

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Nina Bernat, bass

Thursday, February 22, 2024, 11AM

Friday, February 23, 2024, 8PM

Saturday, February 24, 2024, 7PM

Orchestra Hall

Gioachino Rossini	Overture to <i>The Barber of Seville</i>	CA. 7'
Giovanni Bottesini	Concerto No. 2 in B minor for Bass and String Orchestra Allegro moderato Andante Finale: Allegro <i>Nina Bernat, bass</i>	CA. 15'
Anders Hillborg	<i>Through Lost Landscapes</i>	CA. 13'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		CA. 20'
Eduard Tubin	Concerto for Bass and Orchestra Allegro con moto Allegro non troppo Allegro non troppo, poco marciale [The three movements are played without pause] <i>Nina Bernat, bass</i>	CA. 20'
Kevin Puts	Concerto for Orchestra Hymn for the Hurting Caccia no. 1 Music Box with Arietta Toccata Siciliana Ecco la Marcia? (Caccia No. 2)	CA. 24'

PRE-CONCERT

Performance by Le Quatuor International de Saxophones

Thursday, February 22, 10:15am, Target Atrium | Friday, February 23, 7:15pm, Target Atrium

Saturday, February 24, 6:15pm, Target Atrium

THANK YOU

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OSMO VÄNSKÄ,
CONDUCTOR

Minnesota Orchestra Conductor Laureate Osmo Vänskä, whose 19-year tenure as the Orchestra's music director concluded in summer 2022, is renowned internationally for his compelling interpretations of the standard, contemporary and Nordic repertoires. His multi-year recording project with the ensemble to record all ten of Gustav Mahler's symphonies concluded in November 2022 with sessions of the Third Symphony. Vänskä's previous recordings with the Orchestra include all of the Sibelius and Beethoven symphonies, which included discs that earned a Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performances and two additional Grammy nominations. Vänskä also led the ensemble on major tours to Cuba, Europe and South Africa. As a guest conductor, he has received extraordinary praise for his work with many of the world's leading orchestras. He previously served as music director of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and Finland's Lahti Symphony. He began his music career as a clarinetist and continues to perform on that instrument. This season he conducts the orchestras of Atlanta, Bergen, Detroit, Netherlands Radio, Antwerp, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Tokyo Metropolitan, Sydney, Adelaide and Toronto, among other ensembles. More: minnesotaorchestra.org, harrisonparrott.com.



NINA BERNAT, BASS

Double bassist Nina Bernat, acclaimed for her interpretive maturity, expressive depth and technical clarity, has emerged onto the world stage with many awards and accolades to her credit. In 2023 she was honored as a recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant and winner of the Concert Artists Guild Elmaleh Competition. Recent awards include first prizes in the Barbash J.S. Bach String Competition, the FRIENDS of the Minnesota Orchestra Young Artist Competition, the Juilliard Double Bass Competition and the 2019 International Society of Bassists Solo Competition. She has been invited to perform as guest principal bass with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Oslo Philharmonic, serving under the batons of conductors such as András Schiff and Osmo Vänskä. Bernat is in demand as a passionate chamber musician. She begins her involvement with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center as a member of the Bowers Program in 2024. Among her notable chamber performances are appearances with the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players, Bridgehampton Chamber Music Series and Mostly Music. She performs on an instrument passed down from her father, Mark Bernat, attributed to Guadagnini. More: ninabernat.com.

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Rossini: Overture to *The Barber of Seville*

Rossini's overture sets the stage for an opera full of wit and comic intrigue. A slow introduction builds to an exciting *Allegro con brio*, with a well-known "laughing" main theme, and the music crescendos to a sparkling close.

Bottesini: Bass Concerto No. 2

Bottesini did for the bass what Niccolò Paganini did for the violin, and his Bass Concerto No. 2 is a hallmark in the bass repertory. Rich with lyrical melodies and plenty of virtuosic writing, the work allows the soloist to put their full mastery of the instrument on display.

Hillborg: *Through Lost Landscapes*

Hillborg's *Through Lost Landscapes* alludes to the disaster-struck state of the planet today. Its greatly varied scoring includes dense tone clusters, jazz-style piano, solo passages for soprano saxophone and haunting imitations of bird calls.

Tubin: Bass Concerto

Estonian composer Eduard Tubin wrote his Concerto for Bass and Orchestra for fellow countryman Ludvig Juth, who was a bass player in the Boston Symphony. The work is suffused with expansive melodic ideas and contains a unique cadenza which Juth called "unprecedented for the bass."

Puts: Concerto for Orchestra

In composing his recent Concerto for Orchestra, Kevin Puts found a "creative entry point" in Amanda Gorman's poem *Hymn for the Hurting* about the 2022 school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Other varied inspirations include a Mozart opera and a 14th-century musical form, the *caccia*.

**GIOACHINO ROSSINI**

B: February 29, 1792
Pesaro, Italy

D: November 13, 1868
Paris, France

Overture to *The Barber of Seville*

PREMIERED: February 20, 1816
(complete opera)

From the moment of its premiere in Rome on February 20, 1816, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* has been an audience favorite. The opera is one of the finest examples of opera buffa, full of witty music and comic intrigue in the battle of the sexes. One of the most popular parts of *The Barber* has always been its overture, which sets exactly the right mood for all the fun to follow.

CHARMING AND VERSATILE

Yet this overture had originally been composed three years earlier as the introduction to a tragic opera, *Aureliano in Palmira*. And two years later, Rossini used it again as the overture to his historical opera about Queen Elizabeth I, *Elisabetta, Regina d'Inghilterra*. Finally, in 1816, it became the overture to *The Barber of Seville*. It seems hard to believe that an overture composed for a tragic opera could function so perfectly as the introduction to a comic tale, yet it does, and, whether on the opera stage or in the concert hall, this music continues to work its charm.

In modified sonata form, the overture is scored for Mozart's orchestra (pairs of winds, plus timpani and strings) with the addition of one very non-Classical instrument, a bass drum. The overture begins with a slow introduction marked *Andante maestoso*, which features crashing chords, gathering energy and a beautifully poised melody for violins. The music rushes ahead at the *Allegro con brio*, with its famous "laughing" main theme, full of point and expectancy. Solo oboe introduces the second theme group, marked dolce, which alternates with the main violin theme. Along the way are several of the lengthy crescendos that were a virtual Rossini trademark—his nickname was "Monsieur Crescendo"—and one of these drives this sparkling music home in a great blast of energy.

Instrumentation: flute, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.

**GIOVANNI BOTTESINI**

B: December 22, 1821
Crema, Italy

D: July 7, 1889
Parma, Italy

**Concerto No. 2 in B minor
for Bass and String
Orchestra**

COMPOSED: 1845

In the string family, works for soloist and orchestra are distributed quite unevenly. Whereas the violin and the cello enjoy a wealth of concerto repertoire, the viola is relegated to a few pre-1900 works and a thriving contemporary canon, and the bass is given even less attention. Yet the history of solo music for the lowest string instrument begins much earlier than one might expect. As early as the 1700s, composers such as Haydn and Mozart composed virtuosic works for their talented bassist contemporaries. Over the next three centuries, composer-performers such as Giovanni Bottesini, Serge Koussevitzky, Edgar Meyer and François Rabbath expanded the possibilities of this powerful, versatile and colorful instrument, especially taking advantage of its physical changes over time. In today's concert we shall hear bass concerto performances by two composers: Giovanni Bottesini and Eduard Tubin.

THE ACCIDENTAL BASSIST

Despite Bottesini's major contribution to the bass world as both a composer and a virtuosic soloist, he almost didn't become a bassist. Born in 1821 in Lombardy, Italy, he studied violin from a young age and proved to be an incredible talent. When he was 14, his music-teacher father sought to enroll him in the Milan Conservatory, but there were too many violin students for the institution to distribute a scholarship to young Bottesini. As the family lacked the funds to pay full tuition, Bottesini knew he must enroll with one of the only two scholarships that the conservatory had available: one for bassoon and one for double bass. In a matter of weeks, he prepared a bass audition—and successfully won the scholarship.

Subsequently, Bottesini worked at extrapolating the many possibilities of the bass, and became a leading soloist, so much so that he became known as the "Paganini of the Double Bass" (double bass being one common name for the instrument, which in orchestral settings was often used to "double" the same notes as the cello, sounding one octave lower). Bottesini toured the world, holding a position as far away as Havana, Cuba. A talented conductor, Bottesini often premiered his own operas, as well as the world premiere of Verdi's *Aida* held in Cairo. Verdi himself

appointed Bottesini director of the Parma Conservatory. Sadly, only one year into this position, Bottesini passed away, leaving behind a great legacy.

THE CONCERTO: A BELOVED STAPLE

Contributing mightily to the instrument's repertoire, Bottesini's Bass Concerto No. 2 is a beloved staple for the instrument, especially notable for the fascinating cadenza in the introduction. Composed in 1845 and cast in three movements, this Romantic-era concerto is dominated by clear, lyrical melodies, an exploration of the full virtuosic capability of the soloist and the bass itself, and a clarity of harmony and structure. Where the first two movements are quite reminiscent of opera arias, the last movement is more of a rousing dance. One can almost hear tambourines and stomping feet as the music unfolds.

Instrumentation: solo bass and string orchestra

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.



ANDERS HILLBORG

B: May 31, 1954
Sollentuna, Sweden

Through Lost Landscapes
PREMIERED: February 7, 2020

The music of Anders Hillborg, one of the leading Swedish classical composers working today, first arrived at Orchestra Hall in 2014, when Minnesota Orchestra audiences heard soprano Renée Fleming perform Hillborg's *The Strand Settings*. In September 2017 the Orchestra and soloist James Ehnes performed the American premiere of Hillborg's Second Violin Concerto, which was commissioned by a consortium that includes the Minnesota Orchestra. This week brings the Orchestra's first performance of another Hillborg work co-commissioned by the ensemble: *Through Lost Landscapes*.

A LEADING CREATIVE VOICE

Born in 1954 in Sollentuna, Sweden, and educated at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Hillborg has produced a large and varied compositional catalog across four decades that includes works for orchestra, choir and chamber combinations, as well as film scores and pop music. His music is regularly commissioned and performed by major

orchestras around the world. Among the conductors he has been closely associated with is Esa-Pekka Salonen, who has conducted and commissioned a number of his works, including *Sirens*, which was jointly commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In recent years Hillborg has twice been honored with the Swedish Gramophone Award for Best Classical CD of the Year for albums featuring his music.

Many of Hillborg's works bear intriguing and sometimes enigmatic titles; among his most recent works are *Sound Atlas* (2018) for orchestra, *The Breathing of the World* (2019) for choir, soprano saxophone and cello, and *Through Lost Landscapes* (2019) for orchestra. In addition, recent years have brought concertos for cello and viola. Virtuosic writing is a calling card of his music, and some of his earlier works were at first deemed unplayable before musicians rose to the challenge.

SPEAKING TO THE MOMENT

The title *Through Lost Landscapes* has, sadly, become increasingly apt since Hillborg composed the 13-minute work four years ago. Each day seems to bring new images of desolation around the world brought by fires, floods and other natural and man-made disasters. Although this music does not follow a specific extramusical program, it alludes to the state of the planet today both through its title and its recurring haunting bird calls, among other special effects.

Through Lost Landscapes was commissioned jointly by the Minnesota Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León, BBC Radio 3, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. The work received its world premiere in Spain in February 7, 2020, with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León, led by conductor Andrew Gourley, performing mere weeks before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. It is scored for a fairly large orchestra, with the standard layout augmented by larger-than-usual wind complements, soprano saxophone and percussion instruments such as congas, guiro and two large vibraslaps.

THE MUSIC IN BRIEF

The composer has endorsed program annotator Martin Anderson's summary of *Through Lost Landscapes*:

"The piece opens with what must be the grandest yet of Hillborg's clusters, supported with three huge chords, the third marked *Ecstatic*. That unleashes a hectic chase, a jazzy piano prominent in the texture. The texture begins to shimmer, with waves of color from piano and celesta in particular. Another series of massive chords, linked by rolling melodic lines, suggests the image of the forest, with tree trunks of cathedral grandeur holding up a vast carpet

of vegetation; a solo soprano saxophone emerges in a rare island of calm.

“Another chase (an echo of the monkeys in Koechlin’s symphonic poem *Les bandar-log*?) initiates a never-ending downwards glissando, initiating the idea that will underlie most of the rest of the piece. A series of woodwind patterns suggests some treetop activity, an idea that becomes hard to resist when, two pages later in the score, Hillborg marks them as ‘imitating bird calls.’ (Whether by accident or design, these calls sound very like those of the Greater Bird-of-Paradise, *Paradisaea apoda*.) Under the cover of another glissando, the bird calls are transformed into a swift pulse, but it soon falls silent, leaving room for another passage of noisy bird calls. The shimmering waves of piano and celesta return, slowing down to allow another grandiose chord to envelope the orchestra. The Birds-of-Paradise are heard again, twice, and the music sinks gently to rest.”

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (all doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, soprano saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, 3 congas, large guiro, 4 tom-toms, triangle, 2 vibraslaps, glockenspiel, crotales, chimes, piano, celesta and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER.



EDUARD TUBIN

B: June 18, 1905
Torila, Estonia

D: November 17, 1982
Stockholm, Sweden

Concerto for Bass and Orchestra

PREMIERED: March 8, 1957

— Eduard Tubin was born, educated and developed a successful career in his native Estonia. Between 1940 and 1944, Soviet and German warring over this country resulted in citizens forced into labor camps, imprisonment, tens of thousands of Estonian deaths and over 250,000 people being displaced. Tubin was amongst those who fled to Sweden in 1944 after a brutal Soviet attack, and he remained there until his death. Three years after Tubin’s political flight, he met Ludvig Juth, an Estonian bass player in the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

“BETTER” THAN A BASSIST’S CONCERTO

The meeting of the two Estonians resulted in Juth commissioning a concerto from Tubin. This request began

a fruitful exchange in which Tubin was taught about the techniques of bass performance and the instrument’s timbre, wide pitch range and virtuosic possibilities. Even though Juth composed his own concerto in 1932, he said of Tubin’s concerto “...the piece is very good and very suitable for the double bass, even a double bass player would not have written it better.” Juth premiered this piece in a version for bass and piano in 1948, but never played the concerto with an orchestra before his passing in 1957. In March of that same year soloist Manuel Verdeguer delivered the concerto’s orchestral premiere with the Colombia Symphony.

Characteristic features of Tubin’s musical language include his talent for expanding simple melodies into large forms and his love for the Estonian sound. The Bass Concerto is no exception; its first 3-note statement defines the primary emotion of the entire piece, and as it unfolds, one can clearly hear how the additional melodies, harmonies and counterpoint are related. Of special note is the concerto’s cadenza, praised by Juth as something “unprecedented for the bass.” While the normal tuning of the bass, from lowest pitch to highest, is E-A-D-G, a common “solo tuning” for bass concerto repertoire is a whole-step higher: F#-B-E-A, resulting in a brighter sound. In addition to adopting this practice, Tubin remains primarily in the middle and high registers of the instrument in his concerto, making the lower pitches supportive and bold.

Instrumentation: solo bass with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, tamburo, harp and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.



KEVIN PUTS

B: January 3, 1972
St. Louis, Missouri

Concerto for Orchestra

PREMIERED: January 21, 2023

— Although Kevin Puts hails from St. Louis, Missouri, the Twin Cities have loomed large in his award-winning career. Puts won the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Music for his opera *Silent Night*, which was commissioned and premiered by Minnesota Opera, and in 2014 he was named director of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute.

The Orchestra commissioned his 2006 work *Sinfonia concertante* and has played six of his pieces to date. This week brings a seventh—his *Concerto for Orchestra*, which was commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony and Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. Its premiere was given on January 21 of last year by the St. Louis Symphony under the baton of Stéphane Denève, and the piece is dedicated to that ensemble and conductor.

THE COMPOSER'S RESPONSE

The composer has supplied the following comments about the work:

“The [concerto’s] creative entry point for me was the discovery of young Amanda Gorman’s beautiful poem ‘Hymn for the Hurting’ written in response to the horrific school shooting—an occurrence now routine in our country—in Uvalde, Texas, in May 2022. The music at the concerto’s opening—recalled briefly at various places throughout the piece—is my immediate musical reaction to it. The title of the second movement, *Caccia*, is a reference to the 14th-century musical form depicting the hunt or the chase and flows directly from this opening hymn. It continues the opening movement’s focus on the various groups of instruments in the orchestra beginning with the oboes and punctuated at all times by the orchestra’s three percussionists who play identical collections of six drums. *Music Box with Arietta*, by contrast, explores the gentler side of the percussion section, led here by cascading gestures played by the harp and celesta, giving way to a lyrical counterpoint of woodwinds. *Toccata* is a quick exchange between the strings, the winds and the percussion. Eventually the brass section asserts itself, cutting across these exchanges with brash, angular lines. A brief refrain of the opening movement leads to a gentle *Siciliana* featuring nearly all instruments in the orchestra in lyrical ways, perhaps most prominently the piano. Another refrain introduces the final movement, another *Caccia*, this one containing a brief quotation from the Mozart opera which inspired it.”

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Kevin Puts’ music has been commissioned and performed by leading ensembles and opera companies from around the globe; among them are the Metropolitan Opera, Philadelphia Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, Opera Philadelphia and Minnesota Opera. In 2006, early in Puts’ career, the Minnesota Orchestra premiered his *Sinfonia concertante* as part of the ensemble’s series of commissions celebrating its centennial. He has also worked with prominent soloists and conductors such as Renée Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, Yannick Nezet-Seguin, Marin Alsop and Joshua Bell—for whom he composed his most recent orchestral work, *Earth*, which Bell premiered in August 2023 with the

NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra. He is also committed to fostering the next generation of composers. In addition to his leadership role of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute, he teaches composition at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University.

Puts’ most recent opera, *The Hours*, received two premieres in 2022—first in concert by the Philadelphia Orchestra, then fully staged at the Metropolitan Opera. Among other recent highlights are the West Coast premiere of *The Brightness of Light*, featuring Renée Fleming and Rod Gilfry with the Los Angeles Opera Orchestra, and the world premiere of his triple concerto *Contact*, composed for the trio Time for Three. At the 2023 Grammy Awards, a recording of *Contact* with the Philadelphia Orchestra and conductor Xian Zhang was awarded Best Contemporary Classical Composition.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, 2 bongos, 2 timbales, 2 tom-toms, triangle, xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER



Kevin Puts, in his role as director of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute, listening alongside composer Texu Kim at a rehearsal for the Composer Institute concert in May 2015. Kim’s work *Dub-Sanja* is heard at Orchestra Hall earlier this month at the Lunar New Year concert. Photo: Greg Helgeson