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PROFILE

THOMAS SØNDERGÅRD

Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård, who this past fall began his second season as music director of the Minnesota Orchestra, is a highly regarded conductor in both the orchestral and opera spheres. He has earned a reputation for incisive interpretations of works by composers from his native Denmark, a great versatility in a broad range of repertoire, and a collaborative approach with the musicians he leads.

Søndergård first conducted the Minnesota Orchestra in December 2021, establishing an immediate rapport with musicians and audiences; he was announced as the next music director in July 2022 and began his tenure in September 2023. Highlights of his newly announced 2025–26 season will include opera-in-concert performances of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, a concert with cellist Yo-Yo Ma and a festival of music from Nordic countries.

Since 2018 Søndergård has been music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO). Prior to joining the RSNO, he served as principal conductor and musical advisor to the Norwegian Radio Orchestra and then as principal conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW). As a guest conductor he has led major European and North American orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Gewandhaus Orchestra, London Symphony and New York



Philharmonic. This season, in addition to a full slate of RSNO concerts, he leads Strauss' *Elektra* with the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Grieg's *Peer Gynt* with Den Norske Opera and Ballet, and appears as guest conductor with the City of Birmingham Symphony and Aarhus Symfoniorkesterlektra.

Søndergård began his music career as a timpanist, joining the Royal Danish Orchestra after graduating from the Royal Danish Academy of Music. He made his conducting debut in 2005, leading the Royal Danish Opera in the premiere of Poul Ruders' *Kafka's Trial* to wide acclaim; he has returned subsequently many times to the Royal Danish Opera. His discography includes Vilde Frang's debut recording of violin concertos by Sibelius and Prokofiev with the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne; numerous works by Poul Ruders; the Lutosławski and Dutilleux concertos with cellist Johannes Moser and the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra; Sibelius works with BBC NOW; and works by Prokofiev and Strauss with the RSNO.

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SALUTING RETIRING MUSICIANS KATJA LINFIELD AND ELLEN DINWIDDIE SMITH

— This summer the Minnesota Orchestra is celebrating the careers of three retiring musicians from the cello, horn and trumpet sections. Two of those long-serving members—cellist Katja Linfield and horn player Ellen Dinwiddie Smith—are profiled here, while Principal Trumpet Manny Laureano will be saluted in the summer issue of *Showcase*.

As **Katja Linfield** looks back on her time in the Minnesota Orchestra's cello section, she recalls how a treasured family gift added to her winning her audition in 1990: the bow she used then and throughout her career was a gift, in sixth grade, from her grandmother. "It's nothing fancy, but I know it well and no other bow has felt as good," she says.

For Linfield, the Orchestra's 2009 European tour—including a visit to her home city of Düsseldorf, Germany—was a career highlight. "Unfortunately, my grandmother passed away in 1989, but my cousins, aunt and uncle were in the audience," she says, "and I know my grandmother was present in spirit!" Among her other favorite Orchestra memories are a recording of Dominick Argento's *Casa Guidi* with singer Frederica von Stade, and the Orchestra's 2018 tour to South Africa, where she and her wife Annie visited Kliptown to share music with children between rehearsals. "The concert in Soweto will forever be one of the most incredible experiences I have had in my career," she says. She also appeared



Katja Linfield

Joel Larson

regularly on the ensemble's chamber music series throughout her tenure.

Linfield describes the Orchestra as "a very large and tight family." When she joined the ensemble at age 24, she recalls being one of the youngest members—but now, she jokes, "the tables have turned and I am the 'old fart' sitting with new hires who weren't even born yet when I graduated from college. I embrace the moniker with pride and a smile!"

She has especially appreciated the camaraderie in the cello section—"a great mix of personalities, which I have enjoyed so much." One amusing tradition from her early years with the Orchestra has stood the test of time. On days with both morning and afternoon rehearsals, a cellist will tap Principal Cello Anthony Ross on the shoulder, as if to ask a question, precisely 35 minutes into the first

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SALUTING RETIRING MUSICIANS CONTINUED

rehearsal—“at 10:35 on the nose!”—and then “when he turns around we all show him an open hand of five fingers, indicating that we have five hours left of rehearsal.”

In her retirement, Linfield plans to visit Orchestra Hall as an audience member while also embracing life offstage. She is spending more time in her garage woodworking shop, playing ice hockey up to five times a week, traveling and taking pride in the achievements of her three daughters—triplets now pursuing art history and curation, biology, and international relations and European studies. She has chosen to retire after being on a leave of absence this season, and although that means she won’t receive the traditional onstage farewell, she feels it’s fitting: “I’m a ‘below-the-radar’ type of person and I feel going out in this quiet fashion suits me.”

Ellen Dinwiddie Smith—who became the Minnesota Orchestra’s first-ever female brass player upon joining the ensemble in 1993—retires this summer after a trailblazing career during which she held both low and high horn chairs, a rare feat among major orchestras.

Smith recalls fondly her journeys with the Orchestra to stages around the world, from Europe and South Africa to the West Coast and Carnegie Hall. “The South Africa tour was an incredible trip,” she says. “It reinforced to me how powerful music can be in connecting people.” At the Philharmonie in Berlin, she



Zoe Prinds-Flash

Ellen Dinwiddie Smith

remembers, “my sons and husband surprised me and showed up in the middle of the tour and sat behind me in the audience.”

Among her enduring Orchestra Hall memories are the first concert after the lockout ended in 2014—where “it was overwhelming to see the Finnish flags and the solidarity colors (including face paint!)”—and playing Eleanor Alberga’s *Shining Gate of Morpheus* in one of the first concerts during the pandemic. “One of the best things to come out of the pandemic is our partnership with Ashleigh Rowe and the team at TPT to broadcast our concerts,” she says. “I’m so thankful to the board and staff for making this a reality!”

One standout project for Smith was recording Mahler’s Seventh Symphony under Osmo Vänskä, including the *Nachtmusik* movement that starts with a first and third horn call-and-response. “The joy of performing that movement with my longtime



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SALUTING RETIRING MUSICIANS CONCLUSION

colleague Michael Gast will remain in my soul forever,” she says. Another favorite memory involved performing Mahler’s *Resurrection* Symphony while pregnant. As the Minnesota Chorale whispered the word “Auferstehen,” Smith’s unborn son Alex kicked for the very first time. “And not just a little,” she says. “He started drumming and doing somersaults. Music speaks to and moves us all, even before birth!”

Over more than three decades, Smith has seen the Orchestra evolve—and through it all, has remained grounded in gratitude for her colleagues and the rest of the Orchestra family. In retirement, she will teach horn, volunteer, spend time with her

husband, conductor Mark Russell Smith, and engage in her longtime hobby of scuba diving and underwater photography.

Upon final reflection, Smith says, “I’ll miss all the activities and volunteers in the Hall. I also recognize how the vision of our board brought everything together—they truly deserve a standing ovation for their contributions. But the most rewarding aspect of my time here was bringing relevant and exceptional music to our fantastic and supportive community in Minnesota. This audience will hold my heart forever.”

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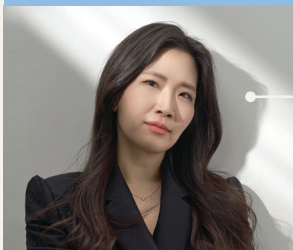
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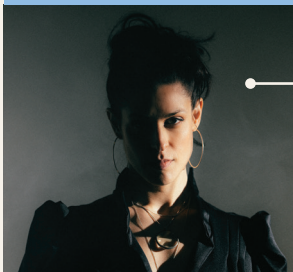
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OTT PLAYS BEETHOVEN

Jonathon Heyward, conductor

Alice Sara Ott, piano

FRI MAY 30 8PM | SAT MAY 31 7PM

Carl Maria von Weber Overture to *Oberon* CA. 10'

Ludwig van Beethoven Concerto No. 3 in C minor for
for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 37 CA. 34'
Allegro con brio
Largo
Rondo: Allegro
Alice Sara Ott, piano

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

Robert Schumann Symphony No. 2 in C major, Opus 61 CA. 34'
Sostenuto assai – Allegro non troppo
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Adagio espressivo
Allegro molto vivace



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on this month's concerts.

Conductor and soloist profiles appear on pages 46 and 48.

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**CARL MARIA
VON WEBER**
B: November 18, 1786
Eutin, Germany

D: June 5, 1826
London, England

Overture to *Oberon*
PREMIERED:
April 12, 1826 (complete
opera)

— Carl Maria von Weber wrote much music for the stage, and opera was his most successful medium. *Oberon*, his last opera, was commissioned by Charles Kemble, an actor and joint proprietor of the Covent Garden Theatre in London. Weber was already highly respected by London operaphiles for his *Freischütz*, which had gone through six different productions there in 1824 alone. Although his health was already precarious, he accepted the assignment anyway, pouring his greatest effort into the venture. He even took more than 150 English lessons so as to understand the language he was setting and to be prepared for his London visit to conduct the premiere—which, on April 12, 1826, was a resounding success. Weber conducted 11 further performances, all of them sold out—and a few weeks later he was dead from consumption at the early age of 39.

A WORLD OF ROMANTIC ADVENTURE

The English libretto, based on Wieland's epic poem *Oberon*, was written by James Robinson Planché (1796–1880) and involves quite a potpourri of characters and locales: Oberon, Titania and Puck (from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*), Charlemagne, Haroun al Rashid, the Caliph of Baghdad, mermaids and fairies, who appear variously in settings from France to fairyland to Baghdad. Like many German romantic operas, *Oberon* incorporates elements of the supernatural, pageantry, faraway locations and maidens in distress rescued by knights in shining armor.

The opera's overture begins with the vision of just such a knight, Huon de Bordeaux, whose soft, beguiling call from his magic horn bids us to enter the world of romantic adventure. Flutes and clarinets answer with “a touch of fairy dust,” as Minnesota Orchestra annotator Mary Ann Feldman once described it, followed shortly by a suggestion of the pageantry of Charlemagne's court.

The main body of the overture (*Allegro*) follows a sonata-form movement, employing themes from the opera. It begins with the stirring music that later accompanies the dash of two lovers—Huon and Rezia, daughter of the

Caliph of Baghdad—to the waiting ship that will carry them to freedom. Then follows the lyrical prayer theme (first heard in the solo clarinet). A few soft hints of Rezia’s grand aria, “Ocean, thou mighty monster,” are heard in the violins. The development section incorporates these ideas, plus a few new ones. Weber saves the grand statement of Rezia’s big aria for the recapitulation. The words to which this is sung later, at the end of the opera, are: “My husband, my Huon, we are saved, we are saved.”

PROGRAM NOTE BY ROBERT MARKOW.



**LUDWIG VAN
BEETHOVEN**

B: December 17, 1770
Bonn, Germany

D: March 26, 1827
Vienna, Austria

**Concerto No. 3 in
C minor for Piano and
Orchestra, Opus 37**

PREMIERED: April 5, 1803

— Ludwig van Beethoven completed the main work on his Third Piano Concerto in 1800. He was the soloist at the premiere in Vienna on April 5, 1803—an occasion at which his Symphony No. 2 and oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* were also introduced.

Ignaz von Seyfried, the newly appointed young conductor at the Theater an der Wien, was recruited to turn pages for Beethoven, “but heaven help me!—that was easier said than done,” he reported. “I saw almost nothing but empty leaves...for he played nearly all of the solo part from memory since, as was so often the case, he had not had time to set it all down on paper. He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages, and my scarcely concealable anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly and he laughed heartily at the jovial supper which we ate afterward.”

THE MUSIC: DRAMA, DEPTH AND WIT

ALLEGRO CON BRIO. The Third Piano Concerto feels tight compared to its expansive predecessor. The first movement’s gestures, the stark octaves, the sharply profiled rhythms, are those of a tensely dramatic music. Even so, the orchestral exposition of the first movement is remarkably spacious. The piano enters with three explosive scales and then plays its own version,

at once elegant and forceful, of the opening theme. Soloist and orchestra together discourse on this. The contrasting lyric theme reappears as well. Brilliant keyboard writing plays an increasingly prominent role, and the soloist brings their part of this chapter to a flashy conclusion with a spectacular scale through four and a half octaves.

For this movement we have a cadenza by Beethoven, and it is an assertive and pianistically brilliant affair. Even more remarkable is Beethoven's way of bringing the orchestra back in after the cadenza. There always tends to be a drop in tension after the razzle-dazzle of the cadenza. Beethoven, however, takes pains to make sure this moment is arresting and not conventional: he gives us something mysterious and tension-laden.

LARGO. For the slow movement, Beethoven chooses the key of E major, and the sound of the first hushed chord in the piano is a shock that does not lose its magic. This *Largo* is a movement of immeasurable depth, beautiful melodies and wonderful sounds. The sheerly sensuous element is manifest with special magic in the quietly suspended transition passages in which the dialogue of flute and bassoon is accompanied by plucked strings and wide-ranging, delicate piano arpeggios. Just before the close, which is itself a surprise, Beethoven gives a brief, written-out cadenza to be played *con gran espressione* (with great expression).

RONDO: ALLEGRO. Beethoven starts the finale with a pun. On the piano, G-sharp, the third note of the E-major scale and the note on which the principal melodies of the *Largo* begin, is the same as A-flat, the sixth note in the scale of C minor and first accented note of the finale's main theme. Later in this vigorous *Rondo* he makes the pun more obvious. And with admirable surefootedness, he introduces a fugued interlude just when a change of pace and texture is needed. This movement, too, has a cadenza at its end. And like Mozart in his concerto in the same key, Beethoven has the music emerge from that cadenza with a rush to the finish in a new key (C major), a new meter (6/8) and a new tempo (*presto*).

PROGRAM NOTE EXCERPTED FROM THE LATE MICHAEL STEINBERG'S *THE CONCERTO: A LISTENER'S GUIDE* (OXFORD, 1998), USED WITH PERMISSION.

**ROBERT SCHUMANN**

B: June 8, 1810
Zwickau, Germany

D: July 29, 1856
Bonn, Germany

**Symphony No. 2 in
C major, Opus 61**

PREMIERED:
November 5, 1846

— Sometime after July 1846, Robert Schumann wrote that in the previous year he had developed a “completely new manner of composition.” In the spring and summer of 1845, Schumann was in what has become known as his Third Period of composition—the final period of three—in which one major focus was on the technique of counterpoint, resulting in works such as *Four Fugues*, Opus 72, and *Six Fugues for Organ on B-A-C-H*, Opus 60 (which he incorrectly predicted would be amongst his most beloved works).

SOMBER OR TRIUMPHANT?

On a more somber note, Schumann endured one of his deepest depressive periods between 1844 and 1846, marked by hypochondria, dizziness, irrational fears and auditory problems. Consequently, many view the works from this period as being affected by Schumann’s mental instability. Various critics and musicologists have attributed what they view as unfocused melodic lines or “alarming monotony” within works of this period to a “sick man” and his “declining [compositional] powers.”

Schumann’s Second Symphony did not escape such critique by those who, as the late biographer John Daverio noted, focused on the “somber rhetoric of the *Adagio*.” On the contrary, the entirety of the symphony, including much of the *Adagio* third movement, projects a poetic spirit of triumph. Schumann’s “new manner” of composition included a more assured contrapuntal technique, a sophisticated approach to large-scale unity, more sensitivity and attention to manipulating musical moods, more refined transitions and a more reflective compositional process. His Second Symphony displays all of these traits and more, resulting in a sublime musical journey that continues to pierce the soul in a profound way.

CREATIVITY AMIDST ADVERSITY

Born to a financially well-off, unmusical family, Schumann initially studied law, despite being more drawn to romantic literature and music. His piano studies with Friedrich Wieck starting in 1829 resulted in frustrations as a performer because of physical problems with his right hand. However,

through such studies, he developed a keen ability and enthusiasm for composing piano works, and he also met and eventually married Friedrich's daughter Clara, one of the 19th century's most accomplished pianists, as well as an inventive and masterful composer.

Schumann's early works consist mostly of piano pieces, while his later output expanded to include large-scale orchestral compositions, beginning in 1841 with the completion of his First Symphony. In the fall of 1845, Schumann wrote to the composer-conductor Felix Mendelssohn about "much trumpeting and drumming" within him. That December, Schumann attended a rehearsal and performance of Schubert's Ninth Symphony, which inspired his own "symphonic thoughts." Where Schumann's First Symphony was sketched in only four days and orchestrated over a month, the Second was sketched during the last two weeks of December but orchestrated over the whole of 1846—amongst illness, the birth of a child, vacationing on Norderney island in Germany and completing other works.

After the Second Symphony's completion on October 19, 1846, Schumann wrote in his diary that he suffered from nervous tension, anxiety and exhaustion during the final weeks of labor on the symphony. The premiere by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra led by Mendelssohn on November 5, 1846, was met unenthusiastically, and prompted some revisions. Its second performance two weeks later was much more successful and yielded positive reviews from critics.

THE SYMPHONY IN BRIEF

Structured in four movements—loosely slow, fast, slow, fast—Schumann's Second explores the symphony orchestra's full range of dynamics, pitches and emotion. The first movement is marked *Sostenuto assai*, or "rather sustained," and opens with meditative string harmonies that support silently triumphant brass declarations. The sustained, reserved emotions eventually explode into full, uninhibited joy and triumph played by the entire orchestra. The second movement is a *Scherzo*, marked with curious harmonic turns of phrase, devilish rhythms and syncopations. The third movement is an *Adagio*, with a melody that pierces the soul. The symphony's finale features quick, upward gestures and a triumphant timpani declaration at its conclusion.

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.

FEI XIE PLAYS JOLIVET

Cristian Măcelaru, conductor

Fei Xie, bassoon

THU JUN 5 11AM | FRI JUN 6 8PM

*These concerts are dedicated in loving memory to Minnesota Orchestra cellist
Arek Tesarczyk (1965-2025).*

Wynton Marsalis	Selections from <i>Blues Symphony</i> II. Swimming in Sorrow VI. Danzón y Mambo, Choro y Samba	CA. 24'
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André Jolivet	Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra Recitativo – Allegro gioivale Largo cantabile – Fugato <i>Fei Xie, bassoon</i>	CA. 15'
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I N T E R M I S S I O N	CA. 20'
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George Enescu	Symphony No. 1 in E-flat major, Opus 13 Assez vif et rythmé Lent Vif et vigoureux	CA. 32'
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available for streaming at minnesotaorchestra.org and on the Orchestra's social
media channels.

**WYNTON MARSALIS**

B: October 18, 1961
New Orleans, Louisiana

Selections from *Blues Symphony*

PREMIERED:
November 19, 2009
(selected movements);
February 4, 2015
(complete symphony)

The top story at the Grammy Awards on February 28, 1984, may have been the unprecedented eight trophies taken home by Michael Jackson, but another star shone bright that night as 22-year-old trumpet player Wynton Marsalis became the first musician to win Grammys in both the jazz and classical categories in the same year—a remarkable feat he repeated in 1985.

Marsalis has since cemented a singular position as a leader in the jazz field and the broader realm of American music and culture—most notably as founder and director of Jazz at Lincoln Center and its Orchestra, and as a recipient of numerous honors including the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for Music, the first time the honor was awarded for a jazz composition, the oratorio *Blood on the Fields*.

A MONUMENTAL TASK

Marsalis' hundreds of compositions include four symphonies, the third of which, *Swing Symphony*, opened the Minnesota Orchestra's 2022-23 season, when the Orchestra was joined by Marsalis and the full forces of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Marsalis' second symphony, *Blues Symphony*, is scored for a more conventional symphony orchestra—with no jazz ensemble embedded—though augmented by a greatly enlarged percussion section.

It is difficult to distill the meaning of the blues; in various senses it is a musical form, a scale, a harmonic progression, an inflection, a mood and an outlook on the human experience. Marsalis describes it thusly: "The blues helps you remember back before the troubles on hand and in mind, and they carry you on the wings of angels to a timeless higher ground."

Writing an hour-long symphony that traces the roots and lineage of the blues and their intertwining with American history is a tall task—one that took Marsalis more than a decade from conception to finished form. After the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra premiered selected movements of *Blues Symphony* in November 2009 and January 2010, Marsalis continued to refine and compose amid his many other projects. A revised full version

of the symphony was premiered on February 4, 2015, by the Shenandoah Conservatory Symphony Orchestra.

THE COMPOSER'S NOTES

Tonight we hear movements two and six of the seven-part symphony; Marsalis himself has provided the following road map.

SWIMMING IN SORROW. “The second movement begins on the open seas of the Middle Passage utilizing a florid melodic language of Afro-American parlor music of the 19th century as a way to access cresting waves of orchestral dynamics. A pastoral interlude of brass and woodwinds is followed by the trombone preaching the gospel with a choir of French horns as elder deacons in recognition of the centrality of church music to the blues and jazz. The trombone usually calls the beginning of New Orleans funerals and is considered the instrument closest to the voice of an exhorting preacher. In a reversal of roles, the clarinet actually leads us in a funeral march and its solitary cry is answered by the introspective memory of tambourine and closely voiced woodwinds.

“A final clarinet cadenza brings us to the washboard and two-beat country shuffle of the slave and rural fiddler to an organic evolution into the 4/4 swing violin of masters like Claude Williams and Stéphane Grappelli. This movement requires the orchestra to identify the meaning of spirituals, of New Orleans funereal music, and of the gospel preaching tradition. It places pressure on the string sections to pursue the American fiddle and international swing traditions in order to play with a disciplined looseness and unforced naturalness. After a brief return to the opening seaborne theme, the French horn sings a spiritual. It is followed by a reprise of the clarinet dirge on cello with the introspective answer now becoming an exotic groove. The final call is a spiritual nocturne delivered by the trumpet with English horn response. The trumpet cry, as in the playing of ‘Taps,’ is often the final sound for the deceased. So we conclude with a repeated blues cry on the English horn above a sustained trumpet note with respect to Dvořák’s Ninth Symphony, *From the New World*.”

DANZÓN Y MAMBO, CHORO Y SAMBA. “The sixth movement begins with New Orleans/Cuban concert music feel and a male-female dialogue between violin and cello; the danzón and then the mambo with cha-cha bell and swooping strings. This movement places a lot of responsibility on the percussion section to learn the subtleties of Latin percussion. An interlude of woodwinds leads into a Charanga-inflected flute solo in honor of Alberto Soccaras from

Cuba who played the first jazz flute solo in 1927. Mr. Soccaras was an ear training teacher of mine in 1979–80, and I had no idea who he was.

“We get deeper in the groove and then those trumpets with bell tones end the mambo. After another contrapuntal woodwind interlude, we turn to the habanera. It is the most universal Afro-Latin rhythm. A transparent orchestral treatment of sultry themes is counter-stated by aggressive French horns and celli with trumpets and trombones punctuating the groove. A brief bossa nova interlude takes us to the Ragtime of Brazil, choro. Choro and samba bring us home and we end with a bossa nova tag.”

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER, WITH MUSICAL DESCRIPTION BY WYNTON MARSALIS.



ANDRÉ JOLIVET

B: August 8, 1905
Paris, France

D: December 20, 1974
Paris, France

Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra

PREMIERED:
November 30, 1954

The 20th-century Frenchman André Jolivet never settled for the expected in his career and aesthetic style—and this holds especially true in his treatment of the solo instrument in his Bassoon Concerto, which calls for intensity and beauty from an instrument often known for pastoral or comedic roles. It’s no small wonder, then, that this weekend’s soloist, Principal Bassoon Fei Xie, calls it his “favorite concerto.”

MUSIC AND THE DIVINE

Although Jolivet’s early studies with Edgard Varèse introduced him to cutting-edge atonality and experimental orchestration, the young composer soon found himself drawn to something deeper: music’s primal, almost mystical roots. In 1936 he co-founded La Jeune France, a group of composers who aimed to create modern music with warmth and emotional depth, distancing themselves from more abstract aesthetics. As his compositional voice developed, Jolivet found himself drawn to spiritual concepts, seeking a connection between music and the divine.

Jolivet wrote in a wide variety of genres including solo, chamber and orchestral compositions. While he composed several well-known concertos for brass and woodwinds, his Bassoon Concerto of 1954 stands out,

remaining one of the most strikingly original works in the instrument's repertoire. It challenges the idea of what the bassoon can be, transforming it into a bold, unpredictable and deeply expressive voice.

THE SOLOIST'S HISTORY

This week, Fei Xie, the Minnesota Orchestra's principal bassoon since 2017, takes the spotlight to perform what he calls "my favorite concerto with my favorite orchestra." He first played Jolivet's concerto at his senior recital at Oberlin Conservatory—accompanied by an orchestra he put together that was conducted by his former teacher George Sakakeeny—and relishes the opportunity to play it again on a grander stage. Revisiting the piece gives him a chance to embrace its demands for boldness and fearless expression—and to perform it with the ensemble he knows and loves.

Xie brings his own dramatic flair to Jolivet's vision of the bassoon as a raw, primal force within the orchestra. "I like to be dramatic, and it's what I go for in this piece," he says. "A good drama in art can really captivate people's interest and attention." Whether delivering angular rhythmic motifs or long, chant-like melodies, the soloist is called to command a broad palette of colors and emotions.

MYSTERY IN THE MUSIC

Jolivet's Bassoon Concerto was commissioned by French conductor and bassoonist Maurice Allard, who premiered it with the Orchestre Radio-Symphonique in Paris on November 30, 1954.

In this relatively brief concerto—spanning 15 minutes and two movements, each divided into two parts—Jolivet presents the bassoon as an untamed force, capable of both intensity and ethereal beauty. The smaller-sized orchestra of piano and strings creates an intimate setting, allowing the bassoon to shine in a uniquely mysterious and evocative light.

RECITATIVO–ALLEGRO GIOVIALE. The concerto ignites with electrifying energy as the bassoon leaps between registers with relentless momentum. The orchestra counters with sharp accents and jagged rhythms. The bassoon remains the untamed center of attention as it weaves through the chaos with virtuosity. Xie describes the first movement as "your own personal monologue...your own cadenza that gives the performer a lot of room to add their own character."

LARGO CANTABILE–FUGATO. Suddenly, everything shifts to a dreamy and lyrical haze. The bassoon's melody mimics a chant in long and meditative lines, and the orchestra's texture thins out, providing dissonant harmonies

and an eerie atmosphere. Time seems to stand still. Here, the listener experiences Jolivet's fascination with ancient and mystical music firsthand.

The calm does not last long. The concerto's final segment erupts with virtuosic outbursts, showcasing the bassoon's agility. The rapid runs and sudden leaps demand absolute technical mastery from the bassoonist. The orchestra mimics this with jazzy and syncopated rhythms that drive the piece towards an ecstatic finale and showing that the bassoon is a force to be reckoned with.

PROGRAM NOTE BY MARTA SIKORA.



GEORGE ENESCU

B: August 19, 1881
Liveni, Romania

D: May 4, 1955
Paris, France

**Symphony No. 1 in
E-flat major, Opus 13**

PREMIERED:
January 21, 1906

George Enescu's Symphony No. 1 was premiered in Paris, France, to great acclaim in January 1906. The young Romanian composer had already scored notable successes with his *Romanian Poem* (1898) and the two Romanian Rhapsodies (1901). The vivacious Romanian Rhapsody No. 1 remains a staple of concert programs to this day, but its very popularity overshadowed the rest of Enescu's orchestral output to an extent the composer came to resent.

FROM PRODIGY TO PROMINENCE

Enescu was born in 1881 and soon was recognized as a musical prodigy in the same league as Mozart, Mendelssohn and Saint-Saëns. Enescu's earliest compositions were written when he was only 5 years old, and his debut as a violinist came at the age of 8. He graduated from the Vienna Conservatory with a Silver Medal at the age of 12. (The usual age for *admission* to the Conservatory at the time was 14!)

While still in his teens, Enescu completed studies at the Paris Conservatory including violin (first prize), piano and composition. By age 20, Enescu was well on his way to establishing an international career as a composer,

conductor and violinist that would make him the most celebrated classical musician in Romanian history. Enescu divided his time between Paris and his native Romania, where many important cultural institutions now bear his name in recognition of his life-long work to advance Romanian music education and culture.

Despite success as a performer and conductor, Enescu's true passion was composition. While some of his early works were based on the Romanian folk music he remembered from his childhood, Enescu's mature musical language was a cosmopolitan blend of the Austro-German foundation of his early training and the diverse musical and aesthetic influences he encountered in turn-of-the-century Paris.

THE MUSIC: VITALITY AND DELICACY

Enescu lays out his First Symphony in three movements: fast-slow-fast. Here he may be following the examples of Franck, Chausson, D'Indy and Dukas, whose symphonies favor this design and that Enescu would have heard in Paris.

ASSEZ VIF ET RHYTHMÉ. The first movement begins with unison brass confidently introducing the principal theme and, one is tempted to say, announcing the arrival of its youthful creator. Enescu contrasts this angular opening motif with lush waltz-like music. These ideas are elaborated and revisited before the movement closes with a powerful restatement of the opening brass fanfare.

LENT. The second movement begins in a hushed nocturnal mood anchored by a descending three-note pattern played by the horn. A succession of themes are presented and developed before ebbing away with music of chamber music-like delicacy.

VIF ET VIGOREUX. The finale reintroduces the rhythmic vitality of the opening movement and follows a similar pattern with a pair of themes being juxtaposed and their motivic potential fully explored, before the movement and symphony is rounded off with an expansive brass fanfare soaring triumphantly over the full orchestra.

PROGRAM NOTE BY JEFFREY STIRLING.

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SØNDERGÅRD CONDUCTS RACHMANINOFF

Thomas Søndergård, conductor

Bruce Liu, piano

THU JUN 12 11AM | FRI JUN 13 8PM | SAT JUN 14 7PM

Carlos Simon	<i>Four Black American Dances</i> Ring Shout Waltz Tap! Holy Dance	CA. 14'
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Sergei Prokofiev	<i>Concerto No. 3 in C major</i> for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 26 Andante – Allegro Theme: Andantino – Variations Allegro ma non troppo <i>Bruce Liu, piano</i>	CA. 28'
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I N T E R M I S S I O N	CA. 20'
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Sergei Rachmaninoff	<i>Symphonic Dances, Opus 45</i> Non allegro Andante con moto (Tempo di valse) Lento assai – Allegro vivace	CA. 35'
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**CARLOS SIMON**

B: April 13, 1986
Washington, D.C.

Four Black American Dances

PREMIERED:
February 9, 2023

Carlos Simon is one of the most frequently performed orchestral composers working in the U.S. today, and the Minnesota Orchestra has been among his leading champions in recent seasons, performing his music at 34 concerts since 2021. The Orchestra has played six of his works in their entirety as well as portions of a seventh: *Four Black American Dances*, which this week is heard in its complete form for the first time at Orchestra Hall.

Minnesota Orchestra followers may know Simon best as one-half of the creative team behind the Orchestra's largest-scale world premiere of recent seasons. The vocal-orchestral work *brea(d)th*, premiered in May 2023 and commissioned by the Orchestra in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, pairs Simon's music with text by librettist and spoken word artist Marc Bamuthi Joseph in an exploration of grief, history, healing and, ultimately, a call for civic action toward an equitable future.

Just three months earlier, the Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered *Four Black American Dances*. In this composition, Simon celebrates the role of dance in Black American social gatherings, with each movement focusing on one style of the "hundreds, perhaps thousands of dances created over the span of American history that have originated from the social climate of American slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow," as the composer states.

Simon—who has served as the Kennedy Center's composer in residence since 2021—this past March had his *Good News Mass* premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Gustavo Dudamel conducting, among many other recent performances of his works, while his *Zodiac* received its premiere just last week by the Jacksonville Symphony under former Minnesota Orchestra Associate Conductor Courtney Lewis. Simon offers the following comments on the movements of *Four Black American Dances*:

THE COMPOSER'S NOTE

RING SHOUT. "A ring shout is an ecstatic, transcendent religious ritual, first practiced by enslaved Africans in the West Indies and the United States, in which worshipers move in a circle while shuffling and stomping their feet

and clapping their hands. To evoke the celebratory nature of this dance, I have asked the percussionist to use a large stick on a wooden floor board paired with fast moving passages in the strings and woodwinds.”

WALTZ. “Cotillion balls existed for ‘upper-class’ families as they allowed aristocratic families to vie for better marriage prospects for their daughters. However, cotillion balls were segregated and expensive, and did not include Black Americans. Debutante balls finally appeared in Black social circles during the 1930s, in large part due to the efforts of Black sororities, fraternities, and the growing number of affluent Black Americans. The waltz was the dance of choice in these environments.”

TAP! “Tap dance is a form of dance characterized by using the sounds of tap shoes striking the floor as a form of percussion. For this movement, I have emulated the sound of the tap with the side rim of the snare drum in the percussion section. The strings play in a very short, disconnected style alongside the brass drawing on jazz harmonies.”

HOLY DANCE. “Protestant Christian denominations, such as the Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.), Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Apostolic, Holiness Church, among many others, are known for their exuberant outward expressions of worship. The worship services in these churches will often have joyous dancing, spontaneous shouting, and soulful singing. The music in these worship services is a vital vehicle in fostering a genuine spiritual experience for the congregation. This movement calls on the vibrant, celebratory character that still exists in many churches today. I have composed music that mimics the sound of a congregation ‘speaking in tongues’ (murmuring in a unknown spiritual language) by asking the orchestra to play in a semi-improvised manner. Often referred to as a ‘praise break,’ the music propels forward continuously with the trombone section at the helm. The section moves to a climactic ending with the plagal ‘Amen’ cadence.”

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER, WITH MUSICAL DESCRIPTION BY CARLOS SIMON.

**SERGEI PROKOFIEV**

B: April 27, 1891
Sontsovka, Ukraine

D: March 5, 1953
Moscow, Russia

**Concerto No. 3 in
C major for Piano and
Orchestra, Opus 26**

PREMIERED:
December 16, 1921

There were several quite different sides to the young Sergei Prokofiev. One was the *enfant terrible* who took a puerile delight in outraging audiences with abrasive, ear-splitting music. Yet there was another Prokofiev, one so different that he seemed to have come from a separate planet altogether. This was a quite traditional composer, drawn to the form and balance of another era.

BALANCE AND BRILLIANCE

When he was able to balance these two creative urges, Prokofiev wrote some of his best music, and the Third Piano Concerto is one of his finest scores. Prokofiev had been planning for some time to write what he called “a large virtuoso concerto” when he finally found time during the summer of 1921 while at a cottage in Etretât in Brittany, only a few months after his 30th birthday.

Here, on the coast of France, he pulled together themes he had been collecting over the previous decade, some dating back to his days as a student in Czarist Russia. The concerto took shape across that summer, and he was able to weld this variety of thematic material into a completely satisfying whole, a score that fuses the strength and saucy impudence of the young Prokofiev with his penchant for classical order. Completed in October, the concerto was first performed on December 16, 1921, with Prokofiev as soloist and Frederick Stock conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

THE MUSIC: VARIED AND UNEXPECTED

One of the most impressive features of the Third Piano Concerto is the range of its color. The piano part—extraordinarily difficult—demands of the performer mechanistic and almost brutal blocks of chords one moment, the most delicate passagework the next. The orchestral writing is just as varied, and Prokofiev enlivens his tonal palette here with such unexpected instruments as castanets, tambourine and bass drum.

ANDANTE–ALLEGRO. For all its steely strength, this concerto begins with deceptive restraint. First one and then two clarinets lay out the innocent opening idea, which is briefly taken up by the strings before the music leaps ahead at the *Allegro*. The piano makes a slashing entrance here, suddenly breaking into the flurry of orchestral motion, and this opening episode pounds its way directly into the second subject, for woodwinds and pizzicato strings over clicking castanet accompaniment.

A vigorous extension of these materials brings a surprise: the music rises to an early climax on the reticent tune that had opened the concerto. Solo piano leads the way back to the “correct” themes of the *Allegro*, and the movement drives to a muscular close. There is no separate cadenza here—or anywhere—in this concerto.

THEME: ANDANTINO–VARIATIONS. The second movement is in theme-and-variation form. Solo flute lays out the lilting and nicely-spiced theme, which extends over several phrases. In the five variations, the piano usually occupies the foreground while the orchestra accompanies with lines woven from bits of theme.

Particularly striking is the fourth variation, in which, Prokofiev notes, “the piano and orchestra discourse on the theme in a quiet and meditative fashion.” This variation is in fact marked *Andante meditativo*, and Prokofiev specifies that individual phrases should be *delicatissimo*, *dolce*, *espressivo* and *freddo* (cold).

At the close of the movement, the complete original theme makes a striking return beneath a lacy piano filigree, and the movement concludes with the unusual combination of a quiet piano chord accompanied only by the stroke of a bass drum.

ALLEGRO MA NON TROPPO. The finale begins with the dry sound of bassoon and pizzicato strings stamping out what will be the main theme of the movement, but the piano has already intruded before this theme can be fully stated. A second subject, sung by the woodwinds in the wistful manner of the very opening of the concerto, is also quickly violated by the piano, which has what Prokofiev describes as “a theme more in keeping with the caustic humor of the work.” But this flowing second theme “wins”: it swells to an expansive statement that becomes the soaring climax of the entire concerto.

The long coda grows out of the movement’s pointillistic beginning, stalking along at first and then gradually gathering power and speed. The ending is brilliant. Piano and full orchestra come hammering home on repeated

chords that seem to create a halo of light, shimmering and finally burning through the hall. It is a perfect conclusion to a concerto that appeals to our minds *and* our senses—and finally satisfies both.

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.



**SERGEI
RACHMANINOFF**

B: April 1, 1873
Semyonovo, Russia

D: March 28, 1943
Beverly Hills, California

**Symphonic Dances,
Opus 45**

PREMIERED:
January 3, 1941

— In the summer of 1940, Sergei Rachmaninoff set to work on what would be his final complete work: a set of dances for orchestra that would ultimately be known as his Symphonic Dances, premiered by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra on January 3, 1941.

OPULENT, SUMPTUOUS—AND SUBTLE

This score is remarkable for the opulence of its color, and Rachmaninoff seems intent on finding and exploiting new orchestral sonorities. More remarkable still is his subtle compositional method. He evolves this music from rhythmic fragments, bits of theme, simple patterns—which are then built up into powerful movements that almost overflow with rhythmic energy.

NON ALLEGRO. The music opens with some of these fragments, just bits of sound from the first violins, and over them the English horn sounds the three-note pattern that will permeate this work, reappearing across its span in endless forms. Rachmaninoff plays it up into a great climax, which subsides as the opening fragments lead to the central episode, sung at first entirely by woodwinds. This slow interlude—the reedy sound of the alto saxophone is exactly right for this wistful music—makes its way back to the big gestures of the beginning section, now energized by explosive timpani salvos. In the closing moments, Rachmaninoff rounds matters off with a grand chorale for strings, beautifully accompanied by the glistening sound of bells, piano, harp, piccolo and flutes, and the movement winks into silence on the fragments with which it began.

ANDANTE CON MOTO (TEMPO DI VALSE). The opening of the second movement takes us into a completely different sound-world with the icy tones of trumpets and horns, played *forte* but stopped with a hand blocking the instruments' bells. Rachmaninoff calls for a waltz tempo, but he sets the music in the untraditional meters of 6/8 and 9/8 and has the waltz introduced by the unlikely sound of solo English horn. This music evolves through several episodes, some soaring, some powerful, before subsiding in a sudden, almost breathless close.

LENTO ASSAI–ALLEGRO VIVACE. The slow introduction to the final movement is enlivened by the strings' interjections of the three-note pattern. Gradually these anneal into the *Allegro vivace*, and off the movement goes, full of rhythmic energy and the sound of ringing bells. A central episode in the tempo of the introduction sings darkly; after wonderful sounds including eerie string glissandos, the *Allegro vivace* returns to rush the Symphonic Dances to a close guaranteed to rip the top off a concert hall.

PROGRAM NOTE BY **ERIC BROMBERGER.**

JUNETEENTH

Jonathan Taylor Rush, conductor
Wordsmith, soloist
John Holiday, countertenor

THU JUN 19 7PM

James Price Johnson	<i>Victory Stride</i>	CA. 5'
Mary D. Watkins	<i>Soul of Remembrance,</i> <i>from Five Movements in Color</i>	CA. 6'
Michael Abels	<i>Delights and Dances</i>	CA. 12'
	Selections from countertenor John Holiday	CA. 12'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		CA. 20'
James Lee III	<i>Freedom's Genuine Dawn</i> <i>Wordsmith, soloist</i>	CA. 18'
Valerie Coleman	<i>Umoja, Anthem for Unity for Orchestra</i>	CA. 11'
Carlos Simon	<i>Ring Shout,</i> <i>from Four Black American Dances</i>	CA. 5'



Scan the QR code for instrumentation details on this month's concerts.

Conductor and soloist profiles appear on pages 46 and 49.
Visit minnesotaorchestra.org/pre for details about pre-concert activities.

THANK YOU

This concert is hosted by Dorsey & Whitney LLP.
The 2024-25 Classical season is presented by Ameriprise Financial.

This concert airs live on [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#).

**JAMES P. JOHNSON**

B: February 1, 1894
New Brunswick,
New Jersey

D: November 17, 1955
New York City

Victory Stride

COMPOSED: 1944

As the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance swept through 1920s New York, James P. Johnson emerged as an extraordinary figure who helped solidify this era of music history. Born in New Jersey in 1894, he first trained as a pianist, inspired by ragtime and gospel music he heard in his childhood home. As he grew older, Johnson also immersed himself in the study of composition, soaking in techniques from prominent musicians and teachers across the musical spectrum. As a result, his unique music ultimately appeared in jazz clubs, symphony halls, opera and ballet houses. He composed the 1920s iconic theme, *Charleston*, was the first to record a jazz piano solo, and is known today as the Father of Harlem Stride.

Although his name may be less familiar to the public today, his ingenuity ignited a shift in the possibilities of piano playing, powering great artists including Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Thelonius Monk. “All the hits you hear, now as then, originated with musicians like James P. Johnson,” the great American singer Ethel Waters remarked, “the rest of the hot piano boys...just followers and proteges of that great man, Jimmy Johnson.”

A ROARING ADVENTURE

Victory Stride was first recorded and released in 1944 by the Blue Note Jazzmen. The Minnesota Orchestra today performs the newest orchestral arrangement—Johnson himself also created one during his lifetime—which sends the full orchestra on a roaring adventure. Several of the musicians are even invited to stand up and improvise solos just as they would have in the original version. Along with a steady walking bass, creativity and improvisation were vital parts of Johnson’s vision for the Harlem stride style.

After Johnson’s death in 1955, his original compositions were lost for several decades until, in 1987, conductor Marin Alsop and pianist Leslie Stiefelman embarked on a search to uncover them. As it turns out, the Johnson family had closely protected his complete collection for half a century, knowing it could have easily been lost or destroyed if not in the

right hands. We are just now beginning to see the breadth of his music come to life again.

PROGRAM NOTE BY EMMA PLEHAL.



MARY D. WATKINS

B: December 9, 1939
Denver, Colorado

Soul of Remembrance,
from *Five Movements*
in *Color*

PREMIERED:
February 12, 1994

Mary D. Watkins was born in 1939 in Denver, Colorado, and was adopted the following year. Before turning 4, she began piano lessons, excelling quickly and discovering her sense of perfect pitch—the ability to identify which note is being played simply by hearing it. Her talents allowed her to take on strong musical responsibilities at her church. Growing up listening to and playing gospel, jazz and classical music has informed her musical vocabulary. Her orchestral masterwork *Five Movements in Color* references jazz, traditional African music, popular forms, traditional classical composition and contemporary techniques.

THE STRUGGLE FOR UNDERSTANDING

A reflective and abstruse meditation, *Soul of Remembrance* is the second movement from *Five Movements in Color*. The composer writes that it is “about Africans struggling to understand their lives as enslaved people and starting their long march to become recognized as fully human.” Watkins herself had a childhood that included ridicule from some students who were jealous of her musical abilities, and others who felt as though she was betraying her cultural heritage. While her initial fame came from her resounding success as a jazz pianist and composer, Watkins has composed classical and folk works throughout her life, studied classical composition and music education, played violin, trumpet, cornet and tuba, and continues to defy labels.

Writing about *Soul of Remembrance*, Watkins reflects: “I saw my own people in their long march to express themselves as fully human. In spite of the trauma of enslavement, dehumanization, degradation and oppression, they carried the ancestral wisdom and spiritual knowledge deep within their souls.” In the march of her own career, Watkins has strived to be viewed

as a complete musician, excelling in composition, performance, recording, improvising and more, always carrying the lessons she learned from her teachers, friends, community and family within her soul.

MUSIC OF CONTEMPLATION

In this sorrowful movement, a march is first anchored by the harp, and other instruments join as the movement progresses. The sustained quality of the melody, combined with the intricate-yet-inchoate harmonies, embodies the namesake of this movement: its “soul of remembrance.” The most striking aspect of this piece is its ending, which hints at a resolution. Is the story of this march complete? Will it ever be? Watkins poses these challenging questions to us all in this quietly powerful musical contemplation.

Soul of Remembrance was commissioned in 1993 by the Camellia Symphony Orchestra, with funding from Meet the Composer and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. It was premiered on February 12, 1994, by the Camellia Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Nan Washburn.

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.



MICHAEL ABELS

B: October 8, 1962
Phoenix, Arizona

Delights and Dances

PREMIERED:
September 25, 2007

Equally at home writing scores for the Hollywood blockbusters of Jordan Peele and music for the classical concert hall, Michael Abels composed *Delights and Dances* on a commission from the Sphinx Organization in celebration of its tenth anniversary in 2007. The work was written for and premiered by the Harlem String Quartet, an ensemble comprising previous winners of the Sphinx Competition for outstanding young musicians from Black and Latin communities.

UPDATING A BAROQUE FORM

Composed for string quartet and string orchestra, *Delights and Dances* offers a modern perspective on a popular musical form dating back to the 17th and early 18th centuries: the concerto grosso. Unlike a standard

concerto spotlighting just one soloist, this approach features a small group of soloists. The soloists—called the concertino or principale—share the primary melodic material while a smaller orchestra—the tutti or ripieno—accompanies and interacts with them.

Delights and Dances features a string quartet paired with small string orchestra. The piece opens with solo cello, soon joined by viola for an expressive duet before the quartet’s violinists add to the texture, each of the four musicians taking on a significant solo role. The orchestra members support the quartet by playing soft pizzicato patterns which introduce an airy blues quality. This gentle groove sets the foundation for innovative cadenzas performed by the four quartet members. Smooth blues transforms into a spirited dance, blending jazz rhythms and bluegrass textures as quartet and string orchestra come together to bring *Delights and Dances* to a rollicking conclusion.

Abels was the recipient of the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his opera *Omar* and he has been recognized with Emmy, Grammy and Critics Choice Award nominations for his film scores to *Get Out*, *Us* and *Nope*. Abels’ music is commissioned and heard all over the world through television and movie screens, opera stages, and orchestral and choral concerts. He is also the co-founder of the Composers Diversity Collective.

PROGRAM NOTE BY EMMA PLEHAL.



JAMES LEE III

B: November 26, 1975
St. Joseph, Michigan

*Freedom’s Genuine
Dawn*

PREMIERED:
January 20, 2022

— On July 5, 1852, in Rochester, New York, abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass gave a speech to the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society. As the U.S. approached a Civil War, Douglass spoke passionately to the crowd about the meaning of the Fourth of July to those who had been enslaved, including Douglass himself. He highlighted the complexities, tragedies, hypocrisies and injustices of such a celebration at a time when much of the country was still deeply invested in slavery.

Three years ago, American composer James Lee III and spoken word artist Wordsmith revisited the speech—known today as “What to the Slave is the

Fourth of July?”—setting sections of Douglass’ text to music. The result, *Freedom’s Genuine Dawn*, was premiered in conjunction with the very first federal recognition of Juneteenth.

In his own notes about the work, Lee explains: “I used the pitches F-G-D in an ascending figure to represent *Freedom’s Genuine Dawn*. One of Douglass’ chief questions was, ‘Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?’ In my title, I believe that it was Douglass’ desire that America would offer genuine freedom from all forms of slavery...”

At the work’s premiere by the Baltimore Symphony in 2022, Wordsmith expressed in an interview with local radio station WEAA 88.9 that preparing the music and the text for performance was an extensive emotional research process. “We don’t have a recording of [Douglass] doing this speech,” he said. And to embody Douglass’ vision, he and Lee spent many hours with the speech to “study and present it in the best possible light.”

Musically, Lee weaves Douglass’ text throughout a powerful orchestral narrative that takes deep care to explore all parts of American culture, spanning an undeniable emotional range. “Black history hasn’t really been told the way it should,” said Wordsmith at the time of the work’s premiere. “It’s never too late to learn about our Black leaders and to learn about those who have helped build America.”

PROGRAM NOTE BY EMMA PLEHAL.



VALERIE COLEMAN

B: September 3, 1970
Louisville, Kentucky

*Umoja, Anthem for Unity
for Orchestra*

PREMIERED:
September 19, 2019

— One of today’s most celebrated American composers, Valerie Coleman continues to make a strong impact on the current classical music landscape. Also an accomplished flutist, she founded the acclaimed wind quintet Imani Winds in 1997, and in 2019 co-founded umama womama—an all-female composer/performer flute, viola and harp trio. Appointed to the composition faculty at the Juilliard School in 2024, Coleman has taught

and continues to teach composition and flute at numerous institutions across the U.S., as well as at summer programs for the younger generation of aspiring musicians.

Recent acclaim for Coleman and her music includes a Grammy nomination for her piece *Revelry*, recorded by the Decoda Ensemble, and a Grammy for the New York Youth Symphony's album including the orchestral version of her anthem *Umoja*. Coleman was also named 2020's "Classical Woman of the Year" by *Performance Today*, while *Washington Post* critic Anne Midgette named her one of the "Top 35 Women Composers in Classical Music" in 2017.

AN ANTHEM OF UNITY

Coleman's *Umoja*—in all its iterations—remains one of her most celebrated works, and its history reflects her own trajectory of success. Around the year 2000, she composed the original version for women's choir. It was a work meant, as the composer explains, to "embody a sense of 'tribal unity' through the feel of a drum circle, the sharing of history through traditional 'call and response' form, and the repetition of a memorable sing-song melody."

Coleman transformed the original into a woodwind quintet for Imani Winds in 2001, creating an anthem for the ensemble that celebrated their cultural diversity. Spanning about three minutes, this version of *Umoja* also exists as a work for concert band, flute choir, flute quartet and string quartet (which has been championed by the Boston-based Castle of our Skins). Coleman considers the multiple versions as "siblings of one another." In 2019, on a commission from the Philadelphia Orchestra, she expanded this simple anthem into a full, rich and lush orchestral journey, replete with cinematic textures, intimate musical episodes and symbolism. The commissioning ensemble, under conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, premiered this version on September 19, 2019.

The dissonance within the work is meant to represent human tension in all of its forms that exist today, while the concluding familiar melody is "a gentle reminder of kindness and humanity." In a 2025 article by Sophie Yarin in Boston University's alumni magazine, *Bostonia*, Coleman states that "My pieces are always centered, one way or another, around joy and celebrating the common threads of human nature...what I'm leaning toward is that we need an end to division—that old adage that love can conquer hate."

PROGRAM NOTE BY ANTHONY R. GREEN.

**CARLOS SIMON**

B: April 13, 1986
Washington, D.C.

*Ring Shout, from Four
Black American Dances*

PREMIERED:
February 9, 2023

Minnesota Orchestra followers may know Carlos Simon best as one-half of the creative team behind the Orchestra's largest-scale world premiere of recent seasons. The vocal-orchestral work *brea(d)th*, premiered in May 2023 and commissioned by the Orchestra in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, pairs Simon's music with text by librettist and spoken word artist Marc Bamuthi Joseph in an exploration of grief, history, healing and, ultimately, a call for civic action toward an equitable future.

Just three months earlier, the Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered another major work by Simon: *Four Black American Dances*. In this composition, Simon celebrates the role of dance in Black American social gatherings, with each movement focusing on one style of the "hundreds, perhaps thousands of dances created over the span of American history that have originated from the social climate of American slavery, Reconstruction and Jim Crow," as the composer states.

Simon—who currently serves as the Kennedy Center's composer in residence, and in recent months has had major works premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Jacksonville Symphony—offers these comments on the work's first movement that is heard tonight, *Ring Shout*:

"A ring shout is an ecstatic, transcendent religious ritual, first practiced by enslaved Africans in the West Indies and the United States, in which worshipers move in a circle while shuffling and stomping their feet and clapping their hands. To evoke the celebratory nature of this dance, I have asked the percussionist to use a large stick on a wooden floor board paired with fast moving passages in the strings and woodwinds."

The Minnesota Orchestra performed *Four Black American Dances* in full at concerts held June 12 to 14; turn to page 32 for more on this work and Simon.

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER.



JONATHON HEYWARD,
CONDUCTOR

Jonathon Heyward is music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the Renée and Robert Belfer Music Director of the Festival Orchestra of Lincoln Center. Recent and future highlights include performances in Europe with the London Philharmonic, London Symphony, BBC Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Danish National Symphony, Castilla y León Symphony, Galicia Symphony, Brussels Philharmonic and MDR-Leipzig Symphony. In the U.S., he conducts the New York Philharmonic and the Atlanta, Detroit, Houston, Seattle, Dallas and St. Louis symphonies. Born in South Carolina, he studied conducting at the Boston Conservatory of Music and London's Royal Academy of Music. Before leaving the Academy, he was appointed assistant conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, where he was mentored by Sir Mark Elder. In 2023, he was named a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. More: imgartists.com, jonathonheyward.com.



JOHN HOLIDAY,
COUNTERTENOR

John Holiday has established himself as one of the finest countertenors of his generation. His unique voice and powerful story have been the subject of profiles in *The New Yorker*, CNN's *Great Big Story* and the *Los Angeles Times*. Highlights of his 2024-25 season include debuts in the role of Farnace in *Mitridate, re di Ponto* at Boston Lyric Opera, and the title role in Philip Glass' *Akhnaten* at Komische Oper Berlin. He returns to the Bayerische Staatsoper in two title roles—*Le Grand Macabre* and *Dido and Aeneas*—and tours with The English Concert in *Giulio Cesare* at venues including Carnegie Hall and the Barbican Centre. He also performs alongside the San Francisco Symphony, New Jersey Symphony and Apollo Chamber Players, performs a solo recital at the Wolf Trap Foundation of the Performing Arts and appears on NPR's Tiny Desk Concert series. More: opus3artists.com, johnholiday.com.



ARIANA KIM,
BROADCAST HOST

For the concert on June 6, Ariana Kim serves as host and writer of the Twin Cities PBS broadcast and online livestream *This Is Minnesota Orchestra*. A Grammy-nominated violinist, Kim made her New York recital debut at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall during her doctoral studies at Juilliard and is now a tenured professor at Cornell University. At age 16, she made her debut with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and at 24 was appointed acting concertmaster of the Louisiana Philharmonic in New Orleans. She shares her home base between Ithaca and New York City, where she is in her 19th season with The Knights. She was a member of the contemporary improvisation ensemble Ne(x)tworks for 10 seasons and recently premiered Piyawat Louilarpprasert's Violin Concerto while on tour in Bangkok, Thailand. A Minnesota native, she serves as artistic director of the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota. More: arianakim.com.



BRUCE LIU,
PIANO

First prize winner of the 2021 International Chopin Piano Competition, Bruce Liu has secured his reputation as one of the most exciting talents of his generation. Highlights of his 2024-25 season include international tours with Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, London Symphony Orchestra and hr-Sinfonieorchester, among other ensembles. He also tours in play-direct programs with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields and Amsterdam Sinfonietta, and debuts with orchestras including the Boston, Cincinnati and Houston symphonies and the Danish National Symphony. An active recitalist, this season he returns to Carnegie Hall, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and major Asian venues, and debuts at the Wiener Musikverein and Prinzregententheater Munich. He also appears at several major festivals. An exclusive recording artist with Deutsche Grammophon, Liu was awarded Opus Klassik's "Young Talent of the Year" prize in 2024. More: opus3artists.com, bruce-liu.com.



CRISTIAN MĂCELARU,
CONDUCTOR

Grammy Award-winning conductor Cristian Măcelaru is music director designate of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, artistic director of the George Enescu Festival and Competition and music director of the Orchestre National de France. He also serves as artistic director and principal conductor of the Interlochen Center for the Arts' World Youth Symphony Orchestra, music director and conductor of the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music and chief conductor of the WDR Sinfonieorchester, which he will serve through the 2024-25 season and continue as artistic partner for 2025-26. This season Măcelaru and the Orchestre National de France tour throughout France, Germany, South Korea and China. His guest appearances include debuts with the Oslo Philharmonic and RAI National Symphony and returns with the Wiener Symphoniker, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich. More: primoartists.com, macelaru.com.



ALICE SARA OTT,
PIANO

Alice Sara Ott is one of today's most forward-thinking classical musicians, celebrated for her visionary projects, globally successful albums, collaborations with leading orchestras and conductors, recital tours, and recordings as a Deutsche Grammophon artist for over 15 years. This season Ott performs with the London Symphony and Gianandrea Noseda, Bayerischer Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester and Karina Canellakis, and gives multiple premieres of Bryce Dessner's Piano Concerto, written for her. Following her acclaimed New York Philharmonic debut, she returns to the U.S. to appear with the Baltimore Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra. As artist in residence at TivoliVredenburg, she brings her versatile artistry to the Netherlands, building on recent residencies at London's Southbank Centre and Radio France in Paris. She also releases two Deutsche Grammophon albums in 2025: the complete Nocturnes of John Field, accompanied by a European tour, and Jóhann Jóhannsson's piano works. More: tezarts.com, alicesaraott.com.



JONATHAN TAYLOR RUSH, CONDUCTOR

Jonathan Taylor Rush brings passion, unique interpretation and a refreshing energy to the orchestral experience. Rooted in his musical upbringing within the church, Rush's approach to conducting is imbued with elements of gospel and soul music. He debuted with the Minnesota Orchestra in May 2023, leading world premiere performances of *brea(d)th* by Carlos Simon and Marc Bamuthi Joseph—a recording of which has been released on Decca Classics. He was subsequently engaged for the Orchestra's 2024 Juneteenth concert. Rush's 2024-25 season includes performances with Nashville Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Louisiana Philharmonic, North Carolina Symphony, Savannah Philharmonic and Hartford Symphony. In 2020 he was named the Baltimore Symphony's assistant conductor, later being promoted to associate conductor for a tenure that concluded in 2023. Concurrently he served as artistic director of the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestras, which he led on a European tour. More: polyarts.co.uk, jonathanrush.com.



WORDSMITH, SOLOIST

Wordsmith—returning this month for his second consecutive Minnesota Orchestra Juneteenth concert—is a songwriter, poet, recording artist, actor, playwright and philanthropist from Baltimore. A Grammy voting member, he is the grand prize winner of the 2025 Bernard/Ebb Songwriting Awards, a finalist for the 2024 Baker Artist Awards and was voted one of 25 Black Marylanders to Watch in 2024 by the *Baltimore Sun*. His music is featured on WWE, ESPN SportsCenter and Netflix, among other outlets. He is an International Exchange Alumni with the U.S. State Department. In 2018 he was hired to write new narration for *Carnival of the Animals* with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Since becoming an artistic partner with the BSO in 2020, he and composer James Lee III have debuted two commissioned pieces; he has also reinterpreted several classical works, and his *Network to Freedom* was performed at the B&O Railroad Museum on Martin Luther King Day in 2024. More: wordsmithmusic.com.



FEI XIE,
BASSOON

Fei Xie joined the Minnesota Orchestra as principal bassoon in 2017 after serving since 2012 as principal bassoon of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble he first joined as second bassoonist in 2008. Xie made his solo debut with the Minnesota Orchestra in a 2021 performance of Mozart's Bassoon Concerto that can be viewed on the Orchestra's YouTube channel, and he appears often on the Orchestra's chamber music series, most recently playing Beethoven's Septet in May 2025. He has also been a soloist with the Baltimore Symphony, Festival Mozaic Orchestra and Sichuan Conservatory Symphony Orchestra. He has been the artistic consultant for the Minnesota Orchestra's annual Lunar New Year concerts since 2022. The 2022 and 2024 concerts also saw Xie joined onstage by his mother and father—the professional Peking Opera musicians Mei Hu and Zhengang Xie, who are yue qin and jing hu masters, respectively. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

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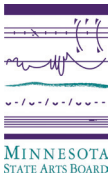
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