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ABOUT THE COVER: Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Thomas Søndergård, whose goal is to be the “music director for all generations,” interviewing a young audience member at a March 2025 Family Concert. Photo: Darrell Owens.

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JUNE 2026

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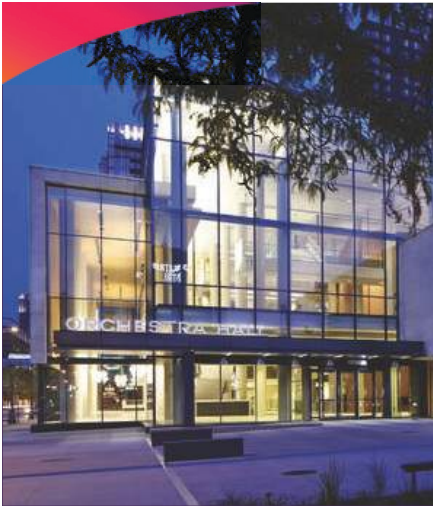
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PROFILE

THOMAS SØNDERGÅRD

Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård, now in 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 2026–27 season in Minnesota will include opera-in-concert performances of Puccini's *Tosca*, a November festival of music from Nordic countries and his second Future Classics concert. In November 2025 the Pentatone label released 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.

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RETIRING MUSICIAN SPOTLIGHT: ROBERT DORER

— This summer the Minnesota Orchestra bids farewell to its longest-tenured trumpet section member, Robert Dorer, who joined the ensemble in 1997 and leaves a legacy of musical excellence, enduring collaborations and a family life closely intertwined with his Orchestra career. His arrival in Minnesota—after six seasons as principal trumpet of the New Mexico Symphony—began a meaningful chapter both professionally and personally. “My memories of starting this job are tied with memories of becoming a father,” he recalls. His first child was born just two months after he and his wife Sally arrived in Minnesota; soon after came a major tour with the Orchestra in its first-ever visit to Europe. “It was an exciting year!” he says. Their second child followed near the end of Dorer’s second season.

Over the years, Dorer was part of a remarkably stable trumpet section, as the same four players made up the section from 2000 to 2025, when Principal Trumpet Manny Laureano retired. “I was lucky to play with this wonderful section, and we were like family,” Dorer says. “We each added something different to the performance, but the combination made for something really special.” His tenure included numerous memorable performances at Orchestra Hall and on tour. One experience stands out in particular: Sibelius’ *Kullervo*, performed in Minneapolis and at Carnegie Hall in 2010 under Music Director Osmo Vänskä. “It was an emotional concert collaborating with the amazing chorus brought in from Finland,” he says.



Zoe Prinds-Flash

An avid chamber musician, Dorer participated frequently in Minnesota Orchestra chamber concerts and performed a wide range of repertoire. Alongside performing, teaching remained a constant. He served on the faculty of the Brevard Music Center for seven summers and has led master classes across the country at music schools such as Juilliard, Rice, Northwestern University and the University of Michigan, sharing insights shaped by his studies with influential teachers including Vincent Cichowicz and Arnold Jacobs. That commitment to education will continue in retirement. “I am planning on continuing teaching the trumpet. I want to draw on my experiences and give back to students,” he says. He also looks forward to spending more time repairing instruments—another longtime interest—as well as traveling. “I hope to visit friends in Alaska and New Zealand,” he adds.

When asked what he will miss most, Dorer names “the wonderful people in

[Continued on page 14](#)

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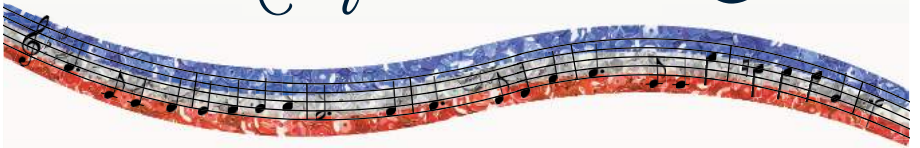


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RETIRING MUSICIAN SPOTLIGHT: ROBERT DORER CONTINUED

the Orchestra and performing great music at the highest level.” Music has also been a shared pursuit at home and the Hall; his wife, Sally, is a cellist who performs often with the Orchestra. “We have enjoyed performing and touring together for the last 25 years,”

he says. As he steps away from the stage, Dorer leaves a message for the community that has supported his career: “Thank you for coming to concerts. You make it possible for us to share something very special.”

WELCOMING KATIE NELSEN, VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVANCEMENT

— In mid-April the Minnesota Orchestra filled a key administrative leadership post as Twin Cities native Katie Nelsen arrived as vice president of advancement. Nelsen, who most recently led external relations at the Children’s Theatre Company, is now guiding the Orchestra’s fundraising vision, overseeing major gift, annual fund and endowment initiatives, and seeking to expand philanthropic opportunities for the organization.

“I am thrilled to join the Minnesota Orchestra at such an exciting and transformative time,” said Nelsen. “Music has been a throughline in my life—from working at the Orchestra during college to my early career days at Minnesota Public Radio—and it is especially meaningful to return to this extraordinary organization in this new capacity. I am inspired by the opportunity to help advance a bold vision for the Orchestra’s future by strengthening community connections, cultivating philanthropic partnerships, and ensuring that the power of music continues to enrich and unite audiences for generations to come.” Nelsen’s ties to the Orchestra date to childhood, when she attended concerts through school trips and family outings.



Minnesota Orchestra President and CEO Isaac Thompson praised Nelsen’s depth and breadth of fundraising experience in the Minnesota community. “Katie’s reputation as a dynamic organizational leader and exceptional relationship builder make her a natural fit for this role,” he said. “We are delighted to welcome her to the Orchestra and look forward to collaborating as we continue to broaden the Orchestra’s circle of supporters.” The vice president of advancement role had been filled since fall 2024 on an interim basis by Rob Nygaard, who now serves as senior director of advancement.

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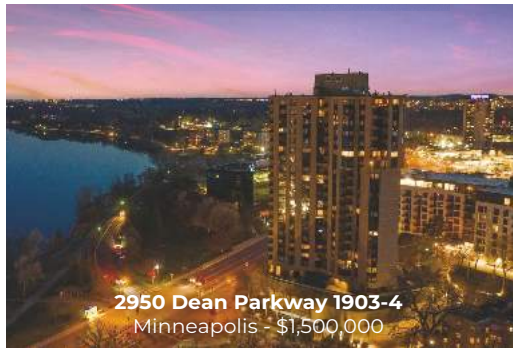
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QUICK ON THE DRAW: STEVE SLASKE SKETCHES THE ORCHESTRA

Minnesota Orchestra concertgoers are accustomed to instructions that photos and videos are not permitted during performances—but earlier this season, one audience member used his artistry to capture the action in another form: through sketching the Orchestra by hand during the concert.

Chicago-based artist Steve Slaske brought his sketchbook to Orchestra Hall when attending an Orchestra concert last

September, commemorating the performance in a new work created live during the performance. Inspired by the music and visuals—including Principal Cello Anthony Ross as soloist in works by Steve Heitzeg and Leonard Bernstein—Slaske drew as he listened, but the conditions proved challenging. “The music was amazing—the sound incredible—but I admit drawing was a challenge,” he said. “It was much darker than I’d anticipated.”

Despite the difficulty, Slaske completed the drawing during the concert, later enhancing it with color. His Minnesota visit also included backstage time with Orchestra musicians and stops at Minneapolis landmarks. It was the first Minnesota Orchestra concert he had attended in many years, part of a trip sparked by a friend’s visit to Minneapolis. He relished the chance to revisit the Hall, which he first experienced as an architecture student in the late 1970s. “I was so impressed by it then—the acoustics being incredible and the building itself so ‘state of the art,’” he said.

Known for his detailed urban drawings and watercolors, Slaske holds a degree in architecture from the University of Wisconsin. His work—collected by major institutions and corporations and exhibited across the U.S. and internationally, and profiled in a PBS interview—often reflects an appreciation for structure, space and design. Visit skylinecityprints.com to learn more about the artist, and go to minnesotaorchestra.org/stories for an extended version of this story.



Artwork of the Minnesota Orchestra by Steve Slaske.



Steve Slaske with Principal Cello Anthony Ross.

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Samuel Barber Adagio for Strings CA. 7'

Peter Lieberson *Neruda Songs* CA. 30'

Si no fuera porque tus ojos tienen color de luna
 (If your eyes were not the color of the moon)
 Amor, amor, las nubes a la torre del cielo subieron
 (Love, love, the clouds went up the tower of the sky)
 No estés lejos de mí un solo día
 (Don't go far off, not even for a day)
 Ya eres mía. Reposa con tu sueño en mi sueño
 (Now you're mine. Rest with your dream in my dream)
 Amor mío, si muero y tú no mueres
 (My love, if I die and you don't)
Jamie Barton, mezzo

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

Sergei Prokofiev Symphony No. 7 in C-sharp minor, Opus 131 CA. 31'
 Moderato
 Allegretto
 Andante espressivo
 Vivace

An English translation of *Neruda Songs'* Spanish text will be projected as surtitles.

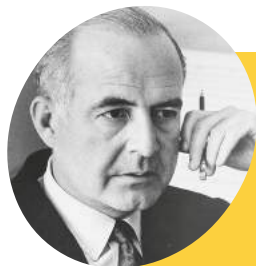
Profiles of the conductor and soloist appear on pages 10 and 50.

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**SAMUEL BARBER**

B: March 9, 1910
West Chester,
Pennsylvania

D: January 23, 1981
New York City

Adagio for Strings

PREMIERED:
November 5, 1938

Few 20th-century Western classical compositions can claim the popularity of Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*. Barber wrote it in 1936 as the central movement of his *String Quartet, Opus 11*, while spending the summer in the picturesque town of St. Wolfgang in the Austrian Tyrol. The premiere was given at the American Academy’s *Villa Aurelia*, performed by the *Pro Arte String Quartet*.

Two years later, back in America, Barber was asked by Arturo Toscanini to arrange the *Adagio* movement for string orchestra. Barber added double basses and divided the second violins and cellos, making a total of seven parts. Toscanini then conducted the first performance in this form in an NBC broadcast on November 5, 1938. The conductor thought enough of the work to include it in a subsequent South American tour, the only American work to be so honored.

TRANQUILITY IN GRIEF

An air of mysticism, the sense of vast spaces and a kind of religious aura infuse the *Adagio*. For many listeners, it does indeed express the tranquility in grief inherent in its use as a threnody. Nicolas Slonimsky described it as “an essay in austere polyphony, slowly rising in dynamic intensity through a series of lingering chordal suspensions leading to languorous cadences.”

The *Adagio*’s single, sinuous theme moves in mostly step-wise motion in even notes, much in the manner of Gregorian chant. Adding to its faintly archaic air is the use of a medieval church mode (the Phrygian) in somewhat adapted form. Following the exalted glow of the climax, which occurs at just about the two-thirds point, the music returns to the grave tone in which it began, the melodic threads fragmenting into ever smaller segments as the sound recedes into darkness and silence.

Instrumentation: string orchestra

PROGRAM NOTE BY ROBERT MARKOW.

**PETER LIEBERSON****B:** October 25, 1946
New York City**D:** April 23, 2011
Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel*Neruda Songs***PREMIERED:**
May 20, 2005

— In the early 1980s, Peter Lieberson was an obscure, largely unrecognized composer when the Boston Symphony chose him as one of 12 to write a work for its centennial season of 1981–82. As the youngest of the 12 (he was not yet 40), he had yet to write an orchestral work. But his Piano Concerto No. 1, which premiered in 1983 with Peter Serkin as soloist, catapulted Lieberson to international recognition. For a time, Lieberson was simultaneously a director of Shambhala Training meditation programs in the Boston area, a professor at Harvard University (his only academic appointment, which lasted from 1984 to 1988) and a composer. He spent the last two decades of his life working solely as a composer while living in Santa Fe. He died in Tel Aviv, where he had gone for treatment of lymphoma.

CARRYING ON A LEGACY

Lieberson was born into a family life dominated by the arts. His father, Goddard Lieberson, was also a composer, but his lasting fame derives from many years as president of Columbia Records. His mother was Vera Zorina, a ballerina with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and former wife of choreographer George Balanchine. Lieberson studied music at Columbia University and Brandeis University. Charles Wuorinen, Milton Babbitt and Donald Martino were his principal composition teachers. A deep and abiding interest in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism colored much of his music, if not programmatically, then in a spiritual way. As a result of meditating he relaxed and, he said, “as a product of relaxation more space came into [my] music.”

Following the premiere of his First Piano Concerto in Boston, Lieberson received commissions from major orchestras and soloists around the globe, including Yo-Yo Ma, the Toronto Symphony, the New York Philharmonic and the National Symphony. *Shing Kham* for percussion and orchestra was left incomplete at his death; it was finished by Oliver Knussen and Dejan Badnjar.

SONNETS AND SONGS

Santa Fe held special importance for Lieberson. This was where he saw the world premiere in 1997 of the largest project of his career, *Ashoka's Dream*, a stage work involving the story of a third-century Indian leader and how he learned generosity through Buddhism. In the cast was the woman he would later marry, mezzo Lorraine Hunt, for whom he wrote the *Neruda Songs* and the *Rilke Songs*.

Lieberson discovered the *100 Love Sonnets* by Nobel Prize-winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) in a shop at the Albuquerque airport in 1997. The *Neruda Songs* resulted from a co-commission by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony. The former orchestra gave the world premiere on May 20, 2005, with Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting. Lorraine Hunt Lieberson was the soloist. Tim Page in *The Washington Post* called the *Neruda Songs* “one of the most extraordinarily affecting artistic gifts ever created by one lover to another.” Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* described the music as having “the feeling of one of those golden summer afternoons when the world seems to reach a point of magical equilibrium, and we want to slow down time so that it does not end so quickly.” The *Neruda Songs* won Lieberson the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition in 2008.

THE COMPOSER'S WORDS

The composer writes: “Each of the five poems that I set to music seemed to me to reflect a different face in love’s mirror. The first poem, ‘If your eyes were not the color of the moon,’ is pure appreciation of the beloved. The second, ‘Love, love, the clouds went up the tower of the sky like triumphant washerwomen,’ is joyful and also mysterious in its evocation of nature’s elements: fire, water, wind, and luminous space. The third poem, ‘Don’t go far off, not even for a day,’ reflects the anguish of love, the fear and pain of separation. The fourth poem, ‘And now you’re mine. Rest with your dream in my dream,’ is complex in its emotional tone. First there is the exultance of passion. Then, gentle, soothing words lead the beloved into the world of rest, sleep and dream. Finally, the fifth poem, ‘My love, if I die and you don’t,’ is very sad and peaceful at the same time. There is the recognition that no matter how blessed one is with love, there will be a time when we must part from those whom we cherish so much. Still, Neruda reminds one that love has not ended. In truth, there is no real death to love nor even a birth: ‘It is like a long river, only changing lands, and changing lips.’”

In their vivid evocations of the rapture and mystery of love, their haunting images, masterly orchestration, refinement and sensuous sheen, Lieberman's *Neruda Songs* recall the world of another great orchestral song cycle, Ravel's *Shéhérazade*. They also evoke Strauss' *Four Last Songs*, especially in the last songs of the cycles, each imbued with a golden glow and a sense of quiet confidence in the acceptance of inevitable death.

The Strauss connection goes further. Both Strauss and Lieberman cultivated relationships with their future wives—both professional singers—during rehearsals of their own first operas (in Strauss' case, Pauline d'Ahna in *Guntram*; in Lieberman's case, Lorraine Hunt in *Ashoka's Dream*, where she portrayed Ashoka's second wife, Triraksha; Lorraine became Lieberman's second wife as well). Pauline and Lorraine also served as powerful muses to their composer-husbands. Unlike the Strausses, who lived into ripe old age, the Liebersons died tragically young—Lorraine at just 52, Peter at 64, both from cancer. A live recording of the *Neruda Songs* with the Boston Symphony on the Nonesuch label remains an eloquent testimony to the luminous beauty of Lorraine Hunt Lieberman's voice and her mesmerizing vocal delivery, and to a sublime artistic partnership.

Instrumentation: solo mezzo with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, crotales, high suspended cymbal, maracas, low tom-tom, vibraphone, glockenspiel, harp, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ROBERT MARKOW.



SERGEI PROKOFIEV

B: April 27, 1891
Sontsivka, Ukraine

D: March 5, 1953
Moscow, Russia

Symphony No. 7 in
C-sharp minor, Opus 131

PREMIERED: October 11, 1952

— Sergei Prokofiev composed his seventh—and final—symphony in 1951-52. This was not a good time for the composer. He had fallen and suffered a concussion from which he never really recovered, and now, at the too-young age of 60, he was so frail that he could work for barely an hour each day.

Moreover, he was working under repressive conditions. Three years earlier, Stalin's ideological watchdog Andrei Zhdanov convened the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, specifically to bring Russian composers into ideological conformity. Prokofiev and others were attacked for writing “confused, neuropathological combinations which transform music into cacophony,” music that “dwells too much on the dark and fearful aspects of reality.” In the aftermath, Prokofiev was reduced to writing politically correct scores, such as a symphonic poem composed for the opening of the Volga Dam canal and the oratorio *On Guard for Peace*.

DEALING WITH DEMANDS

Prokofiev's Seventh Symphony has come in for a hard time from Western critics, who see it as a product of the composer's “tired” final years, a sign of his “capitulation” to Soviet demands for music for the masses. It is true that—coming after Prokofiev's heroic Fifth Symphony and anguished Sixth—the Seventh can seem gentle and understated. It was commissioned by the Children's Division of Moscow Radio, and Prokofiev himself described it as “a simple symphony, for young listeners.” Yet after the first run-through at rehearsal, he appeared to have doubts, worrying: “Isn't the music rather too simple?” Some of the difficulty lies in the title “Symphony,” a term that seems to imply a substantial and dramatic work. Perhaps calling the music a symphonic suite would have occasioned less criticism.

Prokofiev was well enough that his doctors let him attend the premiere of his Seventh Symphony in Moscow on October 11, 1952, but that would prove his final public appearance—he passed away five months later. (In a bitter irony, Stalin died on the same day.)

THE MUSIC: A SIMPLE SYMPHONY

MODERATO. The Seventh Symphony bursts to life on a soaring theme that conveys a wonderful sense of space. The second subject is a broad melody that rises out of the low strings and winds, and Prokofiev closes out the exposition with a piquant little tune for oboe and flute enlivened by the accompaniment of bells and harp. This movement is in sonata form, but without the conflict and resolution that mark most symphonic opening movements. Even Prokofiev's tempo indication for this movement—*Moderato* rather than the expected *Allegro*—suggests a relaxation of mood, and the music closes with quiet reminiscences of the opening theme.

ALLEGRETTO; ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO. The second movement is a waltz, but this is one of those wonderful Prokofiev waltzes that never quite settles into the rhythms we expect. He marks the beginning *Allegretto*, but this quickly accelerates into an *Allegro* as the music begins to dance; two trio sections break the progress of this waltz. The third movement, *Andante espressivo*, is based on a theme Prokofiev had originally written in 1936.

VIVACE. The concluding *Vivace* is the expected good-natured finale. Full of energy, it does feel as if it had been conceived for children. Throughout, one is reminded of a youth festival or a circus or a sleigh ride—some lighthearted occasion brimming with happy energy. But the very end brings surprises. Prokofiev recalls themes from earlier movements, and the music slows to a quiet conclusion with the unusual marking *pensieroso*: “thoughtful.”

At the first rehearsal of this symphony, some of those in the audience convinced Prokofiev that the symphony needed a “happy” ending, so he wrote a 26-measure addition—essentially a quick variant of the movement’s main theme—to bring the symphony to its close. Mstislav Rostropovich is reported to have said that Prokofiev hoped the more abrupt conclusion would eventually be the accepted one, but at the premiere—and in virtually all subsequent performances—it is the “happy” ending that brings Prokofiev’s Seventh Symphony to its sunny conclusion, and at the first performance the audience demanded that the finale be repeated.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel, harp, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.

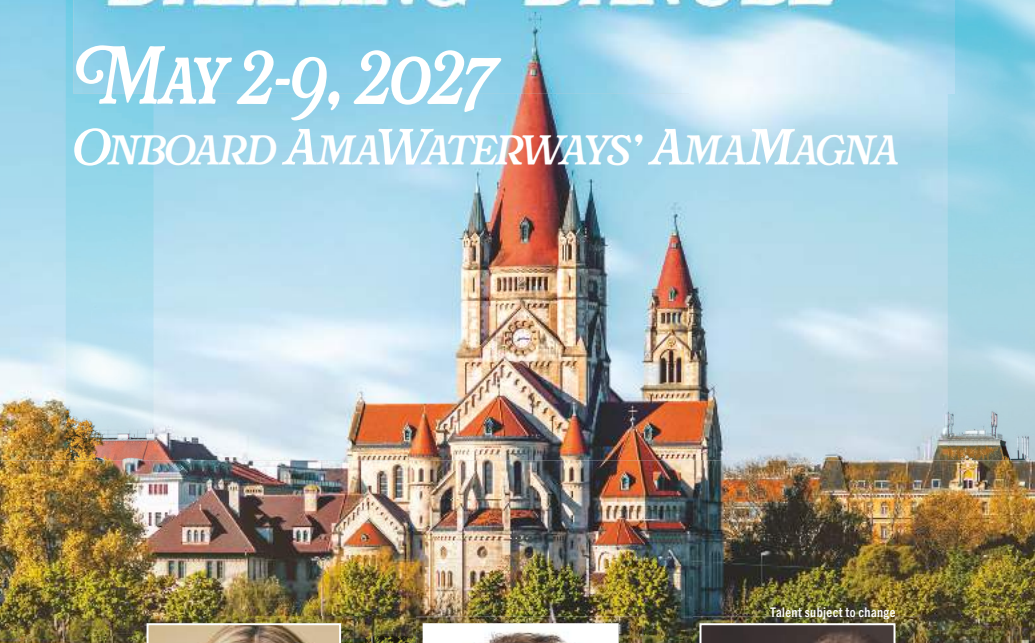


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SØNDERGÅRD AND TCHAIKOVSKY

Thomas Søndergård, conductor

Alexander Gavrylyuk, piano

FRI JUN 12 8PM | SAT JUN 13 7PM

With this concert, we honor the memory of Janet Bartels.

Jennifer Higdon	<i>blue cathedral</i>	CA. 11'
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23 Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso Andantino semplice Allegro con fuoco <i>Alexander Gavrylyuk, piano</i>	CA. 40'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	CA. 20'
Charles Ives	<i>The Unanswered Question</i>	CA. 6'
Alexander Scriabin	<i>The Poem of Ecstasy, Opus 54</i>	CA. 22'

Profiles of the conductor and soloist appear on pages 10 and 52.

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Mingle with musicians onstage following the June 13 concert.

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**JENNIFER HIGDON****B:** December 31, 1962
Brooklyn, New York*blue cathedral***PREMIERED:**
May 1, 2000

Jennifer Higdon’s visionary orchestral work *blue cathedral* encourages us to use our imagination during dark times—finding ways to turn tragedy into celebration and reshape painful memories into beautiful imagery. Just a few years out of graduate school, the Brooklyn-born composer experienced the sudden loss of her younger brother, Andrew Blue, to cancer. Near the same time, the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia—where Higdon taught for years—commissioned her to write a celebratory piece commemorating the school’s 75th anniversary.

Reconciling overwhelming grief with celebration and longevity seemed at first impossible for Higdon. As she reflected on her brother and on all of our life paths and the interactions with others, Higdon began to find wonder and peace. Then, *blue cathedral* emerged—a powerful expression of optimism, joy and awe. It catapulted Higdon’s career and has become her most frequently performed composition.

A CATHEDRAL IN THE SKY

“This piece represents the expression of the individual and the group,” says Higdon on *blue cathedral*, “our inner travels and the places our souls carry us, the lessons we learn, and the growth we experience. Blue... like the sky, where all possibilities soar. Cathedrals...a place of thought, growth, spiritual expression...serving as a symbolic doorway in to and out of this world. Blue represents all potential and the progression of journeys. Cathedrals represent a place of beginnings, endings, solitude, fellowship, contemplation, knowledge and growth. As I was writing this piece, I found myself imagining a journey through a glass cathedral in the sky. Because the walls would be transparent, I saw the image of clouds and blueness permeating from the outside of this church.”

Higdon’s aim is for listeners to be taken on an ethereal journey through this imagined church. Sparkling light shines through crystal pillars and stained glass, and a sensation arises that each of us is floating through the cathedral’s corridors with increasing speed, until the ceiling itself opens up to reveal the heavens.

blue cathedral prominently features flute and clarinet—respectively, the instruments of Higdon and her brother. Flute enters first because Jennifer is the older sibling of the pair. The two communicate joyfully with each other, dancing in and out of the orchestral textures, growing and exploring together. Meanwhile, the radiant musical colors that Higdon creates to produce the cathedral-like environment are magnificent, utilizing chimes and Chinese reflex balls and water glasses for a glistening, shimmering effect.

Expressions of grief, hope, anger, love and peace are all captured over the course of the journey. As the piece comes to a close, one might expect the clarinet solo to disappear, but Higdon found another way to imagine the ending. Instead, her own voice is the one that fades away as the clarinet remains, a sign that even through death, our stories go on.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Jennifer Higdon is one of America's most acclaimed figures in contemporary classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, a 2010 Grammy for her Percussion Concerto, a 2018 Grammy for her Viola Concerto and a 2020 Grammy for her Harp Concerto. In 2018, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize, awarded to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. Most recently, she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Higdon enjoys several hundred performances a year of her works, and *blue cathedral* is today's most performed contemporary orchestral work, with more than 700 performances worldwide. Her works have been recorded on more than seventy CDs. Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and the opera recording was nominated for two Grammy Awards. Her music is published exclusively by Lawdon Press.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns (doubling crystal glasses), 3 trumpets, 3 trombones (doubling crystal glasses), tuba (doubling crystal glasses), timpani, bass drum, bell tree, Chinese health balls, crotales, 2 crystal glasses, sizzle cymbal, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, large tom-tom, 2 triangles, marimba, chimes, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY EMMA PLEHAL.



PETER ILYICH
TCHAIKOVSKY

B: May 7, 1840
Votkinsk, Russia

D: November 6, 1893
St. Petersburg, Russia

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat
minor for Piano and
Orchestra, Opus 23

PREMIERED:
October 25, 1875

On Christmas Eve, 1874, Tchaikovsky sat before his friend, the conductor Nicolai Rubinstein, at the Moscow Conservatory to play for him the piano concerto he had almost completed. “I played the first movement. Not a single remark!...Then a torrent poured forth from Nicolai, gentle at first, then growing more and more into the sound of Jupiter....My concerto was worthless and unplayable....The piece as a whole was bad, trivial, vulgar. I had stolen this from somebody and that from somebody else. It was so clumsy, so badly written that it was beyond rescue.”

Tchaikovsky’s description, sent to his patroness Mme. Von Meck, goes on at great length. Obviously, he was insulted and deeply hurt, but resolved to publish the concerto anyway. As a result of the bad feelings between Rubinstein and the composer, the dedication was changed to Hans von Bülow, who performed it on a tour of the United States. The world premiere, on October 25, 1875, took place then, not in Russia, but in Boston, from where Bülow sent what is thought to have been the first cable ever sent from Boston to Moscow, telling Tchaikovsky of the great popular success of his concerto.

Strange as it may seem, the critics did not agree with the public acclamation. The *Evening Transcript* thought it had “long stretches of what seems...formless void, sprinkled only with tinklings of the piano and snatchy obligatos from all the various wind and string instruments in turn.” The *Journal* was confident that “it would not soon supplant...the fiery compositions of Liszt, Raff and [Anton] Rubinstein,” and *Dwight’s Journal of Music* found it “strange, wild, and ultra-modern,” and wondered “could we ever learn to love such music?” History has decided resolutely in favor of the question, and the work went on to become one of the world’s most popular piano concertos. Tchaikovsky’s original confidence had borne fruit. Even Nicolai Rubinstein changed his mind in later years and performed the concerto often. Tchaikovsky too capitulated by accepting some of the pianist’s suggestions for revisions.

UNIQUE CHARMS AND A FAMOUS INTRODUCTION

ALLEGRO NON TROPPO E MOLTO MAESTOSO. Each of the three movements has its unique charms and attractions. The concerto's most famous theme—that beautiful, lyrical song played by violins just after the opening horn fanfare—is used as introductory material only, and after it has run its course of development through various instruments, never returns. This theme, incidentally, occurs in the key of D-flat major, not the main key of the concerto, B-flat minor. The first movement's true principal subject is a jerky, almost tuneless idea introduced by the soloist in the concerto's nominal key of B-flat minor. Its essential folk character can be detected if the individual pitches are sung slowly. (It is actually a Ukrainian song traditionally sung by seekers of charity.)

ANDANTINO SEMPLICE. The dreamy flute solo that opens the second movement also exudes a folksy flavor, but in this case it is entirely Tchaikovsky's own. This slow movement incorporates what is in essence a miniature Scherzo movement—a prestissimo passage of whimsical, lighthearted fun. It features a lilting tune in the strings that Tchaikovsky borrowed from a French chansonette.

ALLEGRO CON FUOCO. The finale offers the most brilliant virtuosic opportunities yet. Again, we find a Ukrainian folk song used as the basis of the first theme. A lyrical second theme soon follows. The concerto concludes with the soloist roaring their way up and down the keyboard in a stunning display of pianistic pyrotechnics guaranteed to elicit thunderous applause from a super-charged audience. Small wonder that at the premiere in Boston, and at subsequent performances in Bülow's American tour, audiences demanded the entire movement to be encored.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY ROBERT MARKOW.

**CHARLES IVES**

B: October 20, 1874
Danbury, Connecticut

D: May 19, 1954
New York City

The Unanswered Question

PREMIERED: May 11, 1946

Charles Ives' *The Unanswered Question*, probably composed in 1906, was revised at various times between then and 1935. The first performance, with Theodore Bloomfield conducting an ensemble of Juilliard students, was given in New York on May 11, 1946, at the Second Annual Festival of Contemporary Music at Columbia University.

It was the American scholar Wayne Shirley who identified Ives' title as taken from Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem *The Sphinx*. Emerson himself commented on the poem, saying: "If the mind live only in particulars and see only the differences (wanting the power to see the whole—all in each), then the world addresses to this mind a question it cannot answer, and each new fact tears it in pieces, and it is vanquished by the distracting variety."

"RESIDENT DISTURBANCES" IN 1906

Such preoccupations are altogether something to be expected from the ever-amazing Ives—son of a Connecticut bandmaster (a man of infinite curiosity and hunger for experiment), graduate in composition at Yale, organist at several New York churches, inventive and prosperous life insurance executive, and the most original and often the most poetic classical composer our country has produced. He was of course a keen reader of the Transcendentalists: after all, next to *The Unanswered Question*, his best-known piece is the *Concord Sonata* for solo piano. It is that work, with its portraits in music of Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts and Thoreau, whose first performance by John Kirkpatrick in 1939 convinced people what a significant figure Ives was.

For Ives, 1906 was a watershed year: this was the year he declared himself as a modernist, the year he truly became Charles Ives. His New York apartment mates referred to his works of this time as "resident disturbances." The second-best-known composition of 1906 is the beguiling *Central Park in the Dark*, and at some point in the 1930s Ives coupled the two works as:

- I. “A Contemplation of a Serious Matter” or “The Unanswered Question.”
- II. “A Contemplation of Nothing Serious” or “Central Park in the Dark in ‘The Good Old Summer Time.’”

What the two “contemplations” most strikingly have in common is Ives’ truly explosive new idea of counterpoint, no longer thought of just as a combination of different musical lines but one of combining whole different musics.

QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, SILENCE

Three musics live simultaneously in *The Unanswered Question*. From start to finish there is very slow-moving music for strings, muted and pianississimo. It is their task, as Ives wrote, to express “the Silence of the Druids’...They know nothing, say nothing, hear nothing. The trumpet asks ‘the perennial question of existence;’ it does so [six] times without changing its voice. The hunt for the ‘invisible answer,’ however, undertaken by the flutes and other human beings, becomes more active, faster and louder with each reiteration...The answers, fighting one another, seem gradually to become aware of their futility, also as a consequence of a ‘secret conference,’ whereupon they start making fun of ‘the question’—the quarrel is over for a moment. When ‘the answers’ have disappeared, ‘the question’ is asked [by the trumpet] one more time and comes up against ‘the silence,’ far away, in undisturbed solitude.”

Instrumentation: 4 flutes, trumpet and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY THE LATE MICHAEL STEINBERG, USED WITH PERMISSION.



ALEXANDER SCRIBIN

B: January 6, 1872
Moscow, Russia

D: April 27, 1915
Moscow, Russia

The Poem of Ecstasy,

Opus 54

PREMIERED:
December 10, 1908

Richard Wagner may top the list of most flamboyant personalities in Western classical music, but Alexander Scriabin is not far behind. The Russian was a solitary genius—iconoclast, visionary, perhaps even a madman. Scriabin’s goal, like Wagner’s, was a synthesis of all the arts.

In his *Prometheus*, for instance, he incorporated a part for a keyboard devised to project changing colors during the performance, a pioneering multimedia effort. His ultimate ambition was a work of grandiose dimensions, *Mysterium*—a vision of apocalyptic ecstasy and the end of the world. All he completed in this vein was a preliminary poem, but he dreamed of having it performed as part of a sacred rite in the Himalayas. Scriabin, in short, did not think small.

A MYSTIC IN AMERICA

Mysticism dominates Scriabin's music. He also ascribed a high importance to Eros, the Greek god of love, and in *The Poem of Ecstasy*, it is not clear to what extent he was dealing with sensuality or instead with the supreme joy of creative energy. Stylistically, he was ahead of his times—rejecting absolute tonal stability and instead generating harmonies outside the traditional major/minor context. He nevertheless adhered to strong tonal roots—the majestic closing pages of *The Poem of Ecstasy*, for instance, have the entire orchestra reveling in C major, with harp cascades and the ringing of bells.

Undertaken in 1905, Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* began to take shape while the composer—married with four children—had retreated to a picturesque village near Genoa with his muse and mistress Tatiana Schloezer. In December 1906, at the invitation of Modest Altschuler, founder of the Russian Symphony Society of New York, Scriabin performed his piano works in New York, then continued as far west as Detroit and Cincinnati. Schloezer joined him, but they were so snubbed in America owing to their irregular relationship that they quickly retreated to France with scarcely a franc in their pockets. But during the American sojourn, Scriabin no doubt spoke of his progress on *The Poem of Ecstasy*. At any rate, like Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, *The Poem of Ecstasy* had its premiere in America, where the Russian Symphony Society, under Altschuler, first performed it on December 10, 1908.

POETRY OR PURE MUSIC?

As Scriabin was working out the concept of *The Poem of Ecstasy*, he found himself writing a text—"in the most divine word colors," he boasted. "The very meter of the words kindles the meaning of the poem. I am expressing what will be one and the same as the music." For the work's first Moscow performance in 1909, Scriabin approved a printed annotation that provided an outline of the piece, summarizing it as "the Joy of Liberated Action. The Cosmos, i.e. Spirit, is Eternal Creator without External Motivation, a Divine

Play with Worlds...When the Spirit has attained the supreme culmination of its activity and has been torn away from the embraces of teleology and relativity, when it has exhausted completely its substance and its liberated active energy, the Time of Ecstasy shall arrive.”

Do not be concerned if this confuses you; this explanatory text has been long forgotten. Scriabin himself was ambivalent about printing his poem in the score, stating that he would prefer that conductors “approach it first as pure music.” In other words, just listen and ignore the intentions. You will sense the directions in the score—phrases like “very perfumed” and “with perpetual intoxication.” The orchestration is opulent, featuring a battalion of horns and an organ, but its brilliance does not exceed Wagner’s *Ring* cycle, while its form traces a basic sonata design. Following a languid prologue (listen for the flute), the *Allegro* proper springs from contrasted ideas, the chief being a trumpet proclamation, assertive and incessantly recurring—a prime solo for the instrument. The ideas are richly developed and reprised before the almost unbearably ecstatic coda.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, piccolo, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, glockenspiel, church bell, 2 harps, celesta, organ and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY THE LATE MARY ANN FELDMAN.

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Thomas Søndergård, conductor

*Søndergård
Conducts
Stravinsky's
Firebird*

SEP 25–26, 2026

*Pictures at
an Exhibition*

OCT 16–17, 2026

Himari, violin



Ben Folds, vocals and piano

*Ben Folds with
the Minnesota
Orchestra*

OCT 24, 2026

*How to Train
Your Dragon
in Concert*

NOV 28–29, 2026



*Home Alone
in Concert*

DEC 11–13, 2026

Isata Kanneh-Mason, piano

*Gershwin
Concerto in F*

MAY 13–15, 2027



FAMILY CONCERT SYMPHONIC STORYTELLING

Thomas Søndergård, conductor

Emily Switzer, host

Maria Camacho-Dively, American Sign Language interpreter

SUN JUN 14 2PM

We gratefully recognize Angela Pennington and W. Anders Folk as lead sponsors for this concert.

Carlos Simon	<i>Motherboxx Connection,</i> from <i>Tales: A Folklore Symphony</i>	CA. 7'
Dame Ethel Smyth	Overture from <i>The Boatswain's Mate</i>	CA. 6'
Maurice Ravel	<i>Conversations of Beauty and the Beast,</i> from <i>Mother Goose (Ma Mère l'Oye)</i>	CA. 4'
Carlos Simon	<i>John Henry,</i> from <i>Tales: A Folklore Symphony</i>	CA. 5'
Leonard Bernstein	Selections from Symphonic Dances from <i>West Side Story</i> Prologue "Somewhere" Scherzo Mambo	CA. 13'

Profiles of the conductor, host and ASL interpreter appear on pages 10, 51 and 54.

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The Relaxed Family Concert series is made possible by PNC.

This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the **Minnesota State Arts Board**, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

JUNETEENTH

Kedrick Armstrong, conductor
Melody A. Betts, vocals
Brian Raphael Nabors, Hammond organ

THU JUN 18 7PM

*We gratefully recognize the **McVay Foundation** for their generosity as lead sponsor for this program.*

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor	<i>The Bamboula</i> , Rhapsodic Dance No. 1	CA. 11'
Brittany J. Green	<i>Testify!</i>	CA. 5'
	Selections from vocalist Melody A. Betts	CA. 20'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		CA. 20'
Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson	<i>Worship</i> , A Concert Overture for Orchestra	CA. 6'
Nkeiru Okoye	<i>Voices Shouting Out</i>	CA. 5'
Brian Raphael Nabors	Concerto for Hammond Organ Rhapsody Invocation: Threnody for the Victims of Senseless Violence, Racism, Hatred and Bigotry Finale <i>Brian Raphael Nabors, Hammond organ</i>	CA. 29'

Profiles of the conductor and soloists appear on pages 50, 51 and 53.
Visit minnesotaorchestra.org/pre for details about pre-concert activities.

THANK YOU

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This concert will be broadcast live on [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#).



**SAMUEL
COLERIDGE-TAYLOR**

B: August 15, 1875
London, England

D: September 1, 1912
Croydon, England

The Bamboula,
Rhapsodic Dance No. 1

PREMIERED: June 1910

The life of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was far too brief—just 37 years—but was marked by numerous triumphs on the international stage. At age 22 the London-born composer authored what became, by some accounts, the most successful cantata of his era, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. His music and reputation spread quickly across the Atlantic, boosted by three U.S. tours. He was invited to the White House by Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 and earned such a devoted following in America that multiple choruses and public schools were named in his honor. The great achievements of Coleridge-Taylor, whose father was from Sierra Leone, brought special pride to many in the Black American population at a time when the Reconstruction era's steps toward racial equality were being reversed.

THE PATRON'S COMMISSION

The last of Coleridge-Taylor's visits to the U.S. took place in 1910, and on it he traveled to the Norfolk Music Festival to conduct *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* at the invitation of the noted music patron Carl Stoeckel. Stoeckel wasn't content with only Coleridge-Taylor's musical calling card and commissioned a new orchestral work from the visiting composer. Coleridge-Taylor delivered *The Bamboula*, dedicated to Stoeckel and premiered in June 1910 by the New York Philharmonic. It quickly found further hearings; the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra played it as early as 1913.

The score for *The Bamboula* is prefaced by a brief, unattributed note: "The four bars beginning from letter B are identical with a well-known West Indian Negro Dance called 'the Bamboula,' the tempo of the original 'Bamboula' being quite fast throughout. No other subject matter is used throughout the composition, which is merely a series of evolutions of the phrase mentioned. This refers to the middle part also, which is introduced for the sake of contrast."

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

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER.

**BRITTANY J. GREEN****B:** February 3, 1991
Raleigh, North Carolina***Testify!*****PREMIERED:**
September 27, 2024

— Brittany J. Green is a North Carolina-based composer, performer and educator who often creates new work by blending elements of sound, video, movement and text to elicit unconventional responses and redefine relationships between different types of media. Her work has been featured at Carnegie Hall, Tanglewood, the Chicago Symphony’s MusicNOW and many additional festivals worldwide. Her collaborators include Alarm Will Sound, the International Contemporary Ensemble and JACK Quartet.

For Green, the 2025-26 season has included a residency with the Lexington Philharmonic, a collaboration with the New York Philharmonic, and the premiere of her *Letters to America* at Carnegie Hall with soprano Karen Slack and the American Composers Orchestra. Green’s current research explores sounds of the Black church and music technology in K-12 education. She is also pursuing a project that explores the life and work of American composer Julius Eastman through the lens of queer theory and Black experimentalism. Green holds degrees from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, East Carolina University and Duke University, and she currently teaches composition and music theory at East Carolina University.

AN UNUSUAL HOMAGE

One of Green’s most recent works is *Testify!*, premiered in September 2024 by the Jacksonville Symphony under its Music Director Courtney Lewis, who was on the Minnesota Orchestra’s artistic roster from 2009 to 2014, first as assistant conductor and then associate conductor.

The very first and last sounds of *Testify!* are heard only on a tambourine, an homage to Green’s mother and her unusual but regular Sunday morning church role. “I remember watching Mama—a self-proclaimed ‘non-musician’—work her way around a tambourine, making it dance and sing like magic,” says Green in her own notes on the piece. “When she plays the tambourine, even to this day, I feel like I’m in a whirlwind of sound and technicolor.”

Throughout *Testify!*, a persistent rhythmic pattern drives the music forward, never relenting, from the fifth measure until the final ring of the solo tambourine. This steady pulse works its way through every instrument and section of the orchestra, sometimes adding more and more voices until the entire ensemble is accentuating the rhythmic pattern as one. Green adds another layer by asking the musicians to interject spirited musical exclamations and literal shouts of joy. Woven throughout the piece are melodic ideas formed out of the beloved and jubilant gospel hymn, *I'm So Glad, Jesus Lifted Me*—a traditional call-and-response style anthem that often includes shouts of “Hallelujah!” The result is a high-powered, technicolored celebration inspired by Green’s own early church memories.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, 2 tambourines, xylophone, vibraphone, harp, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY EMMA PLEHAL.



**COLERIDGE-TAYLOR
PERKINSON**

B: June 14, 1932
New York City

D: March 9, 2004
Chicago, Illinois

*Worship, A Concert
Overture for Orchestra*

PREMIERED:
September 8, 2001

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson—named after the prominent British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, whose music his mother greatly admired—was a composer, pianist and conductor who wrote music for the concert hall, television and film, and renowned dance and theatre ensembles like the Alvin Ailey Ensemble and American Theater Lab. In addition to his classical works, Perkinson was equally versed in jazz and popular music; he arranged several hits in the 1970s for stars like Marvin Gaye, Harry Belafonte and Max Roach.

Born in 1932, Perkinson was raised in New York City. He studied dance and piano as a young boy, and in 1949 won the LaGuardia Prize in music while still a high school student. He began college at New York University studying education, but later transferred to the Manhattan School of Music for compositional studies. Throughout the early 1960s, he studied conducting in the Netherlands, and in 1965, he co-founded Symphony of

the New World—the country’s first racially integrated orchestra. He later served as its music director.

A BLENDING OF STYLES

Perkinson’s music is a synthesis of styles: classical counterpoint, jazz, Romanticism, blues, spirituals and other Black folk music. Many critics have also noted the rhythmic influence of Igor Stravinsky, whom Perkinson met when he was in high school.

These influences all come to bear in *Worship*, A Concert Overture, written in 2001. Across roughly seven minutes, Perkinson unveils a sound world built on contrasts in tone but united by constant Stravinsky-esque changes in meter, lending a flowing yet angular feel to the work. It opens calmly with singing winds and strings, before percussion and brass propel the motion forward. The calm feeling returns briefly before the clarinet re-energizes the proceedings, driving the overture to a richly layered and percussive close.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, regular and small bass drums, cymbals, suspended cymbal, congas, hi-hat, tam-tam, tom-toms, xylophone and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY MICHAEL DIVINO.



NKEIRU OKOYE

B: July 18, 1972
New York City

Voices Shouting Out

PREMIERED:
February 23, 2002

— Shortly after September 11, 2001, American composer Nkeiru Okoye set out to compose a work in direct response to the tragic attack in her own hometown of New York City. However, she found the moment too much in itself, and the music took several months of distance to find its footing and make its way to paper.

A CHANNELING OF HOPE

On New Year’s Day in 2002, Okoye finally sat down and found a different approach that felt more hopeful and courageous. She recalls the experience:

“As a native New Yorker, born within a mile of Ground Zero, I was shaken, and angry. A sudden burst of inspiration and defiance struck some months later. I decided not to write the terrorism into my music: the piece would be a celebrative tribute to those of us who keep living.”

Voices Shouting Out was composed using an 11-tone row—a set series of 11 different pitches out of the 12 available in the chromatic scale, used in sequence throughout the composition. In a matter of just a few minutes, though, Okoye reaches out to use several different sources for inspiration, creating a one-of-a-kind blend of musical styles.

Using the tone row as a starting point, Okoye harmonized it to give a feeling of jazz influence; she even included a muted trumpet section in honor of the great American jazz trumpeter Miles Davis. At the work’s center, a lyrical section featuring strings, harp and flute takes stylistic elements from contemporary gospel music. Finally, the aggressive, accented style of playing she requests from the orchestra was inspired by and somewhat in honor of a university marching band that rehearsed directly next to where Okoye worked on the piece. She could hear the powerful, impactful chords and rhythms, and incorporated that into this composition. This rhythmic momentum opens the piece and then ultimately returns, carrying the music to its conclusion.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Okoye is a Guggenheim Fellow and American Prize-winning composer, librettist, conductor and cultural thought leader whose music fuses narrative, improvisation and cultural resonance. Her music has been performed at Carnegie Hall and the Royal Opera House, and by ensembles including the BBC Concert Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Houston Grand Opera and Opera North UK. She is currently the William Levi Dawson composer in residence with the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra. Among her many projects, her most recognized works include her opera *Harriet Tubman: When I Crossed That Line to Freedom*; an extensive oratorio, *When the Caged Bird Sings*; and the piece heard today, *Voices Shouting Out*. Her piano miniature *Dusk* appears on the 2025 Latin Grammy-winning album, *Kaleidoscope*, and her upcoming album, *When the Caged Bird Sings*, will be the first one dedicated entirely to her own work.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, triangle, wood block, xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, harp, piano and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY EMMA PLEHAL.

**BRIAN RAPHAEL
NABORS****B:** April 10, 1991
Birmingham, Alabama**Concerto for Hammond
Organ****PREMIERED:**
September 24, 2023

The Minnesota Orchestra's 2025-26 season has featured concertos for several instruments less often given the solo spotlight—such as viola and timpani—but tonight we hear something entirely unprecedented: the ensemble's first-ever performance of a concerto for Hammond organ. Alabama-born Brian Raphael Nabors, whose background is described on page 53, pulls double duty as both composer and soloist on the electro-mechanical organ created in the 1930s by American engineer and inventor Laurens Hammond. The Hammond organ is noted for its warm tones, percussive attack and expressive vibrato. It has become widely used in jazz, gospel, rock and blues, but rarely in classical orchestra settings—though it did appear on the Orchestra Hall stage this past February, in a suite from Bernard Herrmann's film score *Vertigo*.

THE COMPOSER'S WORDS

Nabors' Hammond Organ Concerto was commissioned by the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and members of Sound Investment, and premiered on September 24, 2023, by the composer-soloist and the commissioning ensemble under the direction of Carlos Izcaray. Nabors has provided these illuminating comments on his concerto:

"In the history of American music, the Hammond organ has seamlessly crossed genres and broken barriers. From the spiritual silos of the Black church, to the smooth and vivacious world of Jazz, to the hardy soulfulness of Rock; the Hammond has been there. This concerto is my love letter to all that has made me the artist I am. It is a love letter to the beauty, pain, and struggle that American music was born from. [It] is divided into three movements: a rhapsody, threnody and gospel praise break.

RHAPSODY. "The first movement is an exploration of American sound. It is a celebration of the many cultural influences that make the U.S. such a unique place. In a nutshell, it is everything we continue to strive for; fluid cultural integration. I send the soloist and orchestra through a whirlwind of genres. There's Latin flavor, modern jazz, hard rock, all thrown into a contemporary sound block.

INVOCATION: THRENODY FOR THE VICTIMS OF SENSELESS VIOLENCE, RACISM, HATRED AND BIGOTRY. “The second movement presents many truths that concern the well-being of our nation’s people. Unfortunately, even in this current day and age, America is no stranger to tragedy. Within recent years, we’ve had numerous isolated events of terror: mass school shootings, church shootings, shootings in public places, unlawful killings of unarmed citizens, and unjust groups who threaten our ability to have peace by pushing an agenda of hate and division. To top it off, a global pandemic. I wanted this movement to be a moment where we pay homage to all of those innocent people lost, reflect on who we are, and re-examine our core values if we are to live in a nation where everyone, regardless of where you come from, can prosper.

“This movement features the traditional American hymn *Amazing Grace* and the spiritual *Oh Freedom*. In partnership with the orchestra, the organ introduces these inspirational themes with sound interruptions symbolic of a very cut-throat, visceral pain to create an all-encompassing duality of hope and tragedy. After a roaring improvised cadenza, the strings split into 14-part divisi and voices throughout the orchestra gradually gather and ascend to a soaring climax, with each individual voice creating a counterpoint representing the souls of the innocent victims ascending to claim their peace.

FINALE. “Finally, we have the third movement that is essentially one large gospel praise break between the organ and orchestra. It is a glimpse of what freedom sounds like and the peace that we’ll have when we all understand, as Dr. Maya Angelou said, that ‘we are more alike, than we are unlike.’ This movement is lightning fast, bringing about the sound world of the Afro-American church, where echoes of praise ring out amongst the musicians.”

Instrumentation: solo Hammond organ with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, bongos, congas, crotales, drum set, maracas, tambourine, tam-tam, thunder sheet, Tibetan singing bowl, whip, wood blocks, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano, electric guitar, bass guitar and strings

PROGRAM NOTE INTRODUCTION BY CARL SCHROEDER, WITH MUSICAL DESCRIPTION BY BRIAN RAPHAEL NABORS.



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DISNEY PRIDE IN CONCERT

Sarah Hicks, conductor
 Gerald Gurss, conductor
 Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus

SAT JUN 20 7PM | SUN JUN 21 2PM

Disney PRIDE in Concert is a spectacular new concert that celebrates LGBTQ+ life, love, family and pride. It draws musical inspiration from iconic Disney films including *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King* and *Mary Poppins* to modern classics such as *Coco*, *Zootopia*, *Wreck-It Ralph* and the magical music of Disney Parks with curated video clips from the Disney vault, all interwoven with universal storytelling themes and the powerful voices and personal stories of the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus.

All songs featured in Disney PRIDE in Concert were arranged by Chad Weirick for this special celebration.

All songs in the program are published by Walt Disney Music Company (ASCAP), Pixar Talking Pictures (ASCAP), Wonderland Music Company, Inc. (BMI), and/or Pixar Music (BMI).

"When You Wish Upon a Star" published by Bourne Company.

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Today's concert lasts about 2 hours, including a 20-minute intermission.

Visit minnesotaorchestra.org/disneypride to access the Minnesota Orchestra digital program with the repertoire set list.

Profiles of the conductors and choir, and a choir roster, appear on pages 52 through 55.

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

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The Movies & Music series is presented by U.S. Bank.



KEDRICK ARMSTRONG,
CONDUCTOR

Kedrick Armstrong has been music director of the Oakland Symphony since 2024; his highlights there this season include premieres by Dave Ragland and Jasmine Barnes as part of an ongoing spotlight of Black American composers. His recent guest conducting engagements include the world premiere of a new production of Scott Joplin's opera *Treemonisha* with Washington National Opera and concerts with the Springfield Symphony and Chicago Sinfonietta, as well as his Chicago Symphony debut. He has served on the music staff at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera and Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and recently concluded his tenure as creative partner and principal conductor of the Knox-Galesburg Symphony. He advocates for the performance, publication and preservation of minority voices in classical music, and has spent several seasons as the music mentor/supervisor for EmpowerYouth!—a collaboration of the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Chicago Urban League. More: kedrickarmstrong.com.



JAMIE BARTON,
MEZZO

Critically acclaimed by virtually every major outlet covering classical music, American mezzo Jamie Barton is increasingly recognized for how she uses her powerful instrument offstage—lifting up women, queer people and other marginalized communities. In recognition of her iconic performance at Last Night of the Proms, Barton was named 2020 Personality of the Year at the BBC Music Magazine Awards. She also won the Beverly Sills Artist Award, Richard Tucker Award and BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. Her 2007 win at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions launched a major international career that includes leading roles at the world's most-loved opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera House, Teatro Real, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opéra National de Paris and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. *Unexpected Shadows*, her album with composer-pianist Jake Heggie, earned a 2022 Grammy nomination for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album. More: harrisonparrott.com, jamielbartonmezzo.com.



MELODY A. BETTS,
VOCALS

Melody A. Betts is a Chicago-based actress, singer-songwriter, writer and director who appeared on Broadway most recently as Aunt Em/Evillene in *The Wiz*. She made her Broadway debut in *Waitress* and has also been seen in *Invisible Thread* at Second Stage in New York. Her national tours include *The Sound of Music*, *The Wiz* and *Waitress*. In Chicago she has appeared in *Fiddler on the Roof* and *The Factotum* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *The Nativity* (Goodman Theatre), *Ragtime*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *Seussical the Musical* and *Elf* (Drury Lane Theatre); *Once on This Island*, *Nunsense*, *All Shook Up*, *The Drowsy Chaperone* and *Kiss Me, Kate* (Marriott Theatre); *Comedy of Errors* and *Pinocchio* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); and *Motherhood the Musical* (Royal George Theatre). On TV she has been seen in *Jesus Christ Superstar Live*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago Code*, *Power*, *I Can See Your Voice* and *Southside*. She is a member of AEA, SAG-AFTRA and AGMA. More: stewarttalent.com.



MARIA CAMACHO-DIVELY,
AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE
INTERPRETER

Maria Camacho-Dively is a trilingual interpreter from Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, who believes the magic of theater should be for everyone. A graduate of North Central University and an NIC-certified interpreter since 2011, she brings energy, artistry and connection to every performance, helping stories resonate with both Deaf and hearing audiences. Outside of interpreting, she delights in humming her favorite musical tunes and engaging in lively discussions with friends about their latest theater adventures. She loves attending performances and immersing herself in the vibrant local art scene while also embracing her Puerto Rican heritage through continuous learning and exploration. From a young age, she has been involved with music as a woodwind player, percussionist and steel drum player, among other roles.



ALEXANDER GAVRYLYUK,
PIANO

Ukrainian-born Australian pianist Alexander Gavrylyuk is internationally recognized for his electrifying and poetic performances. He was artist in residence at Wigmore Hall for the 2023-24 season. Highlights of his current season include debuts with Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León, Indianapolis Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Tonkünstler Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Opera North orchestra and i Solisti di Pavia, as well as returns to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Auckland Philharmonia. This season he also returns to Baerum Kulturhaus and the Piano Masters Series in Stoke-on-Trent as a recital artist along with his recital debut at Theater Heerlen. Gavrylyuk gave his first concerto performance at the age of 9, and his honors include First Prize and Gold Medal at the Horowitz International Piano Competition (1999), First Prize at the Hamamatsu International Piano Competition (2000) and Gold Medal at the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Masters Competition (2005). More: askonasholt.com, alexandergavrylyuk.com.



GERALD GURSS,
CONDUCTOR

Dr. Gerald Gurss, a native Kansan, received his bachelor's degree in voice at Emporia State University (Kansas) and his master's degree in voice from Miami University (Ohio). He received his DMA in choral conducting from the University of South Carolina, where his research focus was the inclusion and pedagogy of transgender singers in the choral rehearsal. During his studies at USC, he was the founder of the Midlands Men's Chorus, the gay men's chorus of Columbia, South Carolina. Before leaving the Carolinas, he served as the artistic director for One Voice Chorus (Charlotte's LGBT chorus). Since 2018 he has served as the artistic director for the Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus as well as the choir director for White Bear Lake United Methodist Church. In addition to conducting, he is the recipient of multiple awards from the American Prize for Choral Composition. More: geraldgurss.com.



SARAH HICKS,
CONDUCTOR

Sarah Hicks, the Minnesota Orchestra's principal conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall, has led a broad range of programs since joining the Orchestra as assistant conductor in 2006, and has earned wide acclaim as a guest conductor in the U.S. and abroad. Her notable projects here have included co-creating the Inside the Classics series and Sam & Sarah series with former Orchestra violist Sam Bergman and leading original productions with collaborators such as PaviElle French, Kevin Kling, Peter Rothstein, Robert Elhai, The Moving Company, Nur-D, The New Standards, Cloud Cult and Dessa—with whom Hicks and the Orchestra made a live-in-concert recording on Doomtree Records. This July she will lead the Orchestra in John Williams film music concerts and a Night in the Tropics concert with trumpeter Charles Lazarus; next season she will lead film music concerts of *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* and *Amadeus* as well as performances with Guster and Leslie Odom, Jr. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.



BRIAN RAPHAEL NABORS,
HAMMOND ORGAN

The son of a church musician and pastor in Birmingham, Alabama, Brian Raphael Nabors was surrounded by a wealth of musical activity while growing up. His upbringing immersed him in R&B, NeoSoul, jazz, funk and Black marching band culture. This adventurous, innovative spirit has led to the creation of cutting-edge works, including a Concerto for Hammond Organ and a Concerto for Orchestra that embraces nearly every sector of the American soundscape. Nabors' music has been performed by the Boston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Atlanta Symphony and Britain's Chineke!, among other ensembles, at venues including Carnegie Hall and Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and at festivals such as Lucerne, Tanglewood, Aspen, Ravinia and Grant Park. He holds a doctorate and master's degree in composition from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He currently serves as assistant professor of composition at Louisiana State University. More: viscontiarts.com, briannabors.com.



EMILY SWITZER,
HOST

Violinist Emily Switzer, a member of the Minnesota Orchestra's second violin section since 2019, is a graduate of Yale University. Former co-concertmaster of the Yale Symphony Orchestra, she is a winner of the 2015 Friends of Music Recital Competition and the 2016 William Waite Competition and a recipient of the 2016 Sharp Prize for Music. She has performed with numerous orchestras including the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, Lakewood Symphony, Denver Philharmonic, Littleton Symphony and Yale Symphony Orchestra. In January 2022, she performed with the Yale Philharmonia as a winner of the 2019 Woolsey Concerto Competition. An avid chamber musician and advocate of new music, she was a winner of the 2018 Yale Oneppo Chamber Music Competition, and in May 2018 premiered a violin concerto by emerging composer Max Vinetz. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

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Now celebrating its 45th year, Twin Cities Gay Men's Chorus (TCGMC) is a non-profit volunteer community chorus whose mission is Building Community Through Music. TCGMC seeks to provide its members with rewarding musical experiences and to promote social exchange. As an organization that celebrates diversity and uses music as a way to transform, educate and heal, the Chorus works towards the elimination of homophobia and intolerance through community outreach. TCGMC returns to Orchestra Hall for its 2026-27 season. The season opens with a holiday spectacular, *Slay Bells Ring*, followed by *Stories of Audacity*, an exploration of queer history and identity through song. The season concludes with *The Vegas Strip*, featuring iconic music and special guests Thunder From Down Under, direct from Las Vegas. More: tcgmc.org.

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Laureate Spotlight: Janet Bartels



We lost a dedicated friend of the Minnesota Orchestra on November 25, 2024. Janet and her husband Phillip Bohl became subscribers and donors in the mid-1970s.

Phillip reflected that Orchestra Hall was the place in Minnesota where they spent the most time together outside of their home. Janet felt it was important to support and cherish her community and the arts she so loved. She influenced countless lives as a community organizer—from neighborhood block parties to nature conservation efforts and beyond. Their son Tim describes her legacy as having a ripple effect, with Janet’s influence lasting well beyond her lifetime: “There are people out there, nameless, doing the work every day. Those people can be us.” This life lesson applies so beautifully to experiencing music at Orchestra Hall. All of us together can help bring this music to life with our own generosity.

Phillip is honoring Janet’s memory with a generous multi-year gift to the Orchestra. This gift will have a profound impact for years to come and help others form lasting memories. The concerts on June 12 and 13 are dedicated to Janet. The program includes Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1, which was played at the first live orchestra concert Jan and Phil attended together at University of Nebraska, Lincoln. What a perfect way to pay homage to Jan and Phil’s wonderful memories together.

For more information about how you can make a difference for the Minnesota Orchestra, please contact Emily Boigenzahn at eboigenzahn@mnorch.org or 612-371-7138.

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