

Minnesota Orchestra

Thomas Søndergård, conductor

Ingrid Fliter, piano

Friday, December 3, 2021, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
 Saturday, December 4, 2021, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

*With these concerts we honor the memory of Elizabeth J. Indihar
 in appreciation of her generous estate gift to the Minnesota Orchestra.*

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor	Ballade for Orchestra in A minor, Opus 33	ca. 13'
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart	Concerto No. 23 in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, K. 488 Allegro Adagio Allegro assai <i>Ingrid Fliter, piano</i>	ca. 26'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Richard Strauss	<i>Ein Heldenleben</i> (A Hero's Life), Opus 40	ca. 46'

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. The December 3 concert will also be broadcast live on [Twin Cities PBS \(TPT-2\)](#) and available for streaming at minnesotaorchestra.org and on the Orchestra's social media channels.





Thomas Søndergård, conductor

Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård is the current music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO), a position he took after six seasons as principal guest conductor. Previously, he served as principal conductor of BBC National Orchestra of Wales and as principal conductor and musical advisor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra. Recent highlights of his tenure with the RSNO have included tours to China and the U.S., premieres of new commissions and Wynton Marsalis' Violin Concerto with Nicola Benedetti. This season, he makes his first visits to the Montreal Symphony and Bergen Philharmonic and returns to many orchestras, among them the Malmö Symphony, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, Royal Danish Academy of Music, Royal Danish Opera (with which he will lead Wagner's *Die Walküre* and New Year concerts), London Philharmonic and Danish National Symphony. He has been invited

to perform with many of the world's finest orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw, Chicago Symphony and London Symphony Orchestra.

More: askonasholt.com.



Ingrid Fliter, piano

Argentine pianist Ingrid Fliter—winner of the 2006 Gilmore Artist Award, one of only a handful of pianists and the only woman to have received this honor—made her American orchestral debut with the Atlanta Symphony just days after the announcement of her Gilmore Award. Since then, she has appeared with most of the major North American orchestras including those of Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, New Jersey, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Toronto, as well as the National Symphony Orchestra and New World Symphony. She has also performed at the Mostly

Mozart, Tanglewood, Grant Park, Aspen, Ravinia, Blossom, Tippet Rise and Brevard summer festivals. She has recorded both Chopin concertos with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra for Linn Records as well as the complete Chopin Preludes for the same label. Her two all-Chopin recordings for EMI earned her the reputation as one of the preeminent interpreters of that composer. Her most recent recordings for Linn Records feature the Mendelssohn and Schumann concertos with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the complete Chopin Nocturnes. More: cmartists.com, ingridfliter.com.



Sarah Hicks, host and writer

For the concert on Friday, December 3, Sarah Hicks serves as host of the Twin Cities PBS broadcast and online livestream, *This Is Minnesota Orchestra*, a role she has played over the last year. A profile appears on page 36.

one-minute notes

Coleridge-Taylor: Ballade for Orchestra

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Ballade—premiered two months before the cantata *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* that made the composer famous—is music of drama and heart, beginning and ending in urgency. A slow central section is filled with passionate, lushly-scored melodies.

Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 23

This concerto is filled with music of lovely and touching gallantry, highlighted by a poignant minor-key middle movement in which the piano sings with operatic grace. The spirited finale keeps the soloist in perpetual motion.

Strauss: *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life)

Richard Strauss' epic tone poem contains all the vivid theatricality of an opera, telling the story of a hero, his companion, his struggles and his ultimate fulfillment. Of note are the sweeping hero's theme, introduced by horns, and the virtuosic violin lines that represent the hero's lover—an idealized version of Strauss' wife.



Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Born: August 15, 1875,
London, England

Died: September 1, 1912,
Croydon, England

Ballade for Orchestra in A minor, Opus 33

Premiered: September 12, 1898

British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's outstanding achievements in music—foremost among them authoring *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, the most successful new cantata of his era—are all the more remarkable given his passing of pneumonia at the young age of 37. On our side of the Atlantic, Coleridge-Taylor was invited to the White House by Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 during one of his three U.S. tours, and he earned such a devoted following in America that multiple choruses and public schools were named in his honor—as was the American composer Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, born 20 years after the British composer died.

Sadly, Coleridge-Taylor's fame did not lead to great fortune. His publisher reaped the financial benefits of *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* when, prior to the oratorio's premiere in 1898, the 23-year-old composer sold the work's full rights for 15 shillings. When the oratorio became a roaring success, Coleridge-Taylor quickly capitalized with two sequels, *The Death of Minnehaha* and *Hiawatha's Departure*, which like *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* were based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*. These two cantatas enjoyed moderate success, but not on the level of the first in the series. Coleridge-Taylor spent the rest of his life generating compositions at a rapid pace, but only scraping by financially.

right before fame

Hiawatha's Wedding Feast wasn't Coleridge-Taylor's only success in 1898. That February he conducted a conservatory string section in a concert at the Croydon Conservatoire of Music at which Jessie Walmisley, his former classmate at the Royal College of Music, sang his music—part of a blossoming relationship that grew into marriage the next year. In September, two months before the premiere of *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, Coleridge-Taylor's *Ballade for Orchestra* was warmly received in its first performance at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester, England, with the composer conducting.

Edward Elgar, who was about to compose his famous *Enigma Variations*, helped facilitate Coleridge-Taylor's connection with the Three Choirs Festival by recommending the young composer to the festival's leaders, stating that he was “far and away the cleverest fellow going amongst all the young men.” The commission was soon secured, and Coleridge-Taylor delivered a single-movement work spanning 13 minutes for an orchestra of typical wind, brass and string complements plus timpani, with piccolo brightening the tone of the wind section, and cymbals as the sole percussion instrument. The piece evidently pleased the festival's leadership, as Coleridge-Taylor returned the next year to conduct the premiere of his *Solemn Prelude*, and in 1903 he contributed a third work, *The Atonement*. The Three Choirs Festival still runs today and featured *Solemn Prelude* at its 2021 edition.

confidence, passion and tenderness

The *Ballade in A minor* is the second of three works Coleridge-Taylor titled *Ballade*, all of them in minor keys: a D-minor *Ballade* preceded it in 1895 and a C-minor *Ballade* came in 1909. In instrumental classical music, a ballade has no strict form, but often emphasizes lyricism and a sense of dramatic narrative. This A-minor *Ballade* conveys confidence, passion and tenderness without a specific programmatic story. Although Coleridge-Taylor designates the key of A minor, the score contains six key changes, all in the work's latter half. The opening is an exciting, dramatic show of strength, with trilling winds above unison strings—but before long the music turns slower, passionate and romantic. These two moods alternate throughout the work, with the urgency of the opening theme ultimately triumphing.

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

Program note by **Carl Schroeder**.





Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Born: January 17, 1756,
Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791,
Vienna, Austria

Concerto No. 23 in A major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 488

Composed: ca. early 1786

The opera *The Marriage of Figaro* was Wolfgang Amadè Mozart's big project in the spring of 1786, but the composer repeatedly interrupted himself to dash off several additional works, including his Piano Concerto No. 23. He entered it into his catalogue on March 2 and presumably played it in Vienna soon after.

the music: lovely and touching

allegro. The first movement, music of lovely and touching gallantry, is the essence of Mozartian reticence and *dolcezza*. Its second chord, darkened by an unexpected G-natural in the second violins, already suggests the sadness that will cast fleeting shadows throughout the concerto and altogether dominate its slow movement.

It is both fascinating and delightful the way Mozart scores the two main themes. He begins both with strings alone. He continues the first with an answering phrase just for winds, punctuated twice by forceful string chords, and that leads to the first passage for full orchestra. In the new theme he proceeds more subtly: a bassoon joins the violins nine measures into the melody and, as though encouraged by that, the flute appears in mid-phrase, with horns and clarinets arriving just in time to reinforce the cadence. The beginning of the development is spliced neatly into the end of the exposition; the real activity is in the woodwinds, and the piano accompanies with bright figurations. The recapitulation brings new distribution of material between solo and orchestra. After the cadenza comes a buoyant coda whose close is tongue-in-cheek matter-of-fact.

adagio. Slow movements in minor keys are surprisingly uncommon in Mozart, master of melancholy in music, and this one is in fact the last he writes. An Adagio marking is rare, too, and this movement is an altogether special transformation of the lilting siciliano style. The exquisite dissonances heard in the orchestra's first phrase are brought about by the bassoon's imitation of clarinet and violins. A second theme is more chromatic and thus still more moody than the first.

Throughout, Mozart the pianist imagines himself as the ideal opera singer. Near the end, he writes a miraculous and especially operatic passage, the strings playing simple broken chords, part pizzicato, part arco, over which the piano declaims a noble and passionate melody notable for its range: two and a half octaves, at one point traversed in a single leap. Pianists differ about what to do here, some simply playing the notes in the score, others filling the gaps (in time and space) with embellishments of their own. Our knowledge of 18th-century practice suggests that Mozart might well have taken the latter way.

allegro assai. After the restraint of the first movement and the melancholia of the second, Mozart gives us a finale of enchanting high spirits. It keeps the pianist very busy in music that comes close to perpetual motion and in which there is plenty to engage our ear, now so alert to the delicacy and overflowing invention with which Mozart uses those few and quiet instruments.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns and strings

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



Richard Strauss

Born: June 11, 1864,
Munich, Germany

Died: September 8, 1949,
Garmisch-Partenkirchen,
Germany

Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life), Opus 40

Premiered: March 3, 1899

In the summer of 1898, 34-year-old Richard Strauss set to work on what would be his longest tone poem to date, *Ein Heldenleben*, or *A Hero's Life*—the musical depiction of the life and struggles of an unnamed hero.

In a letter to a friend that summer, Strauss offered a rather disingenuous explanation of why he had chosen this topic: "Beethoven's *Eroica* is so little beloved of our conductors, and is on this account now only rarely performed that to fulfill a pressing need I am composing a largeish tone poem titled *Heldenleben*, admittedly without a funeral march, but yet in E-flat, with lots of horns, which are always a yardstick of heroism."

But the work that was completed that December and premiered the following March was far indeed from the spirit of the *Eroica*, and Strauss was probably right to note that the only thing the two pieces have in common is the key, E-flat major. While Beethoven's *Eroica* offers a rather abstract representation of heroism, in *Ein Heldenleben* Strauss paints in microscopic detail portraits of his hero, the hero's snarling adversaries, a coquettish lover, a terrific battle in which his enemies are chased off the field, and the hero's reward: a contemplative if not entirely serene retirement.

Scored for massive orchestra and shaped by Strauss' ingenious transformation of themes across its more than 40-minute span, *Ein Heldenleben* remains, 122 years after its premiere, one of the great showpieces of orchestral classical music.

the hero's journey: foes, a lover and a battle

Ein Heldenleben has one of the greatest openings in all of music. From the depths of the orchestra, Strauss introduces his hero with a long, sweeping theme whose powerful stride leaps up across three octaves, changing from the dark colors of lower strings and horns to the silvery sound of massed violins as it climbs. Here is a man of force and idealism, constantly striving toward something higher, and the arc of his music is always upward. It is riding a shaft of incandescent energy when it suddenly vanishes in mid-air.

Out of that silence comes something completely different. Here are the hero's enemies, and their music, twisted and gnarled, is depicted by ugly, carping solo woodwinds. Each seems to have a particularly nasty character: individual entrances are marked "very sharp and spiky" and "jarring." (At early performances of *Ein Heldenleben*, outraged music critics felt that Strauss was depicting them in his portrait of the hero's enemies—and they may well have been right.) The hero's theme grows somber as he muses on these adversaries, but before he can face them he is interrupted by the other important figure in this music-drama, his lover.

The companion of this powerful hero is a formidable woman in her own right. Strauss confessed that she was modeled on his own wife: "She is very complex, very feminine, a little perverse, a little coquettish, never like herself, at every minute different from how she had been the moment before." Here she is portrayed by the solo violin, and as he paints her mercurial portrait, Strauss gives the concertmaster some of the most difficult music ever written for that instrument. Individual passages are given markings such as "happy," "flippant," "tender," "insolent," "lovable" and "scolding" before the union is consummated in soaring G-flat major love music that intertwines the themes of the hero and his love.

Their happiness is brief. Distant trumpets pierce the warm calm of the love scene, calling the hero to battle, where finally he must face his adversaries. Over rattling drums, his enemies attack, their

jagged trumpet call a wonderful transformation of the first theme from the adversaries' section. The battle rages at great length above the clash of spears and glint of swords, and through the smoke of the battlefield Strauss deftly weaves together the hero's theme, the adversaries' theme and the love music. Finally the hero triumphs and chases his enemies away (their retreat is a flurry of descending 16th-notes from the woodwinds), and he makes a magnificent entrance on the hero's theme, now back in the original E-flat major.

controversy, serenity and repose

There follows the most controversial section of *Ein Heldenleben*. A recounting of the hero's "works of peace," it takes the form of quotations from Strauss' own music, quotations from *Don Juan*, *Don Quixote*, *Macbeth*, *Guntram*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, the song "Traum durch die Dämmerung" and other works. Critics have been quick, perhaps too quick, to interpret *Ein Heldenleben* as a vehicle for the composer's ego. Often overlooked in the rush to scold Strauss is his skill: he weaves these themes together so deftly, in such graceful counterpoint, as to (almost) disarm criticism for calling attention to his own accomplishments.

If the battle music runs on a little too long, and if the hero's works of peace seem self-indulgent, Strauss rewards our patience in the final section, a portrait of the hero in old age. He clearly suffers from bad dreams (memories of his enemies pop up from time to time to disturb his reveries), but the final moments of *Ein Heldenleben* bring serenity, beauty and repose. The enemies have been banished, and now the themes of the hero and his love return, transformed far from their initial hard-edged appearance.

Borne along by some wonderful writing for solo violin and solo horn, the hero at last finds peace. At the close, a noble chord for winds (in pure E-flat major) swells to a mighty climax, then falls away to silence as the hero completes his journey.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, piccolo, 4 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, tenor tuba, timpani, small military drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, triangle, 2 harps and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.

