This program will last approximately two hours, which includes one intermission.

Thursday, January 4, 2024, 7:30 p.m.
16,975th Concert
Donor Rehearsal at 9:45 a.m.

Friday, January 5, 2024, 2:00 p.m.
16,976th Concert

Saturday, January 6, 2024, 8:00 p.m.
16,977th Concert

Sunday, January 7, 2024, 2:00 p.m.
16,978th Concert

Jaap van Zweden, Conductor
Rudolf Buchbinder, Piano

Wu Tsai Theater
David Geffen Hall at Lincoln Center
Home of the New York Philharmonic

Major support for these concerts is provided by Golnar Khosrowshahi.

Generous support for Rudolf Buchbinder’s appearances is provided by The Donna and Marvin Schwartz Virtuoso Piano Performance Series.

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Jaap van Zweden, Conductor
Rudolf Buchbinder, Piano

WAGNER
(1813–83)
Prelude to Act I of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1862–67)

BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)
Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major,
Op. 58 (1806)
Allegro moderato
Andante con moto
Rondo: Vivace
RUDOLF BUCHBINDER

Intermission

BRAHMS
(1833–97)
Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98
(1884–85)
Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato —
Più allegro

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Notes on the Program

Prelude to Act I of Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg

Richard Wagner

Richard Wagner is known to music lovers almost exclusively through ten compositions — all of them operas — but it would not do to refer to this list as a “mere ten compositions.” They stand, with very few rivals, as the longest and, in some ways, the most imposing pieces in the active operatic repertoire. (Nor do they represent the entirety of Wagner’s creative output.) His earliest operas combined more or less standard traditions of German Romantic opera (as codified in the works of Weber, Marschner, and others) and French Grand Opera (a large-scale enterprise typified by Meyerbeer and his contemporaries in Paris). As Wagner’s career progressed he moved increasingly toward his ideal of a Gesamtkunstwerk, a synthesis of disparate disciplines including music, literature, the visual arts, ballet, and architecture. The operas of his maturity are so distinct in this way that they are often referred to not as operas at all, but rather as “music dramas,” in an attempt to underscore the singularity of his aesthetic goals. Wagner himself was not averse to extracting sections from these closely woven works, and even conducted orchestral extracts from his operas as stand-alone concert works on numerous occasions.

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg represents Wagner’s only mature attempt at comic opera, although clocking in at four-and-a-half hours for the full opera, levity may not strike a listener as its overriding feature. (And one must acknowledge Wagner’s anti-Semitism and the emphasis on the primacy of German tradition in the details of this opera.) Set in 16th-century Nuremberg, Die Meistersinger tells the story of the dashing young nobleman, Walther von Stolzing, and Eva, the lovely daughter of a goldsmith. Learning that Eva is to be married to the winner of an upcoming song contest sponsored by the tradesmen’s Guild of the Mastersingers, Walther applies for membership (a prerequisite for participating in the contest), but is denied due to backstage politics — principally the scheming of the town clerk, Beckmesser, who hopes to win the contest, and Eva’s hand, himself. The wise cobbler Hans Sachs comes to the assistance of the lovers and helps Walther pen a song that may triumph despite the obstacles. Beckmesser steals a copy of the song (not realizing that

In Short

Born: May 22, 1813, in Leipzig, Saxony
Died: February 13, 1883, in Venice, Italy
Work composed: between March or April 1862 and October 1867
World premiere: June 21, 1868, at the Königliches Hof- und Nationaltheater, Munich, Hans von Bülow, conductor
New York Philharmonic premiere: December 2, 1871, Carl Bergmann, conductor
Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: June 17, 2022, Jaap van Zweden, conductor, in Brooklyn at the Concerts in the Parks, Presented by Didi and Oscar Schafer
Estimated duration: ca. 10 minutes
Walther was the author) and performs it at the competition — dismally. Walther then sings it so beautifully that he wins the contest by popular acclaim and thus gains entry into the Guild, as well as betrothal to Eva.

The opening music from the opera, the Prelude to Act I, is one of Wagner’s most immediately irresistible pieces. In it we hear five principal themes that recur in the ensuing opera, attached to specific characters or events: the opening march of the Mastersingers Guild, some gentle rhapsodizing signifying the love between Walther and Eva, a theme relating to the banner of the Mastersingers, the song with which Walther will win his bride, and another melody suggesting the ardor of the lovers’ passion. In the movement’s development section Wagner interlaces all five themes in ingenious and somewhat comical counterpoint before moving on to a blazingly triumphant conclusion.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, cymbals, harp, and strings.

— James M. Keller, former New York Philharmonic Program Annotator; San Francisco Symphony program annotator; and author of Chamber Music: A Listener’s Guide (Oxford University Press)

**Ahead of Its Time**

Wagner was a controversial figure, representing an approach that broke with the line that wove through Mozart and Beethoven and was then seen as best represented by Brahms. A sampling of opposition to *Die Meistersinger* from 1870 alone includes the following assessments:

With scrupulous avoidance of all closing cadences, this boneless mollusk, self-restoring, swims ever on into the immeasurable.

— Eduard Hanslick, Austrian music critic

A more horrendous discordancy (*Katzenjammer*) than Wagner achieves in his *Meistersinger* could not be accomplished even if all the organ grinders in Berlin were locked up in Renz’s Circus, each grinding out a different tune.

— Heinrich Dorn, German conductor, composer, and journalist

The debauchery of *Die Meistersinger* is the maddest assault ever made upon art, taste, and poetry.

— Ferdinand Hiller, German conductor, composer, and writer

— The Editors
Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 emerges with unexpected gentleness. In 1807, when this music was first heard, any reasonably informed member of a Viennese audience would have known that a concerto should begin with a long introduction during which the orchestra presents some of the first movement’s principal themes. In the case of a piano concerto, the soloist might play along, underpinning the orchestral texture, but even in that case the solo instrument would not move into the spotlight until the introduction had come to a resolute conclusion. Beethoven had at least respected that aspect of the Classical mold in his first three piano concertos (not to mention his early “non-canonical” E-flat-major Piano Concerto of 1784) and his Violin Concerto.

Imagine, then, the astonishment with which listeners, conditioned in this way, must have heard Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto when it was new. Rather than the authoritarian sounds of a full orchestra, the first notes they heard were played softly on the piano, the gentle murmuring of a theme based on repeated notes and simple harmonies. And then — just as surprising — following its five-measure presentation of the thematic germ of this movement, the piano simply withdraws, not to be heard from again for another 69 measures. One might say that the silent piano is unusually “present” during the 69 measures of that orchestral introduction, precisely because it made its mark so indelibly at the outset. Beethoven explored radical turf in the opening.

The second movement, too, is extraordinary, even apart from its uncharacteristic brevity (lasting as it does only about five minutes). The music theorist Adolf Bernhard Marx, in his 1859 biography of Beethoven, suggested that this Andante con moto bore some relationship to Gluck’s opera Orfeo ed Euridice — specifically, to how Orpheus used music to tame wild beasts. At some point music historians began misattributing this observation to Franz Liszt, who probably would have been very happy to assign a programmatic explanation to this expressive, conversational movement, but apparently didn’t. (Liszt’s “quotation” can still be found in many discussions of this concerto, even though historical research squashed it a few decades ago.) In 1985 the musicologist Owen Jander pointed out that Beethoven’s music — indeed, in the whole concerto, not just the slow movement —

**In Short**

**Born:** probably on December 16, 1770 (he was baptized on the 17th), in Bonn, then an independent electorate of Germany  
**Died:** March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria  
**Work composed:** early 1806, and perhaps somewhat earlier; it was probably completed on March 27, 1806  
**World premiere:** March 1807, in a private performance at the palace of Beethoven’s patron Prince Lobkowitz; public premiere, December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna  
**New York Philharmonic premiere:** January 31, 1863, Theodore Thomas, conductor, Sebastian Bach Mills, soloist  
**Most recent New York Philharmonic performance:** September 19, 2021, Jaap van Zweden, conductor, Daniil Trifonov, soloist, at Alice Tully Hall  
**Estimated duration:** ca. 35 minutes
seems to follow point by point a popular version of the Orpheus legend that was presented as street theater in the Vienna of Beethoven’s day. Such a literal interpretation of text into tones would have been an extraordinary method for Beethoven to follow, and opinions are divided about whether there is much likelihood that this took place. Still Jander put forth a strong argument, and the idea does capture the imagination.

The first public performance of this concerto took place at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien, on December 22, 1808. The program also included the premieres of Beethoven’s Symphonies No. 5 and No. 6 as well as of the Choral Fantasy (for piano, choir, and orchestra), the Vienna premieres of three movements from the C-major Mass and the concert scena “Ah! perfido,” and a solo keyboard improvisation by the composer. To encounter all of these revolutionary pieces at one sitting must have been overwhelming, and to many attendees the Fourth Piano Concerto must have sounded like just more of the same madness — and who knows what the all-but-deaf Beethoven actually accomplished at the piano. His pupil Carl Czerny termed Beethoven’s performance on that occasion as “playful,” so odd a description that you might wonder if it should be read as a euphemism. It was Beethoven’s last public appearance as a concerto soloist, although he would continue to perform in chamber music or as an accompanist.

Instrumentation: flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings, in addition to the solo piano.

Cadenzas: in these performances Rudolf Buchbinder performs Beethoven’s cadenzas.

— J.M.K.

Listen for … An Unusual Opening

Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 opens unusually, beyond the decision to begin with solo piano. The piano’s opening chords are in G major, but the orchestra’s response is in B major, a key only distantly related to the harmonic region marked out by the piano’s theme.

The relationship of key regions spaced a third apart — such as G and B — would become an obsession of composers as the 19th century progressed. As usual, Beethoven led the way.
"I shall never write a symphony!" Johannes Brahms famously declared in 1872. “You can’t have any idea what it’s like to hear such a giant marching behind you." The giant was Beethoven, of course, and although his music provided essential inspiration for Brahms, it also set such a high standard that the younger composer found it easy to discount his own creations as negligible in comparison.

Four more years passed before Brahms would finally sign off on his First Symphony. But once he conquered his compositional demons he moved ahead forcefully. Three symphonies followed that first effort in relatively short order: the Second in 1877, the Third in 1882–83, and the Fourth in 1884–85. Each is a masterpiece, and each displays a markedly different character. The First is burly and powerful, flexing its muscles in Promethean exertion; the Second is sunny and bucolic; and the Third, though often introspective and even idyllic, mixes in a hefty dose of heroism. With his Fourth Symphony, Brahms achieves a work of almost mystical transcendence born of opposing emotions: melancholy and joy, severity and rhapsody, solemnity and exhilaration. Brahms’s friend and musical confidant, Clara Schumann, recognized this play of duality already in the first movement, observing, “It is as though one lay in springtime among the blossoming flowers, and joy and sorrow filled one’s soul in turn.”

Brahms was well aware of his distinct achievement in this work. He composed it during two summer vacations at the Mürzzuschlag in the Styrian Alps — the first two movements in the summer of 1884, the second two in the summer of 1885. On many occasions he was known to suggest that his compositions reflected the places in which they were written. In this case he wrote from Mürzzuschlag to the conductor Hans von Bülow that his symphony-in-progress “tastes of the climate here; the cherries are hardly sweet here — you wouldn’t eat them!” Brahms was given to disparaging his works — he once described this symphony as “another set of polkas and waltzes” — but in this case he perfectly evoked the bittersweet quality that pervades many of the Fourth Symphony’s pages.

Although it is cast in the same classical four-movement plan as his earlier symphonies, Brahms’s Fourth seems more tightly unified throughout (largely through the pervasive insistence on the interval of the third — especially the minor third), and its movements accordingly proceed with a terrific sense of

**In Short**

**Born:** May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

**Died:** April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

**Work composed:** summers of 1884 and 1885

**World premiere:** October 25, 1885, in Meiningen, Germany, with the composer conducting the Meiningen Ducal Chapel Orchestra

**New York Philharmonic premiere:** December 10, 1886, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony (which merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928); this marked the work’s US premiere

**Most recent New York Philharmonic performance:** April 30, 2019, Semyon Bychkov, conductor

**Estimated duration:** ca. 42 minutes
cumulative power. The opening movement (Allegro non troppo) is soaring and intense, and the second (Andante moderato) is by turns agitated and serene. The Allegro giocoso represents the first time Brahms included a real scherzo in a symphony, quite a contrast to the lighter, even wistful allegretto intermezzi that had served as the third movements of his first three. And for his finale,

Travelogue

Brahms found that his creative juices flowed most freely during his summer vacations, which he spent in a succession of villages in the Austrian, German, Swiss, or Italian countryside. He spent the summers of 1884 and 1885 — the summers of the Fourth Symphony — at Mürzzuschlag, a charmed Styrian village about a two-hour train trip southwest from Vienna.

He rented rooms that met his basic requirements: a decent view (in this case toward the town square rather than the surrounding mountains), large enough to hold a good piano, near a worthy restaurant. Brahms instantly became a local celebrity, and he was amused one day to witness two passersby stopped in front of the house, one whispering ecstatically to the other, “Do you hear? Brahms is playing.” He was able to witness this because the sounds actually emanated from another musician who happened to be lodging in the same house.

A visitor today could not pass through Mürzzuschlag without being reminded of the village’s Brahmsian past. The community conservatory is the Johannes Brahms Musikschule, the ring of hiking trails the composer once followed is now the Brahmsweg, and the town square is graced with a large statue of the composer setting off on one of those very hikes.

And, of course, there is a Brahms Museum “in the genuine summer residence of Johannes Brahms,” which contains memorabilia relevant to the composer’s vacations, sponsors innumerable mostly Brahms concerts, and serves refreshments from the Brahmsbar.

From top: Brahms statue in Mürzzuschlag; a sign along the town’s Brahmsweg trails where he hiked; a view of the town, ca. 1900
Brahms unleashes a gigantic passacaglia, a neo-Baroque structure in which an eight-measure progression (here derived from the last movement of J.S. Bach's Cantata No. 150) is subjected to 32 variations of widely varying character.

As soon as he completed the work, Brahms sent copies to several of his trusted friends and was miffed when they all responded with concern over this or that. His confidante Elisabet von Herzogenberg insisted that she respected the piece, but she allowed of the first movement that “at worst it seems to me as if a great master had made an almost extravagant display of his skill!” His friend Max Kalbeck suggested he throw away the third movement entirely, use the finale as a free-standing piece, and compose two new movements to replace them. Brahms did not cave in, but he anticipated the symphony’s premiere with mounting apprehension. His music had long been criticized as “too intellectual,” and Brahms knew that his Fourth Symphony was at least as rigorous as anything he had previously composed. To his amazement, the symphony proved a success at its premiere, and audience enthusiasm only increased in subsequent performances.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, and strings.

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**Views and Reviews**

Brahms conducted the World Premiere of his Symphony No. 4, leading the Meiningen Ducal Chapel Orchestra, and he subsequently took the work on tour with that group to several cities in Germany and the Netherlands — but not before the orchestra’s conductor, Hans von Bülow, conducted a second performance in Meiningen. Von Bülow was one of the most prominent conductors and pianists of the day — he conducted the World Premiere of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865 and performed the World Premiere of Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 in 1875 — and a champion of Brahms’s music. He offered effusive praise of the symphony during initial rehearsals, jotting these notes:

> Difficult, very difficult. No. 4 gigantic, altogether a law unto itself, quite new, steely individuality. Exudes unparalleled energy from first note to last.

— The Editors
New York Philharmonic

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The New York Philharmonic uses the revolving seating method for section string players who are listed alphabetically in the roster.

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Jaap van Zweden began his tenure as the 26th Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in September 2018. He has served as Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic since 2012, and becomes Music Director of the Seoul Philharmonic in 2024. He has appeared as guest conductor with the Orchestre de Paris, Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and other distinguished ensembles.

In 2023–24, Jaap van Zweden’s New York Philharmonic farewell season celebrates his connection with the Orchestra’s musicians as he leads performances in which six Principal players appear as concerto soloists. He also revisits composers whom he has championed at the Philharmonic, ranging from Steve Reich and Joel Thompson to Mozart and Mahler.

By the conclusion of his Philharmonic tenure he will have led the Orchestra in World, US, and New York Premieres of 31 works. During the 2021–22 season, when David Geffen Hall was closed for renovation, he conducted the Orchestra at other New York City venues and in the residency at the Usedom Music Festival, where the NY Phil was the first American Orchestra to perform abroad since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022–23 van Zweden and the Orchestra inaugurated the transformed David Geffen Hall with HOME, a monthlong housewarming, and examined SPIRIT, featuring Messiaen’s Turangalîla-symphonie and J.S. Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, and EARTH, a response to the climate crisis that included Julia Wolfe’s unEarth and John Luther Adams’s Become Desert.

Jaap van Zweden’s New York Philharmonic recordings include the World Premiere of David Lang’s prisoner of the state (2020) and Wolfe’s Grammy-nominated Fire in my mouth (2019). He conducted the Hong Kong Philharmonic in first-ever performances in Hong Kong of Wagner’s Ring Cycle. His acclaimed performances of Lohengrin, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, and Parsifal — the last of which earned him the prestigious Edison Award for Best Opera Recording in 2012 — are available on CD and DVD.

Born in Amsterdam, Jaap van Zweden, at age 19, was appointed the youngest-ever concertmaster of Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and began his conducting career almost 20 years later. He is Conductor Emeritus of the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra and Honorary Chief Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic (where he was Chief Conductor, 2005–13), having previously served as Chief Conductor of the Royal Flanders Orchestra (2008–11) and Music Director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (2008–18). Under his leadership, the Hong Kong Philharmonic was named Gramophone’s Orchestra of the Year in 2019. He was named Musical America’s 2012 Conductor of the Year and was the subject of an October 2018 CBS 60 Minutes profile on the occasion of his arrival at the New York Philharmonic. In 1997 Jaap van Zweden and his wife, Aaltje, established the Papageno Foundation to support families of children with autism.
Pianist Rudolf Buchbinder is one of the legendary performers of our time. With a 65-year career, his performances combine esprit and spontaneity. Tradition and innovation, faithfulness and freedom, authenticity and open-mindedness all merge in his interpretations of the great piano literature. Buchbinder is an honorary member of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, Wiener Konzerthausgesellschaft, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. He was the first soloist to be awarded the Golden Badge of Honor by the Dresden Staatskapelle.

Buchbinder’s interpretations of the works of Ludwig van Beethoven are regarded as standard-setting. He was the first pianist to perform all of Beethoven’s piano sonatas within one festival summer at the 2014 Salzburg Festival; this cycle was recorded live for CD and DVD. His most recent recordings of Beethoven’s complete Piano Concertos document a remarkable project; the Vienna Musikverein, for the first time in its history, gave a single pianist the honor of performing all five in a specially created series. In addition, Buchbinder joined five of the world’s finest conductors and orchestras — the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and Andris Nelsons, Vienna Philharmonic and Riccardo Muti, and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, and Dresden Staatskapelle, led by, respectively, Mariss Jansons, Valery Gergiev, and Christian Thielemann.

As a contribution to Beethoven’s 250th anniversary, Buchbinder initiated a cycle of New Diabelli Variations, following the genesis of Beethoven’s epochal Diabelli Variations. In cooperation with major concert houses around the world, these were commissioned from 11 of today’s leading composers, among them Lera Auerbach, Brett Dean, Toshio Hosokawa, and Jörg Widmann.
New York Philharmonic

The New York Philharmonic plays a leading cultural role in New York City, the United States, and the world. Each season the Orchestra connects with millions of music lovers through live concerts in New York and beyond, as well as broadcasts, recordings, and education programs.

The 2023–24 season builds on the Orchestra’s transformation reflected in the new David Geffen Hall, unveiled in October 2022. In his farewell season as Music Director, Jaap van Zweden spotlights composers he has championed, from Mahler and Mozart to Steve Reich and Joel Thompson, and leads programs featuring six NY Phil musicians as soloists. The Orchestra delves into overlooked history through the US Premiere of Émigré, composed by Aaron Zigman, with a libretto by Mark Campbell and additional lyrics by Brock Walsh; marks György Ligeti’s centennial; gives World, US, and New York Premieres of 14 works; and celebrates the 100th birthday of the beloved Young People’s Concerts.

The Phil for All: Ticket Access Program builds on the Orchestra’s commitment to serving New York City’s communities that lies behind the long-running Concerts in the Parks, Presented by Didi and Oscar Schafer, and the Free Memorial Day Concert, Presented by the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation. The Philharmonic engages with today’s cultural conversations through programming and initiatives such as EARTH (2023, an examination of the climate crisis centered on premieres of works by Julia Wolfe and John Luther Adams) and NY Phil Bandwagon (free, outdoor, “pull-up” concerts that brought live music back to New York City during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Philharmonic has commissioned and/or premiered works by leading composers since its founding in 1842, from Dvořák’s New World Symphony and Gershwin’s Concerto in F to two Pulitzer Prize winners: John Adams’s On the Transmigration of Souls and Tania León’s Stride, the latter commissioned through Project 19, commissions of works by 19 women composers. The Orchestra has released more than 2,000 recordings since 1917, most recently the live recording of Julia Wolfe’s Grammy-nominated Fire in my mouth conducted by Jaap van Zweden. In 2023 the NY Phil announced a partnership with Apple Music Classical, the new standalone music streaming app designed to deliver classical music lovers the optimal listening experience. The Orchestra’s extensive history is available free online through the New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives.

A resource for its community and the world, the Orchestra complements annual free concerts across the city with education projects, including the New York Philharmonic Very Young Composers Program and the Very Young People’s Concerts. The Orchestra has appeared in 436 cities in 63 countries, including Pyongyang, DPRK, in 2008, the first visit there by an American orchestra.

Founded in 1842 by local musicians, the New York Philharmonic is one of the oldest orchestras in the world. Notable figures who have conducted the Philharmonic include Tchaikovsky, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, and Copland. Jaap van Zweden became Music Director in 2018–19, succeeding musical leaders including Bernstein, Toscanini, and Mahler. Gustavo Dudamel will become Music Director Designate in the 2025–26 season, before beginning his tenure as Music and Artistic Director in 2026.
By including our Orchestra in your estate plans, you can minimize the tax burden for your loved ones while uplifting our vital work on stage, in schools across New York City, and in the lives of millions worldwide. There are many ways to include the NY Phil in your legacy giving, including:

- Bequests
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- Retirement Plan Assets
- Insurance Policies
- Tangible Personal Property
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New York Philharmonic’s Education initiatives reach tens of thousands of young people every year — from introducing new audiences to symphonic music through Young People’s Concerts™, to expanding and reinvigorating music education through Philharmonic Schools.

Your support helps us leverage the many wonders of our art form to engage students, foster communities, and cultivate the next generation of music lovers.

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