

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Kristiina Poska, conductor
Sterling Elliott, cello

Thursday, April 18, 2024, 11AM
Friday, April 19, 2024, 8PM

Orchestra Hall

Aaron Copland	<i>Appalachian Spring</i> (1945 orchestration)	CA. 24'
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	Variations on a Rococo Theme for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 33 <i>Sterling Elliott, cello</i>	CA. 18'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		CA. 20'
Ludwig van Beethoven	Symphony No. 8 in F major, Opus 93 Allegro vivace e con brio Allegretto scherzando Tempo di menuetto Allegro vivace	CA. 26'

PRE-CONCERT

2024-25 Season Preview with Kari Marshall (April 18) and Grant Meachum (April 19)
Thursday, April 18, 10:15am, Target Atrium | Friday, April 19, 7:15pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

THANK YOU

The 2023–24 Classical Season is presented by Ameriprise Financial.
This concert is supported in part by the Sally and Ernest Lehmann Family Fund, in memory of Sally Lehmann.

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.



KRISTIINA POSKA,
CONDUCTOR

Award-winning conductor Kristiina Poska is in high demand on the international music scene. She has held the post of chief conductor of Flanders Symphony Orchestra since the 2019-20 season and principal guest conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra since 2021-22. This season, in addition to her debut with the Minnesota Orchestra this week, she makes her first appearance with the Frankfurt Museumsorchester, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Oregon Symphony, Orquesta Nacionales de España, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Rotterdam Philharmonic. She also returns to the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Orchestre National de France, Hallé Orchestra and Stavanger Symphony Orchestra and tours across Europe with the Flanders Symphony Orchestra. Equally prolific in the operatic repertoire, this season she returns to Staatsoper Berlin to conduct a production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Poska's previous roles have included principal conductor of Cappella Academica from 2006 to 2011, Kapellmeister at Komische Oper Berlin from 2012 to 2016 and music director for Theater Basel for the 2019-20 season. Her latest recording with the Flanders Symphony Orchestra features Beethoven's Symphonies No. 1 and 7. More: harrisonparrott.com, kristiinaposka.com.



STERLING ELLIOTT,
CELLO

Cellist Sterling Elliott is a 2021 Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient and the winner of the Senior Division of the 2019 National Sphinx Competition. This season he debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra and the New Jersey Symphony, among other ensembles, and performs the world premiere of John Corigliano's *Phantasmagoria* with the Orlando Philharmonic. He debuted at London's Wigmore Hall in February. Last summer he made his orchestral debut with the San Francisco Symphony, performed at the Edinburgh Festival and returned to the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has a long history with the Sphinx Organization, from which he receives a Medal of Excellence this season. He also participates in the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Bowers Program and was recently named the YCAT-Music Masters Robey Artist by the London-based Young Classical Artists Trust. He is pursuing an Artist Diploma at the Juilliard School under the tutelage of Joel Krosnick and Clara Kim. He is an ambassador of the Young Strings of America, a string sponsorship operated by Shar Music. He performs on a 1741 Gennaro Gagliano cello on loan through the Robert F. Smith Fine String Patron Program, in partnership with the Sphinx Organization. More: colbertartists.com, sterlingelliott.com.

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Copland: *Appalachian Spring*

Aaron Copland's ballet suite tells the tale of a young pioneer couple in rural Pennsylvania through square dances, country fiddling and a famous finale built on the Shaker song *Simple Gifts*.

Tchaikovsky: *Variations on a Rococo Theme*

Traveling from an original theme in the cello through seven variations and a lively coda, *Variations on a Rococo Theme* is light, elegant and full of charm.

Beethoven: *Symphony No. 8*

With its cheerful disposition and quick pace, this complex yet eminently listenable symphony was one of Beethoven's own favorites. He wrote it while he was losing the last of his hearing and coping with a family feud, making its bright spirit all the more remarkable.

**AARON COPLAND**

B: November 14, 1900
Brooklyn, New York

D: December 2, 1990
North Tarrytown, New York

Appalachian Spring
(1945 orchestration)

PREMIERED: October 30, 1944
(original ballet for chamber
ensemble); October 4, 1945
(suite for full orchestra)

— Tonicity in Western classical music seems to come in waves. In the 1980s it became “permissible” among academic composers to write accessible music again, in a sea-change that some called “the new Romanticism.” But such shifts in fashion and dogma are seen through the centuries.

When Aaron Copland returned to the United States from Paris in 1924, he entered what he called a “period of austerity,” during which he explored 12-tone composition and other modern techniques. Then, toward the end of the 1930s, he found himself dissatisfied with the state of American music, and with the relationship of composers to their audiences.

“The conventional concert public continued [to be] apathetic or indifferent to anything but the established classics,” he wrote in 1941. “It seemed to me that we composers were in danger of working in a vacuum. I felt it was worth the effort to see if I couldn’t say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.” It was in this spirit that Copland embarked upon a series of enduring works that assured his position as a quintessential American classical composer: *Fanfare for the Common Man*, the ballet *Rodeo*, *A Lincoln Portrait* and *Appalachian Spring*.

THE MARTHA GRAHAM FACTOR

The spark for *Appalachian Spring* was Martha Graham, who had helped reshape American ballet with her innovative modern style. (Copland’s original working title for the ballet was “Ballet for Martha.”)

“When I wrote *Appalachian Spring*, I was thinking primarily about Martha and her unique choreographic style, which I knew well,” the composer wrote. “Nobody else seems quite like Martha: she’s so proud, so very much herself. And she’s unquestionably very American: there’s something prim and restrained, simple yet strong, about her which one tends to think of as American.”

Graham and Copland had often planned to collaborate, but it was not until Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge attended a Graham performance in early 1942 that funding became available. The fabulously generous benefactress

commissioned Graham to create three new ballets for the 1943 Fall Festival of the Coolidge Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Appalachian Spring was one of those three, but it didn’t get to the stage that year. Graham’s script was delayed, so Copland didn’t finish the score until June 1944. The premiere that October in Washington—with Graham, Merce Cunningham and May O’Donnell in the company—was a full year later than originally planned. Louis Horst conducted the 13-member chamber ensemble for which the piece was originally composed.

“A PIONEER CELEBRATION”

The ballet depicts, in Copland’s words, “a pioneer celebration in spring around a newly built farmhouse in the Pennsylvania hills in the early part of the last century.” The composer’s description continues: “The bride-to-be and the young farmer-husband enact the emotions, joyful and apprehensive, that their new partnership invites. An older neighbor suggests now and then the rocky confidence of experience. A revivalist and his followers remind the new householders of the strange and terrible aspects of human fate. At the end the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house.”

The suite from the ballet created for full orchestra in 1945, and given its premiere that year by Artur Rodziński and the New York Philharmonic, is the form in which it is best known today. The suite is in eight sections played without pause. Copland himself summarized it:

VERY SLOWLY. Introduction of the characters, one by one.

FAST. Sudden burst of unison strings in A-major arpeggios starts the action.

MODERATE. Duo for the bride and her intended; scene of tenderness and passion.

QUITE FAST. The revivalist and his flock.

STILL FASTER. Solo dance of the bride; presentiment of motherhood. Very slowly.

TRANSITION SCENE. Calm and flowing. Scenes of daily activity for the bride and her farmer husband. There are five variations on a Shaker theme...published under the title “The Gift to be Simple.”

MODERATO. The bride takes her place among her neighbors. At the end the couple are left in their new house.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, claves, tabor, triangle, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel, harp, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY PAUL HORSLEY.



**PETER ILYICH
TCHAIKOVSKY**

B: May 7, 1840
Votkinsk, Russia

D: November 6, 1893
St. Petersburg, Russia

**Variations on a Rococo
Theme for Cello and
Orchestra, Opus 33**

PREMIERED: November 30, 1877

It's hard to believe that Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky wrote this lovely, elegant, chaste music immediately after completing his overwrought symphonic poem *Francesca da Rimini* and immediately before his white-hot Fourth Symphony. That sequence alone should alert us to the fact that there were many sides to this often-tormented composer.

If we automatically identify Tchaikovsky with colorful and emotional music, we need to remember that he was also drawn to the formal clarity of 18th-century classical music and loved Mozart above all other composers. One of the finest examples of this attraction is his *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, composed in December 1876, shortly after he returned to Moscow after attending the first performance of Wagner's *Ring* at Bayreuth.

This was a very difficult time for Tchaikovsky. He was on the verge of entering into a disastrous marriage with one of his students, Antonina Miliukova. He hoped that such a union would “cure” him of his homosexuality, but secretly he must have known that that was impossible. Writing this music may have offered him an escape from that personal turmoil into the clarity and order of another era.

A SOLOIST TAKES CONTROL

The immediate impulse to write it came in a commission from the cellist Wilhelm Fitzenhagen. Trained in Germany, Fitzenhagen had in 1870 become professor at the Imperial Conservatory in Moscow, where Tchaikovsky also taught, and the two men had become good friends. When Fitzenhagen asked Tchaikovsky to write a piece for cello and orchestra for him, the composer responded with a set of variations based on what he called a “rococo” theme and scored for what was essentially Mozart's orchestra (pairs of woodwinds and horns, plus strings).

Tchaikovsky worked closely with Fitzenhagen while composing the *Rococo Variations*, and the writing for cello is graceful and idiomatic. But Fitzenhagen, a composer himself, apparently regarded Tchaikovsky's manuscript as

only a starting point, and he drastically revised the score. He reduced Tchaikovsky's original eight variations to seven, altered their order and re-wrote some of the cello part. By the time of the premiere, which took place in Moscow on November 30, 1877, Tchaikovsky had made the fateful marriage, abandoned his wife and fled to Switzerland to restore his mental balance. When he returned to Moscow in 1879, the music had already been published in Fitzenhagen's revision. At this point it was virtually impossible for him to reverse these changes. The result is that the *Rococo Variations* are invariably performed today in Fitzenhagen's revised version rather than in the version Tchaikovsky actually wrote.

THE MUSIC: GRACEFUL RESTRAINT

A brief orchestral introduction (how light and clear this music sounds!) gives way to the entrance of the solo cello, which sings the “rococo” theme. That theme, Tchaikovsky's own, is marked *espressivo* on its first appearance, and it falls into two eight-bar phrases. Seven variations follow. These are nicely contrasted: some are lyrical, some athletic; some emphasize the cello, while others vigorously toss the theme between soloist and orchestra. Tchaikovsky varies key and meter throughout the set, and he ingeniously turns the final variation into an exciting coda. Yet the key word throughout is “restraint,” and this gentle score seems to come from a different planet altogether from the Fourth Symphony, which would shortly follow.

Instrumentation: solo cello with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.



**LUDWIG
VAN BEETHOVEN**

B: December 15, 1770
Bonn, Germany

D: March 26, 1827
Vienna, Austria

**Symphony No. 8 in
F major, Opus 93**

PREMIERED: February 27, 1814

The Eighth Symphony has always seemed out of place in the progression of Ludwig van Beethoven's symphonies. It comes after the dramatic Fifth, expansive Sixth and powerful Seventh, and it precedes the grand Ninth. Within this sequence, the Eighth seems all wrong: it is brief, relaxed, and—in form and its use of a small

orchestra—apparently a conscious throwback to the manner of Haydn and Mozart.

MORE THAN AN HOMAGE

Beethoven had in mind more than an homage to his forebears, though, as the late musicologist Michael Steinberg notes: “If we think of the Eighth as a nostalgic return to the good old days, we misunderstand it. What interests Beethoven is not so much brevity for its own sake as concentration. It is as though he were picking up where he had left off in the densely saturated first movement of the Fifth Symphony to produce another tour de force of tight packing.”

And perhaps the symphony fits a pattern after all, in approach if not content. Beethoven composed his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies together between 1807 and 1808, intentionally crafting two very different types of symphonies, and he took a similar path with his contrasting Seventh and Eighth, writing them essentially side-by-side in 1811 and 1812. In any case, the Eighth is one of those rare things: a genuinely funny piece of music, full of high spirits, what (at first) seem wrong notes, unusual instrumental sounds and sly jokes.

THE MUSIC: ENERGETIC AND CLEVER

ALLEGRO VIVACE. The symphony explodes to life with a six-note figure stamped out by the whole orchestra; this figure will give rhythmic impulse to the opening movement and function as its central melodic idea. This music seems always to be pressing forward, sometimes spilling over itself with scarcely restrained power, sometimes erupting violently.

ALLEGRO SCHERZANDO. The second movement brings some of the symphony’s most clever moments. Beethoven’s friend Johann Nepomuk Maelzel had invented a metronome, and the woodwinds’ steady tick-tick-tick at the beginning is Beethoven’s rendering of the metronome’s sound. Over this mechanical ticking, the violins dance happily until the music suddenly explodes in short bursts of rapidly played notes.

TEMPO DI MENUETTO. In the third movement Beethoven delights in unexpected twists. The trio section of this movement brings a moment of unexpected beauty as a mysterious, romantic horn solo takes the lead in the middle of the standard, stately form.

ALLEGRO VIVACE. The blistering finale is full of humor. Racing violins present the main idea, and this opening section zips to what should be a moment of repose on the strings’ unison C, but Beethoven slams that C aside with a crashing C-sharp, and the symphony heads off in the “wrong” key. The jokes come so quickly in this movement that many of them pass unnoticed: the “wrong” notes,

the “oom-pah” transitions scored for just timpani and bassoon, and so forth. The ending brings the best joke of all, for the coda refuses to quit. Finally—finally!—Beethoven wrenches this most good-natured and energetic music to a resounding close.

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

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.