

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Ruth Reinhardt, conductor

Steven Banks, alto and soprano saxophones

Friday, February 9, 2024, 8PM

Saturday, February 10, 2024, 7PM

Orchestra Hall

Bedřich Smetana *Šárka*, No. 3 from *Má vlast* (My Homeland) CA. 11'

Billy Childs *Diaspora* (Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra) CA. 22'

Motherland

If We Must Die

And Still I Rise

Steven Banks, alto and soprano saxophones

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

CA. 20'

Sergei Prokofiev Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*, Ballet Music, Opus 64 CA. 33'

The Montagues and the Capulets

Juliet—The Young Girl

Masks

Dance

The Death of Tybalt

Romeo and Juliet Before Parting

Morning Serenade (Aubade)

Romeo at Juliet's Grave

PRE-CONCERT

Performance by Ballet Co.Laboratory

Friday, February 9, 7:15pm, Target Atrium | Saturday, February 10, 6:15pm, Target Atrium

THANK YOU

The 2023–24 Classical Season is presented by Ameriprise Financial.

These concerts are generously sponsored by Huntington Bank.

The Minnesota Orchestra is grateful to Al and Kathy Lenzmeier for supporting Billy Childs' *Diaspora* in this program.

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. The February 9 concert will also be broadcast live on [Twin Cities PBS \(TPT-2\)](#) and available for streaming at minnesotaorchestra.org and on the Orchestra's social media channels.



RUTH REINHARDT,
CONDUCTOR

German conductor Ruth Reinhardt is building a reputation for a keen musical intelligence, programmatic imagination and elegant performances. In the 2023-24 season, she leads a production of *La Traviata* for the Royal Swedish Opera and makes debuts in Europe with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic and WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne. In North America, she begins the season with the Nashville Symphony and makes debuts with the New Jersey Symphony and Grand Rapids Symphony, in addition to her first appearance with the Minnesota Orchestra. Placing significant emphasis on women composers of the late 20th century and early 21st century, Reinhardt brings new names and fresh faces to many orchestras for the first time. Among those whose works appear often in her programs are Grażyna Bacewicz, Kaija Saariaho, Lotta Wennäkoski, Daniel Bjarnason, Dai Fujikura and Thomas Adès. Reinhardt attended the Juilliard School, where she received her master's degree. She was a Dudamel Fellow of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in the 2017-18 season, conducting fellow at both the Seattle Symphony in 2015-16 and the Tanglewood Music Center in 2015, and Taki Concordia associate conducting fellow from 2015 to 2017. More: opus3artists.com, ruth-reinhardt.com.



STEVEN BANKS,
ALTO AND SOPRANO SAXOPHONES

Saxophonist and composer Steven Banks is striving to bring his instrument to the heart of the classical music world. He is driven to program and write music that directly addresses aspects of the human experience and is an active and intentional supporter of diverse voices in the future of concert music. In 2022 he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and was a chosen artist for WQXR's Artist Propulsion Lab. Ensembles he has appeared with include the Cleveland Orchestra, Montreal Symphony, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra and Aspen Festival Orchestra. He has also appeared across the U.S. in recital and as a chamber musician, and he is a founding member of the all-saxophone Kenari Quartet. This season he is premiering and touring Billy Childs' concerto *Diaspora*, which was co-commissioned by nine orchestras along with Young Concert Artists. As a composer, Banks has been commissioned by numerous organizations. His work for alto saxophone and string quartet, *Cries, Sighs and Dreams*, was premiered in 2022 at Carnegie Hall with the Borromeo Quartet, and his solo piano work *Fantasy on Recurring Daydreams* was premiered last year by Zhu Wang. More: imgartists.com, steven-banks.com.



WILLIAM EDDINS,
BROADCAST HOST

For the concert on February 9, William Eddins serves as host and writer of the Twin Cities PBS broadcast and online livestream *This Is Minnesota Orchestra*. Eddins has a multifaceted musical career as a conductor and pianist. He is the music director emeritus of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, a former associate conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra and a frequent guest conductor of major orchestras throughout the world. In September 2022 he conducted the Orchestra's season opening concerts for the first time in a program that included the Minnesota premiere of Wynton Marsalis' *Swing Symphony*, performed with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. More: williameddins.com.



BEDŘICH SMETANA

B: March 2, 1824
Leitomyšl, Bohemia
(now Litomyšl,
Czechoslovakia)

D: May 12, 1884
Prague, Bohemia

Šárka, No. 3 from *Má vlast* (My Homeland)

COMPOSED: 1875

Bedřich Smetana was born in a picturesque town in Bohemia when the land was subjected to the ironclad rule of the Austrian monarchy, and its administration was unconditionally German. Educated from his earliest days in the German language, the composer—who was to be recognized as the founder of Czech national music—struggled to express himself in the Czech tongue. He did, however, declare in words as well as his music, “My homeland means more to me than anything else.” And in the cycle of a half-dozen symphonic poems collectively known as *Má vlast* (My Homeland), he left an orchestral legacy inspired by his country’s landscape, legends and history.

Of this remarkable set of descriptive pieces, only *The Moldau*, which traces the course of the river Vltava as it flows northward through the Bohemian forest to the Elbe, is a staple of the repertory. The lesser-known *Šárka* is the third of the initial trilogy composed in rapid succession in 1874–75. Ironically, this was a difficult, even sorrowful period in Smetana’s life, for he had totally lost his hearing and had to resign his conductorship at the National Opera. But no traces of his suffering will be found in the brilliant music, so optimistic and affirmative of the Czech spirit.

A TALE OF BETRAYAL AND VENGEANCE

Šárka (pronounced “sharka”) is a miniature orchestral drama based on the tale of the legendary Amazon of Bohemian folklore. Completed early in 1875, it was first performed under the baton of Adolf Čech, though sources disagree on the premiere date, falling either in December 1876 or March 1877. Addressing Čech in February 1877, Smetana summarized the course of the piece:

“The idea of my work is, in a word, the story of the young heroine Šárka herself, which had been recalled to me by the sight of the district that bears her name. I do not depict this wild land, but being in the midst of it, I tell the tale of Šárka over again. The beginning speaks of her rage against men, her mortification and wrath—the outcome of love betrayed—and her vow to take vengeance. Ctirad and his soldiers now come upon the scene (the march in A minor). He sees Šárka in lamentable plight attached to the tree and, astounded at her beauty, falls in love with her. She deludes him and makes the mercenaries drunk (the 3/4 rhythm, in D major). Their gaiety ends in heavy sleep. The horn (in C) gives out Šárka’s signal to her women. Echo. The women fall upon the slumbering camp. Their triumph. The massacre. Vengeance is accomplished. There is no moral. Each listener is free to follow his own fancy and add what he pleases to the broad outline.”

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

PROGRAM NOTE BY MARY ANN FELDMAN.

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Smetana: *Šárka*, No. 3 from *Má vlast*

Bedřich Smetana’s distinctly Czech symphonic poem is a miniature orchestral drama based on the tale of the legendary Amazon of Bohemian folklore, telling of the young heroine Šárka—her romantic betrayal, rage and vengeance.

Childs: *Diaspora* (Saxophone Concerto)

In this rarity—a concerto for saxophone and orchestra—Billy Childs’ music draws inspiration from the poetry of Nayyirah Waheed, Claude McKay and Maya Angelou to tell a unique story of Black experiences in America.

Prokofiev: Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*

Seven selections from Sergei Prokofiev’s ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, chosen for these performances by Ruth Reinhardt, summon vivid images of Shakespeare’s romantic tragedy, from a masked ball to a violent duel to the lovers’ tragic end.



BILLY CHILDS

B: March 8, 1957
Los Angeles, California

Diaspora (Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra)

PREMIERED: February 10, 2023

During a December 2020 online masterclass sponsored by the jazz education platform Open Studio Jazz, American composer Billy Childs explained the driving force behind his musical creations: “I approach [my] compositions melodically. That’s my way in. I feel that the melody communicates to the listener, just like a beautifully constructed sentence in a speech. If music is a language, then melody is like a sentence in that language.”

This approach to melody is evident in his recently premiered saxophone concerto *Diaspora*. Featuring an instrument not typically heard in a symphony orchestra—and even more rarely placed at center stage—Childs has created a beautiful musical speech in three movements, constructed from melodic sentences birthed from a people that have borne and continue to bear and survive myriad injustices. Where legends such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Jacobs, Bayard Rustin and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper have employed the written and spoken word, Childs joins a legacy of composers such as William Grant Still, Undine Smith Moore, Margaret Rosezarian Harris and Olly Wilson who use the musical “language” as a tool to effect positive, just and necessary change.

FROM PRODIGIOUS BEGINNINGS

William “Billy” Edward Childs was born and raised in Los Angeles, where popular music, jazz and classical music constantly surrounded him. A piano prodigy, he gave his earliest performance at 6 years old. Beginning at age 16, he attended the Community School of the Performing Arts at the University of Southern California (USC), and eventually continued on to receive a bachelor of music degree from USC. He toured Japan with the J. J. Johnson Quintet at just 20 years old and made his debut recording with that ensemble. From 1977 to 1984 he gained notoriety playing with Freddie Hubbard’s ensemble. Four years later he began his solo jazz recording career, and he has since amassed 13 Grammy nominations and five Grammy Awards.

Alongside his success in the jazz field, classical music has always been a strong presence in the life of Childs. He has received commissions from the Ying Quartet, Kronos Quartet, Dorian Wind Quintet, American Brass Quintet, Los

Angeles Master Chorale, Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic, among other ensembles. He has also performed with famous classical stars such as Yo-Yo Ma and Renée Fleming.

SHOWCASING MUSICAL DIVERSITY

Diaspora showcases the comfort that Childs has cultivated within diverse genres. Steven Banks, the saxophonist who helped to commission this concerto and was the soloist for its premiere as well as this week’s performances, emphatically reflects: “I’ve certainly never played a concerto that had this wide of a musical scope. The first movement is very diatonic, almost sing-songy, and the second movement gets all the way up to a screaming multiphonic (a technique where the saxophone plays multiple pitches at the same time).”

Childs refers to this new saxophone concerto as a symphonic poem. Its three movements are each based on poetry. Both Childs and Banks were drawn to Ravel’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* (a three-movement piano suite based on poems by Aloysius Bertrand) as a structural model, but where Ravel’s masterpiece uses poems by one author, Banks and Childs selected poems by Nayyirah Waheed, Claude McKay and Maya Angelou to form the journey that the concerto represents. *Diaspora* begins in a natural and “pure” African setting, then progresses to the period of African capture and the forced journey into American enslavement, and concludes with music representing survival and a hopeful future. The bookends of positivity within this narrative are treated with familiar and comforting musical construction, contrasting with the raw, brash and visceral crying that powers to the fore when the music tells of the enraged and pained psychological state of the enslaved. Thusly, the “wide musical scope” is apropos: a story so powerful and diverse requires music that matches this dynamic.

Diaspora was composed in 2022 on a commission from a consortium of nine orchestras including the Minnesota Orchestra, along with a tenth partner, Young Concert Artists, for Banks, who is in the midst of touring with the concerto. The world premiere was given by the Kansas City Symphony in February 2023, with Banks as soloist, under the baton of this week’s conductor Ruth Reinhardt.

THE CONCERTO: BUILDING TO EMPOWERMENT

The first movement, *Motherland*, begins in a manner atypical of a concerto. The soloist plays a folk-like melody unaccompanied for quite a significant amount of time. It is, however, not a cadenza where a soloist must display their virtuoso technique; rather, it is a melody that must be sung with utmost care. This singing melody firmly establishes an African setting—balanced and purposeful, containing wisdom and secrets to be revealed. By the end of this

movement, the melody takes on an array of changes, which eventually culminate in the moment where Europeans fight with Africans, and the movement ends with the first cadenza—a reflective moment of confusion, moments of hope, yet a foreshadowing of a dismal future.

The second movement, *If We Must Die*, takes one of the most powerful sonnets ever written in history and uses it as a foundation. Claude McKay’s most famous work ends with a couplet that perhaps sums up the entirety of this concerto: “Like men, we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack / Pressed to the wall dying but fighting back.” Expectedly, this movement contains brash utterances, wailing gestures, tense undulations, and other compositional approaches that evoke this “fighting” and “dying.” This movement concludes with a short cadenza that transitions the mood from pain to resilience, self-love, self-worth and self-determination.

The third and final movement, *And Still I Rise*, is hope musically embodied. “Black empowerment,” according to Childs, is what defines this finale. He opens this movement with a variation of the melody that begins the entire piece. Yet in this setting for saxophone and piano, Childs draws upon his experiences playing gospel in church, and creates an intimate sound that is heard in the context of Black American worship. With its rousing conclusion, the music reflects one of Maya Angelou’s most powerful literary statements—a message of survival, encouragement and hope.

THE COMPOSER’S NOTE

Billy Childs has provided a detailed program note on *Diaspora*. To read it in full, visit minnesotaorchestra.org/diasporanote or scan the QR code.



Instrumentation: solo saxophone with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo and alto flute), oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, bassoon, contrabassoon, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, bass trombone, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, brake drum, cowbell, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, wood blocks, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.



SERGEI PROKOFIEV

B: April 23, 1891
Sontsovka, Russia

D: March 5, 1953,
Moscow, Russia

Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*, Ballet Music, Opus 64

PREMIERED: December 30, 1938 (complete ballet)

Late in 1934 the Kirov Theater in Leningrad approached Sergei Prokofiev with the proposal that they collaborate on a ballet based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Prokofiev completed the massive score by the end of the summer of 1935, but the project came to seem nearly as star-crossed as Shakespeare’s young lovers. The Kirov Ballet backed out, and the Bolshoi Theatre of Moscow took over the project. Prokofiev’s first plan had been to give the story a happy ending in which Romeo would rescue Juliet before her suicide—because, as he explained, “living people can dance, the dying cannot.” Fortunately, this idea was scrapped, but when the Bolshoi finally saw Prokofiev’s score, they called it “undanceable” and refused to produce it.

While *Romeo and Juliet* languished in limbo, Prokofiev transformed excerpts from the ballet’s 52 numbers into a series of orchestral suites. The first two suites were premiered in 1936 and 1937—thus much of the music from the ballet was familiar to audiences long before it was produced on the stage. The third suite was compiled in 1946.

A TALE OF WOE

The premiere of the ballet itself took place not in Russia but in Brno in 1938. Preparations for the first Russian performance brought more trouble, including a fight between Prokofiev and the choreographer, disputes with the dancers and a threatened walk-out by the orchestra. When the Russian premiere finally took place in Leningrad on January 11, 1940, it was a triumph for all involved. Still, ballerina Galina Ulanova, who danced the part of Juliet, touched on the ballet’s difficult birth when she paraphrased the play’s final lines in her toast to the composer after the opening performance:

*Never was a tale of greater woe,
Than Prokofiev’s music to Romeo.*

The movements in Prokofiev’s three orchestral suites from *Romeo and Juliet* are not in chronological sequence: he created the suites by arranging movements in sequences he felt would be effective in the concert hall. Conductors frequently assemble their own selection of movements from these suites, as Ruth Reinhardt has done for these

performances. The eight movements she has chosen comprise two movements from Prokofiev’s Suite No. 1, five from the Second Suite and a lone movement from the Suite No. 3—conjuring in sound the characters, actions and moods of the drama.

MUSIC TENDER AND DRAMATIC

The Montagues and the Capulets is one of the most famous excerpts from the ballet, forging ahead powerfully as it depicts the swagger of the rival families; its quiet central episode features several striking sounds, including a tenor saxophone solo and wispy glissandos for muted violas. *Juliet—The Young Girl* captures the heroine’s sprightly energy with racing violins and teasing motifs, though wistful interludes also suggest a depth to her character. In the witty *Masks*, Mercutio and Benvolio have talked Romeo, a fellow Montague, into crashing the ball at the Capulets, and this music accompanies their stealthy entrance. *Dance* continues these events, accompanying a scene from the ball.

The violence that triggers the concluding tragedy explodes in *The Death of Tybalt*. Tybalt, a Capulet, has killed the Montague Mercutio, and Romeo, once the voice of calm, becomes furious and kills Tybalt. The music illustrates the swordfight, the fatal thrust, and a clod-hopping funeral march in which cellos and horns sing the funeral song above rolling drums. *Romeo and Juliet Before Parting* brings some of the finest music in the ballet. The tender flute solo at the beginning sets the mood of love, which Prokofiev underlines with a solo for viola d’amore (a part usually undertaken by the modern viola). Following the emotional *Morning Serenade*, a love song also known as *Aubade*, today’s suite concludes with *Romeo at Juliet’s Grave*, as grieving violins drive the music to a painful climax, and it falls away into numbed silence.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, cornet, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, chimes, harp, piano, celesta and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.

CODA

The Minnesota Orchestra, then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, first performed the *Sárka* movement from Bedřich Smetana’s *Má vlast* on March 6, 1930, at the St. Paul Auditorium Theater, under the baton of the Orchestra’s second music director, Henri Verbrugghen. That same day was a landmark occasion in Great Depression-era labor history, as a coordinated International Unemployment Day brought hundreds of thousands to the streets in major cities around the world to protest mass unemployment associated with the Depression. Riots erupted in New York City and Detroit while 30 American cities, including Minneapolis and Duluth, saw mass demonstrations. The *Minneapolis Tribune* reported that “700 banner-waving communists” walked peacefully around Minneapolis’ City Hall.

This week marks the Orchestra’s initial performances of Billy Childs’ saxophone concerto *Diaspora*, as well as the ensemble’s first performance of any music by Childs. Although saxophone soloists are rarely heard at Orchestra Hall, the current decade began with one at center stage, as saxophonist Jess Gillam performed music by John Williams and Darius Milhaud to ring in 2020. Minnesota audiences will have a second opportunity to hear Childs’ music this month as musicians from the Bakken Ensemble perform his String Quartet No. 2, *Awakening*, on February 25.

The Orchestra first performed music from Sergei Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* on November 17, 1960, in a concert at Minnetonka High School led by Stanislaw Skrowaczewski just three months into his 19-year tenure as the Orchestra’s music director. On that occasion the ensemble performed the Prokofiev’s Suite No. 2 from the ballet. Each of the Orchestra’s subsequent music directors has conducted music from *Romeo and Juliet* except for its newest artistic leader, Thomas Søndergård, although Søndergård did lead a work by Prokofiev—the *Winter Bonfire Suite*—at the recent New Year’s concerts.