

## Minnesota Orchestra

Kazuki Yamada, conductor

Alexandre Kantorow, piano

Thursday, February 16, 2023, 11 am | Orchestra Hall

Friday, February 17, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

<b>Tōru Takemitsu</b>	<i>How slow the Wind</i>	ca. 11'
<b>Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky</b>	Concerto No. 2 in G major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 44 Allegro brillante e molto vivace Andante non troppo Allegro con fuoco <i>Alexandre Kantorow, piano</i>	ca. 40'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
<b>Antonín Dvořák</b>	Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Opus 95, <i>From the New World</i> Adagio – Allegro molto Largo Molto vivace Allegro con fuoco	ca. 43'

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.





**Kazuki Yamada**, conductor

Japanese conductor Kazuki Yamada, now making his Minnesota Orchestra debut, will become chief conductor and artistic advisor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in April 2023, a position which builds upon the deep musical bond formed with players during his time as principal guest conductor. He will tour Japan with that ensemble this coming summer. He is also artistic and music director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo. Committed to what he calls his “Japanese feeling” for classical music developed under the close supervision of his mentor Seiji Ozawa, Yamada returns to Japan every season to work with the NHK Symphony and fulfill his duties as principal guest conductor of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. He

commands a busy international schedule of symphonic concerts in addition to opera and choral engagements. This season marks his debuts with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre National de Belgique. Future engagements include performances with the Swedish Radio Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. More: [kdschmid.de](https://kdschmid.de), [kazukiyamada.com](https://kazukiyamada.com).



**Alexandre Kantorow**, piano

Alexandre Kantorow, who appears this week with the Minnesota Orchestra for the first time, became the first French pianist to win the Gold Medal and Grand Prix at the Tchaikovsky

Competition—awarded only three times in the competition’s history—in 2019 at the age of 22. He has received numerous additional awards and invitations to perform with the world’s leading orchestras. Highlights of this and future seasons include concerts with the Orchestre de Paris, Staatskapelle Berlin, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia of London and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, as well as tours with the Orchestre National de Toulouse, Budapest Festival Orchestra and Munich Philharmonic. He appears often with the Mariinsky Orchestra under Valery Gergiev and collaborates regularly in chamber music settings with other such esteemed musicians as Victor Julien-Laferrrière, Renaud Capuçon, Daniel Lozakovich and Matthis Goerne. His recordings, exclusively made on the BIS label, have received numerous honors. In 2020 he won the Victoires de la Musique Classique in two categories: Recording of the Year and Instrumentalist of the Year. The following year he received the Trophée d’Anée from Radio Classique. More: [intermusica.co.uk](https://intermusica.co.uk), [alexandre-kantorow.com](https://alexandre-kantorow.com).

### one-minute notes

#### **Takemitsu: *How slow the Wind***

The sound world of *How slow the Wind* incorporates both Eastern and Western musical traditions, and like several of Takemitsu’s compositions, it is rooted in a three-note motive associated with the sea. In some passages, the orchestra’s instruments use non-traditional techniques to evoke the sounds of Japanese instruments such as the shakuhachi and koto.

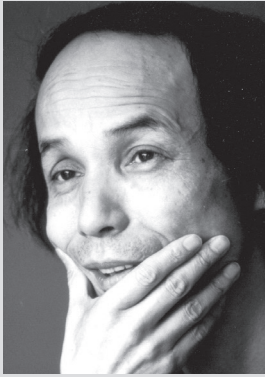
#### **Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 2**

A thundering march launches this concerto, which initially segregates soloist and orchestra. The middle movement offers a surprise—the hint of a triple concerto with violin and cello—while the finale has the spirit of a high-stepping country dance.

#### **Dvořák: Symphony No. 9, *From the New World***

Dvořák’s beloved Ninth, composed during a three-year visit to America, is a melting pot of African American, Indigenous American and European musical languages. Among its many unforgettable passages: a gorgeous English horn melody in the *Largo* inspired by African American spirituals and a dramatic finale that overflows with inspired tunes.





## Tōru Takemitsu

**Born:** October 8, 1930,  
Tokyo, Japan

**Died:** February 20, 1996,  
Tokyo, Japan

### *How slow the Wind*

**Premiered:** November 6, 1991

ush. Hypnotic. Arresting. The late-career music of Tōru Takemitsu consistently encapsulates these qualities, yielding musical atmospheres that, for the listener, organically stop the passing of time. These characteristics are the result of a lifelong journey with multiple points of recognition and intimacy.

Born in Tokyo in 1930, Takemitsu was raised in China until he was 8 years old, when his family returned to Japan. The global conflict that raged during his formative years had a surprising musical aftermath: during the American occupation of Japan, Takemitsu worked for the U.S. Armed Forces and listened to much Western music via the Armed Forces network. It was during this time, despite his lack of formal music education, that Takemitsu began to compose, later recognizing that music was his life's obligation. Though he studied briefly with Japanese music teacher Yasuji Kiyose, Takemitsu remained largely self-taught throughout his life.

### "the value of my own tradition"

Takemitsu's early career was marked by a rejection of Japanese traditions and idioms. His sentiments started to shift when, in 1961, Takemitsu was in attendance as composer-pianist Toshi Ichianagi gave the Japanese premiere of American composer John Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*. This performance left a deep impression upon Takemitsu. Delving into Cage's practices, he was encouraged to embrace silence, Zen practices and other Eastern philosophies, as Cage had also done. In a 1989 music journal article, Takemitsu recalled: "I must express my deep and sincere gratitude to John Cage. The reason for this is that in my own life, in my own development, for a long period I struggled to avoid being 'Japanese,' to avoid 'Japanese' qualities. It was largely through my contact with John Cage that I came to recognize the value of my own tradition."

Near the same time, Takemitsu witnessed a performance of bunraku (traditional Japanese puppet theater accompanied by voice, shamisen and percussion), and the music captured his attention, emboldening him to incorporate more traditional

Japanese music in his compositions. He began composing works that mixed traditional Japanese instruments and Western instruments together, but these early works rarely drew moments of confluence between the sound-worlds of Western and Eastern instrumentation, partly because of the differing traditions of music notation. After many years of musical and geographical journeys, personal growth and self-study, Takemitsu found a way to integrate Japanese sonic approaches into his Western practice, thus ushering in his later, more unified musical style.

### a signature motive

Takemitsu's *How slow the Wind* exemplifies this integration. Completed in 1991 and premiered that November by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, this dreamlike music evokes the sound world of Debussy, Chopin, Schoenberg, Webern and Still, but shifted to an Eastern atmosphere. Its embrace of tonality and melody is typical of the composer's late style, as is its use of a "S-E-A" motive—through which the word "sea" is written into the music using the names of musical pitches. This takes some explaining: "S" is not a pitch in the musical scale, but the pitch E-flat in the German language is written "Es," which sounds like the letter "s." When incorporating the pitches E and A, the "S-E-A" (or E-flat, E, A) motive is formed. Takemitsu extended this motive in various ways throughout his late compositions, and no fewer than six of his works from 1980s and '90s include the word "sea" in the title.

In *How slow the Wind*, the "S-E-A" motive is flipped, contracted and manipulated ingeniously to form the main melodic motif. This lush tune is first played by the plaintive oboe, and is answered almost immediately by the breezy flute, glimpsing the sound world of a shakuhachi (a Japanese flute-like instrument). A short moment later, the melody is heard again, this time played by a solo flute, oboe and clarinet at the same time, adding to the windy atmosphere that Takemitsu establishes at the opening, with shimmering strings, warm horn tones, and lush chords in the celesta and the harp. Throughout the piece, Takemitsu uses non-traditional techniques perhaps to evoke the aura of certain traditional Japanese instruments. For example, a harpist normally plucks the middle of the string to produce a pure tone. However, if the harpist plucks towards the bottom of the string, the sound has a bit of a twang, much like the Japanese national instrument, the koto. As you listen, rather than imagining the music as a journey, try experiencing it in the same way one would view a painting—perhaps a natural landscape painting by Hokusai—as the music's winds and waves wash through Orchestra Hall.

**Instrumentation:** flute, piccolo (doubling alto flute), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 2 horns, antique cymbal, 2 cowbells, glockenspiel, vibraphone, tubular bells, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

Program note by **Anthony R. Green**.



## Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**Born:** May 7, 1840,  
Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia

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

### Concerto No. 2 in G major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 44

**Premiered:** November 12, 1881

Tchaikovsky may not have believed explicitly that the devil finds work for idle hands to do, but we do know that lack of work made him nervous. He spent the fall of 1879 at his sister Alexandra's country place at Kamenka, going through the exacting but tedious labor of proofreading his Suite No. 1 for Orchestra. He helped pitch hay and joined the family in sewing bees. "I have hemmed and monogrammed a handkerchief," he reported to his brother Anatol. But this was not enough.

#### the need to create

On October 22 he wrote to Anatol's twin, Modest: "These last days I've begun to observe in myself things which at first I didn't understand. I experienced a certain vague dissatisfaction with myself, an over-frequent and almost irresistible desire to sleep, a certain emptiness, and finally *boredom*. There were times when I didn't know what to do with myself. Finally yesterday it became clear to me what was the matter. I had to get on with something: I find myself absolutely incapable of living long without work. Today I began to create something, and the *boredom* vanished as if by magic."

The "something" was the Piano Concerto No. 2. He enjoyed himself, writing to his patroness Mme. von Meck that the new score "began to grow and to display characteristic features. I work with pleasure and am trying to curb the habitual haste that has so often been injurious to my work." The work sheets accompanied him to Berlin, Paris and Rome, but it was at Kamenka, where he had begun the score, that he finished it. The first performance was in the United States, with Madeleine Schiller as soloist and Theodore Thomas conducting the New York Philharmonic on November 12, 1881, and it was not a great success. In Russia, the performance by Sergei Taneyev brought the audience to its feet, but there, too, the critics were reserved.

#### the music: a lesser-known sequel

Opinions about the Second Concerto have been widely divergent, but the work has always had its champions, a few of whom have

probably taken their stand just because the First Concerto—less calculated, yet in many respects more sure—is so consumingly popular.

**allegro brillante e molto vivace.** Tchaikovsky begins with a thundering march whose odd scansion gives it a nice twist. The orchestra plays it, then the piano repeats it with enthusiastic encouragement from the crowd. The flute momentarily gives this a melancholy turn, which leads to the piano's next solo—nervously fluttering, thin-skinned music. It does not take long for the exuberance of the opening to disappear. Both the initial march and the piano solo are in their contrasting ways instantly suggestive of Schumann, a composer whom Tchaikovsky learned to love in his student days and whose voice ghosted through his music, always unexpectedly, all his life.

A dramatic change of key, heralded by a string tremolo, brings new, lyric material. The development is most originally arranged, consisting of two extended passages for orchestra, the first harmonically static, the second powerfully propelling the music from dark minor-mode caverns into major, both of these episodes being followed by huge cadenzas for the piano. Some years later Tchaikovsky remarked that he disliked the sound of piano and orchestra together: in the Concerto No. 2 he certainly went to extreme lengths to segregate them. The piano writing here is far more demanding even than that in the First Concerto, both in range of keyboard vocabulary and in sheer taxing athleticism and endurance. The coda is brilliant and brief.

**andante non troppo.** The second movement starts with one of those unprepared dissonances that struck terror into the hearts of 19th-century harmony teachers. This is the first in a series of shifting string chords through which Tchaikovsky makes his way to his new key of D major. The approach is completed by a solo violin, and how startled those first audiences must have been when they heard the violin move into an extended and beautiful song all by itself. A solo cello continues the thought, the violin now providing a descant. It is as if Tchaikovsky had forgotten he was writing a *piano* concerto. At last, the piano plays its own version of the melody—and *there* is a challenge: for the seated percussion virtuoso to compete with colleagues on real singing instruments!

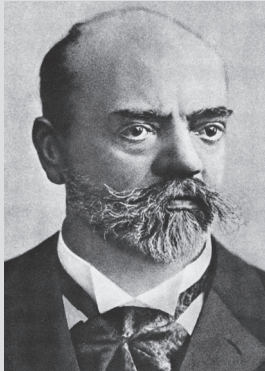
After an agitated middle section, a cadenza for the violin and cello leads to the return of the opening melody, sung now by the violin, accompanied by cello and piano. Eventually the violin and cello retire, leaving the piano and orchestra to bring the movement to its atmospheric close. No feature of this work has been more controversial than Tchaikovsky's strange and daring move to offer us a triple concerto for some minutes, but these pages are undoubtedly Tchaikovsky's loveliest in this score.



**allegro con fuoco.** After the grand formal adventures of the first and second movements, the third is as simple in design as it is straightforward in tone. The spirit is that of high-stepping country dance, and virtuosity continues to be demanded in a big way right to the whirling end.

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

Program note by the late **Michael Steinberg**, used with permission.



**Antonín Dvořák**  
**Born:** September 8, 1841,  
 Nelahozeves, Bohemia  
 (now Czech Republic)  
**Died:** May 1, 1904,  
 Prague

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**Symphony No. 9 in E minor,  
 Opus 95, From the New  
 World**  
**Premiered:** December 16, 1893

Antonín Dvořák's Symphony No. 9, the *New World* Symphony, was one of many works this composer wrote during his sojourn in America from 1892 to 1895. Although the *New World* Symphony was written in the New World, it is not specifically about the New World. True, there are themes that were inspired by music of Indigenous Americans and African Americans, but he did not quote directly from folksongs—though special attention should be paid to the multi-layered story behind the famous melody the *Largo* movement.

Some 30 years before Dvořák composed the *New World* Symphony, he read Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*, in a Czech translation. Dvořák re-read the poem in America and claimed that the scene of Minnehaha's funeral in the forest inspired the *Largo* movement of his symphony. Although the *Largo*'s main theme, introduced by English horn, is Dvořák's own, it is inspired by the tradition of African American spirituals taught to Dvořák by Harry Burleigh, a student at Dvořák's conservatory in New York City with whom education went both ways. Dvořák spent a summer reflecting on this music, as well as elements of Indigenous American music, while in the process of composing the *New World* Symphony.

### the music: magical melodies

**adagio-allegro.** This alone of Dvořák's nine symphonies opens with a slow introduction. Within the space of just 23 measures, the composer incorporates moods of melancholic dreaming and

tense foreboding, startling eruptions and a surging melodic line. The main *Allegro* section is launched by horns in an arpeggiated fanfare motif in E minor, a motif that will reappear in all remaining movements as well. Several additional themes follow.

**largo.** The second movement contains one of the most famous melodies in all of Western classical music, known to many as the song "Goin' home." That title arose when another of Dvořák's students, William Arms Fisher, superimposed lyrics after Dvořák had completed the symphony. This theme, first presented by the English horn, is in the key of D-flat major, which is harmonically very distant from the key of the first movement, E minor. Dvořák arrives at the new key through a sequence of just seven somber chords played by low woodwinds and brass, beginning in E minor and ending in D-flat major. The effect is effortless, even magical, "like the drawing back of a curtain revealing the scene to the spectators' gaze," to quote biographer Otakar Šourek.

**scherzo-molto vivace.** The *Scherzo* is one of the most energetic and exhilarating movements Dvořák ever wrote, and it borders on the virtuosic as well for the dazzling orchestral display it entails. Contributing to the bright colors and brilliant effects is the triangle, which is employed in this movement alone. The contrasting Trio section is a charming rustic dance introduced by the woodwind choir and set to a lilting long-short-long rhythm.

**allegro con fuoco.** The finale, too, contains its share of melodic fecundity and inventiveness. The development section treats not only material from this movement but from the three previous ones as well, especially the main theme of the *Largo*, which is fragmented and tossed about with almost reckless abandon. The grand climax of the long coda (which begins after the horn solo that amazingly covers three full octaves) brings back the chordal sequence that opened the *Largo*, but now painted in broad, majestic strokes in the full brass and woodwind sections.

The fury subsides, the orchestra dies away to a whisper, horns softly intone the finale's main theme like an echo from a far-away world. Violins proudly proclaim the theme one last time, and the symphony seems destined to end in E minor, the key in which it began. But with a sudden shift of the harmonic gears, Dvořák brings the symphony to a close in joyous E major. The final chord, too, is a surprise—not a predictably stentorian chord played *fortissimo* by the full orchestra, but a lovely, warm sonority of winds alone.

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

Program note by **Robert Markow**.