

# Minnesota Orchestra

Marin Alsop, conductor

Awadagin Pratt, piano

Saturday, December 31, 2022, 8:30 pm | Orchestra Hall

Sunday, January 1, 2023, 2 pm | Orchestra Hall

Leonard Bernstein Overture to *Candide* ca. 5'

Jessie Montgomery *Rounds* for Piano and Strings ca. 15'  
Awadagin Pratt, piano

I N T E R M I S S I O N ca. 20'

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade*, Opus 35 ca. 47'  
The Sea and Sindbad's Ship  
The Story of the Kalendar Prince  
The Young Prince and the Young Princess  
Festival at Baghdad - The Sea - The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock Surmounted  
by the Bronze Statue of a Warrior  
Erin Keefe, violin

After the New Year's Eve concert, join us in the Roberta Mann Grand Foyer for a countdown to midnight, vintage jazz from Belle Amour and a complimentary Champagne toast.

Then January 1 concert will be broadcast live on stations of [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#), including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.





**Marin Alsop**, conductor

One of the foremost conductors of our time, Marin Alsop is the first woman to serve as the head of a major orchestra in the U.S., South America, Austria and Britain. She debuted with the Minnesota Orchestra in 1993 and last visited in 2011, leading the Dvořák Violin Concerto with Jonathan Magness as soloist. She is chief conductor of Vienna's ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra and chief conductor and curator of Chicago's Ravinia Festival, where she curates and conducts the Chicago Symphony's summer residencies. She holds the title of music director laureate and OrchKids founder of the Baltimore Symphony after serving 14 years as its music director. She has also served as

conductor of honor of Brazil's São Paulo Symphony, as the first music director of the University of Maryland's National Orchestral Institute + Festival, and as 2021-22 Harman/Eisner Artist in Residence of the Aspen Institute Arts Program, and she was music director of California's Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music for 25 years. Her many honors include being the only conductor ever to receive a MacArthur Fellowship. To promote and nurture the careers of her fellow female conductors, she founded the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship. More: [marinalso.com](http://marinalso.com).



**Awadagin Pratt**, piano

Pianist Awadagin Pratt is acclaimed for his musical insight and intensely

involving performances in recital and with orchestras. He studied at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in piano, violin and conducting. He won the Naumburg International Piano Competition in 1992 and was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1994. Since then, he has appeared in recital and as concerto soloist in many of this country's most prestigious venues and with many of the major American orchestras. An experienced conductor, he has engaged recently in a dual conductor/soloist performance with the Chamber Orchestra of Pittsburgh and conducted performances of *Porgy and Bess* for the Greensboro Opera. He is currently a professor of piano at the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati, as well as the artistic director of the Art of the Piano Festival. Through the Art of the Piano Foundation, Pratt has commissioned seven composers to compose works for piano and string orchestra and the vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth. All seven works were recorded in summer 2022 with the chamber orchestra A Far Cry for New Amsterdam Records. More: [awadagin.com](http://awadagin.com).

### one-minute notes

#### **Bernstein: Overture to *Candide***

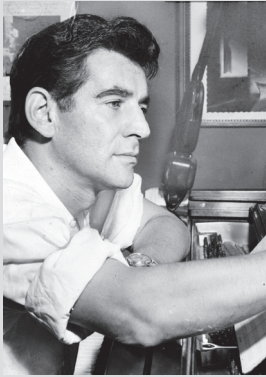
The best-known portion of Bernstein's *Candide* is its vigorous and lyrical overture, which begins with a dramatic fanfare, then offers a quick tour of memorable themes from the operetta.

#### **Montgomery: *Rounds* for Piano and String Orchestra**

Montgomery's *Rounds*, which was commissioned for Awadagin Pratt and premiered by him just nine months ago, is inspired by T.S. Eliot's poem *Four Quartets* and explores musically the interconnectedness of action and reaction, dark and light, and stagnant and swift. The form, says the composer, is "a rondo, within a rondo, within a rondo," with only a partly improvised cadenza breaking the pattern.

#### **Rimsky-Korsakov: *Scheherazade***

*Scheherazade* brings to life a fairy-tale world of palace romances, brilliant festivities and danger on the high seas. The solo violin portrays the title character in one of the most colorfully orchestrated scores ever composed.



### Leonard Bernstein

**Born:** August 25, 1918,  
Lawrence, Massachusetts  
**Died:** October 14, 1990,  
New York City

### Overture to *Candide*

**Premiered:** December 1, 1956  
(Broadway); January 26, 1957  
(concert)

When thousands perished in the Lisbon, Portugal, earthquake of 1752, the French writer and philosopher Voltaire responded with the diverting story of *Candide*, a guileless innocent who through every trial and tribulation clings to the notion that this is indeed the best of all possible worlds. Published in 1759, Voltaire's stinging satire attacked the bedrock premise of the philosophical optimists who provided a rationalization for any apparent evil.

Nearly 200 years after *Candide* appeared in print, Leonard Bernstein and playwright Lillian Hellman collaborated to produce a musical version. After tryouts in Boston and New Haven, *Candide* opened at the Martin Beck Theater in New York on December 1, 1956. For all its vigor, tunefulness and immense theatricality, the show was not an immediate success, earning mixed reviews and surviving just 73 performances in its initial run.

### "gone" and back again

"*Candide* is on and gone," Bernstein wrote in his diary in February 1957, penning a highly premature obituary. Already on January 26, 1957, Bernstein had led the New York Philharmonic in the first concert performance of the *Candide* Overture, which started its swift ascent into the orchestral repertory where it remains beloved for its embodiment of the high-energy American spirit.

Despite its initial stage failure, *Candide* has gone on to a successful life. The first of several key modifications to the production came in 1958, when Bernstein pulled in playwright Hugh Wheeler to take up where Hellman left off, helping Bernstein trim the two acts to one, restoring Voltaire's biting wit and creating a narrator's role for Voltaire. Still, much credit for *Candide's* longevity and ultimate success must go to Bernstein's music, the best-known portion of which remains the vigorous and lyrical overture. It begins with a dramatic fanfare, then offers a quick tour of "Oh, Happy We," "Glitter and Be Gay" and other memorable themes from the operetta.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, glockenspiel, xylophone, harp and strings

Program note by *Mary Ann Feldman*.



### Jessie Montgomery

**Born:** December 8, 1981,  
New York City

### Rounds for Piano and String Orchestra

**Premiered:** March 27, 2022

Six of American composer Jessie Montgomery's works for chamber ensembles and full orchestra have been performed in 10 different Minnesota Orchestra programs since 2019, making her one of the most familiar and popular living composers for Orchestra Hall audiences in recent seasons. Born in 1981 and raised on the Lower East Side of New York City in an artistic family, Montgomery has a thriving career as both an accomplished violinist and a world-renowned composer. Currently, she is the Mead Composer in Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. As a violinist, she is a founder of the PUBLIQuartet and formerly performed with the Providence and Catalyst quartets, in addition to her extensive work with the Sphinx Organization since 1999.

### making the rounds

One of Montgomery's newest works, *Rounds for Piano and String Orchestra*, was commissioned by Art of the Piano Foundation and co-commissioned by nine American orchestras. It was written especially for pianist Awadagin Pratt, who is the director of the Foundation, which hosts expert-level classes for aspiring pianists. Since its world premiere in March 2022 by Pratt and South Carolina's Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra under conductor John Morris Russell, *Rounds* has already seen successful performances by Pratt soloing with 12 major orchestras, making the rounds across the country from Boston to St. Louis to Denver.

In what is her first major work for piano and orchestra, Montgomery has braided together inspirations found in other music with ideas from nature, science and poetry, culminating in a contemplative perspective on all things infinite. In addition, the concept of the divine interconnectedness of all living things

inspired musical gestures and timbres that flow throughout the piece.

One source of her unique vision for the piece is *Four Quartets*, a monumental work by prominent 20th-century modernist poet T. S. Eliot. Eliot considered it one of his most successful pieces of literature, and the work that helped him to earn a Nobel Prize in 1948. Each of the four poems of *Four Quartets* draws loosely on an element of nature: air, earth, water and fire, and leans heavily into the interdependency of each natural element with humanity and of the universe that contains them all.

### “the interdependency of all beings”

Montgomery drew rhythmic and thematic elements from Eliot’s words, but she also found sparks of musical energy through the spiral-like flying patterns of migratory birds and another study of the natural world: the colorful, mesmerizing, one-of-a-kind designs called fractals.

“While working on the piece, I became fascinated by fractals— infinite patterns found in nature that are self-similar across different scales—and also delved into the work of contemporary biologist and philosopher Andreas Weber who writes about the interdependency of all beings,” Montgomery explains in a program note. “Weber explores how every living organism has a rhythm that interacts and impacts with all of the living things around it and results in a multitude of outcomes.”

Tying together these disparate inspirations and explaining how they manifest in the music, she notes: “Like Eliot in *Four Quartets*, beginning to understand this interconnectedness requires that we slow down, listen, and observe both the effect and the opposite effect caused by every single action and moment. I’ve found this is an exercise that lends itself very naturally towards musical gestural possibilities that I explore in the work—action and reaction, dark and light, stagnant and swift.”

### rondos within rondos

The title *Rounds* is a reference to the musical term *rondo*, a form that uses a primary theme alternating with contrasting themes in a pattern or series of rounds. One common rondo form can be distilled to the letters ABACABA, where A represents the primary theme, and B and C are the secondary material. Often, the rondo form is the musical structure of a single movement of a larger work, most commonly the final movement of a sonata.

In this piece, however, Montgomery utilizes the rondo form not just in the larger structure of the movement, but rather like a set of nesting bowls, each one stacked inside another.

“I set the form of the work as a rondo, within a rondo, within a rondo,” she says. “The five major sections are a rondo; section

‘A’ is also a rondo in itself; and the cadenza—which is partially improvised by the soloist—breaks the pattern, yet, contains within it, the overall form of the work.”

Throughout the score, Montgomery asks the performers to consider musical descriptions such as meandering, sparse and ethereal. The orchestral harmonies are rich and swirling, and pulsing with energy. The piano cadenza also leaves intentional room for improvisation and flexibility for the soloist. By design, of course, the musical possibilities are endless.

### the soloist’s view

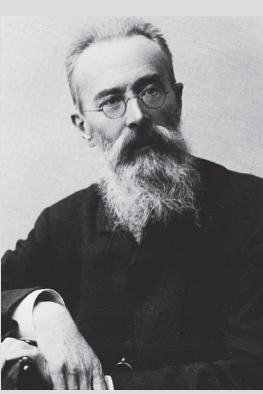
*Rounds* is not Awadagin Pratt’s first collaboration with Jessie Montgomery, as the two have performed together in the past—with Pratt at the keyboard in a collaboration with a string quartet that included Montgomery as a violinist. “She thinks of [*Rounds*] as a chamber piece, and that stems from us having played together,” Pratt explained in an interview with David Lewellen prior to the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra’s performance last June, adding: “It might have turned out differently if she had written it for a different pianist.”

Pratt commented further on the piece in a September conversation with Arun Rath of the radio program *All Things Considered*. “[*Rounds* is] idiomatic for the piano. And there’s an interplay of the material...where material gets moved around through the voices,” he noted. “Sometimes I have what’s considered a lot of material, but I mostly have this kind of accompanying figure in certain parts of the piece. It’s kind of hard to describe, but the tune, per se, is this ‘bee-bum-bee-bum’—this kind of delightful figure, and I have these running notes through that. And there are several different sessions that recur, and then there’s a middle section that’s really hauntingly beautiful.”

**Instrumentation:** solo piano and string orchestra

Program note by *Emma Plehal*.





### Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov

**Born:** March 18, 1844,  
Tikhvin, Russia  
**Died:** June 21, 1908,  
Lyubensk, Russia

### *Scheherazade*, Opus 35

**Premiered:** January 21, 1937

In the summer of 1888, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, then 44 years old, went to his summer estate on the shores of Lake Cheryemenyetskoye and set to work on a new orchestral composition. He called it *Scheherazade* and added a subtitle, “Symphonic Suite on 1001 Nights,” that made clear its inspiration. The movement titles suggested a definite program, and the composer included an introductory note in the score:

“The Sultan Schahriar, persuaded of the falseness and faithfulness of all women, had sworn to put to death each of his wives after the first night. But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her life by arousing his interest in tales which she told him during a thousand and one nights. Driven by curiosity, the Sultan put off his wife’s execution from day to day and at last gave up his bloody plan altogether.”

#### “fairy-tale wonders”

*Scheherazade*, composed within the month of July 1888, quickly became one of the most popular works in symphonic literature, played (and some might say overplayed) around the world, where audiences could revel in the stories with which the wily Scheherazade entranced her dangerous husband.

But does this music tell a story? Each of the movements has a descriptive title, and certain themes are obviously musical portraits: the menacing opening is clearly the ferocious Sultan, while the solo violin is just as clearly the imaginative Sultana, spinning her tales. And along the way we hear the swaying sea, the sighs of the young lovers, the festival in Baghdad and the crash of the ship against the rock.

Or do we? Despite what seems obvious musical portraiture, Rimsky-Korsakov discouraged any talk of this music’s telling a specific story and suggested that his intentions were much more general: “In composing *Scheherazade*, I meant these hints to direct only slightly the hearer’s fancy on the path which my own fancy had traveled, and to leave more minute and particular conceptions to the will and mood of each listener. All I had desired was that

the hearer, if he liked my piece as symphonic music, should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders....” The composer even went so far as to withdraw temporarily the descriptive titles of the four movements.

And so listeners are free to approach this music in any way they wish. They can experience it as the Sultana’s depiction of a thousand exciting tales and even imagine the specific events the music seems to evoke. They can listen for Rimsky-Korsakov’s endless transformation of just a few themes, which return in an exotic array of new shapes and colors. Or they can listen for the opulence of the sound he is able to draw from the orchestra, for *Scheherazade* remains—more than a century after its creation—one of the most sumptuous scores ever composed. Perhaps some of the charm of this music is that it simply cannot be pinned down but remains as elusive, evocative and mysterious as the Sultana’s tales.

There was a time, a generation or two ago, when *Scheherazade* was considered the stereotype of the warhorse, music so overplayed and over-familiar that the mere mention of its name produced smiles and a certain condescension. It appears much less often in concert halls today, and one of the particular charms of a concert like this is the pleasure of hearing this distantly remembered music burst to vibrant life in front of us one more time.

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

*Program note by Eric Bromberger.*