

SEASON OPENING SØNDERGÅRD AND ROSS

Thomas Søndergård, conductor
Anthony Ross, cello

FRI SEP 26 8PM | SAT SEP 27 7PM

With these concerts we honor the memory of Bruce Taylor and Dennis Carey.

Joan Tower	<i>Made in America</i>	CA. 14'
Leonard Bernstein	Three Meditations from <i>Mass</i> for Cello and Orchestra [in three movements] <i>Anthony Ross, cello</i>	CA. 19'
Steve Heitzeg	<i>EcoSaga</i> (Concerto in Three Landscapes)* water and stone forest and fells wild life <i>Anthony Ross, cello</i>	CA. 12'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		CA. 20'
Béla Bartók	Concerto for Orchestra Introduzione Gioco delle coppie Elegia Intermezzo interrotto Finale	CA. 38'

* World premiere; co-commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra and Linda Lovas Hoeschler and Peter Blyberg, in honor of their families who are challenged, vitalized and healed by music.

Mingle with musicians onstage following the September 27 concert.

Conductor and soloist profiles appear on pages 10 and 57.

Visit minnesotaorchestra.org/pre for details about pre-concert activities.

THANK YOU

The 2025-26 Classical season is presented by Ameriprise Financial.

Friday night Classical concerts air live on [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#).

**JOAN TOWER**

B: September 6, 1938
New Rochelle, New York

Made in America

PREMIERED:
October 2, 2005

Grammy-winning composer Joan Tower is widely regarded as one of America's most important living classical composers. During her 60-plus year career, she has combined her compositional work with an active career as a performer, conductor and music educator, and her works have been commissioned by numerous major ensembles, soloists and orchestras. The League of American Orchestras gave Tower its highest honor, the Gold Baton, in 2019. The following year, *Musical America* named Tower its Composer of the Year.

REFLECTIONS ON AMERICA'S BEAUTY

One of Tower's most successful works of this century is 2005's *Made in America*. Co-commissioned by the League of American Orchestras and Meet the Composer, it was performed in all 50 states by some 65 different orchestras in the 15 months after its premiere by New York's Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra on October 2, 2005. In 2008 it won the Grammy for Best Classical Contemporary Composition.

In the score for *Made in America*, Tower writes: "I crossed a fairly big bridge at the age of 9 when my family moved to South America (La Paz, Bolivia), where we stayed for nine years. I had to learn a new language, a new culture, and how to live at 13,000 feet! It was a lively culture with many saints' days celebrated through music and dance, but the large Inca population in Bolivia was generally poor and there was little chance of moving up in class or work position. When I returned to the United States, I was proud to have free choices, upward mobility, and the chance to try to become who I wanted to be. I also enjoyed the basic luxuries of an American citizen that we so often take for granted: hot running water, blankets for the cold winters, floors that are not made of dirt, and easy modes of transportation, among many other things.

"So when I started composing this piece, the song *America the Beautiful* kept coming into my consciousness and eventually became the main theme for the work. The beauty of the song is undeniable and I loved working

with it as a musical idea. One can never take for granted, however, the strength of a musical idea—as Beethoven (one of my strongest influences) knew so well. This theme is challenged by other more aggressive and dissonant ideas that keep interrupting, unsettling it, but *America the Beautiful* keeps resurfacing in different guises (some small and tender, others big and magnanimous), as if to say, ‘I’m still here, ever changing, but holding my own.’ A musical struggle is heard throughout the work. Perhaps it was my unconscious reacting to the challenge of how do we keep America beautiful.”

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, timpani, bass drum, 3 suspended cymbals (large, medium and low), egg maraca, medium maraca, sleigh bells, tambourine, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ELIZABETH SCHWARTZ.



LEONARD BERNSTEIN

B: August 25, 1918
Lawrence,
Massachusetts

D: October 14, 1990
New York City

Three Meditations from *Mass for Cello and Orchestra*

PREMIERED:
October 11, 1977

— The 1970s was a decade of great growth for many major American arts institutions. The Minnesota Orchestra, for instance, opened Orchestra Hall in 1974 and expanded its season to year-round, while the Detroit Symphony renovated its own Orchestra Hall early in the decade, and the San Francisco Symphony capped the '70s by beginning work on its current home venue. Perhaps most notably, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts opened in 1971 in Washington, D.C., as a living memorial to the late President John F. Kennedy.

Jacqueline Kennedy, widow of the slain President, asked Leonard Bernstein to compose a large-scale piece for the inauguration of the Kennedy Center on September 8, 1971. He responded with his *Mass*, subtitled *A Theater Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers*, and taking the form of a dramatic stage production. Incorporating a full orchestra augmented by rock instruments and quadraphonic tape, the commission was an ambitious undertaking—

an inspired, in some ways preposterous work, whose impact remains controversial. Based on the traditional Catholic liturgy, to which Bernstein added his own words and texts by Stephen Schwartz, *Mass* blended diverse musical styles, expressing the composer's belief in the power of music to transcend all barriers, and to heal and unite.

The epic scope and performing forces required for *Mass* have made it less often-heard than Bernstein's most famous creations—although the Minnesota Orchestra presented it as part of a Bernstein festival in 2009. A smaller-scale—though still substantial—musical sibling of *Mass* is the *Three Meditations from Mass* for Cello and Orchestra. It was premiered by the great Russian-born cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich at the Kennedy Center on October 11, 1977, with Bernstein conducting the National Symphony Orchestra. It is scored for cello soloist without winds or brass—but with a large percussion complement, timpani, harp, piano, organ and strings.

THE MUSIC: THREE MEDITATIONS

The first two Meditations, which occur as instrumental interludes in the complete *Mass*, were initially arranged by the composer for cello and piano. The first (rather slow, very sustained) occurs between the *Confession* and the *Gloria*, and the second (slow, sustained) between the *Gloria* and the *Epistle*. The latter is a set of four variations with a coda, based on an 11-note sequence which Bernstein borrowed from the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The choral cry for common humanity echoes in the cello's rich double stops.

A third Meditation, very fast, stems from various parts of *Mass*, as a note in the score explains: "The *Epiphany*, a kind of solo fantasia; *In Nomine Patris*, a trance-like dance; and the chorale *Almighty Father*." Although some of these sections are widely separated in the complete work, they share an underlying thematic unity. Bernstein inscribed the piece to Rostropovich, who declared in an interview, "I would be happy to play this work all my life."

Instrumentation: solo cello with orchestra comprising timpani, 2 snare drums, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, 3 hand drums, gourds, tambourine, tom-toms, triangle, xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, vibraphone, harp, piano, organ and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY MARY ANN FELDMAN.

**STEVE HEITZEG**

B: October 15, 1959
Albert Lea, Minnesota

***EcoSaga* (Concerto in Three Landscapes)**

PREMIERING:
September 26, 2025

— Among living Minnesota-born composers, there may be no closer friend of the Minnesota Orchestra than St. Paul-based Steve Heitzeg, whose ties to the ensemble and Orchestra Hall extend back to the 1990s, when he began writing works for Kinder Konzerts and Young People's Concerts. The longstanding relationship has resulted in a steady progression of commissions, premieres and performances on many of the Orchestra's concert series—often capturing in music Heitzeg's passion for the environment, social issues, human rights and "the peaceful coexistence of all species through music," as the composer distills his philosophy. Another of his signatures is the frequent inclusion of naturally found percussion instruments such as stones, shells and driftwood.

Heitzeg's output, which has been commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra, VocalEssence and many other institutions and individuals across the country, also extends to the genres of choral and chamber music, ballet and documentary films. Among his recent works are *Our House is on Fire* (Song for Climate Justice) for mixed chorus and piano—setting text by climate activist Greta Thunberg—and *Death Suite for Jackie O*, premiered by mezzo Clara Osowski and pianist Casey Rafn at the Schubert Club this past January.

SPOTLIGHTING THE ORCHESTRA'S MUSICIANS

Several of Heitzeg's works have been composed with specific Minnesota Orchestra soloists in mind. These include the 2006 violin trio *Peace Cranes*—written for then-Orchestra violinists Pamela Arnstein, Angela Fuller and Sarah Kwak—and the trumpet concerto *American Nomad*, premiered in 2015 by Charles Lazarus and the Orchestra, who reprised it in 2019.

This week's concerts bring the world premiere of a concerto dedicated to the Orchestra's Principal Cello Anthony Ross, bearing the intriguing title *EcoSaga* (Concerto in Three Landscapes). It was co-commissioned by the Orchestra and longtime supporters Linda Lovas Hoeschler and Peter Blyberg "in honor of their families who are challenged, vitalized and healed by music," according to the score's dedication.

“Working on *EcoSaga* with Steve has been a real delight,” says Ross. “The depth and scope of his music is truly enthralling. The awesomeness of nature and humanity really comes through. He also has a gift for melody and wonderful harmonies.”

IN THE COMPOSER’S WORDS

Heitzeg offers these comments on the music and its dedicatee:

“It was an honor to be asked by Tony Ross—a great champion of living composers—to write this piece. The concerto evokes diverse moods of wild landscapes with the soloist acting as heroic witness, sometimes paying tribute to the beauty of wild spaces, sometimes protesting their destruction.

WATER AND STONE. “Oceanic and ancient sounds from low strings, ocean drum, stones and waterphone open the concerto with the cellist playing a haunting theme—evoking whale songs with bends and glissandi. The movement closes with the section ‘*and the birds sing for peace (in memory of Pablo Casals)*.’ Here percussionists play a Starling bird call and birdy box while woodwinds flutter and the cello soloist closes this movement in the stratosphere on a diaphanous high A.

FORESTS AND FELS. “Part elegy/part pastorella for strings; it is a graceful paean to bucolic and distant horizons.

WILD LIFE. “Marked *With Abandon*, the cello soloist rips into an angular, mixed-meter theme that is taken up by the orchestra. A brief *Sanctuary* follows. Then the opening theme is restated in a lyrical *Lento maestoso*. A *Protest Against Ecocide* erupts with dramatic gestures by both soloist and orchestra. The concerto closes with an *Ascendant* section with the soloist, strings, timpani and chimes in a processional leading to the final chord of deep strings, while the soloist holds a high F that fades into infinity.”

Instrumentation: solo cello with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, birdy box, 2 pieces of driftwood, ocean drum, Starling bird call, 2 stones, tambourine, tam-tam, temple blocks, Tibetan tingsha bells, waterphone, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel, chimes and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER, WITH MUSICAL DESCRIPTION BY STEVE HEITZEG.

**BÉLA BARTÓK**

B: March 25, 1881
Sânnicolau Mare,
Romania

D: September 26, 1945
New York City

Concerto for Orchestra

PREMIERED:
December 1, 1944

— Béla Bartók and his wife Ditta fled to the United States in October 1940 to escape World War II and the Nazi domination of Hungary, but their hopes for a new life in America were quickly shattered. Wartime America had little interest in Bartók or his music, and the couple soon found themselves living in near poverty. Then came catastrophe: in the spring of 1942 Bartók's health failed. By the following spring his weight had dropped to 87 pounds, and he had to be hospitalized. Bartók fell into a depression, convinced that he would neither recover nor compose again.

TRANSFORMED BY A COMMISSION

At this point, Bartók's friends rallied around him—and very discreetly too, since the fiercely proud composer would never accept anything that savored of charity. Fritz Reiner and Joseph Szigeti convinced Serge Koussevitzky to ask for a new work from the ailing composer, and the conductor visited Bartók's hospital room in New York City to tell him that the Koussevitzky Foundation had commissioned an orchestral work for which it would pay \$1,000. Bartók refused. He believed that he could never complete such a work, but Koussevitzky gave Bartók a check for \$500 and insisted that the money was his whether he finished it or not. The visit had a transforming effect: soon Bartók was well enough to travel to Saranac Lake in upstate New York, where he spent the summer.

Once he started on his new commission, Bartók worked fast—beginning on August 15, 1943, and completing the score eight weeks later. Koussevitzky conducted the *Concerto for Orchestra* in its first performance, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, on December 1, 1944. It was an instant success, and Bartók reported that Koussevitzky called it “the best orchestra piece of the last 25 years.”

MUSIC OF STRENGTH AND BEAUTY

Bartók provided his own program note for the work's premiere, stating in part: “The title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat the single orchestral instruments in a *concertante*

or soloistic manner. The ‘virtuoso’ treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato section of the development of the first movement (brass instruments), or in the perpetuum-mobile-like passage of the principal theme of the last movement (strings), and especially in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages.”

This is music of strength, humanity, beauty and, not least, humor. Bartók’s own description may touch the secret of its emotional appeal: “The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one.”

The five movements of the Concerto for Orchestra are in the beautifully symmetric arch form that Bartók sometimes employed. The outer movements, both in modified sonata form, anchor this arch, framing the two even-numbered movements, both of which have the character of scherzos (each is marked *Allegretto*). The central slow movement, which itself is in a symmetric ternary form, becomes the capstone to the arch.

Visit minnesotaorchestra.org/bartokconcerto for an extended description of the music.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, triangle, 2 harps and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.

PROFILE

THOMAS SØNDERGÅRD

Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård, who this fall begins his third 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. Highlights of his 2025–26 season in Minnesota include opera-in-concert performances of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, a festival of music from Nordic countries and his first Listening Project concert. In November the Pentatone label will release the Orchestra's first album under his direction, featuring works of Thomas Adès including the Violin Concerto with soloist Leila Josefowicz.

Since 2018 Søndergård has been music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO). He previously 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 at home and on tour in both Europe and China, he appears as guest conductor with the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Danish National Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Oslo Philharmonic and Barcelona Symphony.

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.

For more information, visit minnesotaorchestra.org.



ANDREW MANZE,
CONDUCTOR

Andrew Manze is celebrated as one of the most inspirational conductors of his generation. He was chief conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie in Hannover from 2014 to 2023, drawing special notice for tours to China and Japan, as well as award-winning Mendelssohn and Mozart recordings for Pentatone. Since 2018, he has been principal guest conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and since 2024 he has been principal guest conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, which he led last season on tour. As a guest conductor, he has longstanding relationships with many leading orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic and Rotterdam Philharmonic, among others. In recent seasons he has also led the Boston Symphony and the New York and Los Angeles philharmonics, and has appeared often at the Mostly Mozart Festival. Last season's highlights included concerts with violinist James Ehnes and the Danish National Symphony. More: [intermusica.com](https://www.intermusica.com), [andrewmanze.com](https://www.andrewmanze.com).



ANTHONY ROSS,
CELLO

Anthony Ross, leader of the Minnesota Orchestra's cello section since 1991, has been a soloist many times with the Orchestra, performing all the standard cello concertos—most recently Walton's in fall 2024—as well as modern works such as Michael Daugherty's *Tales of Hemingway*, James MacMillan's Cello Concerto, Paul Moravec's *Montserrat* and David Ott's Concerto for Two Cellos, which he and his wife, Minnesota Orchestra cellist Beth Rapier, have long championed. He has appeared many times on the Orchestra's chamber music series and has been a concerto soloist with the Moscow State Orchestra, Louisville Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, South Dakota Symphony and many other Midwest regional orchestras. An avid chamber musician, he is a member of Accordo and the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota and has appeared on many festival stages. In 1982 he won the bronze medal at the prestigious Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. More: [minnesotaorchestra.org](https://www.minnesotaorchestra.org).