

Minnesota Orchestra
Dalia Stasevska, conductor
Erin Keefe, violin

Thursday, February 23, 2023, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, February 24, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, February 25, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Missy Mazzoli	<i>Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)</i>	ca. 12'
Leonard Bernstein	<i>Serenade after Plato's "Symposium" for Solo Violin, Strings, Harp and Percussion</i> Phaedras - Pausanias: Lento - Allegro Aristophanes: Allegretto Eryximachus: Presto Agathon: Adagio Socrates - Alcibiades: Molto tenuto - Allegro molto vivace <i>Erin Keefe, violin</i>	ca. 30'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
William Dawson	<i>Negro Folk Symphony</i> The Bond of Africa Hope in the Night O, Le' Me Shine, Shine Like a Morning Star!	ca. 35'



Dalia Stasevska, conductor

Ukrainian-born conductor Dalia Stasevska, who this week is welcomed for her Minnesota Orchestra debut, is chief conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and artistic director to the International Sibelius Festival, as well as principal guest conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The 2022-23 season sees her conducting major American orchestras such as Chicago, National and San Francisco symphonies, Philadelphia Orchestra and New York and Los Angeles philharmonics, as well as ensembles abroad such as the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Orchestre philharmonique de Strasbourg and Toronto Symphony Orchestra. She has made several major festival appearances, including opening the 2021 Edinburgh International Festival,

and had been scheduled to lead the high-profile Last Night of the Proms in 2022 with the BBC Symphony until the passing of Queen Elizabeth II necessitated the event's cancellation. Her career also includes conducting opera with companies the world over. Her many honors include being bestowed with the Order of Princess Olga of the III degree by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in October 2020 for her significant personal contribution to the development of international cooperation, the prestige of Ukraine internationally and the popularization of its historical and cultural heritage. More: harrisonparrott.com, daliastasevska.com.



Erin Keefe, violin

Erin Keefe, the Minnesota Orchestra's concertmaster since 2011, has

established a reputation as a violinist who combines exhilarating temperament and fierce integrity. As a soloist with the Orchestra, she has played Beethoven's Violin Concerto, two concertos by Mendelssohn—the Violin Concerto and the Double Concerto for Violin, Piano and Orchestra—as well as the violin concertos of Brahms and Kurt Weill and Dvořák's Romance for Violin and Orchestra. A dedicated educator, she joined the violin faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music in fall 2022. Winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and the Pro Musicis International Award, Keefe has appeared as soloist with orchestras throughout the world. She is also a highly sought-after chamber musician who has been an Artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and plays locally with the Accordo chamber ensemble. As a guest concertmaster, she has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, Seoul Philharmonic and São Paulo Symphony Orchestra. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she and Minnesota Orchestra Conductor Laureate Osmo Vänskä recorded many violin-and-clarinet works and shared them with audiences around the world. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

one-minute notes

Mazzoli: *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)*

Mazzoli's *Sinfonia* is patterned after the loops of planets, with the orchestra pushed beyond its traditional orbit of sounds and technique to create surprising and vibrant textures. Pitches slide from one to the next, several players set down their instruments for harmonicas and a synthesized organ sound rings out to otherworldly effect.

Bernstein: *Serenade after Plato's "Symposium"*

The solo violin carries on a dialogue with strings, harp and percussion, speaking variously with wit and mystery, beauty and humor—as if to replicate the Greek philosopher Plato's dinner-table conversation on the nature of love.

Dawson: *Negro Folk Symphony*

In the 1930s, Dawson composed *Negro Folk Symphony* as a musical link between African and American heritage—a symphony into which he poured his life's experience. As he explained: "The themes are taken from what are popularly known as Negro spirituals. In this composition, the composer has employed three themes taken from typical melodies over which he has brooded since childhood, having learned them at his mother's knee."



Missy Mazzoli

Born: October 27, 1980,
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)

Premiered: April 14, 2014

grammy-nominated American composer Missy Mazzoli has been a significant presence in the world of contemporary music for the past two decades. Since completing studies in the Netherlands funded by a Fulbright Grant, she has gained commissions from Opera Philadelphia, the National Ballet of Canada, the Chicago Symphony, and numerous other prestigious ensembles and soloists internationally. The Minnesota Orchestra played a vital role early in her career when, in 2006, it was the initial professional orchestra to perform her first orchestral work, *These Worlds In Us*, under Osmo Vänskä's direction. Also an active pianist, she plays in the band Victoire, which she formed in 2008. Victoire has since performed internationally in Sweden and Berlin and throughout the U.S. at places such as Millennium Park in Chicago and Carnegie Hall in New York.

Mazzoli's music has also been featured on television and in film, including compositions for the Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning show *Mozart in the Jungle* and the documentary *Detropia*, among others. Also active in arts administration and advocacy, Mazzoli is the former executive director of the MATA Festival. In 2016, along with composer Ellen Reid in collaboration with the Kaufman Center, she founded the Luna Composition Lab, a mentorship program and support network for female-identifying, non-binary and gender nonconforming composers ages 13 to 19.

celestial bodies in sound

Given her experience in various circles within contemporary music, Mazzoli's experience has necessitated navigating diverse worlds with professionalism and confidence. (The word "worlds," in fact, appears in the titles of two of her compositions.) It is no surprise, then, that Mazzoli's compositional and musical interests would have her navigate celestial bodies. In her words from the introduction of a digital performance of *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)* in 2020 by the Yale Symphony, she states: "I set out to write a piece in the shape of a solar system." What does this mean, exactly? Mazzoli elaborates that the piece begins with "small looping bits of material (planets) that would combine into a massive loop (orbits) so that...the piece would end where it

began, but in a slightly different way—the way that a planet in orbit ends up in sort of the same place, but it's a year later and things are different."

In the composer's program note, the "looping bits of material" are described as *rococo*—an 18th-century stylistic practice characterized by excessive and/or intricate ornamentation, but with a lightness and gaiety (as opposed to its stylistic slightly older sibling *baroque*). Yet the title purposely references the Baroque period; *sinfonia* is an Italian term with numerous meanings, most commonly associated with orchestral introductions to large-scale vocal works such as operas, cantatas and oratorios. As an orchestra of the 17th and 18th centuries was much smaller than the contemporary orchestra, the use of the term today often denotes a piece for a chamber orchestra or other smaller ensemble, but this is not always the case. Mazzoli is part of a cohort of the past 100 years' composers—including Violet Archer, Luciano Berio, Benjamin Britten, Paul Desenne, Eibhlís Farrell, Elena Firsova, Makiko Kinoshita, Thea Musgrave, Sergei Prokofiev, Su Lian Tan and George Walker, among others—who have revived this term with a fresh reinterpretation.

The instrumentation of the composition also underwent a journey, changed at the end of its orbit. It started as a piece for chamber orchestra, commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and premiered in April 2014 with John Adams conducting. The full orchestra version was created for a Music Alive Composer Residency with the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, which introduced it in February 2016. Small revisions were made in 2018 and 2021. Since its premiere, the piece has been performed more than 75 times, and future performances are consistently being arranged.

a more distant orbit

In keeping with the composition's title, Mazzoli has pushed the orchestra far beyond its traditional orbit of sounds and technique. She does so by incorporating not only unconventional ways of playing the instruments, but also adding in moments of rhythmic fluidity, focusing on sliding pitches, and blending sounds to create surprising, vibrant textures. Further still, Mazzoli demands some of the musicians to play harmonica, assigns a synthesizer (with an organ sound) to the piano performer, includes pre-recorded sounds that are played towards the end of the work, and mixes clearly and organically with the acoustic sound world she creates within the orchestra.

The overall effect of the piece is rather reminiscent of the experience one gets when looking up at a starry night sky. The scene itself may seem static—but just keep looking and listening. An entire new world will gradually appear: a world that has a beauty one has never before seen. Hold this beauty with you as

you continue on the orbit of your life, and your journey will be much easier to achieve.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons (doubling harmonica), 2 horns (doubling harmonica), 2 trumpets (doubling harmonica), 2 trombone (doubling harmonica), tuba, snare drum, suspended cymbal, boombox, lion's roar, melodica, opera gong, spring coil, glockenspiel vibraphone, marimba, piano (doubling synthesized organ sound) and strings

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



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

Serenade after Plato's "Symposium" for Solo Violin, Strings, Harp and Percussion
Premiered: September 12, 1954

Renowned composer, conductor, pianist, author, teacher and television personality, Leonard Bernstein was a leading 20th-century figure in both the classical music and Broadway realms. Through his myriad activities, he developed friendships with many prominent musical personalities of his times—among them violinist Isaac Stern, for whom he composed the *Serenade* for Violin, Harp and Percussion in 1954. Commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the work is dedicated “To the beloved memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky.” Serge, who had died just three years before, was Bernstein’s mentor in conducting at Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s summer home. Natalie, a longtime patron of the arts, was also an early supporter and friend of the young composer.

music inspired by philosophical discourse

In the 1950s, Bernstein was composing in many different fields. The *Serenade* comes near the same time as his Academy Award-nominated score for the Elia Kazan film *On the Waterfront*, from which he subsequently produced a symphonic suite in 1955. The musical *Wonderful Town* was behind him, and soon he would be creating incidental music for Lillian Hellman’s *The Lark* and writing a comic operetta, *Candide*, and in 1957 came his most famous work, the musical *West Side Story*—which has since become the only musical adapted twice by Hollywood that was

nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture Oscar on both occasions. But amid the typical flurry of Bernstein activity, the summer of 1954 was a relatively quiet time for the composer, and the inventive *Serenade*, a nostalgic and emotional work inspired by philosophical discourse, reflects the serenity of living in Italy.

Just five weeks after Bernstein finished the *Serenade*, it was premiered at the Venice Festival on September 12, 1954; Bernstein conducted the Israel Philharmonic, and Stern was the soloist. They collaborated again for the American premiere, which took place in April 1956 at Carnegie Hall. Over the years, the work has appeared on just six Minnesota Orchestra programs, four of which featured the concertmaster as soloist: Norman Carol in 1966, Lea Foli in 1983 and Jorja Fleezanis in both 2006 and 2013; with this week’s performance, Concertmaster Erin Keefe follows in that tradition.

In his mid-30s, the Harvard-educated Bernstein re-read the Greek philosopher Plato’s dialogue, *The Symposium*, and the result is one of his most original and lyric works, a blend of symphonic suite and concerto entitled *Serenade*. In the first four of the five movements, the violin soloist is the chief speaker, initiating the musical discussion. The violin is solitary in the thoughtful opening (*Lento*), and predominant after that, until the concluding *Socrates – Alcibiades* movement, which is preceded by an extended introduction led off by strings and chimes. Although there is no program as such, each section evokes the speaker of the title. Like good conversation, the music is rich in variation of ideas. Bernstein has explained that the relationship of the movements does not depend on common thematic material, but rather on a system whereby each movement evolves out of elements in the preceding one. There are ample moments for the soloist throughout.

“guide-posts” from the composer

Nobody, though, explains music better than Bernstein himself. On the day after completing the score in August 1954, he prepared a short commentary, advising: “There is...no literal program, and the music, like the dialogue, is a series of related statements in praise of love, and generally follows the Platonic form throughout the succession of speakers at the banquet. For the benefit of those interested in literary allusion, I might suggest the following points as guide-posts:

Phaedras-Pausanias: lento-allegro. “Phaedrus opens the symposium with a lyrical oration in praise of Eros, the god of love (*fugato*, begun by the solo violin). Pausanias continues by describing the duality of the lover as compared with the beloved. This is expressed in a classical sonata-allegro, based on the material of the opening *fugato*.”

Aristophanes: allegretto. “Aristophanes does not play the role of clown in this dialogue, but instead that of the bedtime-storyteller, invoking the fairy-tale mythology of love. The atmosphere is one of quiet charm.”

Eryximachus: presto. “The physician speaks of bodily harmony as a scientific model for the workings of love-patterns. This is an extremely short *fugato-scherzo*, born of a blend of mystery and humor.”

Agathon: adagio. “Perhaps the most moving speech of the dialogue, Agathon’s panegyric embraces all aspects of love’s powers, charms and functions. This movement is a simple three-part song.”

Socrates-Alcibiades: molto tenuto-allegro molto vivace. “Socrates describes his visit to the seer Diotima, quoting her speech on the demonology of love. Love as a daemon is Socrates’ image for the profundity of love; and his seniority adds to the feeling of didactic soberness in an otherwise pleasant and convivial after-dinner discussion. This is a slow introduction of greater weight than any of the preceding movements, and serves as a highly developed reprise of the middle section of the *Agathon* movement, thus suggesting a hidden sonata-form. The famous interruption by Alcibiades and his band of drunken revelers ushers in the *Allegro*, which is an extended rondo ranging in spirit from agitation through jig-like dance music to joyful celebration. If there is a hint of jazz in the celebration, I hope it will not be taken as anachronistic Greek party-music, but rather the natural expression of a contemporary American composer imbued with the spirit of that timeless dinner party.”

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, Chinese blocks, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, glockenspiel, chimes, harp and strings

Program note by *Mary Ann Feldman*.



William Dawson

Born: September 26, 1899,
Anniston, Alabama

Died: May 2, 1990,
Montgomery, Alabama

Negro Folk Symphony

Premiered: November 20, 1934

“I’ve not tried to imitate Beethoven or Brahms, Franck or Ravel—but to be just myself, a Negro,” William Dawson remarked in a 1932 interview. “To me, the finest compliment that could be paid my symphony when it has its premiere is that it unmistakably is not the work of a white man. I want the audience to say: ‘Only a Negro could have written that.’”

“again and yet again”—finally

Two years later, Leopold Stokowski led the New York Philharmonic in the premiere of Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony*. Critics and audiences alike hailed it as a masterpiece. One reviewer declared it “the most distinctive and promising American symphonic proclamation which has so far been achieved,” and another enthused, “the immediate success of the symphony [did not] give rise to doubts as to its enduring qualities. One is eager to hear it again and yet again.”

Given this overwhelmingly positive reception, Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony*, which at the time he thought of as the first of several future symphonies, should have been heard “again and yet again.” But among America’s most prestigious orchestras, it was not. Despite Stokowski’s advocacy for Dawson and the *Negro Folk Symphony*, and despite the stellar reviews it received at its premiere, the composer’s music, like that of many Black composers, was generally excluded from regular programming by the country’s major orchestras for many decades due to systemic racism. Dawson never composed another symphony, although he did continue writing and arranging music—primarily spirituals, which he preferred to call “Negro folk songs”—for the rest of his long career.

In the current climate of racial reckoning, Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony* is enjoying a long-overdue revival, as is the music of Black classical composers such as Florence Price, William Grant Still, Nathaniel Dett and others.

“symbolic of the link”

Dawson wrote that his symphony was “symbolic of the link uniting Africa and her rich heritage with her descendants in America,” and gave each of its three movements a descriptive title. Dawson explained in his own program note: “The themes are taken from what are popularly known as Negro spirituals. In this composition, the composer has employed three themes taken from typical melodies over which he has brooded since childhood, having learned them at his mother’s knee.” Musicologist Gwynne Kuhner Brown observes, “The themes are handled with such virtuosic flexibility of rhythm and timbre that each movement seems to evolve organically,” creating a “persuasive musical bridge between the ‘Negro Folk’ and the ‘Symphony.’”

The Bond of Africa. To start the symphony, Dawson opens with a horn solo. The dialogue between the horn and the orchestra recalls the call-and-response format of most spirituals. The horn solo repeats, usually in abbreviated form, a number of times throughout this movement, and serves as a musical “bond” holding the work together.

Hope in the Night. The central slow movement also features a unifying solo. Here an English horn sounds Dawson’s own spiritual-inspired melody, which he described as an “atmosphere of the humdrum life of a people whose bodies were baked by the sun and lashed with the whip for two hundred and fifty years; whose lives were proscribed before they were born.” Underneath the plaintive tune, the orchestra provides a dirge-like accompaniment that builds to an ominous repetition of the solo for tutti orchestra. This episode is offset by an abrupt change of mood, and we hear a lighthearted, up-tempo reworking of the original tune (the “hope” of the movement’s title). These two contrasting interludes alternate throughout the rest of the movement. Towards the end, Dawson reworks the harmony, which has been grounded in minor keys up to this point, and tiptoes towards major tonalities without fully embracing them. Musically, this device works as a powerful metaphor for the importance and elusive nature of hope to sustain people through traumatic circumstances.

O, Le’ Me Shine, Shine Like a Morning Star! The closing section imagines a world in which the hopes of the previous movement are fully realized. Dawson creates this musical utopia through rhythm. The central melody showcases accented off-beat exclamations from various solo instruments and sections throughout, as the rhythms layer increasingly complex parts over one another. Dawson revised this movement in the early 1950s after he encountered the intricate polyrhythms of West African music during a trip to Africa. The interlocking parts and

the sounds of African percussion instruments captured Dawson’s ear; when he returned to America, he added these elements. Eventually all these rhythmic strands come together in a final buoyant exclamation by the full orchestra.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, adawura (Ghanian bell), African clave, gong, triangle, chimes, xylophone, harp, and strings

Program note by **Elizabeth Schwartz** © 2023.

coda

Dr. Louise Toppin, a singer, professor of voice at the University of Michigan, and researcher and scholar of African American music, shares these thoughts in an interview on *Negro Folk Symphony* and its title:

“William Dawson, William Grant Still and Florence Price have the distinction of being the first [African American composers] to break into the symphonic world, and so it was very important to them to reclaim spirituals that had been long neglected after the period of enslavement. They wanted to take the music that was of their culture and their folk into the European classical model and perform it in symphonies.

“[Dawson] chose the title *Negro Folk Symphony* because that was the term that was used at that time to describe African Americans. In the Harlem Renaissance, the New Negro movement was about reclaiming the word Negro as a part of the identity of African Americans who had previously been called ‘colored.’ He was giving a label to spirituals: it’s America’s true folk music, and he’s naming it....He’s coming right out and saying: this is not just folk songs, but this is folk songs created by Black people, who were called Negro at the time. It was a term of dignity and pride. There were students of Dvořák’s who were white who actually began to experiment with writing spirituals....and William Dawson very much was making it clear who was the creator of this music and why it was created and for what community it was created, even though it was going to go into a concert hall.... [Dawson’s] music represents the music of the time, but it also represents the history of the past. And it blends the two together, and it speaks to who African Americans were up to that point.”