

## Minnesota Orchestra

David Afkham, conductor

Emily Magee, soprano

Friday, April 14, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall  
 Saturday, April 15, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Outi Tarkiainen

*The Ring of Fire and Love*

ca. 10'

Richard Wagner/

orch. Felix Mottl/Wagner

*Wesendonck-Lieder*

ca. 25'

Der Engel (The Angel)

Stehe still (Be still)

Im Treibhaus (In the Greenhouse)

Schmerzen (Sorrows)

Träume (Dreams)

*Emily Magee, soprano*

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

ca. 20'

Lili Boulanger

*D'un soir triste* (Of a Sad Evening)

ca. 10'

Claude Debussy

*La Mer*

ca. 23'

From Dawn to Noon on the Sea

Play of the Waves

Dialogue of Wind and Sea

## pre-concert

Pre-concert Performance by Ballet Co.Laboratory

Friday, April 14, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium

Saturday, April 15, 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.





**David Afkham**, conductor

German conductor David Afkham has been chief conductor and artistic director of the Orquesta y Coro Nacional de España since 2019, following a five-year tenure as the orchestra's principal conductor. He is in high demand as a guest conductor with some of the world's finest orchestras and opera houses, from the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood and London Symphony Orchestra to the Glyndebourne Festival and Theater an der Wien, and he has toured with several ensembles including the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He debuted with the Minnesota Orchestra in October 2021, leading a program that featured pianist Emanuel Ax.

Recent and upcoming highlights of his schedule include a debut with the Orchestre National de Lyon and return invitations to the Chicago Symphony and Copenhagen Philharmonic. Earlier this year he conducted Strauss' *Arabella* at Teatro Real in Madrid. Early in his career he was the first recipient of the Bernard Haitink Fund for Young Talent and winner of the 2008 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition in London. More: [askonasholt.com](http://askonasholt.com), [davidafkham.com](http://davidafkham.com).



**Emily Magee**, soprano

American soprano Emily Magee is in great demand as an important voice on

the world's leading opera and concert stages, from the Metropolitan Opera to the Vienna State Opera, Royal Opera House and La Scala. She has won acclaim in a wide variety of roles, particularly those of Richard Strauss, Wagner and Puccini, with Kaiserin in Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten* having emerged as a signature role. She is featured in many recordings, including as Ariadne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* from the Salzburg Festival, and appears often at major European summer festivals, including the Bayreuth Festival, where next summer she will sing Sieglinde in *Die Walküre* and Gutrune in *Götterdämmerung*. Elsewhere in the 2022-23 season she sings Elsa in *Lohengrin* with Opera Australia and Oper Leipzig, the title role in *Tosca* with Liceu Opera Barcelona and as a soloist in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Dresden Philharmonic, Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the Gewandhaus Orchestra and Verdi's Requiem with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, among other engagements. More: [emilymagee.com](http://emilymagee.com).

### one-minute notes

#### **Tarkiainen: *The Ring of Fire and Love***

Outi Tarkiainen's *The Ring of Fire and Love*, premiered in 2021, is music that speaks to the moment of birth—"this earth-shattering, creative, cataclysmic moment [the mother and child] travel through together," says the composer.

#### **Wagner: *Wesendonck-Lieder***

Richard Wagner composed five songs for voice and piano to poems by Mathilde Wesendonck. The two had a mutual infatuation that may have extended to a love affair, and the songs remain a memento of their relationship. They are heard here in a soprano-and-orchestra version, with the last of the set orchestrated by Wagner himself and the other four by composer-conductor Felix Mottl.

#### **Boulanger: *Of a Sad Evening***

*D'un soir triste* (Of a Sad Evening) was the final music from the pen of Lili Boulanger, whose brief life spanned less than a quarter-century. Deeply felt music of both sorrow and hope, it is notable for a melancholic song from the clarinets and a gently uplifting close.

#### **Debussy: *La Mer***

Claude Debussy's classic oceanic portrait recreates the feeling of a visit to the sea. Two slower movements surround a scherzo as a kaleidoscopic stream of musical fragments eventually builds to a thrilling, bombastic close.



## Outi Tarkiainen

**Born:** February 7, 1985,  
Rovaniemi, Finland

### *The Ring of Fire and Love*

**Premiered:** March 18, 2021

The orchestral works of young Finnish composer Outi Tarkiainen have been nurtured by some of today's leading orchestras around the globe, perhaps because her music reverberates well with lovers of orchestral music. Her music communicates successfully in a manner that is simple and at times quite colorful—through melodies and orchestration that evoke the spirit of Wagner, Brahms, Tchaikovsky or John Williams—with an often cinematic quality pervading her large ensemble creations. Drawing from multiple sources of inspiration, Tarkiainen filters all of these sources into sonic environments that comment on numerous aspects of the human experience.

### the bold north

Tarkiainen was born in 1985 in Rovaniemi, Finland, about 500 miles north of the nation's capital, Helsinki. Her love for the north brought her to live for a time even further in that direction, in the town of Ivalo. She has stated that she has “a fundamental longing for the northernmost regions within me,” and this love shines powerfully in her icy musical textures. Tarkiainen also owes part of her development to the American south and her studies at the University of Miami, which complemented her education at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. Another significant aspect of her career is her work in a genre that was created in a southern U.S. geography: jazz. She has had significant experience as a composer-conductor in leading jazz orchestras throughout Europe, including the Slovenian Big Band and the Metropole Orchestra.

It's no surprise, then, that Tarkiainen's musical palette is full of differing textures and sensitivities, notably combining the cool, clear harmonies of the north with a warm, rich southern jazz vernacular. Moreover, her music also is concerned with womanhood and femininity. For example, her 2019 work *Midnight Sun Variations* was inspired by the birth of her son, which occurred during a summer night in the northern part of Finnish Lapland, when that part of the country has 24 hours of light.

### an earth-shattering moment

A year after she composed that work, Tarkiainen crafted an orchestral work that also uses childbirth as a foundation: *The Ring of Fire and Love*. In her notes, she offers this explanation of the title and concept:

“‘The ring of fire’ is a volcanic belt that surrounds the Pacific Ocean...It is also the term referring to the bright ring of sunlight around the moon at the height of a solar eclipse...Yet, the same expression is also used to describe what a woman feels when, as she gives birth, the baby's head passes through her pelvis. That moment is the most dangerous in the baby's life...[This piece is] about this earth-shattering, creative, cataclysmic moment they travel through together.”

Tarkiainen starts *The Ring of Fire and Love* in the middle of a difficult moment in the birthing process. The orchestra explodes with loud, scintillating gestures that seem unstable and insistent. After this cry, the texture sinks into a rumble—a rumble that ultimately forms the foundation upon which this cyclical journey rests. The rumbling introduces a hypnotic motive, heard predominantly in the harp and the celesta. Around this hypnotic motive are cries, coos, shivering, trembling, undulations, pleas, mantras and affirmations stated with a quiet power throughout the range of instruments.

One musical technique that Tarkiainen uses in abundance to achieve these textures and colors is called *tremolo*—a rapid statement of one or more notes, usually at a quick speed. The tremolo has many different variations, especially within this score. For example, at the very start of the piece, the swelling of the suspended cymbal is a tremolo. After the first massive descent, the rumbling is created by tremolo in the low strings, timpani, tamtam and bass drum; during the first moments of the hypnotic gesture, the violins and the violas execute two different types of tremolo. The piece ends with a soft tremolo emanating from violas, violins, timpani and bass drum.

### love in the fire, fire in love

Structurally, *The Ring of Fire and Love* is in two sections, with each section containing two different environments. The first section begins in a “fire” environment and ends in a “love” environment. The second section also follows this structure, but the duration of each environment is longer. In the first section, the fire material seems to come and go quite quickly before the love material is introduced. When the fire material returns to start the second section, it lasts longer, it is further developed, it is more urgent. To conclude, the love material returns and lasts longer than any other environment of the piece.

Even though the piece has this division of “fire” and “love” environments, there is love in the fire, and there is fire in the love—implying a cyclical approach to the sonic environment, round like a ring. Additionally, as the piece ends, it is rather easy to imagine another cycle of fire and love material emerging, and thus this ring of fire and love is placed permanently on our souls after we listen to this gripping orchestral poem.

*The Ring of Fire and Love* was co-commissioned by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra (RSPO), the Jyväskylä Sinfonia, and the Kymi Sinfonietta. It was first performed by the RSPO on March 17, 2021, at the Stockholm Concert Hall, with Sakari Oramo conducting.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, crotales, glockenspiel, gong, snare drum, tam-tam, bass drum, cymbals, glass and shell wind chimes, harp, celesta, and strings

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



## Richard Wagner

**Born:** May 22, 1813,  
Leipzig, Germany

**Died:** February 13, 1883,  
Venice, Italy

## *Wesendonck-Lieder*, orchestrated by Felix Mottl and Richard Wagner

**Composed:** 1857-58 (original songs)

Richard Wagner composed five songs for voice and piano setting poetry by Mathilde Wesendonck in 1857-58, and while the music itself is not scandalous, the story behind it certainly is. Wagner composed them as he was engrossed in work on the opera *Tristan and Isolde* while living in Switzerland. At the time he was in exile from Germany, where he had managed to escape the wrath of the Dresden police after he had gotten too involved with a radical politic fringe inspired by the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. After a warrant for Wagner’s arrest was issued, Franz Liszt gave him the money to escape across the Swiss border with his first wife Minna, armed with a fraudulent passport.

## notes from a scandal

In Zurich, Wagner met up with Otto Wesendonck and his wife, Mathilde. The family were Wagner “groupies” who first came in touch with the composer when they heard him conduct his

*Tannhäuser* Overture in Zurich in 1851, and they quickly became important financial benefactors. Wagner sorely needed the funds, and in any case—his ego not being underdeveloped—he considered himself more than deserving of whatever benefaction anyone cared to bestow on him.

In this case, Wagner’s sense of entitlement extended to Mathilde Wesendonck herself, and the two entered into what must at the very least be described as a passionate friendship. This went on until August 1858, by which time their close relationship was so public that social propriety required that the situation be tamed. Both parties remained married throughout, though Mathilde’s husband seems to have been less upset about things than was Wagner’s wife. Mathilde unquestionably played the role of muse to Wagner as the simmering passion of *Tristan and Isolde* sprung from his mind to the page, but Wagner’s interest in—or use for—her played itself out by the time *Tristan* reached its final cadence. After those heady years together they maintained an aloof cordiality, but not more.

Fortunately, a memento of the better times of their relationship remains in the five *Wesendonck-Lieder*, which Wagner identified on the cover of a manuscript score as “five amateur poems.” He wasn’t being unfair, really: Mathilde was an amateur in an era rife with parlor poets and verses the cannot be said to rise above the level of their time. Nonetheless, Wagner labored carefully over his musical settings of her poems, revising each of them at least once.

## reimagined for orchestra

In their original form, the *Wesendonck-Lieder* were first performed publicly in 1862 at the villa of the Schott family, near Mainz, by the soprano Emile Genast and pianist Hans von Bulow. They are heard this week in a version for soprano and orchestra, of which Wagner himself produced the last of the set, *Träume*, in 1857, while the other four orchestrations were completed in 1893 by the composer-conductor Felix Mottl.

Mottl, who was born in Bayreuth in 1856, was noted for his mastery of leading Wagner’s music and had a hand in preparing the first complete cycle of Wagner’s *Ring* operas in Bayreuth in 1876, assisting Hans Richter on that occasion. In 1886 he conducted Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* in Bayreuth, an experience that proved relevant to his orchestration of *Wesendonck-Lieder*, as Wagner referred to two songs in that set—*Im Treibhaus* and *Träume*, here performed as the third and fifth movements—as “studies for *Tristan und Isolde*.”


The first song, *Der Engel* (The Angel), is based on a passage from a different Wagner opera, *Das Rheingold*, depicting the compassion of angels who carry earthy spirits up to heaven. The second song, *Stehe still* (Be still) expresses a plea for time to



stop to allow the experience of pure being. *Im Treibhaus* (In the Greenhouse) reflects on the nothingness of reality and embraces the void, employing music that bears a strong kinship to the third act prelude from *Tristan and Isolde*, while *Schmerzen* (Sorrows) ponders the paradox of life and death. Finally *Träume* (Dreams) expresses the longing for dissolution of being, sharing material with the love duo in King Mark's Garden from *Tristan and Isolde*'s second act.

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

Program note by *Mary Ann Feldman*.



**Lili Boulanger**  
**Born:** August 21, 1893,  
 Paris, France  
**Died:** March 15, 1918,  
 Mézy-sur-Seine, France

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***D'un soir triste***  
**(Of a Sad Evening)**  
 Composed: 1918

Marie Juliette “Lili” Boulanger was born the youngest daughter in a musical family; her father was a professor of music at the Paris Conservatory, while her mother and grandparents were also musicians. It was her sister Nadia who first made the family name famous as one of the pre-eminent composition teachers of the 20th century, a pedagogue to pupils such as Aaron Copland, Elliott Carter, Philip Glass and Adolphus Hailstork, among many others. While Nadia's life and work spanned nearly a century, Lili's extraordinary musical accomplishments were condensed into an unfortunately short timeline. Her star burned bright in its own way, though (and still does—an asteroid discovered in 1927 was named 1181 Lilit in her honor).

The work on today's program, *D'un soir triste* (Of a Sad Evening) was the last that Lili Boulanger attempted to put on paper with her own hand. It is a companion piece to *D'un matin de printemps* (Of a Spring Morning), which the Minnesota Orchestra performed last October in a program led by the Orchestra's Music Director Designate Thomas Søndergård. After this pair of works, Nadia transcribed some of Lili's last musical ideas for her until the young composer lost her battle at age 24 to what we now know was Crohn's disease.

## a brief life of highs and lows

To understand the emotions behind *D'un soir triste*, it is important to envision the events in Lili Boulanger's life at the time. Four years prior to the work's composition, Boulanger became the first woman ever to win the top prize at the Prix de Rome in France, doing so at just 20 years of age. The Prix de Rome was the pinnacle of achievement for aspiring French composers and had been a thread through the Boulanger family for years. Boulanger's father Ernest, who died when she was a young child, had received the honor in 1835; her sister had also submitted her work for evaluation, unfortunately without success. Boulanger first competed for the Prix de Rome as a teenager, but her failing health interjected and she collapsed mid-performance. Just one year later, however, she returned and won the top prize and the honor of a multi-year scholarship to study and compose in Rome.

As war broke out across Europe, the tide turned quickly, ending her residency as soon as it had begun. It was during this time that doctors informed Boulanger that she would only have a few years left to live. She invested what little energy she had to supporting the artists who had stepped up to the front lines of war, working with her sister and other music students to send care packages to soldiers. Nevertheless, the combined emotional weight of the devastations of war and her failing health was profound. She worked rapidly to finish some incomplete composition projects, including *D'un soir triste*. Now, it is nearly impossible to not feel the personal heartbreak expressed through this music.

The piece was kept in Nadia Boulanger's personal collection until soon before her own death six decades later. JoAnn Falletta, music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, worked alongside the Women's Philharmonic Orchestra to make *D'un soir triste* and other works by Lili Boulanger accessible, transcribing her nearly illegible handwriting into playable parts and advocating for this music to be performed by ensembles around the world.

## music of deep emotion

A quick glance through the score for *D'un soir triste* will tell you much about the deep emotions of this piece even if you cannot read the music itself. Markings include words such as sorrowful, painful, intense and resigned, but also distant, sweet and elegiac. As a dark, melancholic song emerges from the clarinet section, the strings pulse beneath meandering woodwind chords, relentlessly building in intensity. In soft moments midway through the work, solos expressing deep reflection pass through the orchestra, trading between individual wind and string players. Both sorrow and hope sweep through Boulanger's music, until her last penned notes gently lift upward into the clouds.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, harp, celesta, bass drum, suspended cymbal, tamtam and strings

Program note by **Emma Plehal**.



## Claude Debussy

**Born:** August 22, 1862,  
Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

**Died:** March 25, 1918,  
Paris, France

## *La Mer*

**Premiered:** October 15, 1905

In the summer of 1903, the 41-year-old Debussy took a cottage in the French wine country, where he set to work on a new orchestral piece inspired by his feelings about the sea. To André Messager he wrote, “I expect you will say that the hills of Burgundy aren’t washed by the sea and that what I’m doing is like painting a landscape in a studio, but my memories are endless and are in my opinion worth more than the real thing, which tends to pull down one’s ideas too much.”

### the sea as a concept

Had Richard Strauss written this work, he would have made us hear the thump of waves along the shoreline, the cries of wheeling sea-birds, the hiss of foam across the sand. Debussy’s aims were far different: he wanted this music to give us the feeling of being in the ocean’s presence, to feel the *idea*, particularly his own idea, of the ocean. Thus *La Mer* sets out not to make us see whitecaps—but to awaken in us a sense of the sea’s elemental power and beauty.

*La Mer* consists of two moderately paced movements surrounding a scherzo, created from seeming fragments of musical materials. We discover hints of themes, rhythmic shapes and flashes of color that reappear throughout the work, like kaleidoscopic bits in an evolving mosaic of color and rhythm.

**from dawn to noon on the sea.** The work begins with a murmur, quiet yet strong. Out of darkness, glints of color and motion emerge, and solo trumpet and English horn share a fragmentary tune that will also return in the final movement. As the morning brightens, the music becomes more animated and a wealth of ideas follows: swirling rhythms, a noble horn chorale, a dancing

figure for the cello section. At the movement’s close, the horn chorale builds to an unexpectedly powerful climax. Out of this splendid sound, a solitary brass chord winds the music into silence.

**play of the waves.** Opening with shimmering swirls of color, the second movement is brilliant, dancing and surging throughout—it has a sense of fun and play, as a scherzo should. One moment it can be sparkling and light, the next it will surge up darkly. In the delicate close, solo instruments seem to evaporate into the shining mist.

**dialogue of wind and sea.** The mood changes sharply at the beginning of the final movement, which Debussy specifies should sound “animated and tumultuous.” The ominous growl of lower strings prefaces a restatement of the trumpet tune from the very beginning, and soon the horn chorale returns as well. Woodwinds sing gently and wistfully before the music builds to a huge explosion. Moments later their tune returns in a touch of pure instrumental magic: against rippling harps and the violins’ high harmonics, solo flute brings back this melody with the greatest delicacy. The effect is extraordinary—suddenly we feel a sense of enormous space and calm. Yet within seconds this same shape roars out with all the power of the full orchestra. Earlier themes are recalled and whipped into the vortex as the music hurtles to a tremendous climax, with dissonant brass bellowing out the final chord.

Debussy may be popularly identified as the composer of “impressionistic” moods, full of muted color and subtle understatement. The conclusion of *La Mer*, however, is anything but the music of water lilies: it is driven by a force beyond human imagination. The normally understated Debussy makes us feel that wild strength in the most bombastic ending he ever wrote.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, triangle, glockenspiel, 2 harps and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.