

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Juraj Valčuha, conductor
Jörgen van Rijen, trombone

Friday, October 13, 2023, 8PM
Saturday, October 14, 2023, 7PM | Orchestra Hall

Betsy Jolas	<i>A Little Summer Suite</i> Strolling away Knocks and clocks Strolling about Shakes and quakes Strolling under Chants and cheers Strolling home	CA. 10'
James MacMillan	Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra [in one movement] <i>Jörgen van Rijen, trombone</i>	CA. 30'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	CA. 20'
Dmitri Shostakovich	Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Opus 47 Moderato Allegretto Largo Allegro non troppo	CA. 48'

THANK YOU

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JURAJ VALČUHA,
CONDUCTOR

Conductor Juraj Valčuha is recognized for the effortless expressiveness and the depth of his musicianship. Since June 2022 he has been music director of the Houston Symphony. He was previously music director of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, first guest conductor of the Konzerthausorchester Berlin and chief conductor of the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della Rai. He led the Minnesota Orchestra most recently in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in November 2021. His engagements in 2023 and 2024 take him to the Houston, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Chicago symphonies as well as Tokyo's Yomiuri Nippon Orchestra. On the opera stage he conducts *Fanciulla del West* and *Tristan and Isolde* at the Bavarian State Opera and at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, *Jenufa* at the Opera di Roma and *Salomé* at the Semperoper in Dresden. He also leads concerts with the RAI Orchestra, Orchestra dell'Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Orchestre National de France, and the NDR, SWR and Bamberg symphonies, among others. A champion of living composers, he has premiered major works by Christopher Rouse and Steven Mackey. More: jurajvalcuha.com.



JÖRGEN VAN RIJEN,
TROMBONE

Dutch trombonist Jörgen van Rijen is much in demand as a soloist with a special commitment to promoting his instrument, developing new repertoire for the trombone and bringing the existing repertoire to a broader audience. He is a specialist on both the modern and Baroque trombone and has performed as a soloist in most European countries, as well as the U.S., Canada, Japan, China, Korea, Russia, Singapore and Australia. He has performed concertos with orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (of which he is the principal trombonist), Czech Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Taiwan Philharmonic, Nagoya Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony, Antwerp Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. In 2004 he was awarded the Netherlands Music Prize—the country's highest distinction in the field of music—by the Dutch Ministry of Culture. He teaches at the Amsterdam Conservatory and has been appointed International Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, London. He is also an active chamber musician in ensembles such as the New Trombone Collective, RCO Brass and Brass United. More: rayfieldallied.com, jorgenvanrijen.com.

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Jolas: *A Little Summer Suite*

Betsy Jolas' *A Little Summer Suite* consists of interconnected sections, strolling through various moods which each have a distinct sonic identity, including enchanting melodies from the winds and the contributions of a massive percussion array.

MacMillan: *Trombone Concerto*

While mourning his late granddaughter, James MacMillan worked with trombonist Jörgen van Rijen to craft a virtuosic and emotionally impactful concerto for him. Cast in a single half-hour movement, the concerto navigates various moods and themes, including a foundational seven-note motif, a dance-like scherzo and a hymn-like close.

Shostakovich: *Symphony No. 5*

Dmitri Shostakovich's Fifth, the most frequently performed of his 15 symphonies, is forceful and questioning. It imitates the form of a classical symphony until its icy third movement, scored without brass, as gorgeous melodies rise and fall. Dueling critics have interpreted the finale as either triumphant or a biting sarcastic rebuke of Joseph Stalin's authoritarian regime.



BETSY JOLAS

B: August 5, 1926
Paris, France

A Little Summer Suite
PREMIERED: June 16, 2016

There’s a ringing truth to actress Joan Collins’ witticism that “Age is just a number...unless, of course, you happen to be a bottle of wine”—and there’s an equal certainty that the career of French-born composer Betsy Jolas has aged like fine wine. Jolas, who celebrated her 97th birthday last August, has enjoyed some of her greatest career triumphs in the past decade, including two commissions from the Berlin Philharmonic. This week the Minnesota Orchestra brings her music to its stands for the first time, playing *A Little Summer Suite*—the first of the Berlin Philharmonic commissions—which that ensemble premiered on June 16, 2016, under Sir Simon Rattle’s baton.

“ANYWHERE AT ANY TIME”

A Little Summer Suite spans 10 minutes and is presented in seven short movements that flow together with only a brief fermata—a held note or rest—separating them. The suite shares some connective tissue with another well-known work comprising short movements, as Jolas explains in her own program note. “I’ve been toying lately, in much of my work, with the notion of ‘wandering music’; in other words, music which seems aimless and could land anywhere at any time,” she says. “This concept, obviously inherited from Mussorgsky’s justly famous *Pictures at an Exhibition*, is at the root of the seven-movement structure of my *Little Summer Suite*.” The work alternates between “strolling” movements—the first, third, fifth and seventh are titled *Strolling away*, *Strolling about*, *Strolling under* and *Strolling home*—and three movements that come in between: *Knocks and clogs*, *Shakes and quakes* and *Chants and cheers*.

A Little Summer Suite downplays traditional tonality in favor of more modern harmonic systems pioneered in the 20th century, such as 12-tone rows in which all 12 pitches available in a chromatic scale are each played once without repetition. Colorful scoring and moments of great lyricism, particularly from a songlike solo oboe, alternate with near-percussive treatment of the winds, brass and strings, which periodically play short, staccato interjections. A large but judiciously used array of percussion instruments sometimes comes to the fore on its own. Tempos vary from a slow opening, in which 12-tone patterns unfold in the low strings, to more rapid and unpredictable music—fulfilling Jolas’ promise of music that “could land anywhere at any

time.” The close offers one last surprise: a fade-out and long fermata rest in which we wonder if the piece has ended, then two soft staccato notes from the whole ensemble.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born in Paris to American parents—her mother a mezzo singer and her father a literary journal editor—Betsy Jolas studied composition with Darius Milhaud and Olivier Messiaen at the Paris Conservatoire, where she herself later taught, and was also influenced by the modernist music of Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Among her compositions are six stage works, more than 25 pieces for orchestra with or without soloist, a large output of chamber, duet and solo works, and nearly 50 pieces employing the human voice. She has stated that her 2022 work *Ces belles années...*, composed for the Berlin Philharmonic, will be her last for orchestra. Her late-career success, though, is prompting a revival of her earlier catalogue—the fine wine of her musical output earning ever-wider appreciation by the masses.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo and alto flute), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, military drum, side drum, 3 sizzle cymbals, 3 suspended cymbals, bongos, glass chimes, wood chimes, claves, crotales, gong, maracas, metal blocks, rain stick, 2 tamtams, temple blocks, tom-toms, 2 triangles, wood blocks, 2 wooden boards, marimba, vibraphone, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER.



JAMES MACMILLAN

B: July 16, 1959
Kilwinning, Scotland

Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra
PREMIERED: April 20, 2017

Of the countless possible inspirations for a musical work, few resonate more deeply with audiences than the pain of losing a loved one—and in listening to such a piece, we can empathize or reflect on losses of our own. A large-scale orchestral composition often stems from more than one inspiration, and Sir James MacMillan’s Trombone Concerto blends a personal tragedy with the composer’s ties to an esteemed solo musician, bringing forth a work of great virtuosity and emotional heft.

The Trombone Concerto was written in 2016 while the composer was mourning his late granddaughter, Sara Maria MacMillan, who had recently passed away at the age of 5. Both she and this week’s soloist Jörgen van Rijen—who premiered the concerto six years ago with Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra—are the work’s dedicatees. An international consortium of orchestras joined the premiering ensemble in commissioning the concerto: the Royal Flemish Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra de la Suisse Romande, Oulu Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonisches Orchester des Staatstheaters Cottbus and Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

A SPARK FROM THE SOLOIST

The first spark that led to MacMillan’s concerto came from the soloist rather than the composer. Van Rijen’s trombone choir had performed arrangements of several choral compositions by MacMillan, and he approached the composer to request a more substantial addition to the trombone repertoire. MacMillan then worked closely with van Rijen to bolster his knowledge of the instrument and the specialties van Rijen could bring to a new work.

After committing to write a concerto for van Rijen, MacMillan and his family experienced a heartbreaking tragedy: the death of the composer’s young granddaughter Sara, who had suffered from a congenital brain condition. The concerto was the first piece MacMillan composed after her passing, and it takes the listeners through a journey of many moods and atmospheres. Although MacMillan states that he doesn’t consider it a “morose” work, he notes that “as I settled down to write it...thoughts of Sara were with me all the time. It’s a big abstract piece, it has no particular message, but subliminally it’s haunted by her memory.”

THE MUSIC

MacMillan has provided his own description of the concerto, which is cast in a single movement.

“[The Trombone Concerto is] based on a ‘ghostly’ theme of seven notes (and three pitches) which is heard at the start and repeats in many different guises throughout the opening slow section. Each time it is joined by new counter-material, most importantly a high expressive melody on solo trombone. This solo material descends in tessitura as the other accompaniments become busier and unsettled.

“Eventually the music gives way to a dance-like ‘scherzo’ variation, based on the opening melodic shape. This is an *Allegro*, marked *marcato e ritmico*. This halts abruptly when some of the opening slow counter-materials return and are briefly developed, principally a prominent flute melody.

“A new dance rhythm takes over, a flowing waltz-like idea, again a variation on the opening theme. Gradually this poise is undermined by fast scurrying on the lower instruments, which eventually throws the music forward

into the central ‘development’ and the pulse gets faster and more frantic. This is halted briefly by a contrapuntal quartet for the four trombones, before the music reaches its fastest point, dominated by the sound of a siren!

“The quartet music is reprised, but this time with four violas. This heralds the main slow section of the concerto, which is initially hymn-like in character, but settles to an episode which highlights the trombone in ‘discussion’ with solo horn and two solo cellos, where the music is marked *delicato e lontano, espressivo, dolente* and ‘like chamber music.’ A new, high, intervallically-altered and ethereal version of the main theme arrives at the end of this, and the concerto finally moves to the final dance-like section, throwing ‘chugging’ strings against virtuoso fast tonguing on trombone. This climaxes in a cadenza where the four trombones have a final semi-improvised conversation before a brief codetta, dominated by the hymn-like expressivity from earlier.”

Van Rijen performed the world premiere on April 20, 2017, with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, of which he serves as principal trombone, under the direction of Iván Fischer. A recording of the premiere was later released on the BIS Records label. In a review of the premiere, a critic from the Dutch newspaper *De Trouw* opined that “at the very end van Rijen and MacMillan struck me down completely: between the serene harmonies which came to a moment of rest, the trombone once more entered with a heart-breaking eruption....It is a concerto for eternity, and trombone players could use one.”

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

James MacMillan’s music first attracted attention with the acclaimed premiere of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* at the BBC Proms in 1990, and his many compositions since then have received worldwide recognition. He has written music in all the major classical forms—including five symphonies, 17 concertos and three operas—as well as three music theater works and a large output of choral music. In 2015 he was awarded a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II. A bookend to that moment came seven years later, when MacMillan’s anthem *Who Shall Separate Us?* was commissioned for the Queen’s funeral—paying more testament to the power of music in capturing the feeling of loss and helping ease the pain of this unifying human experience.

Instrumentation: solo trombone with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, crotales, siren, tamtam, temple blocks, 2 timbales, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY MARTA SIKORA.



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

B: September 25, 1906
St. Petersburg, Russia

D: August 9, 1975
Moscow, Russia

**Symphony No. 5 in
D minor, Opus 47**

PREMIERED: November 21,
1937

Shostakovich's Fifth is as popular as it is enigmatic—which is to say greatly on both counts. It was composed in the aftermath of the savage January 1936 attack by the Communist propaganda newspaper *Pravda* on Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which probably had been ordered by Stalin himself. Before that, Shostakovich had been the bright young star of Soviet music. Now, virtually overnight, he found himself in disgrace, his career in ruins and he himself perhaps ticketed for a labor camp—or worse.

After soul searching, Shostakovich composed his Fifth Symphony between April and July 1937, and its triumphant premiere in Leningrad on November 21 of that year signaled his artistic and political rehabilitation. One of the most striking features of this music is Shostakovich's return to classical form, a move that has signaled capitulation to some Western critics. But it may well be that Shostakovich felt some truth in the denunciation and that his music did need greater balance, restraint and stability.

A SYMPHONY OF INTENSE DRAMA

MODERATO. The first movement opens with ominous canonic exchanges between string sections, and these give way to the violins' quietly twisting main theme. Shostakovich introduces the simple rhythmic motif (short-short-long) that will saturate and unify the entire symphony. There follows a beautiful episode: over string accompaniment that pulses along on the rhythmic motif, first violins sing a melody full of wide leaps. But the wonder is that this peaceful theme, which sounds completely new, is actually a subtle transformation of the powerful canonic introduction to the symphony.

The entrance of the piano signals the beginning of the development. Now themes that had been peaceful at their introduction are made shrill, almost hysterical in their intensity. The movement reaches a climax on a furious tamtam stroke as brass stamp out the rhythmic motif. Shostakovich resolves the tensions beautifully: the themes now return peacefully and, with its energy spent, the movement ends quietly.

ALLEGRETTO. Many have felt the influence of Mahler in the bittersweet second movement that waltzes past in quickstep time. Much of the fun lies in the instrumental color—the sardonic solo clarinet, the solo violin's slides in the trio and the rattling sound of the xylophone.

LARGO. The third movement's scoring is unique: Shostakovich eliminates the brass, divides the strings into eight parts and gives a prominent role to harp, piano and celesta. He wrote this movement in one great arc, and the *Largo* features lean textures, an icy sound and some of his most beautiful melodies. It rises to a great climax, then falls away to end quietly on the eerie sound of harp harmonics.

ALLEGRO NON TROPPO. Out of this quiet, the finale rips to life with pounding timpani, ringing brass and boundless energy; an angular second subject arrives in the solo trumpet over whirring strings. The militaristic bombast of this movement has bothered some listeners, but Shostakovich rescues it by his stunning transformation of this bluff beginning. Gradually these themes are made to slow down and sing, and material that had been strident on its first appearance yields unsuspected melodic riches in the subdued center section. Shostakovich gathers his forces and drives the symphony to a triumphant, if somewhat raucous, close in D major.

INTERPRETING THE MUSIC

Music this dramatic cries out for interpretation, and it has become the *locus classicus* of what might be called “The Great Shostakovich Debate” between two groups: those who regard this symphony as sincere and consciously heroic, and those Western critics unwilling to accept the proposition that great music might have been composed under the Soviet system. Its triumph, they say, is hollow, a conscious nose-thumbing at a political regime that insisted on happy endings from its artists.

Heard for itself, it remains an exciting work, satisfying both emotionally and artistically. Far from being a capitulation, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony marks a refinement of his musical language and an engagement with those classical principles that would energize his music for the next 40 years.

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

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.