

nov 4, 5

Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1

Minnesota Orchestra

Scott Yoo, conductor

Simon Trpčeski, piano

Friday, November 4, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Saturday, November 5, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Ulysses Kay

Concerto for Orchestra
Allegro moderato
Adagio
Andante

ca. 18'

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23
Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso
Andantino semplice
Allegro con fuoco
Simon Trpčeski, piano

ca. 33'

I N T E R M I S S I O N

ca. 20'

Béla Bartók

Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta
Andante tranquillo
Allegro
Adagio
Allegro molto

ca. 32'

pre-concert

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Scott Yoo
Friday, November 4, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium
Saturday, November 5, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium

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.



Scott Yoo, conductor

Scott Yoo has served as the chief conductor and artistic director of the Mexico City Philharmonic since 2016. Since 2004 he has been music director of Festival Mozaic, an orchestral and chamber music festival in California. He is also the host and executive producer of the PBS series *Now Hear This*, which received an Emmy nomination in 2021. He first collaborated with the Minnesota Orchestra in October 2021 for the first iteration of an annual series now called the Listening Project, conducting the first-ever professional recordings of five works, including one featured on this week's concerts, Ulysses Kay's Concerto for Orchestra. He has conducted many major orchestras in the U.S., Europe and

Asia, and his discography includes over 20 recordings. A proponent of the music of our time, he has premiered 71 works by 38 composers. Born in Tokyo and now living in Connecticut, he began his musical studies at age 3, performed the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with the Boston Symphony at age 12 and later won first prize in the 1988 Josef Gingold International Violin Competition, among other high honors. More: scott-yoo.com, felsnerartists.com.



Simon Trpčeski, piano

Macedonian pianist Simon Trpčeski has established himself as one of the most remarkable musicians to have emerged in recent years. Launched onto the international scene 20 years ago as

a BBC New Generation Artist, he has collaborated with over 100 orchestras on four continents, from New York and Los Angeles to London, Amsterdam, Seoul and Sydney. At his Minnesota Orchestra debut in 2015, he played Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto. His broad and award-winning discography includes repertoire such as Rachmaninoff's complete works for piano and orchestra and the Prokofiev piano concertos as well as composers such as Poulenc, Debussy and Ravel. *Variations*, his latest solo album released in spring 2022, features works by Brahms, Beethoven and Mozart. Committed to strengthening the cultural image of his native country, his chamber music project MAKEDOMISSIMO is dedicated to introducing audiences worldwide to the rich traditional Macedonian folk roots. In 2009 he received the Presidential Order of Merit for Macedonia, and in 2011 he became the first-ever recipient of the title "National Artist of Macedonia." More: cmartists.com, trpceski.com.

one-minute notes

Kay: Concerto for Orchestra

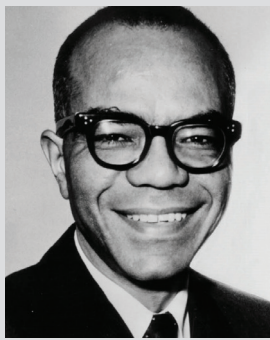
Ulysses Kay's Concerto for Orchestra—in which all of the ensemble's instruments and sections engage in conversation, contrast and conflict—follows a fast-slow-fast form with some surprises thrown in, such as a ramping up in tempo and volume in the midst of a so-called *Adagio* movement and a surprising harmonic shift to the piece's final chord.

Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1

Like Beethoven, who angrily removed Napoleon's name from his *Eroica* Symphony, Tchaikovsky furiously scratched out the name of the intended dedicatee of this famous concerto—and it became an instant success in the hands of the man he then honored with the dedication, Hans von Bülow. It begins with high drama, retreats to a place of calm and rushes toward its close in a mood of white-hot energy.

Bartók: Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta

Bartók's concept of positioning instrumentalists in exact locations across the stage means that where the sound comes from is an important part of this unusual music—with a singular instrumentation that spotlights the celesta, a small high-pitched keyboard instrument, while excluding winds and brass.



Ulysses Kay

Born: January 7, 1917,
Tucson, Arizona

Died: May 20, 1995,
Englewood, New Jersey

Concerto for Orchestra

Composed: 1948

When a new orchestral work enters the world, its prospects of enjoying massive success are generally slim, since it is competing with centuries of entrenched favorites known as the “standard repertoire.” A few things can improve a new arrival’s odds of flourishing, such as a prominent premiere, rave reviews, sustained advocacy—perhaps by a conductor, performer, publisher or impresario—as well as a tool that was not widely available to orchestras until about a century ago.

“a definite plus”

“A record of the work is a definite plus,” commented the American composer Ulysses Kay in a 1985 interview with radio announcer Bruce Duffie. Only a small portion of his output, which numbers about 140 works ranging from piano solos to full-length operas, was put to disc and released commercially in his lifetime. Kay noted in the interview that those which were recorded, such as the Six Dances, received performances that would otherwise never have happened.

Beyond extending a composition’s reach, Kay mentioned another benefit of a new composition being recorded, rather than just performed: the quality of the work’s rendition. “Usually if they’re going to record, [the orchestra] will take some more time to prepare it, to rehearse it adequately, rather than as a first performance and good-bye [in which] they’ll just get through it,” he noted. “They’re aware of it being in a more permanent form, so they take pains.”

ahead of his time

In this interview, 36 years before the Minnesota Orchestra launched its Listening Project initiative in October 2021, Kay was foretelling its core aim: helping make masterful but overlooked compositions more widely known through the creation of high-quality professional recordings. In the Orchestra’s case, this new annual project is focused exclusively on music by composers from historically underrepresented and marginalized racial groups, with its first two editions collectively spotlighting 11 works by Black composers of the past and present. The Listening Project

recordings are then made available at no cost so that other orchestras can more easily evaluate and program the works, and so listeners worldwide can enjoy the music.

One of the works recorded at the 2021 Listening Project sessions, which were played under the direction of this week’s conductor Scott Yoo, was Kay’s Concerto for Orchestra that dates from 1948. The three-movement composition actually *was* recorded previously, in 1953 by the Teatro La Fenice Symphony Orchestra, but on a relatively low-budget label called Remington Records. The concerto received a number of performances during the composer’s lifetime in the U.S., Canada and Europe, but the Minnesota Orchestra’s musicians and artistic leaders are hopeful that last year’s recording and the programming at this week’s subscription concerts will help popularize the work for a new era of listeners.

a contradictory conception

The idea of a concerto for orchestra is a clash with classical tradition: most concertos from the mid-1700s through the present comprise a large-scale dialogue between one solo instrument (occasionally two or very rarely a few more) and a large ensemble, with the solo part standing out in importance and virtuosity, and often given the sole spotlight in one or more cadenzas. Works titled Concerto for Orchestra, which began to proliferate in the 20th century, take other approaches—sometimes turning the composition into a series of mini-concertos featuring individual instruments and sections in conversation or conflict with the larger group, and with numerous parts written at a high degree of difficulty.

Kay’s Concerto for Orchestra, which received its premiere in Venice while the composer was living in Europe for much of the late 1940s and early ’50s, meets some of these criteria, though the writing is not quite as demanding as more famous concertos for orchestra such as Béla Bartók’s or Witold Lutosławski’s. Its three movements follow the basic fast-slow-fast form of a traditional concerto—but with some surprising deviations.

allegro moderato. The concerto’s energetic opening movement begins with the full ensemble playing melodies that contain wide leaps, then proceeds with passages scored for the wind, brass and string sections in turn. The three sections then converse in music of increasing complexity before a grandiose close.

adagio. The middle movement, labeled *Adagio* initially, begins softly, with lyrical wind and violin solo lines that seem to indicate a quiet and sparse movement. A surprising crescendo and accelerando belies the movement’s title; 16th notes and even more rapid quintuplet and sextuplet groupings break out before the slow, gentle mood returns.

andante. Starting with no pause between movements, the finale contains the concerto's most complicated and extended contrapuntal passages for the whole ensemble. The close is bold and exciting, ending with the work's final surprise: an unexpected harmonic shift coinciding with a sudden drop to a piano dynamic, as the whole ensemble plays a sustained chord that rises back to *ffff*—a dynamic technically called *fortississimo*.

a prolific Neoclassical composer

Kay, whose centennial passed five years ago, was the nephew of influential jazz bandleader and cornet and trumpet player King Oliver, and was prodded by composer William Grant Still in the mid-1930s to redirect his academic efforts from liberal arts to music. He studied at the University of Arizona, Eastman School of Music, Yale University and Columbia University, and like many classical composers who came of age in the 20th century, he had available to him a dizzying array of traditional and modern compositional styles and techniques. While studying with Paul Hindemith in the early 1940s, he found his primary voice in the Neoclassical style—the revival of 18th-century European practices such as light textures, simplicity of style, harmonies rooted in traditional Western tonality (though with expanded use of dissonance), and the favoring of traditional non-programmatic forms such as dance suites and sonatas.

By the time of Kay's passing in 1995, his output included five operas, the last of which was about Frederick Douglass, as well as nearly four dozen orchestral works and numerous choral, chamber and film compositions. Also vital to his life's story were his service in the U.S. Navy as a musician during World War II; a Fulbright fellowship that enabled an extended postwar period of study in Italy; 15 years as an advisor and consultant for the performing rights organization Broadcast Media, Inc. (BMD); and two decades as a distinguished music professor at the City University of New York (CUNY). In a Minnesota connection, he was a Hubert H. Humphrey Lecturer at Macalester College in St. Paul in 1975.

The Minnesota Orchestra has previously performed only three of Kay's compositions in concert: after it programmed the Serenade for Orchestra in both 1968 and 1971, nearly a half-century passed before selections from his Six Dances were played at a New Year's Eve concert in 2020. A year ago this month, subscription concerts featured a suite of music from Kay's score to the 1948 documentary drama film *The Quiet One*. Last year's recording of the Concerto for Orchestra, which was made without a live audience, is available via the Orchestra's YouTube channel—a method of distribution that the composer couldn't have dreamed of when he commended the value of a "record" in the 1985 interview.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, triangle, glockenspiel and strings

Program note by Carl Schroeder.



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born: May 7, 1840,

Votkinsk, Russia

Died: November 7, 1893,

St. Petersburg, Russia

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23

Premiered: October 25, 1875

On Christmas Eve, 1874, Tchaikovsky sat before his friend, the conductor Nicolai Rubinstein, at the Moscow Conservatory to play for him the piano concerto he had almost completed. "I played the first movement. Not a single remark!...Then a torrent poured forth from Nicolai, gentle at first, then growing more and more into the sound of Jupiter....My concerto was worthless and unplayable.... The piece as a whole was bad, trivial, vulgar. I had stolen this from somebody and that from somebody else. It was so clumsy, so badly written that it was beyond rescue."

Tchaikovsky's description, sent to his patroness Mme. Von Meck, goes on at great length. Obviously, he was insulted and deeply hurt, but resolved to publish the concerto anyway. As a result of the bad feelings between Rubinstein and the composer, the dedication was changed to Hans von Bülow, who performed it on a tour of the United States. The world premiere, on October 25, 1875, took place then, not in Russia, but in Boston, from where Bülow sent what is thought to have been the first cable ever sent from Boston to Moscow, telling Tchaikovsky of the great popular success of his concerto.

Strange as it may seem, the critics did not agree with the public acclamation. The *Evening Transcript* thought it had "long stretches of what seems...formless void, sprinkled only with tinklings of the piano and snatchy obbligatos from all the various wind and string instruments in turn." The *Journal* was confident that "it would not soon supplant...the fiery compositions of Liszt, Raff and [Anton] Rubinstein," and *Dwight's Journal of Music* found it "strange, wild, and ultra-modern," and wondered "could we ever learn to love such music?" History has decided resolutely in favor of the question, and the work went on to become the world's most popular piano concerto. Tchaikovsky's original confidence had borne fruit. Even Nicolai Rubinstein changed his mind in later years and performed

the concerto often. Tchaikovsky too capitulated by accepting some of the pianist's suggestions for revisions.

unique charms and a famous introduction

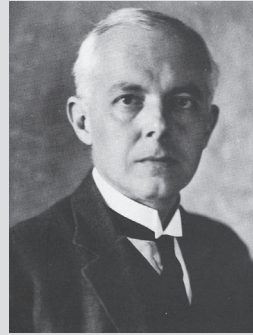
Each of the three movements has its unique charms and attractions. The concerto's most famous theme—that beautiful, lyrical song played by violins just after the opening horn fanfare—is used as introductory material only, and after it has run its course of development through various instruments, never returns. This theme, incidentally, occurs in the key of D-flat major, not the main key of the concerto, B-flat minor. As this is the tune most of us remember most about the concerto, it is worth recalling the late Michael Steinberg's comments about it: "The effect [of the crashing piano chords] is splendid, it is even exciting to watch, and it makes much more of Tchaikovsky's bold idea of having the first solo entrance be an accompaniment—but what an accompaniment!" The first movement's true principal subject is a jerky, almost tuneless idea introduced by the soloist in the concerto's nominal key of B-flat minor. Its essential folk character can be detected if the individual pitches are sung slowly. (It is actually a Ukrainian song traditionally sung by seekers of charity.)

The dreamy flute solo that opens the second movement also exudes a folksy flavor, but in this case it is entirely Tchaikovsky's own. This slow movement incorporates what is in essence a miniature Scherzo movement—a prestissimo passage of whimsical, lighthearted fun. (Steinberg describes it as "something akin to a waltz at about triple speed.") It features a lilting tune in the strings that Tchaikovsky borrowed from a French chansonette.

The finale offers the most brilliant virtuosic opportunities yet. Again, we find a Ukrainian folk song used as the basis of the first theme. A lyrical second theme soon follows. The concerto concludes with the soloist roaring her way up and down the keyboard in a stunning display of pianistic pyrotechnics guaranteed to elicit thunderous applause from a super-charged audience. Small wonder that at the premiere in Boston, and at subsequent performances in Bülow's American tour, audiences demanded the entire movement to be encored.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note by Robert Markow.



Béla Bartók

Born: March 25, 1881,
Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary
(now Sânnicolau Mare, Romania)

Died: September 26, 1945,
New York City

Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta

Premiered: January 21, 1937

When the young Swiss conductor Paul Sacher met Béla Bartók in the early 1930s, he was—like everyone else—swept away by the force of the composer's presence. In a famous description, Sacher said of Bartók: "His being breathed light and brightness; his eyes burned with a noble fire." Sacher was so impressed by a performance of Bartók's Fifth String Quartet that he asked the composer for a new work for the tenth anniversary of his Basel Chamber Orchestra.

Bartók was interested. At 55, he had written no purely orchestral music since his Dance Suite of 1923. This particular commission limited him to a small orchestra, but Bartók restricted his forces even more precisely—he chose to write only for the string and percussion sections of the orchestra. Working rapidly over the summer of 1936 (he composed this work directly into full score), Bartók completed the piece he called Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta on September 7. Sacher had 25 rehearsals before the successful premiere in Basel on January 21, 1937, which Bartók attended.

"more beautiful than I had imagined"

Bartók arrived at this abstract and functional title only after some uncertainty: this is music for precisely defined forces. It is also a work of real originality. One seminal theme gives shape to all four movements, the players are distributed across the stage in exact locations so that *where* the sounds come from is an important part of the music, and Bartók generates a world of sounds never heard before. Even the composer could be surprised by what he written: during rehearsals he wrote to his wife, "A couple of spots sound more beautiful and startling than I had imagined. There are some very unusual sounds in it!"

Yet for all this originality, the Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta is composed in some of the most traditional of classical forms, which Bartók handles with crisp control. This close fusion of the new with the traditional is a most impressive feature of this work, one that appeals powerfully to the mind, to the ear and also to the heart. From the dark opening, Bartók leads us

across a varied landscape to as exciting and cathartic a finale as he ever wrote.

the music

andante tranquillo. Bartók chooses that most disciplined of forms, the fugue, for the first movement. The somber subject (announced by muted violas and developed exclusively by the strings) divides into four brief rising-and-falling phrases. Bartók changes meter almost every measure, so the sense of a downbeat or natural phrase unit is obliterated. Bartók's control is absolute. There are no interludes, no counterthemes, and the fugue reaches its climax, then breaks off in silence.

The return is almost more impressive than the fugue itself. Bartók reduces his theme to fragments, inverts them and telescopes their entries. The music winds into silence as two violin sections offer a mirror-image cadence that slowly and precisely lands on a unison A, the pitch at which the fugue began. Mere words do not begin to describe the impact of this music, which is powerful precisely because it is so controlled: it begins in near silence, and Bartók gradually unleashes a searing energy that flames to life, then re-controls it, and—like a genie driven back into its lamp—the music vanishes at just the spot where it had come to life.

allegro. After such intensity, some release is necessary. The second movement deploys two string orchestras antiphonally (they had been tightly woven together in the first movement) and uses the rest of the percussion, which had sat silent through the fugue. Here is another quite traditional structure—a sonata-form movement in C major—and Bartók quickly has the music ricocheting across the stage as the two string orchestras take bits of it up in turn. Only gradually does the ear recognize that their sharply-inflected music is a variation of the opening fugue subject. Every sonata-form movement needs a second subject, and here it shows up in the classically-correct dominant, G major (Haydn and Mozart would have approved). After a clearly defined recapitulation, the movement—full of energy, humor and sounds in motion—concludes riotously.

adagio. Here is the classic example of a Bartók “night-music movement” (though it should be noted that, in its dark colors and somber expression, the work's opening fugue is also a night-music movement). The form here is a great deal more free: it falls into five brief sections, all linked by ominous fragments of the fugue theme. Here, more than in any other movement, Bartók explores the range of sounds available within his choice of instruments. The *Adagio* opens with the clink of solo xylophone, which gives way to the uneasy swoop of timpani glissandos. The violas' *parlando* entrance (imitating the rhythms and sounds of speech) launches the sequence of episodes, which run from icy swirls through great snapped-off chords.

allegro molto. The finale returns to the antiphonal presentation of the second movement, and the opening violin dance rips along the asymmetric rhythms of Bulgarian folk music (accented 3+3+2). A passage marked *Presto strepitoso* (fast and noisy) rushes the work to its climax: beneath a high harmonic D, the initial fugue subject returns, now opened out to a somewhat more diatonic form. Bartók expands this into a grand statement: the theme that had been so somber in the first movement now rises up to assume a heroic, almost romantic form before the movement dances to its exuberant close.

Instrumentation: timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, xylophone, harp, piano, celesta and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.