

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

David Afkham, conductor
Christian Tetzlaff, violin

Thursday, May 30, 2024, 11AM
Friday, May 31, 2024, 8PM
Saturday, June 1, 2024, 7PM

Orchestra Hall

Johannes Brahms Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77 CA. 36'
Allegro non troppo
Adagio
Allegro giocoso
Christian Tetzlaff, violin

I N T E R M I S S I O N CA. 20'

Henri Dutilleux *Métaboles* CA. 17'
Incantatoire
Linéaire
Obsessionnel
Torpide
Flamboyant

Béla Bartók Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*, Opus 19 CA. 21'

PRE-CONCERT

Performance by Duo Avila

Thursday, May 30, 10:15am, Target Atrium | Friday, May 31, 7:15pm, Target Atrium
Saturday, June 1, 6:15pm, Target Atrium

THANK YOU

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

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DAVID AFKHAM,
CONDUCTOR

Known for his impeccable technique and compelling artistry, David Afkham has received worldwide acclaim and is one of the most sought-after conductors of his generation. He is the chief conductor and artistic director of the Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, a position he has held since 2019 after five seasons as the orchestra's principal conductor. Afkham's impressive career has been marked by a series of critically acclaimed performances and collaborations with some of the world's leading orchestras. He has appeared with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony, NHK Symphony, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Philadelphia Orchestra, among many other major orchestras. He debuted with the Minnesota Orchestra in October 2021 in a program featuring piano soloist Emanuel Ax. His recent successes at the opera pit include performances of Richard Strauss' *Arabella* at the Semperoper Dresden and a new production of the work at the Teatro Real, Madrid. Highlights of his 2023-24 season include debuts with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Detroit Symphony. Born in Germany, Afkham began piano and violin lessons at an early age. He studied at the Freiburg Music University and Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt. More: kdschmid.de, davidafkham.com.



CHRISTIAN TETZLAFF,
VIOLIN

An artist known for his musical integrity, technical assurance and compelling interpretations, Christian Tetzlaff has for many years been internationally recognized as one of the most sought-after violinists and exciting musicians on the classical music scene. He has performed and recorded a broad spectrum of repertoire ranging from Bach's unaccompanied sonatas and partitas to world premieres of contemporary works such as the Jorg Widmann Violin Concerto. A dedicated chamber musician, he founded the Tetzlaff Quartet in 1994 with violinist Elisabeth Kufferath, violist Hanna Weinmeister and his sister, cellist Tanja Tetzlaff. He appears regularly with the orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Pittsburgh, among many others in the U.S., as well as the major European ensembles. He is also a guest at the world's most prominent summer music festivals. He has received numerous awards for his recordings including the "Diapason d'or" in 2018, the Midem Classical Award in 2017 and the "Preis Der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik" in 2015. Most recently, his recording of the Bartók Violin Concertos with the Helsinki Philharmonic was chosen as the Gramophone Concerto Recording of the Year. Also of special significance are his recordings of the unaccompanied Bach Sonatas and Partitas. More: cmartists.com, christian-tetzlaff.de.

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Brahms: Violin Concerto

One of the most beloved works for violin and orchestra, this concerto is breathtaking in its musical scope. It is also fiendishly difficult to play—requiring great technical prowess—thanks in part to the soloist for whom Brahms intended it: his friend Joseph Joachim, whose influence shows especially in passages asking for tenths, an interval requiring nimble hands.

Dutilleux: *Métaboles*

Métaboles explores the concept of transition, with five continuous movements reflecting various aspects of change. This piece marked a turning point in Dutilleux's career, incorporating unique structural experiments and soloistic percussion.

Bartók: Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*

The Miraculous Mandarin was a failure at its 1926 premiere, as audiences, press, civic leaders and the Catholic Church called it shockingly immoral. Bartók insisted the story was a cautionary and allegorical tale of the conflict between good and evil, with an outcome of real beauty. The music, condensed into a suite, can be appreciated on its own terms: brilliant, hard-edged, rhythmic and powerful.



JOHANNES BRAHMS

B: May 7, 1833
Hamburg, Germany

D: April 3, 1897
Vienna, Austria

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77

PREMIERED: January 1, 1879

Like his Haydn Variations, Brahms wrote his Violin Concerto during a summer spent in a lovely location: the resort town of Pörlschach on the Wörthersee, a lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains. It was 1878, and in a letter to a friend he noted how much he felt like writing music there: “So many melodies fly about that one must be careful not to tread on them.” The composer set out to write something for his friend and colleague of 25 years, the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who was both soloist and conductor at the work’s premiere in Leipzig on January 1, 1879.

LYRIC, SPACIOUS—AND CHALLENGING

Brahms’ Violin Concerto is extraordinarily difficult for the soloist, and in a famous jibe it has been called “a concerto against the violin rather than for it.” It requires a tremendous violinist, one with the ability to make huge leaps and land with dead-center accuracy, to project the violin’s sound over a large orchestra, and to have hands nimble enough to play the tenths that Brahms frequently calls for. Yet the work is not showy or flashy. Violin and orchestra are beautifully integrated, with the melodic line flowing seamlessly between them, and the soloist’s skills always at the service of the music, rather than the reverse.

ALLEGRO NON TROPPO. Brahms stays close to classical tradition in the first movement of the concerto, where a long orchestral exposition introduces the themes before the entrance of the violinist. The very beginning, with its arching and falling main subjects, is distinctive for the way the composer manages to disguise the meter: it is in 3/4, yet the stresses of the opening phrases obscure the downbeats. Solo oboe introduces the second theme, and the full string section stamps out the third. Only when these themes have been fully presented does the solo violin enter, with a dazzling two-octave run up the scale, followed by a series of blistering string-crossings.

This big, dramatic movement can make a huge sound, with all the thrust and fire a concerto should have. But Brahms’ performance instructions make clear that he believed the true character of this music to be *dolce*, *espressivo*, *tranquillo*, *lusingando* (coaxing, charming). Much of the writing for

violin is graceful and lyric, and in particular Brahms’ transformation of the second subject into a slow waltz is a moment of pure magic.

Perhaps as a nod to Joachim, Brahms did not write out a cadenza for the first movement; Joachim produced one that is splendid, and others since have been drawn to write their own. The return of the orchestra at the end of the cadenza is another magical moment: over quiet accompaniment, the violinist lays out once again the movement’s opening theme and then takes it very high on long sustained notes as the orchestra sings far below. Gradually the music descends from these Olympian heights, gathers momentum and strength, and hurtles to the resounding D-major chord that closes the movement.

ADAGIO. The entire opening statement of the second movement, in F major, is given to the wind choir, and the solo oboe announces the movement’s main idea. When the solo violin enters, it is with music that is already a variation of the oboe’s noble song. The center section, moving to F-sharp minor, grows much more impassioned, with the violin burning its way high above the orchestra before the return of the poised opening material and a graceful close.

ALLEGRO GIOCOLO, MA NON TROPPO VIVACE. The final movement is the expected rondo, which Brahms marks *Allegro giocoso* (fast and happy), but he also specifies *ma non troppo vivace* (not too fast). Brahms loved Hungarian music more exactly, Romani music), and many have remarked on the Hungarian flavor of this movement. It is difficult for the soloist, full of extended passages in octaves and great leaps across the range of the violin, yet with wonderfully lyric interludes along the way. A great cascade of runs from the violinist introduces the coda, where Brahms subtly recasts the 2/4 rondo tune so that it seems to be in 6/8. This gathers strength, and all appears set for the expected closing fireworks. But in the last measures Brahms springs one final surprise, winding the music down so that it seems almost to have lost its way before three great chords ring out to proclaim the true close.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.



HENRI DUTILLEUX

B: January 22, 1916
Angers, France

D: May 22, 2013
Paris, France

Métaboles

PREMIERED: January 14, 1965

In French, *métaboles* is a musical term indicating a transition from one pentatonic scale—a unit of five different pitches—to another. While Henri Dutilleux did not fixate on the idea of a pentatonic scale in his orchestral work *Métaboles*, the concept of transition is very much a foundational idea. His piece is in five different movements, but they are all to be played continuously without pausing in between, thus reinforcing the idea of transition.

The names of the movements themselves all have a link to this foundational idea. The first movement, *Incantatoire* (Incantatory), evokes chants reminiscent of pagan rituals accompanying changing seasons. The second movement, *Linéaire* (Linear), perhaps describes the directionality of transition. The third movement, *Obsessionnel* (Obsessive), can reference feelings that may arise throughout the transition process. The fourth movement, *Torpide* (Torpido), may indicate the speed of certain transitions. The finale, *Flamboyant*, might be attributed to the final product of a transition, a perfect example being a butterfly.

A TRANSITIONAL COMPOSITION

While the musical foundation of *Métaboles* is grounded upon transition, the work itself is also a transitional piece in Dutilleux's compositional history. It was composed in 1963 and 1964 on a commission from George Szell, then conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, who led its premiere with that ensemble on January 14, 1965.

Until 1960, Dutilleux worked mostly with traditional forms. Always self-critical, he felt that his early works were too derivative of Debussy, Ravel and Roussel, and either denounced or destroyed most of his compositions completed before 1945, thus naming his 1948 piano sonata as his Opus 1. While his more mature, post-1945 works are solidly within Dutilleux's recognizable sonic vernacular, the completion of *Métaboles* marked one of his first ventures into experimenting with structure. Dutilleux expanded his musical language for *Métaboles*, and it also marks his first foray into significant soloistic composition for percussion.

According to the scholar Thomas May, Dutilleux turns to the evolutionary process of nature itself for *Métaboles*. In this way, Dutilleux's philosophical approach is in

opposition to the goal-oriented works of Romanticism or the representational compositions of Impressionism. In *Métaboles*, the music is the process to enjoy, much like how organic processes such as the changing states of water (solid, liquid, gas) or pollination are wonders to behold in their own right. In this respect, Dutilleux's profound contribution may have influenced similar works such as *Afatsim* by Chaya Czernowin from 1996, which is about galls or abnormal plant growths; or *Sketches Set #7* by Ed Bland from 1987, which has a structure derived from Bland's manipulation of the gestures he composed using an original tone row—a lineup of 12 different pitches. Where these contemporary works employ a contemporary musical vernacular, *Métaboles* is lush, atmospheric, at times warm and at times scintillating. I personally recommend paying particular attention to the fragrant, celestial cello solo in the second section.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born in Angers, a small town in the northwestern area of France, just southwest of Paris, Dutilleux came from a family that included a painter, a mathematician and another composer—his grandfather, Julien Koszul. In his youth, he studied harmony, counterpoint and piano at the Douai Conservatory north of Paris, then began studies at the Paris Conservatory in 1933. Five years later, his cantata *L'Anneau du Roi* (The King's Ring) won him a Rome Prize; however, he could not finish his stay in Italy because of the first World War. Consequently, he returned to Paris in 1940 and was based there for the rest of his life.

While in Paris, Dutilleux was the head of music production for Radio France for 18 years, and subsequently taught at the École Normale de Musique de Paris until 1970, also serving as the school's president from 1968 to 1974. Dutilleux received notable commissions and performances from ensembles in the United States, and was the guest composer in residence at the Tanglewood Music Center in 1995 and 1998. He maintained a private studio on Îles Saint-Louis, one of two natural islands of the Seine River in Paris. After his death at 97 years old in 2013, he was buried in the same grave as his wife Geneviève Joy, who was a pianist and the dedicatee of Dutilleux's piano sonata.

Instrumentation: 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, Chinese cymbal, suspended cymbal, cowbell, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, xylophone, glockenspiel, harp, celesta and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.



BÉLA BARTÓK

B: March 25, 1881
Sânnicolau Mare, Romania

D: September 26, 1945
New York City

Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*

PREMIERED: November 27, 1926

No other work looms quite as large in Bartók's career as *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and none of his other works caused him so much trouble. From the time he encountered Melchior Lengyel's story in January 1917, Bartók worked on this music for almost 10 years—the most time he spent on a single work—before it was produced on the stage. Yet the premiere in Cologne was a catastrophe. The audience jeered, the press was savage, the Catholic Church protested and the mayor of Cologne ripped into him for programming “such a dirty piece” and blocked any further performances. Efforts to produce *The Miraculous Mandarin* in Budapest in 1931, ran into such opposition that they had to be canceled.

A DISTURBING TALE

The reasons for such furious opposition are obvious. *The Miraculous Mandarin* tells a story that prompts offense even today due to its violent and racist content. The composer himself left a concise summary: “Three apaches force a beautiful girl to lure men into their den so that they can rob them. The first is a poor youth, the second is not better off, but the third, however, is a wealthy Chinese [man]. He is a good catch, and the girl entertains him by dancing. The Mandarin's desire is aroused, he is inflamed with passion, but the girl shrinks from him in horror. The apaches attack him, rob him, smother him in a quilt, stab him with a sword—but their violence is of no avail. They cannot cope with the Mandarin, who continues to look at the girl with love and longing in his eyes. Finally...the girl satisfies the Mandarin's desire; only then does he collapse and die.”

The tale could hardly be more disturbing, so Bartók's reactions to it catch us by surprise. He called it “marvelously beautiful,” and on another occasion exclaimed “how beautiful the story is.” Bartók saw it as a moral tale. Beneath the lurid surface, it is an allegory of the collision of good and evil and of the ultimate triumph of good. The evil is clear: the three robbers—always portrayed by noisy, abrasive music—represent the worst of society: money-mad, corrupt, violent, destructive. They have corrupted the innocent girl to do their bidding. Into this setting comes the powerful Mandarin. He represents an unstoppable life force beyond the understanding of the robbers. Only the girl

comes to understand, and the passion she shares with the Mandarin has what Bartók viewed as redemptive—although many listeners then and now may find the encounter disturbingly coercive.

A BALLET—OR NOT?

The Miraculous Mandarin is usually classified as a ballet, but Bartók insisted that it was not. For Bartók, the emphasis was on action rather than dance, and his music depicts that action with raw power. Some have heard the influence of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* here, while others have heard the music of Arnold Schoenberg (which Bartók had discovered after World War I), but *The Miraculous Mandarin* actually sounds like Bartók in every measure—brilliant, hard-edged, rhythmic, powerful. It has been observed that a stage performance needs no choreographer, since every action—every gesture—is clear from the music.

Onstage, *The Miraculous Mandarin* lasts half an hour, but the suite consists of about the first two-thirds of the complete score. From its first instant, this music is unsettled. Second violins swirl up and down over a “wrong” interval (octave plus a half-step), and the din of the industrialized urban setting arrives in a blast of auto-horns.

Each of the girl's seductive decoys in the window, depicted by clarinets, nets a prospective client. First, a shabby rake (Bartók's original scenario reverse the sequence of the first two Johns) enters to the sound of trombone glissandos and then is graphically thrown down the stairs by the robbers. The second decoy brings a reticent young man (solo oboe), and the girl dances shyly for him before he too is found to be penniless and is cast down the stairs.

But the third decoy brings the Mandarin, who makes a magnificent entrance. The orchestra “shivers” in terror as the lower brass stamp out a stereotype of an “Eastern-sounding” theme and the acid chords that mark his arrival in the room. A moment of stunned silence follows. Terrified, the girl begins to dance for him, and her waltz gradually becomes more animated. When the Mandarin tries to embrace her, she flees in terror, and he chases her around the room. This music, the most violent in *The Miraculous Mandarin*, is a furious fugue, and at the climax of the chase—just before the robbers leap out to seize the Mandarin—Bartók rips the suite to a sudden close on three brutal chords.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling E-flat clarinet and 1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, soprano snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, triangle, xylophone, harp, piano, celesta, organ and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.