

Minnesota Orchestra
 Christoph König, conductor
 Olga Kern, piano

Thursday, March 23, 2023, 11 am | Orchestra Hall

Friday, March 24, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Hannah Kendall	<i>The Spark Catchers</i>	ca. 10'
Edvard Grieg	Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16 Allegro Adagio Allegro moderato molto e marcato [There is no pause before the final movement.] Olga Kern, piano	ca. 30'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		ca. 20'
Robert Schumann	Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Opus 97, <i>Rhenish</i> Lebhaft Scherzo: Sehr mässig Nicht schnell Feierlich Lebhaft	ca. 35'

pre-concert

Concert Preview with Valerie Little and guests
 Thursday, March 23, 10:15 am, Auditorium
 Friday, March 24, 7:15 pm, Auditorium

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.



Christoph König, conductor

Celebrated for his clarity, precision and elegant approach, Christoph König is in high demand as a guest conductor all over the world. He has been principal conductor and music director of the Solistes Européens Luxembourg since 2010, and this week makes his first appearance with the Minnesota Orchestra. Since his U.S. debut in 2010, he has conducted many major North American symphony orchestras including those of Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, New Jersey, Houston, Oregon and Toronto, as well as the Los Angeles Philharmonic. His other engagements include concerts with the Rochester Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, Orchestre de Paris and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra,

whom he led on a highly successful tour of China in 2008. He previously held conducting positions with the Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, Malmö Symphony Orchestra and l'Orquestra Filarmonica de Gran Canaria, and has been affiliated with many leading opera houses. A recent highlight of his discography is his 2020 recording of the complete Beethoven symphonies on the British label RUBICON. Born in Dresden, König studied conducting, piano and singing at the Musikhochschule Dresden. More: arabella-arts.com, christophkoenigconductor.com.



Olga Kern, piano

With a vivid stage presence, passionately confident musicianship and extraordinary

technique, Olga Kern is widely recognized as one of the great pianists of her generation. Welcomed this week for her Minnesota Orchestra debut, she appears this season with numerous orchestras including the Baltimore Symphony, Dallas Symphony, National Philharmonic Orchestra in Hungary, Orquestra Filarmónica de Gran Canaria in Spain and Orquestra de São Paulo in Brazil. Additional highlights of recent seasons include tours with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra of China. She is also an active recitalist and chamber musician. Her many accolades include first prize at the Gold Medal at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2001—when she became the first woman in more than 30 years to take the honor—a 2008 Grammy nomination for her disc of Rachmaninoff's *Corelli Variations* and the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 2017. Born in Moscow and now an American citizen, she is artistic director of the Olga Kern International Piano Competition, founded in 2016. In 2012 she and her brother Vladimir Kern co-founded the Aspiration Foundation, which provides assistance to musicians throughout the world. More: olgakern.com.

one-minute notes

Kendall: *The Spark Catchers*

Inspired by Lemn Sissay's evocative poem commemorating a Victorian-era match factory workers' strike, *The Spark Catchers* comprises four contrasting sections that summon moods of liveliness, darkness, suspense and delicacy.

Grieg: Piano Concerto

This virtuosic keyboard showcase, written when its composer was only 25, reveals its heritage in evocations of traditional Norwegian song and dance, and contains a wealth of themes and dramatic gestures.

Schumann: Symphony No. 3, *Rhenish*

This five-movement symphony, named for the German Rhineland the composer had just happily journeyed to, opens with energy, syncopations and rhythmic displacements. The charming second and third movements segue to a solemn fourth that brings the symphony's first appearance of trombones, and the finale is a joyful return to sunlight.



Hannah Kendall

Born: 1984,
London, United Kingdom

The Spark Catchers

Premiered: August 30, 2017

Six years ago, Hannah Kendall's *The Spark Catchers*, which was inspired by events of the late 1880s, received its premiere at a music festival whose history extends nearly that far back—the BBC Proms in London. *The Spark Catchers* was commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and premiered by Chineke! at a Proms concert under the baton of Kevin John Edusei on August 30, 2017. Chineke!—Europe's first Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) orchestra—was given a 10:15 p.m. concert time on a Wednesday night for its debut concert at the Proms. Despite such an awkward day and time, Royal Albert Hall was packed with an enthusiastic crowd to witness history.

The evening delivered top-quality performances of works spanning a long history. *The Spark Catchers* was the most recently-written work on the program, and one of two works performed that evening by a composer who was still living (the other work being *Lyric for Strings* by George Walker, who passed away the following year). With its high energy, captivating sound world, intriguing narrative and powerful ending, *The Spark Catchers* illuminated Royal Albert Hall that evening and has continued to intrigue audiences since its 2017 premiere, both through digital recordings and in concert halls.

a blossoming career

Hannah Kendall was born in 1984 in London. Her parents, both from Guyana, encouraged her musical and artistic pursuits, resulting in successful matriculations from the University of Exeter, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the Royal College of Music in London. In 2015, Kendall was featured by *The Telegraph* newspaper in partnership with BBC Radio 3 as one of five composers featured that week who are “brilliant female composers under the age of 35.” After this recognition, Kendall's accolades and projects have blossomed.

In 2016, Kendall completed a chamber opera, *The Knife of Dawn*, concerning the 1953 imprisonment of Martin Carter—a political activist in what was then British Guiana. This dramatic work, directly relating to her own cultural heritage, received critical

acclaim. The following year marked her BBC Proms debut with Chineke! and *The Spark Catchers*, and in 2020 she returned to the Proms for the premiere of *Tuxedo: Vasco 'de' Gama*. Kendall's *Tuxedo* series, which thus far includes 10 entries, is named after a work of visual art by Jean-Michel Basquiat. She notes that Basquiat's “eponymous piece provides one of many graphic scores that [I have] used as inspiration throughout [my] career,” and adds that her music doesn't create musical representations of the images—rather, the artwork sparks her creative process.

Kendall's important and fascinating contributions to the orchestral repertoire place her solidly within the history of Black female orchestrators and symphonists such as the British composers Shirley Thompson OBE and Errollyn Wallen CBE and the American composers Margaret Bonds, Margaret Rosezarian Harris, Julia Perry and Florence Price. Kendall is currently based in New York City, where she is studying composition in the doctor of musical arts program at Columbia University as a Dean's Fellow.

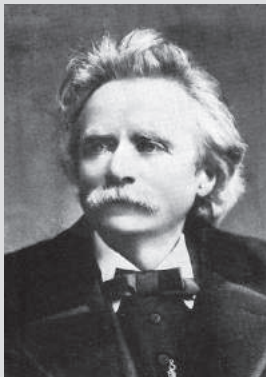
music from poetry: stopping the sparks

To compose *The Spark Catchers*, Kendall used a beloved British poem as a foundational inspiration. That poem, which bears the same title as Kendall's composition, was written by the British-Ethiopian poet Lemn Sissay, and was commissioned for a permanent poetry installation in the London Olympic Park in 2012. At the time, Sissay was the official poet of the London Olympics. His text pays homage to the women and girls who worked in deplorable conditions at the Bryant and May match factory. In 1888, these workers created the first non-unionized strike, which revolutionized labor in Britain. The poem imagines these women and girls practicing, at night, how to catch a spark in the air. In the match factory, these workers were surrounded by highly combustible material, and stopping a spark was necessary to protect property, their employment and, most importantly, their lives.

Kendall's enchanting orchestral fantasy encapsulates both the urgency of this spark-catching tactic and the need to improve labor conditions. The music achieves this mainly through an abundance of repeated notes, syncopation (accenting unexpected rhythms to create a feeling of surprise and vibrance), and a sophisticated use of harmony and dissonance. Kendall's bright sonic color palette highly exaggerates the idea of “spark”; while listening to the music, one can imagine the spark of flint, the spark of an idea, the spark of anger or even the spark of a revolution. Kendall's vivacious orchestral experience pushes aside romanticism, opting rather for power. This power, however, is not a pounding or a screaming power. No—the power in *The Spark Catchers* is a fire birthed from the sparks created by surviving oppressive situations and demanding justice.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, glockenspiel, harp and strings

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



Edvard Grieg

Born: June 15, 1843,
Bergen, Norway

Died: September 4, 1907,
Bergen, Norway

Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16

Premiered: April 3, 1869

In June 1867 Edvard Grieg, then a struggling 24-year-old composer, married his first cousin Nina Hagerup, a soprano. The following summer, wishing for a break from the busy musical life of Norway, the Griegs went to Denmark, where they hoped the milder climate would benefit the composer's often frail health. They rented a two-room garden cottage a few miles outside Copenhagen, and there Grieg began his Piano Concerto in A minor. He completed the score early the following year, and Edmund Neupert gave the first performance in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869. The concerto was an immediate success, but Grieg continued to revise it across the rest of his life: he made the final revisions in 1907, only a few months before his death.

a "splendid" success

Several years after the premiere, the Griegs traveled to Rome, where they visited Franz Liszt in his villa. Liszt sat down at his piano and sight-read this difficult concerto from Grieg's manuscript. Grieg reported that while Liszt played the first movement too fast, his reading of the cadenza was magnificent, and the older master was so taken with the music at one point that he got up and strolled away from the piano with his arms upraised, "literally roaring out the theme." Best of all, Liszt recognized the way Grieg had amended one of the principal themes of the finale when it comes back for a triumphant reappearance at the end. He shouted out: "G-natural! G-natural! Not G-sharp! Splendid!" Liszt played that ending one more time, then told Grieg: "Keep on, I tell you. You have what is needed, and don't let them frighten you."

Liszt's judgment was sound: the Grieg Piano Concerto has become one of the most popular ever written. Its combination of good

tunes alternating with stormy, dramatic gestures, all stitched together with brilliant writing for piano, has made it virtually irresistible to audiences. In a way, this music has become a victim of its own success: by the middle of the last century it had become almost too popular, but over the past generation or so it has appeared much less often in concert halls. Which makes a fresh performance all the more welcome.

the music: from a grand opening to a folk finale

allegro molto moderato. Grieg greatly admired the music of Robert Schumann, and the similarity between the beginnings of their respective piano concertos is striking: each opens with a great orchestral chord followed by a brilliant passage for the solo piano that eases gently into the movement's main theme. Grieg makes his opening even more dramatic by beginning with a long timpani roll that flares up like a peal of thunder; the piano's entrance then flashes downward like a streak of lightning.

The movement's march-like main theme, shared on its first appearance by winds and strings, is only the first of many attractive ideas. (One observer has counted seven different themes in this movement, and these range from a melting lyricism to heaven-storming violence.) The cadenza that Liszt sight-read so well is particularly effective. Though it begins quietly, the concerto soon unleashes great torrents of sound from hammered octaves and brilliant runs. It is altogether typical of this movement that Grieg should introduce a new theme after the cadenza. The piano's pounding, driving chords propel the music to its exciting close.

adagio. The mood changes completely in the *Adagio*. Grieg mutes the strings here and moves to the key of D-flat major, which feels soft and warm after the powerful opening movement. A long orchestral introduction leads to the entrance of the piano, which sounds utterly fresh after the dark, muted strings. But this entrance is deceiving. The piano part soon turns dramatic and drives to its own climax; the music subsides and continues without a break into the finale.

allegro moderato molto e marcato. After an opening flourish, the piano introduces the main theme, a dancing 2/4 idea that sounds as if its roots must be in Norwegian folk music. Once again, this movement is built on a wealth of ideas. At the coda Grieg moves into A major and ingeniously recasts his main theme in 3/4 meter, and the movement drives to its powerful close.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger.**



Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810,
Zwickau, Germany

Died: July 29, 1856,
Bonn, Germany

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Opus 97, *Rhenish*

Premiered: February 6, 1851

On the evening of September 2, 1850, Robert Schumann and his family arrived in Düsseldorf, where he had agreed to take up the position of the orchestra's music director. It was a much-needed fresh start: Schumann had spent the previous six years in Dresden, in various stages of depression, and now he was delighted to escape a city he associated with creative blockage and begin anew. In Düsseldorf he and Clara were feted with a flurry of concerts, dinners and dances, and four weeks later they traveled 30 miles up the Rhine river for the enthronement of Archbishop Geissel of Cologne as a Cardinal. Though the Schumanns were not Catholic, this solemn ceremony in the still-unfinished cathedral made a deep impression on the composer.

a rejuvenated composer

His spirits revived, Schumann plunged into work, quickly composing his Cello Concerto and beginning to conduct the Düsseldorf orchestra. In the midst of this, he set to work on a new symphony. This would be listed as his Third, even though it was the last of the four he composed: he sketched the first movement between November 2 and 9, made another quick visit to Cologne, and had the entire work complete on December 9. The composer led the successful premiere of the Third Symphony in Düsseldorf on February 6, 1851. Things happened faster in those days: from the time Schumann sat down before a blank sheet of manuscript paper until he led the premiere, only 96 days had passed.

Schumann himself contributed the nickname *Rhenish* for the new symphony, but that name needs to be understood carefully. This music paints no scenes and tells no story; it does not set out to translate the fabled Rhine into sound. Rather, it is music inspired by a return to the river on which Schumann had spent happy student days 20 years earlier and which was now the setting for his new job and, he hoped, a return to health. Several movements originally had descriptive titles, but Schumann excluded these from the completed score: he wanted this symphony understood purely as music. To his publisher, Schumann explained simply that the symphony “perhaps mirrors here and there something of Rhenish life.”

energy, charm, grandeur

lebhaft. The structure of the symphony is unusual: it opens with a huge and dramatic sonata-form movement, which is then followed by four relatively short movements. The opening *Lebhaft* (lively) has no introduction—Schumann plunges directly into this music with a theme that swings and thrusts its way forward. The Rhine has become a slow flatland river by the time it reaches Düsseldorf, and one inevitably feels that the Rhine of Schumann's first movement is the river upstream as it rolls through the deep gorges and past the fabled castles of the mountains of western Germany.

The opening is full of a resounding energy that carries all before it, but this music is also remarkable for its syncopations and rhythmic displacements: the effort to beat the downbeats will quickly end in confusion, so skillfully has Schumann written against the expected pattern of the measures. The second subject is a delicate, waltz-like tune introduced by the woodwinds, but it is the opening material that dominates this movement, and—pushed on by some terrific horn calls—this theme drives the movement to a splendid close.

scherzo: sehr mäßig-nicht schnell. The next two movements, melodic and charming, function as interludes. The Scherzo, “very moderate,” is like a comfortable country dance that flows along the easy swing of its main theme; the trio section turns a little darker, and Schumann ingeniously combines these themes in the reprise. The third movement, marked simply *Nicht schnell* (not quickly), alternates the clarinets' delicate opening idea with the violas' expressive second subject.

feierlich. The atmosphere changes completely in the fourth movement, marked *Feierlich* (solemn). Silent until now, three trombones darkly intone the somber main idea in E-flat minor, which Schumann treats to some impressive polyphonic extension, developing this idea in tight imitative canon. In his manuscript Schumann had originally headed this movement “In the character of the accompaniment to a solemn ceremony,” and surely this music was inspired by the ceremonial enthronement of Cardinal Geissel in the vast Cologne Cathedral. This solemn movement drives to a grand close on a series of ringing chords.

lebhaft. Out of their echoes, the finale bursts to life. Commentators have universally been unable to resist comparing this moment to stepping from out of a dark cathedral into the sunlight—and they may well be right. This music leaps to life, but it is worth noting that Schumann marks this beginning *dolce*: “gentle, sweet.” Like the first movement, also marked *Lebhaft*, the finale overflows with energy, and Schumann drives it to a climax that recalls the solemn trombone theme from the fourth movement, now played so loudly that it should shake the hall, and a quick reference to the grand

swing of the opening of the first movement. A brisk coda drives this wonderful music to a close fully worthy of its nickname.

the darkness returns

Despite Schumann's enthusiastic return to the Rhineland, things did not go well in Düsseldorf. He proved an indifferent conductor, soon there were intrigues against him, and periods of black depression inevitably returned. In a sad irony, Schumann attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine in Düsseldorf in 1854; he was rescued by fishermen but placed in an asylum from which he never emerged. Many critics feel that the music of Schumann's final years shows a decline, yet everyone who hears the *Rhenish* Symphony knows that this is an exception to that bleak rule—its power and happiness and assured technique make this the finest work of Schumann's final period. How sad it is that a work written at age 40 should have to be from a composer's "final period."

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.

coda

The Minnesota Orchestra has performed **Hannah Kendall's** *The Spark Catchers* on one prior program—the only past time the ensemble has performed her music—at New Year's Eve and Day concerts at Orchestra Hall marking the arrival of 2020. On that occasion the Orchestra was led by Osmo Vänskä, and the program had a distinctly British flavor: in addition to Kendall's music, the concert featured works by English-born composers Benjamin Britten, Edward Elgar, Peter Maxwell Davies and Thomas Arne.

The Orchestra gave its first performance of **Edvard Grieg's** *Piano Concerto* on March 9, 1906, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting and Raoul Pugno as soloist in the French pianist-composer's sole appearance with the ensemble. The most recent soloist to play the concerto with the Orchestra is Juho Pohjonen, who performed it in September 2019 to open the Orchestra's 2019-20 season and reprised it during the Orchestra's January 2020 visit to Indiana University. Earlier in 2019 the concerto's final movement was played at a series of Young People's and Family concerts with Minnesota native Emma Taggart, winner of the 2018 YPSCA Young People's Concerto Competition, at the keyboard.

The Orchestra's initial performance of **Robert Schumann's** *Rhenish Symphony* came on March 13, 1936, in a performance at Northrop Memorial Auditorium led by Eugene Ormandy. That same concert featured famous violinist Jascha Heifetz as soloist in Brahms' Violin Concerto and was one of the last performances Ormandy led before concluding his six-year term as the Orchestra's third music director and beginning a 44-year tenure at the head of the Philadelphia Orchestra.