

Minnesota Orchestra

Xian Zhang, conductor

Adam Kuenzel, flute

Friday, May 13, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, May 14, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Qigang Chen	<i>L'Éloignement</i> for String Orchestra	ca. 16'
Carl Nielsen	Concerto for Flute and Orchestra Allegro moderato Allegretto <i>Adam Kuenzel, flute</i>	ca. 18'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	Suite from <i>The Sleeping Beauty</i> , Opus 66a Introduction: La Fée des lilas Adagio: Pas d'action Panorama Valse	ca. 18'
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	<i>Francesca da Rimini</i> , Opus 32	ca. 24'

thank you

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Xian Zhang, conductor

Xian Zhang, who is in her sixth season as music director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, also holds the positions of principal guest conductor of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and conductor emeritus of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, of which she was music director from 2009 to 2016. Her recent and upcoming engagements include concerts in Europe with the Philharmonia Orchestra, La Verdi in Milan, Spanish National Orchestra, orchestra of Komische Oper in Berlin, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Warsaw Philharmonic and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, as well as North American engagements with the Los Angeles

Philharmonic and the orchestras of San Francisco, Philadelphia, Detroit, Montreal, NAC Ottawa and Toronto. Also active in the opera world, she will make her debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 2024. She has previously served as principal guest conductor of the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, and as associate conductor of the New York Philharmonic. More: imgartists.com.



Adam Kuenzel, flute

Principal Flute Adam Kuenzel joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 1990. He has regularly appeared as soloist at Orchestra Hall, including for the 2007 world premiere of Stanislaw Skrowaczewski's *Fantasies for Flute*

and Orchestra, *Il Piffero della Notte*, with the composer conducting. In recent years he has also performed Bernstein's *Halil* and the premiere of Manuel Sosa's *Eloquentia: Espacio para Flauta y Orquesta*; the latter work, which was written for Kuenzel, garnered the composer a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011. In 2017 he was selected to premiere Laura Schwendinger's *Aurora* for flute and piano, which was commissioned by the National Flute Association for its annual convention, held that year in Minneapolis. He has been a guest artist at the Aspen Music Festival, Grand Teton Music Festival, Spoleto Festival, St. Bart's Music Festival in the French West Indies and Oregon Bach Festival. He has also appeared as guest principal flute with the Boston, Chicago and Dallas symphony orchestras, and with the Seattle Opera. More: minnesotaorchestra.org

Kuenzel describes Carl Nielsen's *Flute Concerto*, which he performs at this week's concerts, as resembling "a circus train, with each idea a different car, but all linked together with sudden turns of mood."

one-minute notes

Chen: *L'Éloignement*

Qigang Chen's *L'Éloignement* is a poignant work for strings inspired by a Chinese proverb and the vital force of renewal and rebirth, with music of conflicting moods that the composer calls "happy and sad, nostalgic and exciting."

Nielsen: *Flute Concerto*

Carl Nielsen's *Flute Concerto* is a compact piece in just two movements, charming and pastoral, yet also quirky, with a brash trombone asserting itself as the flute's rival.

Tchaikovsky: *Suite from The Sleeping Beauty, Francesca da Rimini*

Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* presents a tale of magical spells, a long-delayed romance and a royal wedding full of color. A soaring waltz, one of the most popular ever written, is among the highlights of the suite performed here. His symphonic poem *Francesca da Rimini* tells a darker tale from the epic poetry of Dante, of two adulterous lovers who are caught, murdered and cast into eternal torment. Unfolding in three sections, it contains some of Tchaikovsky's stormiest music.



Qigang Chen

Born: August 28, 1951,
Shanghai, China

L'Éloignement for String Orchestra

Premiered: June 8, 2013

Chinese-born Qigang Chen was just beginning music lessons when the Cultural Revolution descended upon his country. His father—a calligrapher, painter, and an administrator in the Beijing Academy of Fine Arts—was sent to a labor camp, and the young Chen was kept in confinement and put through ideological re-education. But as luck would have it, he was just old enough to become a member of the famous “class of 1978,” named for the year conservatories reopened in China. He won one of just 26 spots from among two thousand applicants who passed the entry exams for the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing.

from China to France

Chen remained at the Conservatory for five years, then, in 1984, moved to Paris to study privately for four years with Olivier Messiaen, who took on Chen as his last student after leaving the Conservatoire.

In 1989, Chen received his Diplôme de Musicologie at the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne. Awards and public recognition soon followed. In 1990, he was chosen “Musician of the Year” by the Chinese press, in 1992 he was awarded the Nadia and Lili Boulanger grant, and in 2000 earned the Grand Prize of the City of Paris. Commissions began pouring in, many of them from French sources, and Charles Dutoit became one of his champions. Chen’s reputation received a further boost when the film (followed soon after by the ballet) *Raise the Red Lantern* became an international hit. He was invited to become music director for the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. He has been a French citizen since 1992. In 2013, the French government conferred on him the decoration of Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. His violin concerto, *La joie de la souffrance*, dedicated to his late son Yuli, was premiered at the 2017 Beijing Music Festival with Maxim Vengerov as soloist.

words from the composer

L'Éloignement, Chen’s 15-minute work for 34 strings, was composed on commission from the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, which gave the first performance at Shanghai’s International

Arts Festival in 2003. The composer has provided the following comments:

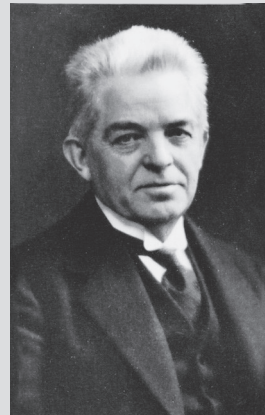
“There is a Chinese proverb that says when a man is uprooted, he gains vital force. If he remains stationary, he cannot flourish. Renewal of his surroundings brings new opportunities; whatever changes there may be, large or small, are always experienced like a great rebirth.

“Still, while this brings hope and excitement, change also means separation from the immediate environment, and from family and friends. It is this sense of distancing, or estrangement, that is described in the peasant song from northwest China, ‘Zou Xi Kou’ (Going beyond the western gorges). A love-song upon the departure of a beloved one, plaintive and nostalgic, its melody is used in *L'Éloignement* because it retains a basic simplicity and because it gives the composer the possibility to express therein his own estrangement.

“Laid out as a rondo with variations, *L'Éloignement* depicts separation, disorder, imagination, and yearning. The music is both happy and sad, nostalgic and exciting, all of which account for the conflicting moods of the departing one.”

Instrumentation: string orchestra

Program note by Robert Markow.



Carl Nielsen

Born: June 9, 1865,
Sortelung, Denmark

Died: October 2, 1931,
Copenhagen, Denmark

Concerto for Flute and Orchestra

Premiered: October 21, 1926

Carl Nielsen supported himself and his family for many years as a violinist, but he had an unusually close relationship with wind instruments throughout his life. As a boy of 14 he played trumpet, signal horn and trombone in a military band, and late in life he wrote a number of works for wind instruments. After hearing the Copenhagen Wind Quintet play Mozart in 1921, Nielsen became good friends with the members of that ensemble. He wrote a Wind Quintet for them in 1922, then decided to write a concerto for each of the Quintet’s members. Nielsen completed

a Flute Concerto (1926) and a Clarinet Concerto (1928), but his death at 66 of heart disease robbed us of the planned concertos for oboe, bassoon and horn.

“...with its gentle nature”

Nielsen felt that every separate instrument had its own unique character, and he once remarked that “each instrument is like a person who sleeps, whom I have to wake to life.” It has been suggested that the Flute Concerto takes its character from the flutist for whom it was written, Holger Gilbert Jespersen. Jespersen has been described as “elegant” and “Gallic,” and some have been quick to hear these qualities in the concerto written for him, but Nielsen was probably writing for the instrument rather than for a specific performer. He said of the flute: “It is at home in Arcadia and prefers pastoral moods. A composer must fit in with its gentle nature.” Nielsen’s Flute Concerto—in two movements that last only about 20 minutes—is often “pastoral” in mood, but it is also a quirky, original, charming (and very funny) piece of music.

Nielsen wrote this concerto while on vacation in Italy in the fall of 1926 (the manuscript is dated October 1 in Florence), and Jespersen was soloist at the first performance, which took place as part of an all-Nielsen concert in Paris three weeks later. That concert was a huge success (Maurice Ravel and Arthur Honegger were in the audience, and Nielsen was awarded the Legion of Honor the following day), but Nielsen was not fully satisfied with the concerto. He re-wrote its ending, and Jespersen was again the soloist when this final version was premiered in Oslo on November 9, 1926. That change, as we shall see, was crucial to giving this music its special flavor.

the music: a concerto with an unexpected guest

allegro moderato. The *Allegro moderato* springs to life with a fierce gesture from the orchestra, but this will prove to be a false direction, quickly corralled by the flute’s more refined entrance, and the movement settles down for what seems at first a normal exposition. This is based on two ideas: a dancing, staccato theme announced by the solo flute, and a more flowing melody marked *dolce*, introduced by the orchestra and taken up by the flute. The development begins, and at this point an unexpected guest shows up: the concerto’s “other” principal player, a bass trombone, intrudes and becomes the rival of the solo flute. The trombone functions in this concerto much like a pesky neighbor who feels free to lean over the fence and comment on everything going on in your backyard. Here, over pounding timpani, it makes a rude entrance, going on at length while the flute scurries about in dismay. And then the development resumes as if nothing had happened.

At this point Nielsen introduces the movement’s third theme, an absolutely lovely idea that is sung glowingly by the flute. Nielsen

offers his soloist an impressive cadenza, first accompanied by timpani and then joined by a saucy solo clarinet. The orchestra returns, the movements themes are reviewed briefly (it is altogether typical of this concerto that a new one should show up in the closing measures), and gradually the soloist leads the orchestra to a calm close in G-flat major.

allegretto. The *Allegretto* begins violently with harmonically unstable attacks from the orchestra, and once again the solo flute restores order with its dancing entrance, marked *grazioso* and set in unambiguous G major. A brief *Adagio ma non troppo* recalls the theme introduced in the closing moments of the first movement; this rises to a rather strident climax before the *Allegretto* resumes. And from here on, things really take some surprising turns. At the coda, marked *Tempo di marcia*, Nielsen re-bars the movement’s main theme in 6/8, something Mozart would do occasionally.

At the Paris premiere, the concerto marched home calmly in D major, but after hearing that performance, Nielsen rethought the ending and produced a new one for the Oslo premiere, more in keeping with the concerto’s wry sense of humor. Our old friend the bass trombone shows up again and apparently has had a few drinks while he was gone—now he takes over the *Tempo di marcia* theme for himself, then insists on singing the flute’s lovely third theme from the first movement. However rude it may be, the trombone also knows what it’s doing. Its sleazy glissandos now nudge the concerto toward the “correct” key of E major, and finally the concerto dances to its wonderful close: the flute tries desperately to maintain its elegant bearing, but it is the tipsy trombone that gets the last word.

Instrumentation: solo flute with orchestra comprising 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, bass trombone, timpani and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born: May 7, 1840,
Votkinsk, Russia

Died: November 6, 1893,
St. Petersburg, Russia

Suite from *The Sleeping Beauty*, Opus 66a

Premiered: January 15, 1890
(complete ballet)

In the spring of 1888, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was visited by the Director of the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg, Ivan Vsevolozhsky, who proposed that Tchaikovsky compose the score for a new ballet. It would be based on the fairy tale *La belle au bois dormant*, originally collected by the 17th-century French writer Charles Perrault and published as part of his *Contes de la mere l'oye* (Tales of Mother Goose). Tchaikovsky's one previous ballet, *Swan Lake*, had been a disaster at its premiere in 1877, and the composer was wary of another such experience. But he was nevertheless attracted to Perrault's tale. He sketched the new ballet between October 1888 and the spring of 1889 and completed the orchestration on September 1, 1889.

The premiere of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg on January 15, 1890—attended by the czar—was a huge success. Tchaikovsky, who was perpetually worried about having written himself out, could finally take pleasure in one of his own compositions: “The subject is so poetic (and) it lends itself so admirably to music that I enjoyed composing it very much and worked with a zeal and eagerness that always makes for good results.” For once, the critics agreed, and *The Sleeping Beauty* has been universally judged one of Tchaikovsky's finest works.

a familiar fairy tale

The *Sleeping Beauty* tale is familiar from the Walt Disney version and other iterations. The infant Princess Aurora is blessed by six good fairies at her christening, but the evil Carabosse—who was not invited—shows up in a carriage drawn by rats and pronounces a curse: one day Princess Aurora will prick her finger and die. The Lilac Fairy softens the curse: the princess will not die, but will fall into a slumber for a hundred years, to be awakened by the kiss of her true love. Sixteen years later, at a ball where she is courted by four suitor-princes, Aurora is given a spindle by the disguised Carabosse, pricks her finger, and falls into a deep sleep along with the rest of the court. One hundred years later, Prince Florimund fights his way through the thicket that the Lilac Fairy has caused

to grow up around the castle, defeats the evil Carabosse, and discovers the sleeping princess. He awakens her with a kiss, and a wedding celebration soon follows.

the music: a satisfying suite

In its full form, the ballet comprises a Prologue and three acts. The Prologue sets the scene and introduces the characters, while Act I begins with the celebration of Princess Aurora's 16th birthday and concludes with Carabosse's curse coming true. Act II brings the arrival of Prince Florimund, the awakening of the princess, and their engagement. Act III is a set of characteristic dances celebrating their wedding. The *Sleeping Beauty* Suite heard at this week's performances presents four well-known excerpts from the ballet—arranged not in their chronological sequence in the ballet, but rather to provide a musically satisfying concert suite.

introduction: la fée des lilas. The Prologue's beginning is full of energy and expectancy; after its dramatic opening gesture, the English horn sings a flowing melody that will be associated with the Lilac Fairy and her protective intervention after Carabosse's curse.

adagio: pas d'action. The soaring *Adagio*, sometimes called the *Rose Adagio*, is the music from Act I that accompanies the scene in which the four suitor-princes approach the princess, each with the gift of a rose; the teenaged princess dances this movement, which begins with a long harp cadenza, before the four princes.

panorama. Next comes a selection from Act II: elegant music that accompanies Prince Florimund's approach to the castle where Aurora lies sleeping. The meter and accompaniment are in 6/8, but the violins' silky melody seems to be in 3/4, and those two rhythms tug nicely at each other throughout.

valse. The famous *Waltz* comes from Act I, where it is part of the princess' 16th birthday celebration. Danced by villagers carrying garlands of flowers, it is sometimes known as the Garland Waltz.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, glockenspiel, harp and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

***Francesca da Rimini*, Opus 32**

Premiered: March 9, 1877

In the fifth Canto of the epic 14th-century narrative poem *Divine Comedy*, Dante meets Francesca da Rimini and her lover, Paolo, as he descends into the second circle of Hell. The lovers' tale is one of tragedy and horror, beginning as Francesca is tricked into marrying Paolo's brother, the cruel Gianciotto. When Gianciotto discovers the affair, he murders his brother and Francesca in a jealous rage. When they arrive in Hell, they are condemned to spend an eternity in the Second Circle (reserved for those who commit sins borne of passion and lust), caught in a violent windstorm and cursed never to walk on solid ground ever again.

inflamed with desire

Tchaikovsky's programmatic symphonic fantasy based on Francesca and Paolo's tale is just one of three pieces written during the Romantic period inspired by the tragically doomed lovers. Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote his opera *Francesca da Rimini* in the early 1900s, based on a libretto written by Tchaikovsky's brother, Modest. Franz Liszt's *Dante* Symphony also contains a musical depiction of Francesca and Paolo, written a full decade before Tchaikovsky composed his symphonic fantasy in late 1876. Tchaikovsky initially considered writing an opera on Francesca earlier that same year but those plans were ultimately scrapped.

But it seems that Francesca's tale proved too alluring a tale for Tchaikovsky to ignore completely; in a letter written during the summer months of 1876, he wrote to Modest that he had been "inflamed with a desire to write a symphonic poem on *Francesca*" after he read Canto V. The work was completed by October of 1876. Its premiere was given in Moscow in March 1877 by Nikolay Rubinstein and the Russian Musical Society. It quickly became a popular work and a personal favorite of Tchaikovsky, though he would come to temper this stance later in his life.

the music: a journey to the depths

Francesca da Rimini consists of three main sections, as it corresponds to Dante's journey and meeting of Francesca. In his own program note for the work, Tchaikovsky includes a detailed account of what happens in the plot as the music unfolds.

"...Dante...descends into the second circle of the Hellish abyss. Here the walls echo with cries of despair...Violent, Hellish whirlwinds carry away tormented souls..."

Before beginning composing *Francesca* in earnest, Tchaikovsky traveled to Bayreuth to hear a complete performance of Wagner's

Ring cycle, and later admitted a direct influence from the German composer on *Francesca*. That influence manifests itself most clearly in this first section through its use of ambiguous harmonies, repeated use of the "Devil's interval," or the tritone, and thickly orchestrated passages which give the listener no rest. The slow, macabre opening gives way to Tchaikovsky's depiction of the windstorm, an orchestral cacophony that revels in its own chaos. The strings play fast, repeated notes frantically into the highest registers over and over while the brass answers imposingly, a tornado of sound and color with no clear beginning, middle or end.

"Dante calls out to these tortured souls, and asks them for what terrible crimes they were being punished. Francesca's spirit, drenched with tears, recounts their pitiful tale."

Dante has now noticed Francesca and Paolo and called to them in the storm. The chaos of the storm dies down as a solo voice, the clarinet, begins playing one of Tchaikovsky's most elegantly crafted, heart-wrenching melodies, which soon overtakes the entire orchestra. This music yearns, sighs and pulses as Francesca tells her tale. Tchaikovsky's gift for composing beautifully poignant melodies shines throughout this middle section.

"...Francesca's spirit, and that of Paolo, were snatched away in the raging whirlwind. Overwhelmed by the endless suffering, Dante, completely exhausted, falls dead."

The storm returns, overtaking the orchestra once again as Francesca and Paolo are whisked away by its violent winds. The added coda ends the piece with a damning finality.

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

Program note by **Michael Divino**.