

Minnesota Orchestra

Kevin John Edusei, conductor

Ning Feng, violin

Thursday, April 7, 2022, 11 am | Orchestra Hall

Friday, April 8, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Dmitri Shostakovich	Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77 Nocturne Scherzo Passacaglia Burlesca <i>Ning Feng, violin</i>	ca. 36'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Samy Moussa	Nocturne	ca. 14'
Maurice Ravel	Suite No. 2 from <i>Daphnis and Chloe</i> Lever du jour Pantomime Danse générale	ca. 16'
Maurice Ravel	<i>Boléro</i>	ca. 14'

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.





Kevin John Edusei, conductor

German conductor Kevin John Edusei, now debuting with Minnesota Orchestra, conducts widely across Europe and North America, dividing his time between the concert hall and opera house. His 2021-22 season features many debuts, including with the Dallas, Baltimore and Indianapolis symphony orchestras and at Alice Tully Hall (New York City) with the Juilliard Orchestra, and in Europe with the Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic orchestras, Essen Philharmonic and Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin. He also returns to Scotland to conduct a joint concert with the BBC Scottish and Royal Scottish

National symphony orchestras in Glasgow. The 2021-22 season marks Edusei's eighth and final season as chief conductor of the Munich Symphony Orchestra. He takes up the position of principal guest conductor with the Fort Worth Symphony in the 2022-23 season. More: intermusica.co.uk, kevinjohnedusei.com.



Ning Feng, violin

Violinist Ning Feng performs around the globe with major orchestras and conductors, and in recital and chamber concerts in some of the most important international series and festivals. He has toured Europe, Asia and Australia

with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra; and China with many orchestras including the Budapest Festival Orchestra, Berlin Konzerthaus Orchester and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Other career highlights to date include performances with the Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, National Symphony of Washington, D.C., Helsinki Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony, Frankfurt Radio Symphony and Russian National Symphony orchestras. In the 2020-21 season, he was artist in residence with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. He records for Channel Classics, and his most recent disc features concertos of Paganini and Vieuxtemps. More: intermusica.co.uk, ningfengviolin.com.

one-minute notes

Shostakovich: Violin Concerto No. 1

Once hidden within the repressive climate of Stalin's regime, Shostakovich's concerto alternates somber movements with brighter, virtuosic passages. A spectacular cadenza links the ominous third movement with the work's striking, fast-paced finale.

Moussa: Nocturne

In Moussa's Nocturne, the center of gravity is pitched in the lower registers, with a few moments of brightness. The final minutes create a ghostly atmosphere through unusual modern techniques.

Ravel: Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis and Chloe*; *Boléro*

The ancient lovers in Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe* Suite are shown in happy moments. Rippling woodwinds announce sunrise; solo flute represents Daphnis telling the tale of Pan and Syrinx; and the couple celebrates with a joyous dance. Then, over a beguiling and insistent rhythm, *Boléro* repeats a single hypnotic melody on an ever-shifting combination of instruments. With each change in orchestral color, the tension builds—to a climax of shattering intensity.



Dmitri Shostakovich

Born: September 25, 1906,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Died: August 9, 1975,
Moscow, Russia

Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77

Premiered: October 29, 1955

during the summer of 1947, in the icy political atmosphere that followed military victory in World War II, Dmitri Shostakovich began what seemed an entirely “safe” composition. For years he had been an admirer of violinist David Oistrakh, and that summer—in the village of Kellomäki on the Gulf of Finland—he began a violin concerto for his friend. He sketched the first movement that July and completed it in November after returning to his teaching position in Moscow. The second movement, a scherzo, came quickly and was done by the first week in December, while the third, a passacaglia, was completed in January 1948.

a demand for conformity

But as Shostakovich continued to work on the concerto, the political and artistic climate around him turned deadly. This was the period of the crackdown on Soviet artists led by Stalin’s ideological pointman, Andrei Zhdanov. At the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers in February 1948, Shostakovich—along with Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Miaskovsky and others—was attacked for his “formalistic distortions and antidemocratic tendencies” and for writing “confused, neuropathological combinations which transform music into cacophony,” music that “dwells too much on the dark and fearful aspects of reality.”

Forced to read a humiliating apology and to promise to mend his ways, Shostakovich quickly learned that the government’s demand for conformity took more menacing forms. He was dismissed from his teaching positions, his music was effectively banned, and there is evidence that the Shostakovich family subsisted during this period on the savings of their housekeeper. The death of Stalin in 1953 seemed to promise a more liberal artistic atmosphere in Russia, but Shostakovich held the concerto back for two more years. It was finally premiered, by Oistrakh and the Leningrad Philharmonic under Yevgeni Mravinsky, on October 29, 1955, eight years after its composition.

spectacular and virtuosic

From the perspective of a half-century later, it seems extraordinary that this music could have been considered dangerous, either to its

audience or its composer. In many respects, the most remarkable feature of this concerto is how old-fashioned it is. It is a big virtuoso piece, conceived with the talents of a specific performer in mind and offering that soloist a cadenza so spectacular that it almost becomes a separate movement in itself. The Concerto in A minor has become so frequently performed and recorded that the fact that Shostakovich had to keep it hidden for so many years speaks volumes about the political and artistic climate in Russia during Stalin’s paranoid final decline.

We need not know any of its history, however, to feel the greatness of this music. The concerto has some unusual features. It has two dark slow movements, both of them almost night-music movements (one of them in fact is called *Nocturne*), and these alternate with two bright fast movements, both of which have titles that imply a degree of play: *Scherzo* and *Burlesca*. For the scoring, Shostakovich does without trumpets and trombones, but his use of xylophone, harp and celesta gives this concerto a distinct, sometimes eerie, sound.

the concerto: slow movements that haunt

nocturne. The opening movement truly is night-music. The lower strings’ rocking opening supplies the shape of the movement’s main theme, and the solo violin ruminates on this shape as it rises above their somber sound. The music builds to a climax marked *appassionato*. Then Shostakovich mutes the violin, and the music turns subdued and dark. Much of the writing for the solo violin is very high here, and eventually the violin comes swirling down out of the dark moonlight. Some aggressive double stopping leads to the wonderful close, where the muted violin climbs to the top of its range, its high E shimmering above the icy suspension of the orchestra’s final chord.

scherzo. By contrast, the *Scherzo* is all hard edges, dancing and skittering along its 3/8 meter. While there are episodes on other themes, it is the strident energy of the opening that drives this movement to its unrelenting close.

passacaglia. With horn fanfares ringing above them, lower strings stamp out the ground bass of the *Passacaglia* theme, which stretches out over 17 measures, then begins to repeat quietly. A woodwind choir sings a somber variation before the solo violin enters, soaring above the ominous tread of the passacaglia subject far below. Its plaintive opening melody gives way to more impassioned material, and at the climax the violin stamps out the passacaglia ground in fortissimo double stops.

Gradually this falls away, the orchestra drops out, and—as a bridge between the third and fourth movements—Shostakovich offers his soloist a tremendous cadenza. This begins simply (marked “quiet but majestic”) as the violin explores bits of the

passacaglia ground, but gradually it gathers speed and accelerates straight into the concluding *Burlesca*.


burlesca. “Burlesque” implies a mocking or joking character, and this movement is at times almost sneering. The stinging sound of the xylophone colors its jaunty main idea, and this finale, in the general shape of a rondo, does not relax its pace for an instant. At the close, the violin rushes from the bottom of its range to the very top as the music hurtles to its brusque final chords.

It is no surprise that Shostakovich kept this music hidden during Stalin’s repressive final years. There is nothing tragic about this work, nor is there anything ideologically dangerous about it beyond the fact that it is simply a very serious piece of music. In those uncertain years, that may have been enough to make it dangerous.

Beautifully written for one of the great violinists, the concerto makes a brilliant impact in live performance, especially in its glittering final movement. But long after the brilliance of the finale has ended, it is the haunting power of the slow movements—the somber *Nocturne* and the heartfelt *Passacaglia*—that stays to haunt the memory.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, tuba, timpani, tam-tam, tambourine, xylophone, 2 harps, celesta and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.



Samy Moussa
 Born: June 1, 1984,
 Montreal, Canada

Nocturne
 Premiered: February 17, 2015

born in Montreal and based in Berlin for the past decade, conductor and composer Samy Moussa is enjoying great success in North America and Europe, recently highlighted by the Vienna Philharmonic’s premiere of his *Elysium* last September and his appointment as the Toronto Symphony Orchestra’s artist in residence for the 2021-22 season. His impressive catalog of compositions includes two operas, an oratorio, 17 pieces for

orchestra including two symphonies and two concertos, and numerous choral, chamber, solo and multimedia works.

Moussa’s *Nocturne* was completed in 2014 and premiered by the Montreal Symphony under conductor Kent Nagano on February 17, 2015. In 2016, Moussa finished his Symphony No. 1, titled *Concordia*, and included the *Nocturne* as the third of four movements. The Montreal Symphony and Nagano premiered the symphony in its full form in June 2017; *Nocturne* is now performed by orchestras both as a standalone piece and as part of the larger symphony.

night

Moussa’s captivating portrait of the night is moonlit and deeply atmospheric from start to finish. Even at its brightest moments, there is an intriguing darkness, an otherworldliness, present. The work opens with a mysterious horn call; it is slow-paced, intentional and beautiful, supported by low strings, bassoons and clarinet, each layering in cautiously and increasing the intensity of the horn’s original theme.

It soon becomes clear that this *Nocturne* will be different from a traditional Romantic-era nocturne, especially in the way it utilizes the lowest instruments in the orchestra as Moussa leans into the ominous, rich tones of the bass clarinet, contrabassoon, tuba and basses.

In an interview with the Houston Symphony about *Nocturne*, Moussa explained: “I was interested in creating a piece where the center of gravity would be pitched in the lower registers. It allowed the few moments of brightness to be—hopefully—more extraordinary.”

Throughout 12 extraordinary minutes, the swells and diminuendos move like a chest rising through deep breaths and long exhales. The pace quickens and energizes with staccato notes in the bassoons and bass clarinets, as glittering high woodwinds and trumpets add spectacular flashes of light. Grumbling, agitated low brass and timpani interjections punctuate long, ominous chords, but the music repeatedly returns to the haunting opening theme. After a journey through extremes of dark and light, the stillness of night settles in. Slowly and methodically, the orchestra fades away until only the deepest tones of the ensemble remain.

a deeper meaning


Following the premiere of *Nocturne* in Montreal, a review in *Musical Toronto* remarked that Moussa’s orchestration seems to be “harnessed to a deeper meaning.”

Nocturnes are meant to tell stories of the energy, the mystery and the beauty of the night. With this piece, however, Moussa

takes that a step beyond. “I build sounds and invent music with my own fantasy,” he also said in the interview with the Houston Symphony. In this composition, he transports us to fantastical place, into the unexplored depths of our dreams, guided only by the light of the moon.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets (1 doubling piccolo trumpet), 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, Chinese cymbals, large and small suspended cymbals, tambourine, 3 triangles, glockenspiel, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

Program note by **Emma Plehal**.



Maurice Ravel

Born: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, France

Died: December 28, 1937, Paris, France

Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis and Chloe*

Premiered: June 8, 1912
(complete ballet)

In 1909 the impresario Serge Diaghilev brought the Ballets Russes to Paris as part of his ongoing presentation of things Russian (art, sculpture, icons, opera and ballet) in the City of Lights, and that summer Diaghilev approached Maurice Ravel and asked him for a score. The French composer, then 34, could not have had more distinguished collaborators: Diaghilev oversaw the project, Mikhail Fokine was choreographer, Leon Bakst designed the sets, and Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina would dance the lead roles.

gentle story, stormy collaboration

But it proved a stormy collaboration. For the subject, Diaghilev proposed the gentle love story of Daphnis and Chloe, a pastoral by the Greek Longus (fourth or fifth century B.C.). A young man and woman, abandoned as infants by their respective parents and raised by a shepherd and a goatherd, meet and fall in love. She is kidnapped by pirates but rescued by the intercession of the god Pan, and the ballet concludes with general rejoicing.

The story seems simple enough, but quickly the collaborators were at odds. Part of the problem was that while Bakst had conceived

an opulent Eastern setting for the ballet, Ravel imagined “a vast musical fresco, less thoughtful of archaism than of fidelity to the Greece of my dreams, which identifies quite willingly with that imagined and depicted by late 18th-century French artists.” Paintings of the verdant sets suggest that Ravel’s conception—described by Madeline Goss as “a typically 18th-century atmosphere of Watteau shepherdesses”—finally prevailed.

“into our hearts like a comet”

The *Daphnis* premiere was conducted by Pierre Monteux at the Châtelet Théâtre on June 8, 1912. The ballet had an overwhelming impact. Poet and dramatist Jean Cocteau, then only 23, asserted: “*Daphnis and Chloe* is one of the creations which fell into our hearts like a comet coming from a planet, the laws of which will remain to us forever mysterious and forbidden.”

Ravel drew two suites from the ballet for concert performance. The familiar Suite No. 2 constitutes the closing celebration of the ballet. Rippling flutes and clarinets echo the sound of rivulets as Daphnis awakes and the sun comes up. This glorious music is derived from the soaring horn melody heard at the very beginning of the ballet. Chloe appears, and the joyful lovers are united. Told that Pan had saved her in memory of the nymph Syrinx, Daphnis and Chloe now act out that tale in pantomime, and Daphnis mimes playing on reeds, a part taken in the orchestra by an opulent flute solo. The two collapse into each other’s arms and pledge their love. The stage is filled with happy youths, whose *Danse générale* brings the ballet to a thrilling conclusion.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), alto flute, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, castanets, tambourine, triangle, glockenspiel, 2 harps, celesta and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.

Maurice Ravel

Boléro

Premiered: November 22, 1928

Though it is most often heard today in the concert hall, Ravel’s *Boléro* began life as a ballet—the dancer Ida Rubinstein asked the composer for a ballet with a Spanish atmosphere, and he wrote this score for her in 1928. In Rubinstein’s choreography, a young woman in gypsy dress mounts a table in a smoky tavern and begins to dance. Men surround the table and begin to pound out the bolero rhythm as her dance grows in excitement. The

climax brings an explosion—knives are drawn—but trouble is avoided and everyone vanishes with the last chord. So exciting was the premiere in Paris on November 22, 1928, that the audience rushed the stage and Rubinstein herself barely escaped injury in the resulting tumult.

Originally, a bolero was a moderately-paced Spanish dance in triple-time in which the dancers sang and accompanied themselves with castanets. Ravel excludes the sound of voices and begins with the simplest of openings: a snare drum lays out the two-measure rhythmic pattern that will repeat throughout *Boléro*.

Solo flute plays the languorous main idea, a lilting, winding melody that is repeated and extended by other wind instruments. And then Ravel simply repeats this material, subtly varying its orchestration as it gradually grows louder. The music is full of striking effects that make use of uncommon instruments (two kinds of saxophone, E-flat clarinet and oboe d'amore) or set instruments in unusual registers. At the close, he makes one harmonic adjustment, shifting from C major to E-flat major, and in this context even so simple a modulation seems a cataclysmic event. Grinding dissonances drive *Boléro* to a thunderous close on a great rush of sound.

Even before its use in the movie *10*, Ravel's *Boléro* was one of the most famous works ever written for orchestra, familiar to millions around the world and a favorite even with those who claim to dislike classical music. Yet this dazzling piece is remarkable for the utter simplicity of its material. Ravel himself described it as "17 minutes of orchestra without any music" and said that it was "one very long, gradual crescendo." But it is the "non-musical" materials—the hypnotic rhythms, subtle shifts of instrumental color, avoidance of any kind of development, cumulative expressive power—that make *Boléro* such an exciting experience.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), piccolo, 2 oboes (1 doubling oboe d'amore), English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, 2 snare drums, tam-tam, bass drum, harp, celesta and strings

Program note by *Eric Bromberger*.

The Minnesota Orchestra, then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, gave its initial performance of **Dmitri Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto** on November 6, 1964, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with Stanislaw Skrowaczewski conducting and Leonid Kogan as soloist. Three days earlier, incumbent President Lyndon B. Johnson defeated Barry Goldwater in a landslide election, winning his first and only full four-year term after assuming the office following the assassination of John F. Kennedy a year earlier. Four of the last five soloists who have performed the work with the Minnesota Orchestra are women: Hilary Hahn in 1998, Viktoria Mullova in 2001, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg in 2004 and Lisa Batiashvili in 2007.

This week's performances of **Samy Moussa's Nocturne** are the Minnesota Orchestra's first performance of the work, but the second time the ensemble has played his music in less than a month; his *Crimson* was heard on March 10 and 11 under the baton of Fabien Gabel.

The Orchestra first performed **Maurice Ravel's Suite No. 2 from Daphnis and Chloe**—and gave its initial rendition of the Suite No. 1 as well—on December 4, 1924, at the St. Paul Auditorium Theater, with Henri Verbrugghen on the conductor's podium. At that concert, the featured pianist soloist was renowned composer Percy Grainger, who later toured with the Orchestra in 1928 and 1948.

The Orchestra introduced **Ravel's Boléro** to its repertoire on March 6, 1930, also at the St. Paul Auditorium Theater with Verbrugghen conducting. It was one of the first pieces ever recorded at Orchestra Hall, at sessions in October 1974.