



Thursday, January 2, 2025, 7:30 p.m.
17,118th Concert

Friday, January 3, 2025, 7:30 p.m.
17,119th Concert

Saturday, January 4, 2025, 7:30 p.m.
17,120th Concert

Tuesday, January 7, 2025, 7:30 p.m.
17,121st Concert

Kevin John Edusei, Conductor
(New York Philharmonic debut) ■
Isabel Leonard, Mezzo-Soprano

■ **Chang-Chavkin Debut Artist**

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

This program will last approximately one and three-quarters hours, which includes one intermission.



January 2–4 & 7, 2025

Kevin John Edusei, Conductor (New York Philharmonic debut)
Isabel Leonard, Mezzo-Soprano

Samy MOUSSA
(b. 1984)

Elysium for Orchestra (2021)

BERLIOZ
(1803–69)

*Les Nuits d'été (The Summer Nights),
Op. 7* (1840–41; orch. 1843, 1855, 1856)
Villanelle
Le Spectre de la rose (The Specter
of the Rose)
Sur les lagunes: Lamento (On the
Lagoons: Lament)
Absence (Absence)
Au cimetière: Clair de lune (In the
Cemetery: Moonlight)
L'île inconnue (The Unknown Island)
ISABEL LEONARD

Intermission

R. STRAUSS
(1864–1949)

*Also sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke
Zarathustra), Tone Poem (freely after
Friedrich Nietzsche) for Large
Orchestra, Op. 30* (1895–96)

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Notes on the Program

Elysium for Orchestra

Samy Moussa

While growing up in Montreal in the 1990s, Samy Moussa started to compose on his own initiative — formal training began only after he enrolled at the Université de Montréal. His most transformative lesson in those early years involved observing how his music affected other people: how what he had undertaken as a private activity had the power to communicate in a deep and enduring way.

An urge to communicate remains the driving force of Moussa’s artistic life, as a composer and a conductor alike. Far from conveying a didactic message, however, his music strives to inspire with an uplifting ideal of beauty. “I’m not a preacher who tells people what to do or think or who imposes anything,” he says. “My aspiration to create beauty is an attempt to fulfill my role as an artist.”

In his early 20s Moussa moved to Germany to continue composition studies with Matthias Pintscher and Pascal Dupain in Munich, later making his home in Berlin. He quickly rose to prominence through a series of prestigious commissions across Europe and North America. Major distinctions include the Roche Young Commissions at the Lucerne Festival, the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation’s Composer’s Prize, the Hindemith Prize, the German Rome Prize, and, this season, a composer residency with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. Moussa additionally took master classes in conducting with Pierre Boulez and Peter Eöt-vös, and he has pursued a parallel career on the podium.

Moussa’s diverse output of more than 40 compositions ranges from songs and brief chamber works to concertos, symphonies, and two chamber operas, along with a multimedia project. He is particularly drawn to writing for orchestra, exploring a uniquely expressive sonic landscape with each new piece.

The title *Elysium* reflects Moussa’s fascination with ancient Greek and Classical sources. Also known by the epithet “the Elysian Fields,” Elysium refers to a paradisiacal realm, distinct from the Underworld in Greek mythology, that offered a blissful afterlife to heroes and those favored by the gods. Its idyllic promise is described by Homer and Hesiod and echoes through the epics of Virgil and Dante down to the present — even occurring in Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony (in his setting of Schiller’s description of Joy as “daughter of Elysium”).

In Short

Born: June 1, 1984, in Montreal, Canada

Resides: in Berlin

Work composed: 2021, on a commission from the Vienna Philharmonic, Festival de Lanaudière, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and Royal Scottish National Orchestra & BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

World premiere: September 18, 2021, by the Vienna Philharmonic, Christian Thielemann, conductor, at Sagrada Família, Barcelona, Spain

New York Philharmonic premiere: these performances

Estimated duration: ca. 12 minutes

Moussa, however, insists on steering clear of any Romantic idealization of the Hellenic world. He particularly admires the work of the pre-Socratic philosophers (most of which survives only in fragmentary form), and singles out a text on the afterlife by Empedocles, a remarkable fifth-century BCE pioneer of natural philosophy who lived in what today is Sicily. Moussa also included the words of Empedocles in the multi-source libretto he crafted for his oratorio *Antigone*, which was premiered last spring at Dutch National Opera & Ballet.

From Empedocles's large-scale poem known as *Purifications*, which treats religious and ethical topics, Moussa cites this fragment (in English translation), in

which Elysium is envisioned as a final escape from the cycle of reincarnation:

But, at the last, they appear among mortal men as prophets, songwriters, physicians, and princes; and thence they rise up as gods exalted in honor, sharing the hearth of the other gods and the same table, free from human woes, safe from destiny, and incapable of hurt.

Moussa notes that he interprets Empedocles's image of Elysium "as the ultimate reward for an ethical life" — a reward no longer limited to an elite of god-favored heroes — as "a metaphor for a beautiful life, for a life well-lived on this planet."

At the same time, the composer em-

The Work at a Glance



Samy Moussa's *Elysium* grips the listener from the outset with gestures that initially sound deceptively familiar but veer into unexpected directions — as if unfolding in an alternate universe. A radiantly shimmering B-flat-major chord, sustained by divided strings and undergirded by a bassoon / contrabassoon fundament, slips in and out of focus with a ghostly slide. In the stately triple meter of a sarabande — the slow Baroque dance Bach reserved for some of his most profound meditations — horns and brass expand the sense of spaciousness. The sequence of chords they lay out forms the spine of *Elysium*.

Clarity is of paramount importance to this composer. He achieves it through harmonic transformations that are easily recognizable, creating an architecture in which we perceive "how the harmonies evolve, grow, and are connected to each other." At the same time, he treats the orchestra with painterly attention to changing densities of texture and timbre. Additional musical ideas, including a scalar ascent accentuated with flickering percussion, intensify *Elysium*'s color scheme.

Moussa's abiding reverence for Bruckner's symphonism is apparent in the impression *Elysium* evokes of a cosmic scale beyond ordinary time — above all, in the piece's carefully prepared climaxes. It resembles a monumental *Adagio* that builds to a euphoric outburst that is pierced by a rending dissonance. In an expertly paced coda, the music then retreats to a new state of serenity, coming to rest again on a lingering B-flat-major chord — but a far cry from the sonority that opened the piece.

phasizes that *Elysium* should not be approached as program music. The title, as is usually the case for Moussa, actually came after he had composed the piece. In contrast to, say, Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, which translates Nietzsche's philosophy into a dramatic narrative, "the way in which *Elysium* is constructed and functions is purely musical." Its essential narrative is "about the art form itself: the musical devices are aimed at constructing a new world that is inherently metaphysical."

Instrumentation: two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons

and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, wind gong, vibraphone, tambourine, large and small cymbals, tubular bells, tam-tam, crotales, suspended china cymbal, orchestra bells, small triangle, snare drum, and strings.

— *Thomas May, a writer, critic, educator, and translator whose work appears in such publications as The New York Times, Gramophone, and The Strad*

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Les Nuits d'été (The Summer Nights), Op. 7

Hector Berlioz

Hector Berlioz spent his career hopelessly mired in the future. Think of his *Symphonie fantastique* of 1830, surely the most extraordinary “First Symphony” ever composed by anyone, in comparison with other works that appeared at that time — Bellini’s *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena*, Auber’s *Fra Diavolo*, Schumann’s *Abegg Variations*, Paganini’s Violin Concerto No. 4, Chopin’s E-minor Piano Concerto, Mendelssohn’s *Reformation Symphony* — and it becomes apparent that already in his relatively early work Berlioz was occupying a creative world that bore little relation to the mainstream, or even to the rest of the avant-garde, of his time.

That Berlioz was a genius there can be no doubt, but genius does not always ensure a calm passage through life. Pressed by his father, a physician, to pursue the same profession, Berlioz’s musical inclinations were largely ignored in his youth. As a result, he never learned to play the piano in a more than rudimentary sense, and his practical abilities as a performer were limited to lessons on flute and guitar, both of which he played with some accomplishment. He was sent to Paris to attend medical school, hated the experience, and took advantage of being in the big city by enrolling himself in private musical studies and, beginning in 1826, the composition curriculum at the Paris Conservatoire.

As a composer little given to reining in his imagination, Berlioz was drawn most emphatically to the larger forms — symphonies, operas, and oratorios or other big sacred works — and these are the pieces that most firmly bolster his reputation today. Nonetheless, he had no

trouble working less imposing pieces into his schedule, and his catalogue accordingly includes quite a few stand-alone orchestral overtures, independent scenes for voice(s) and orchestra, and songs (either solo or choral). He enlarged the repertoire of the classic French *mélodie* by about 40 songs, some of which he set in alternative versions. With the exception of the six songs in the cycle *Les*

In Short

Born: December 11, 1803, in La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France

Died: March 8, 1869, in Paris

Work composed: 1840–41, originally with piano accompaniment; orchestrated in February 1843 (*Absence*), 1855 (*Le Spectre de la rose*), and 1856 (*Villanelle, Sur les lagunes: Lamento, Au cimetière: Clair de lune, L’île inconnue*), with texts by Théophile Gautier

World premiere: *Absence* on April 24, 1842, at the Paris Conservatoire, sung by Mme. Mortier with piano accompaniment, and on February 23, 1843, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, with the composer as conductor, Marie Recio, soloist. *Le Spectre de la rose* was first heard in its orchestrated version on February 6, 1856, at the Ducal Theatre in Gotha, with Berlioz conducting and Mme. Falconi singing. The early performance history of the other songs is incomplete.

New York Philharmonic premiere: complete work, April 4, 1953, Dimitri Mitropoulos, conductor, soprano Eleanor Steber, soloist

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: February 5, 2022, Jaap van Zweden, conductor, countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo, soloist

Estimated duration: ca. 33 minutes

Nuits d'été, his songs are little known and rarely performed.

Given that Berlioz was unstoppable in writing about practically everything in his life — in his correspondence and criticism, as well as in his *Mémoires* — it is surprising that he never offered any discussion about the inspiration for and composition of *Les Nuits d'été*. He wrote it in 1840–41, and the set was published in the latter year in its original version for piano with voice. In 1843, while touring in Germany with a singer who was doubling as his girlfriend, Berlioz created an orchestration for *Absence*, but the piece met with no success in that form. Nonetheless, in 1855–56 he followed up with orchestrations for the remaining five songs; he transposed two of them, lowering *Le Spectre de la rose* by a minor third and *Sur les lagunes* by a whole step, and he effected some other changes, most notably adding a beautiful orchestral introduction to *Le Spectre de la rose*.

The effect of the two versions can be quite different. There is no doubt that the

piano setting reflects the composer's initial conception and that the orchestrated version represents his ultimate ideas about the piece. Some have taken the idiosyncratic piano writing as evidence that he had an orchestral transcription in mind from the outset. One might prefer to imagine that the keyboard part, which is indeed unidiomatic compared to traditional piano writing, more likely reflects Berlioz's lack of a bias toward the keyboard (unusual for composers, certainly at that time) and the fact that his musical syntax is simply different from that of any other composer.

Instrumentation: two flutes, oboe, two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, harp, and strings, in addition to the solo voice (here, a mezzo-soprano).

— 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)

Views and Reviews

Although Berlioz and Ravel may be viewed as two of the most impressive figures in all of French music, the latter held an ambivalent attitude toward his Romantic predecessor. On the one hand, he acknowledged Berlioz's sheer creativity; on the other, he was exasperated by what he considered Berlioz's technical malfeasance. Berlioz, he once observed, was "a genius who couldn't harmonize a waltz correctly."

In an interview with the critic M.D. Calvocoressi, published in the *Daily Telegraph* of London in 1929, Ravel expounded on *le cas Berlioz*:

Of course, when speaking of the unsatisfactory quality of Berlioz's harmonies, I was not thinking of "correctness" according to school rules. ... My contention is that Berlioz was the only composer of genius who conceived his melodies without hearing their harmonisation, and proceeded to discover the harmonisation afterwards. Something of the kind is noticeable, occasionally, in Gluck's music; but with Berlioz it is the rule, not the exception. ... When I say that Berlioz's basses are generally "wrong," or his modulations "clumsy," I am not referring to the "rightness" and "elegance" that textbooks profess to teach. ... There are a few striking harmonies in Berlioz's music; but as often as not what I feel about them is that they have happened by accident, so to speak, and not in accordance with a well-weighted purpose.

Texts and Translations

Les Nuits d'été (The Summer Nights), Op. 7

Hector Berlioz

Texts by Théophile Gautier

Villanelle

*Quand viendra la saison nouvelle,
Quand auront disparu les froids,
Tous les deux, nous irons, ma belle,
Pour cueillir le muguet aux bois;
Sous nos pieds égrenant les perles,
Que l'on voit au matin trembler,
Nous irons écouter les merles
Siffler.*

*Le printemps est venu, ma belle,
C'est le mois des amants béni,
Et l'oiseau satinant son aile,
Dit des vers au rebord du nid.
Oh! Viens donc sur ce banc de mousse,
Pour parler de nos beaux amours,
Et dis-moi de ta voix si douce:
"Toujours!"*

*Loin, bien loin, égarant nos courses
Faisons fuir le lapin caché
Et le daim au miroir des sources
Admirant son grand
bois penché;
Puis, chez nous, tout heureux, tout aises,
En paniers, enlaçant nos doigts,
Revenons rapportant des fraises
Des bois.*

Le Spectre de la rose

*Soulève ta paupière close
Qu'effleure un songe virginal,
Je suis le spectre d'une rose
Que tu portais hier au bal.*

Villanelle

When the new season comes,
And the frosts are over,
We shall go, my beloved, to the woods
Together and gather lilies of the valley.
Scattering under our feet the dewy pearls
Which tremble in the morning light,
We shall hear the blackbirds'
Strident song.

Spring has come, my beloved.
This is the month consecrated to lovers,
And the bird, smoothing his shining wing,
Repeats its song at the edge of the nest.
Oh, come now to this mossy seat,
To express our happy love,
And in your sweet voice say to me:
"Forever!"

Far, so far, we wander from our path,
Startling the hidden rabbit
And the deer that admires its fine
spreading antlers
Reflected in the water of the spring.
Then, completely happy and carefree,
Entwining our fingers into baskets,
We shall return, bringing home
Wild strawberries.

The Specter of the Rose

Awaken now from a sleep
Lightly touched by a maidenly dream.
I am the specter of a rose
Which yesterday you wore at the ball.

*Tu me pris encore emperlée
Des pleurs d'argent de l'arrosoir,
Et parmi la fête étoilée
Tu me promenas tout le soir.*

*Ô toi, qui de ma mort fus cause,
Sans que tu puisses le chasser,
Toutes les nuits mon spectre rose,
À ton chevet viendra danser.*

*Mais ne crains rien, je ne réclame
Ni messe ni De Profundis;
Ce léger parfum est mon âme,
Et j'arrive du paradis.*

*Mon destin fut digne d'envie;
Et pour avoir un sort si beau,
Plus d'un aurait donné sa vie,
Car sur ton sein j'ai mon tombeau,*

*Et sur l'albâtre où je repose
Un poète avec un baiser
Écrivit: Ci gît une rose
Que tous les rois vont jalouser.*

Sur les lagunes: Lamento

*Ma belle amie est morte,
Je pleurerai toujours;
Sous la tombe elle emporte
Mon âme et mes amours.*

*Dans le ciel, sans m'attendre,
Elle s'en retourna;
L'ange qui l'emmena
Ne voulut pas me prendre.*

*Que mon sort est amer!
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!*

*La blanche créature
Est couchée au cercueil;
Comme dans la nature
Tout me paraît en deuil!*

You picked me when I was still bedewed
With the sprinkler's silver tears,
And in that brilliant festive gathering
You wore me the whole evening long.

Oh you, who were the cause of my death,
You will be unable to keep
My rose-specter from coming every night
To dance at the head of your bed.

But fear not: I demand
No Mass, no *De Profundis*;
That gentle perfume is my essence,
And I come here from Paradise.

My destiny was enviable;
More than one would have given his life
To achieve so beautiful a fate,
For my tomb is on your breast.

And on that alabaster where I rest,
A poet, with a kiss,
Has written: "Here lies a rose
Of which every king will be jealous."

On the Lagoons: Lament

Dead is my beautiful loved one.
My weeping will have no end.
She takes with her beneath the tomb
My soul and my love.

Without waiting for me,
She has returned to heaven;
The angel that took her
Did not wish to take me as well.

That is my bitter fate!
Alas, to go over the sea without love!

The pale creature
Is laid in her coffin.
Everything, as though part of nature,
Appears to me to be in mourning!

(Please turn the page quietly.)

*La colombe oubliée
Pleure et songe à l'absent,
Mon âme pleure et sent
Qu'elle est dépareillée.*

*Que mon sort est amer!
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!*

*Sur moi la nuit immense
S'étend comme un linceul;
Je chante ma romance
Que le ciel entend seul.*

*Ah! comme elle était belle
Et comme je l'aimais!
Je n'aimerai jamais
Une femme autant qu'elle.*

*Que mon sort est amer!
Ah! sans amour, s'en aller sur la mer!*

Absence

*Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée!
Comme une fleur loin du soleil,
La fleur de ma vie est fermée,
Loin de ton sourire vermeil.*

*Entre nos coeurs quelle distance;
Tant d'espace entre nos baisers.
Ô sort amer! Ô dure absence!
Ô grands désirs inapaisés!*

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée! etc.

*D'ici là-bas, que de campagnes,
Que de villes et de hameaux,
Que de vallons et de montagnes,
À lasser le pied des chevaux!*

Reviens, reviens, ma bien-aimée! etc.

The forgotten dove
Weeps and dreams of the absent one.
My soul also weeps,
And feels completely isolated.

That is my bitter fate!
Alas, to go over the sea without love!

The immensity of night
Overwhelms me like a shroud.
I sing my song,
Which is heard by heaven alone.

Ah! how beautiful she was
And how I loved her!
I shall never love another woman
As I did her.

That is my bitter fate!
Alas, to go over the sea without love!

Absence

Return, return, my most beloved!
Like a flower away from the sun,
My life's flower closes quickly,
Far from your ruby smile.

What a distance there is between our hearts!
So much space between our kisses!
O bitter fate! O cruel absence!
O great desires unfulfilled!

Return, return, my most beloved!, etc.

From here to everywhere so many plains,
So many towns and hamlets.
So many valleys and mountains,
Enough to tire the horses' feet!

Return, return, my most beloved!, etc.

Au cimetière: Clair de lune

Connaissez-vous la blanche tombe
Où flotte avec un son plaintif
L'ombre d'un if?
Sur l'if, une pâle colombe,
Triste et seule, au soleil couchant,
Chante son chant.

Un air maladivement tendre,
À la fois charmant et fatal,
Qui vous fait mal,
Et qu'on voudrait toujours entendre;
Un air, comme en soupire aux cieux
L'ange amoureux.

On dirait que l'âme éveillée
Pleure sous terre à l'unisson
De la chanson,
Et, du malheur d'être oubliée
Se plaint dans un roucoulement
Bien doucement.

Sur les ailes de la musique
On sent lentement revenir
Un souvenir;
Une ombre, une forme angélique
Passe dans un rayon tremblant,
En voile blanc.

Les belles de nuit, demi-closes,
Jettent leur parfum faible et doux
Autour de vous,
Et le fantôme aux molles poses
Murmure en vous tendant les bras:
Tu reviendras!

Oh! jamais plus, près de la tombe,
Je n'irai, quand descend le soir
Au manteau noir,
Écouter la pâle colombe
Chanter, sur la pointe de l'if,
Son chant plaintif!

In the Cemetery: Moonlight

Do you know the white tomb
Where the shadow of the yew tree
Hovers with a plaintive sigh?
On that yew a pale dove,
At sundown, sad and solitary,
Sings its song.

A sadly tender refrain,
At once delightful and deathly,
That though sorrow-filled,
You would listen to forever.
A song such as the amorous angel might sing
In the heavens.

One might say the awakened soul
Is weeping beneath the earth
In unison with the song,
And, in a gentle murmur
Is complaining of the misery
Of being forgotten.

On the music's wings
One feels a memory
Slowly return.
A shadow, an angelic form,
Passes in a tremulous light,
Shrouded in a white veil.

Flowers of the night, half-open,
Give forth their scent, mild
And sweet around you,
And the phantom with its languid motion
Whispers as it opens its arms to you:
"You will return!"

Oh, never again will I go near that tomb,
When the somber cloak
Of night descends,
To listen to the pale dove,
From the heights of the yew tree,
Sing its plaintive song!

(Please turn the page quietly.)

L'Île inconnue

*Dites, la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller?
La voile enfle son aile,
La brise va souffler!*

*L'aviron est d'ivoire,
La pavillon de moire,
Le gouvernail d'or fin;
J'ai pour lest une orange,
Pour voile une aile d'ange;
Pour mousse un séraphin.*

Dites, la jeune belle, etc.

*Est-ce dans la Baltique?
Dans la mer Pacifique,
Dans l'île de Java?
Ou bien est-ce en Norvège,
Cueillir la fleur de neige,
Ou la fleur d'Angsoka?*

Dites, la jeune belle, etc.

*Menez-moi, dit la belle,
À la rive fidèle
Où l'on aime toujours.
Cette rive, ma chère,
On ne la connaît guère
Au pays des amours.*

*Où voulez-vous aller?
La brise va souffler!*

The Unknown Isle

Tell me, pretty young maid,
Where would you like to go?
The sail unfurls like a wing,
The breeze is about to blow!

The oar is of ivory,
The flag of watered silk,
The rudder of fine gold;
For ballast I have an orange,
For a sail, the wing of an angel,
For ship's boy, a seraph.

Tell me, pretty young maid, etc.

Would it be to the Baltic?
Or to the Pacific?
Or to the isle of Java?
Or would it be to Norway,
To pluck the snow-flower,
Or the Angsoka flower?

Tell me, pretty young maid, etc.

Lead me, says the pretty one,
To the faithful shore
Where we will love forever!
This shore, my dear,
Is scarcely known
In the land of love.

Where would you like to go?
The breeze is about to blow!

Also sprach Zarathustra (Thus Spoke Zarathustra), Tone Poem (freely after Friedrich Nietzsche) for Large Orchestra, Op. 30

Richard Strauss

The idea of the symphonic poem, or tone poem, traces its ancestry to the dramatic or depictive overtures of the early 19th century, such as Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave Overture* or Berlioz's *Waverley Overture*, but it was left for Franz Liszt to mold it into a clearly defined genre. This he did through a dozen single-movement orchestral pieces composed in the 1840s and '50s that drew inspiration from literary sources. As time went by, composers also derived depictive influence for their symphonic poems from paintings or other visual artworks, or from some other non-musical germ. The idea proved popular and the repertoire grew thanks to impressive contributions by such composers as Smetana, Dvořák, Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns, Franck, and — most devotedly of all — Richard Strauss.

Strauss's direct link to the Liszt-Wagner circle was Alexander Ritter, an Estonian-born violinist and composer who married a niece of Wagner's, composed six symphonic poems of his own, and eventually acceded to the position of associate concertmaster of the Meininger Court Orchestra. There he grew friendly with the young Richard Strauss, brought in by conductor Hans von Bülow as an assistant music director in 1885. Strauss would later say that it was Ritter who opened his eyes to the possibilities of the symphonic poem. In 1886 Strauss produced what might be considered his first symphonic poem, *Aus Italien* (it is more precisely a descriptive symphony), and he continued with hardly a break for two decades through the series of tone poems that many feel represent the genre at its height:

Macbeth, Don Juan, Tod und Verklärung, Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Also sprach Zarathustra, Don Quixote, Ein Heldenleben, and Symphonia domestica, with Eine Alpensymphonie (1911–15) arriving as a late pendant. He was drawn to the idea (as he would recall in his memoirs) that

new ideas must search for new forms; this basic principle of Liszt's symphonic works, in which the poetic idea was really the formative element, became henceforward the guiding principle for my own symphonic work.

Strauss immersed himself in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) in the early 1890s and was impressed by the philosopher's attacks on formalized religion, which mirrored the composer's own stance. Nietzsche's philosophy had just then reached its mature formulation, and it was articulated most completely in his

In Short

Born: June 11, 1864, in Munich, Germany

Died: September 8, 1949, in Garmisch

Work composed: 1895–96; the score is dated August 24, 1896, Munich

World premiere: November 27, 1896, in Frankfurt am Main, by the Frankfurt City Orchestra, with the composer conducting

New York Philharmonic premiere: November 13, 1908, Wassily Safonoff, conductor

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: October 22, 2019, Susanna Mälkki, conductor

Estimated duration: ca. 34 minutes

four-part treatise *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–85). In this work the philosopher speaks in a prose narrative (as opposed to the formalized style of traditional philosophical treatises) through the voice of Zarathustra, a fanciful adaptation of the Persian prophet Zoroaster, who spends years meditating on a mountaintop and then descends to share his insights with the world. Most of the catchphrases popularly associated with Nietzsche — “God is Dead,” the “Will to Power,” the “Übermensch” (or “Superman”) — appear in these volumes. Nietzsche’s ideas went to the heart of human existence and aspiration, which he viewed (quite pessimistically) as an endless process of self-aggrandizement and self-perpetuation, over which the much-heralded

achievements of civilization — morality, religion, the arts — stand merely as pleasant distractions from the underlying banality of humanity.

Nietzsche’s text, Strauss wrote to his friend Romain Rolland, was “the starting point, providing a form for the expression and the purely musical development of emotion.” Indeed, it would be difficult for a listener not armed with a score to follow anything but a musical narrative in this symphonic poem. Nonetheless, a sort of narrative does exist, and following the stentorian fanfares of the work’s famous introduction, Strauss inscribed textual indications in the score to punctuate the sections of the piece’s program: “Of Those of the Unseen World,” “Of the Great Longing,” “Of Joy and Passions,” “The

Views and Reviews

The French author and critic Romain Rolland (1866–1944) attended the premiere of *Also sprach Zarathustra* and remarked of its composer,

The whole of him is to be found in this work, his highly poetic aspirations, and that harmonic and orchestral audacity which, in 1897 [sic], was shocking to those neo-classical circles beyond the Rhine whose gods were Brahms and the famous violinist Joachim.

In an 1899 essay on Strauss, he summarized the “narrative” of this tone poem:

In it man is seen, at first crushed by the enigma of nature, searching for a refuge in faith; then, rebelling against ascetic ideas, plunging madly into the passions; soon sated, nauseated, tired to death, he tries learning, then rejects it, and succeeds in freeing himself from the anxiety of knowledge; finally he finds his release in laughter, master of the world, the blissful dance, the dance of the universe, into which all human sentiments enter: religious beliefs, unsatisfied desires, passions, disgust, and joy. “Lift up your hearts, brothers, high, higher! And don’t forget your legs, either! I have canonized laughter; supermen, learn to laugh!” [Rolland is quoting Nietzsche.] Then the dance moves away, and is lost in the ethereal regions. Zarathustra disappears dancing beyond the worlds. But he has not solved the enigma of the world for other men: therefore, in contrast to the harmony of light which characterizes him, is set the sad note of interrogation, with which the poem closes.



Richard Strauss, 1904

Dirge,” “Of Science,” “The Convalescent,”
“Dance Song,” “Night Wanderer’s Song.”

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubling piccolo) and piccolo, three oboes and English horn, two clarinets plus E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet,

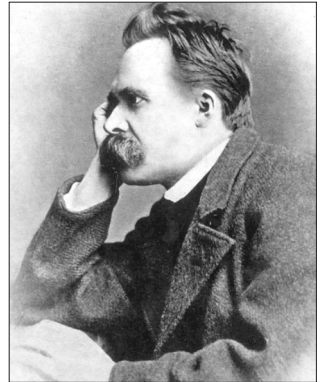
three bassoons and contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, two tubas, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, orchestra bells, deep bell in E-flat, two harps, organ, and strings.

— J.M.K.

Sources and Inspirations

When Richard Strauss was writing his tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Gustav Mahler was also busy composing his Third Symphony (1893–96), which draws the text of its fourth movement (*Midnight Song*) from the same Nietzsche treatise. Mahler preferred not to make much of this coincidence. Asked about it in 1906, he remarked, “The explanation is simply that we both, as musicians, sensed what I might call the latent music in Nietzsche’s mighty work.” It is worth noting that in November 1910, when Mahler was Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, he conducted the Orchestra in three performances of Strauss’s *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The musicologist Ludwig Schiedermair, who knew both composers, generally viewed them as polar opposites. However, in *Musikalische Begegnungen* (Cologne, 1949) he addressed their common bond in Nietzsche:

Like Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler was affected by Nietzsche’s spirituality. It is not that either tried to dissolve and convert Nietzsche’s ideas directly into music, but rather that they were inspired by them to produce basic ideas of their own work. More extensively than Strauss in his *Zarathustra* (of 1896) Mahler grappled over and over again with Nietzsche’s thought — as his spoken and written statements to me also testify — driven by an unrelenting urge to escape the discord in his own nature. However much they differed in their physical and intellectual make-up, they yet agreed in their adherence to Nietzsche’s art, and in their productive reaction to the challenges of program music.



Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882

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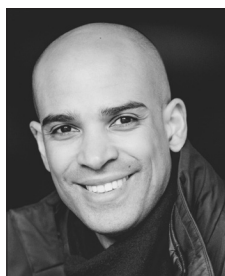
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The Artists



German conductor **Kevin John Edusei** is praised for the drama and tension in his music-making and the sense of architecture, warmth, and insight that he brings to his performances.

Deeply committed to the creative elements of performance, he presents classical music in new formats, cultivating audiences and conducting an eclectic range of repertoire. His 2024–25 season highlights include debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Bournemouth Symphony, and Taiwan Philharmonic orchestras, and at the Musikverein with the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra. His return engagements include the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra at Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, and Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra in his final season as principal guest conductor. His carefully curated programs across the 2024–25 season include premieres of works by Hannah Kendall, Thomas Larcher, Samy Moussa, Brian Nabors, Derrick Skye, and Gabriella Smith.

Edusei appears regularly as a guest conductor with ensembles including the Munich Philharmonic, London Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, Seattle Symphony, and Sydney Symphony orchestras. He has a longstanding relationship with the Chineke! Orchestra, with which he performs this season at London’s South Bank Centre, Konzerthaus Berlin, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, and BOZAR, Brussels.

Edusei is the former chief conductor of the Munich Symphony Orchestra and Bern Opera House.

In 2022 Edusei made his debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden conducting Puccini’s *La bohème*, and in 2023–24 returned for Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. He has enjoyed great success at the Semperoper Dresden, English National Opera, Hamburg Staatsoper, Volksoper Wien, and Komische Oper Berlin. During his tenure at Bern Opera House, he led an array of highly acclaimed new productions.

Born in Bielefeld, Germany, Kevin John Edusei studied sound engineering, classical percussion, and conducting at the University of the Arts Berlin and the Royal Conservatory The Hague with Jac van Steen and Ed Spanjaard. He was awarded a conducting fellowship at the Aspen Music Festival by David Zinman; was a prizewinner at the Lucerne Festival conducting competition under the artistic direction of Pierre Boulez; and won First Prize in the Dimitri Mitropoulos Competition in Athens. Edusei is an alumnus of the Deutsche Bank Akademie Musiktheater heute and Dirigentenforum of the German Music Council.



Three-time Grammy Award-winning mezzo-soprano **Isabel Leonard** has established herself as one of the most in-demand performers on the world’s leading stages and screens. The 2024–25 season sees her much-anticipated return to Opéra National de Paris as Rosina in Damiano Michieletto’s

production of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* conducted by Diego Matheuz, and her house debut at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu as Anita in a concert performance of Bernstein's *West Side Story* conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. Leonard also returns to Houston Grand Opera (HGO) to sing Angelina in Joan Font's production of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* and for her directorial debut leading the HGO Family Day production of Rossini's *Cinderella*. She also returns to the Metropolitan Opera as Rosina in Bartlett Sher's celebrated production of *The Barber of Seville*. In addition to

Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'été* with Kevin John Edusei and the New York Philharmonic, her orchestral appearances include performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, *Resurrection*, conducted by Courtney Lewis. Leonard also continues her collaboration with guitarist Pablo Sáinz Villegas, performing their all-Spanish program at the Gallo Center for the Arts in Modesto, California, and she appears in recital at Matinee Musicale in Cincinnati, Ohio; Teatro de la Ciudad in Monterrey, Mexico; and Sala São Paulo and Teatro Municipal de Río de Janeiro in Brazil.

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.

Gustavo Dudamel will become the NY Phil's Music Director Designate in the 2025–26 season, before beginning his tenure as the Oscar L. Tang and H.M. Agnes Hsu-Tang Music and Artistic Director in the autumn of 2026. In the 2024–25 season Dudamel conducts works by composers ranging from Gershwin and Stravinsky to Philip Glass and Varèse, Mahler's Seventh Symphony, and a World Premiere by Kate Soper (one of 13 World, US, and New York Premieres the Philharmonic gives throughout the season). He also leads the New York Philharmonic Concerts in the Parks, Presented by Didi and Oscar Schafer, for the first time.

During the 2024–25 “interregnum” season between Music Directors, the Orchestra collaborates with leading artists in a variety of contexts. In addition to Yuja Wang, who serves as The Mary and James G. Wallach Artist-in-Residence, the NY Phil engages in cultural explorations spearheaded by Artistic Partners. International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) joins the examination of Afro-modernism through performances of works by African composers and those reflecting the African diaspora, complemented by panels, exhibits, and more; John Adams shares his insights on American Vistas; and Nathalie Stutzmann shares her expertise through Vocal Echoes, featuring music both with and without voice, including on a free concert presented by the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation. The Orchestra also marks milestone anniversaries of Ravel and Boulez, the latter of whom served as the NY Phil's Music Director in the 1970s.

The New York Philharmonic has commissioned and / or premiered works by leading composers since its founding in 1842, from

Dvořák's *New World* Symphony to two Pulitzer Prize winners: John Adams's *On the Transmigration of Souls* and Tania León's *Stride*, commissioned through *Project 19*, which is supporting the creation of works by 19 women composers. The Orchestra has released more than 2,000 recordings since 1917, including the live recording of Julia Wolfe's Grammy-nominated *Fire in my mouth*. In 2023 the NY Phil announced a partnership with Apple Music Classical, the standalone music streaming app designed to deliver classical music lovers the optimal listening experience. The nationally syndicated radio program *The New York Philharmonic This Week* features the Philharmonic's recent performances and commercial recordings complemented by interviews and archival highlights. 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 the annual free Concerts in the Parks across the city and the Phil for All: Ticket Access Program with education projects, including the Young People's Concerts, Very Young People's Concerts, and the New York Philharmonic Very Young Composers Program. The Orchestra has appeared in 436 cities in 63 countries, including Pyongyang, DPRK, in 2008 — the first visit there by an American orchestra — as well as, in 2024, the first visit to mainland China by a US orchestra since the COVID-19 pandemic, a tour that included education activities as part of the tenth anniversary of the NY Phil-Shanghai Orchestra Academy and Partnership.

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. Distinguished conductors who have served as Music Director include such luminaries as Bernstein, Toscanini, and Mahler.

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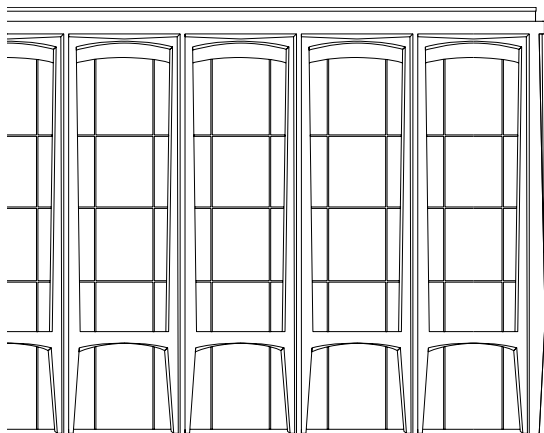
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