of Beethoven and of that classical tradition Beethoven brought to so remarkable a pass.

At the same time, however deeply he was in debt to Beethoven, Berlioz strove to write “new music.” He succeeded. The *fantastique* sounds and behaves like nothing ever heard before. It takes off on paths Beethoven could never have imagined; that it was written just three years after the death of Beethoven is a fact to stagger the historical imagination.

a composer's obsession

In 1827, at the Paris Odéon, Berlioz saw a staging of *Hamlet* by a company from London. Among the performers was Harriet Smithson, a 27-year-old actress with whom Berlioz fell instantly and wildly in love. He wrote to her repeatedly; he heard gossip about an affair between her and her manager. This hurt him, but it also provided enough distance to enable him to plan and to begin work on the symphony—whose subject was an artist “with a vivid imagination” who falls in love with his “ideal” woman, experiences hope and doubt, then an opium-induced dream in which he sees himself being executed for killing his beloved; after his death she appears to be “only a prostitute” taking part in an orgy at “a foul assembly of sorcerers and devils.”

The premiere took place on December 5, 1830. Two years later Berlioz presented a sharpened and improved version of his symphony, now with a sequel whose script was full of unmistakable allusions to his passion for Smithson. She was in Paris again, and she was persuaded to attend Berlioz' concert on December 9, 1832. They finally met, and on October 3, 1833, they were married. The whole business was a disaster. By the time they separated in 1844, Smithson was no longer performing, as an accident had put an end to her career. She died in 1854, an alcoholic and paralyzed; though they were no longer together, Berlioz supported her financially until her death.

a fantastic symphony

Berlioz wrote several programs for his autobiographical and in every way fantastic symphony. Excerpts from the note he published with the score in 1845 are indicated with quotation marks.

reveries - passions. A young musician, “the artist,” sees and falls hopelessly in love with a woman who embodies the charms of “the ideal being of whom he has dreamed.” In his mind she is linked to a musical thought, and both “the melodic image and its human model pursue him incessantly like a double *idée fixe*....The passage from this state of melancholic reverie, interrupted by a few fits of unmotivated joy, to one of delirious passion, with its movements of fury and jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolation—all this is the subject of the first movement.”

The subtly shaped *idée fixe* is the melody that violins and flute play to an accompaniment of nervous interjections by the strings when the *Allegro* begins.

a ball. Whether the artist is engaged in festivities or contemplating nature, the “beloved image appears before him and troubles his soul.” The first three dozen measures paint for us the ballroom with its glitter and flicker, its swirling couples, the yards and yards of whispering silk. All this becomes gradually visible, like a new scene in the theater. This softly scintillating waltz is exquisitely scored.

in the country. The artist is calmed by the sound of shepherds piping, by “the quiet rustling of the trees gently disturbed by the wind,” but wondering if his beloved might be deceiving him, he feels a “mixture of hope and fear...ideas of happiness disturbed by black presentiments.” This scene speaks very much from a new sensibility, yet it is also here that we most feel the presence of Beethoven, particularly the Beethoven of the Fifth and *Pastoral* Symphonies. Berlioz' piping shepherds are mutations of Beethoven's nightingale, quail and cuckoo, but there is nothing in music before this, or since, like the pathos of the recapitulated conversation with one voice missing. As a picture of despairing

loneliness it is without equal.

march to the scaffold. “Having become certain that his love goes unrecognized, the artist poisons himself with opium.” But rather than dying, he “dreams that he has killed the woman he loves, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold, and that he is witnessing his own execution.” In this stunning march, an instant knockout, Berlioz' orchestral imagination—the hand-stopped horn sounds, the use of the bassoon quartet, the timpani writing—is astonishing in every way.

dream of the witches' sabbath. The artist sees himself “in the midst of a frightful assembly of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, all come together for his funeral.” The melody representing his beloved is now “no more than the tune of an ignoble dance, trivial and grotesque...she takes part in the devilish orgy...funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*...”

As we enter the final scene, with its trim thematic transformations, its bizarre sonorities—deep bells, squawking E-flat clarinet, the beating of violin and viola strings with the wooden stick of the bow, glissandos for wind instruments, violent alternations of *ff* with *pp*—its grotesque imagery, its wild and coruscating brilliance, we have left the Old World for good.

sound the bells

This week's performances of *Symphonie fantastique* feature a Minnesota Orchestra debut: the unveiling of a pair of large church bells, custom-cast for the Minnesota Orchestra by the Royal Eijsbouts foundry in the Netherlands and added to the Orchestra's permanent instrument collection thanks to a donation by Orchestra patron Gary B. Cohen. Learn more about the bells on page 12.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo),
2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets
(1 doubling E-flat clarinet), 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets,
2 cornets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani, field drum,
bass drum, cymbals, 2 large bells, 2 harps and strings

Program note excerpted from the late Michael Steinberg's The Symphony: A Listener's Guide (Oxford University Press, 1995), used with permission.

