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from the editor

The word “score” has multiple meanings: in music, the notes on the printed page; in sports, the points on the scoreboard; in time, a span of 20 years. During the first score of the 21st century, the world has faced a number of difficult challenges: terrorism, economic recession and, most recently, a global health emergency. These crises can reveal how fragile our society’s bedrocks are, but they can also reveal our collective strength when we view the situation with an “all-in-this-together” mentality. The Minnesota Orchestra thanks you for your continued support as we offer music for respite and nourishment in the weeks and months ahead. We’ve redoubled our efforts to clean and sanitize Orchestra Hall before and after all concerts, and we’re currently waiving all ticket exchange fees to allow for maximum flexibility.

The scores on the conductor’s stand in April range from Johannes Brahms’ final symphony, composed in 1885, to a virtuoso percussion concerto by Finland’s Kalevi Aho premiered just 10 years ago. In a season highlight, the Sphinx Virtuosi chamber orchestra makes its Orchestra Hall debut, bringing an array of talented musicians to the stage for two string orchestra works alone, then a shared performance of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade with the Minnesota Orchestra. And at month’s end, the Orchestra and Associate Conductor Akiko Fujimoto visit Austin, Minnesota, for a Common Chords residency week—making it the eighth city to host a Common Chords week since 2011, for those keeping score. Stay safe, and enjoy the music!

Carl Schroeder, Editor
editor@mnorch.org

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about the cover
Music Director Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra outside its home of Orchestra Hall in downtown Minneapolis. Photo: Travis Anderson


April 2020

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Sarah Grimes
Helen Chang Haertzen
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Norbert Nielubowski

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Osmo Vänskä, music director

Finnish conductor Osmo Vänskä, the Minnesota Orchestra’s tenth music director, is renowned internationally for his compelling interpretations of the standard, contemporary and Nordic repertoires. He has led the Orchestra on five major European tours, as well as a 2018 visit to London’s BBC Proms, and on historic tours to Cuba in 2015 and South Africa in 2018. In summer 2020 he and the Orchestra will travel to South Korea and Vietnam, the latter stop in observance of the 25th anniversary of restored U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic relations. He has also led the Orchestra in appearances at New York’s Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, Chicago’s Symphony Center and community venues across Minnesota.

Vänskä’s recording projects with the Minnesota Orchestra have met with great success, including a Sibelius symphonies cycle, one album of which won the 2014 Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance. In December 2019 BIS released the Orchestra’s newest album, featuring Mahler’s Fourth Symphony—part of a Mahler series that includes a Grammy-nominated Fifth Symphony recording. Other recent releases include an album of in-concert recordings of Sibelius’ Kullervo and Finlandia and Kortekangas’ Migrations; two albums of Beethoven piano concertos featuring Yevgeny Kissin; a two-CD Tchaikovsky set featuring pianist Stephen Hough; To Be Certain of the Dawn, composed by Stephen Paulus with libretto by Michael Dennis Browne; and a particularly widely-praised Beethoven symphonies cycle.

As a guest conductor, Vänskä has received extraordinary praise for his work with many of the world’s leading orchestras, including the Boston and Chicago symphony orchestras, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Vienna Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. In January 2020 he became music director of the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and Kortekangas’ Migrations; two albums of Beethoven piano concertos featuring Yevgeny Kissin; a two-CD Tchaikovsky set featuring pianist Stephen Hough; To Be Certain of the Dawn, composed by Stephen Paulus with libretto by Michael Dennis Browne; and a particularly widely-praised Beethoven symphonies cycle.

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Vänskä began his music career as a clarinetist, holding major posts with the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Turku Philharmonic. Since taking up the instrument again for Sommerfesst 2005 he has performed as clarinetist at Orchestra Hall, other Twin Cities venues, the Grand Teton Festival, the Mostly Mozart Festival, La Jolla Summerfest, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and several festivals in Finland. He has recorded Bernhard Henrik Crusell’s three Clarinet Quartets and Kalevi Aho’s Clarinet Quintet for the BIS label and is in the process of recording several duos for clarinet and violin which he has commissioned with his wife, violinist Erin Keefe.

During the 2019-20 season he will conduct American orchestras including the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Florida’s New World Symphony, and will lead a U.S. tour of the Curtis Institute Orchestra. Abroad he will appear with ensembles such as the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lyon, Qingdao Symphony Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and Taiwan Philharmonic Orchestra. Vänskä will conclude his tenure as Minnesota Orchestra music director at the close of the 2021-22 season. For more information, visit minnesotaorchestra.org.
The Minnesota Orchestra, led by Music Director Osmo Vänskä, ranks among America’s top symphonic ensembles, with a distinguished history of acclaimed performances in its home state and around the world. Founded in 1903, it is known for award-winning recordings as well as for notable radio broadcasts and educational engagement programs, and a commitment to new orchestral repertoire.

Great women in Minnesota Orchestra history: Sarah Hicks

- In 2006 Sarah Hicks became the Minnesota Orchestra’s assistant conductor, making history as the first woman to hold a titled conducting post with the ensemble. She held the post until 2009, when she became principal conductor of pops and presentations; in 2014 she began her current role as principal conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall. During her tenure she has led more Orchestra concerts than any conductor besides Osmo Vänskä.

- Born in Tokyo and raised in Honolulu, Hicks originally hoped to become a pianist, but after developing tendinitis she turned her focus to composing and conducting. She earned a bachelor’s degree in composition from Harvard University, then received an artist’s diploma in conducting from the Curtis Institute of Music.

- Highlights of Hicks’ tenure in Minnesota have included founding the Inside the Classics series with Orchestra violist Sam Bergman—which has been succeeded by the Sam & Sarah series—as well as creating original programs such as A Scandinavian Christmas, A Musical Feast and Home for the Holidays.

- In recent seasons Hicks and the Orchestra have worked frequently with singer-rapper-writer Dessa; their live-in-concert album Sound the Bells reached #2 on Billboard’s Classical Crossover chart.

- Hicks has also collaborated often with singer-songwriter-pianist Ben Folds. In 2011 she served as conductor for Sting’s 31-concert Symphonicities Tour across Europe.
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jamie joseph

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Tell us about one of your favorite musical memories. In 1979 I won my first orchestra job as second oboe in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Within a few months of starting there, the orchestra went on its first European tour, led by their music director Antal Dorati. We were performing Brahms’ First Symphony at the Musikverein in Vienna. At this point, Dorati was getting to the end of his career. When we got to the last movement of the symphony and began the beautiful chorale near the end, Dorati was looking up, as if to heaven, and there was a tremendous look of both sadness and hope on his face. I will never forget that, and every time I play this piece, I have tears in my eyes.

What part of being in the Minnesota Orchestra has been the most meaningful for you? I have always admired the Orchestra’s work ethic. In the toughest of times, we always managed to do our best, even from the first rehearsal. It has always inspired me to be as ready as I can be.

What are you looking forward to doing in retirement? I think it’s pretty funny when colleagues ask me this question, too! After I retire from the Orchestra at the end of the current season, I plan to travel a lot, cook and bake a lot, throw pots, write poetry and stories, dabble in watercolor painting, and just generally see what John Snow is all about without an oboe reed in his mouth!

What is your favorite performance venue? The Musikverein in Vienna is so stunning both visually and acoustically, and it is always inspiring to play there. It is the quintessential historical monument to centuries of great classical music.

If you could give an aspiring orchestral musician one piece of advice, what would it be? Being rejected at an audition does not mean you are a failure. It simply means it wasn’t your turn that day.

We know you love to cook. What is your favorite thing to make? My favorite comfort food is fresh, homemade pasta topped by steamed broccoli in a homemade basil pesto sauce with crumbled bacon and parmesan.

What else should we all know about you? Without having any experience, I built a cabin up north of Hinckley. I followed a seven-page magazine article with a single diagram and step-by-step instructions. I managed to do this pretty much on my own except for a long weekend when several friends from the Orchestra came up to help put on the roof. I built a matching outhouse, and now, in retirement, I will finally add indoor plumbing and solar energy! This will definitely go down as one of my biggest achievements!

Symphony Ball to feature Byron Stripling and Laura Osnes

The Minnesota Orchestra’s 64th annual Symphony Ball gala is coming up on Saturday, June 6—and tickets are now available! The evening’s theme, “A Night at the Moulin Rouge,” is inspired by the La Belle Époque era and the dancing, music and revelry that are trademarks of Paris’ iconic Moulin Rouge cabaret. Music Director Osmo Vänskä will lead the Orchestra in a performance of music by great French orchestral composers, plus additional surprises. The Orchestra will be joined by two guest artists: acclaimed trumpet player Byron Stripling and Minnesota-born Broadway star singer-actress Laura Osnes. In addition, a post-concert party will feature DJ Delphine des Disques and Nooky Jones. The Ball is chaired by W. Anders Folk, Angela Pennington, Bill Miller and Katie Miller, with Gordy and Dee Sprenger serving as Honorary Chairs. For more information and to buy tickets, visit minnesotaorchestra.org/symphonyball.
critics’ column:
recent reviews

“It added up to a quite rewarding concert, as [guest conductor Paul] Watkins’ Minnesota Orchestra debut demonstrated some impressive chemistry...Enthusiasm is a key element of Watkins’ conducting, and he doubled it on the C.P.E. Bach concerto, leading the orchestra from the soloist’s chair. Joy overflowed from the opening Allegro, Watkins’ playing lithe yet muscular. The ensuing Largo had a haunted tone, especially on a cadenza reminiscent of some of the more spare and sorrowful sections of the unaccompanied cello suites composed by C.P.E.’s father, Johann Sebastian Bach. But it all ended in a playful place on the finale.”
—Rob Hubbard, Pioneer Press, January 30, 2020

“American conductor Karina Canellakis was on the podium making her Orchestra Hall debut, and led a clear and confident performance of [Zosha] Di Castri’s composition [Lineage]. Its soundworld constantly demanded attention, from the plink of gong strokes in the expanded percussion section through the burble of xylophone and marimba, to the spitting bass and cello slaps that spiked up through the textures at one point...[In Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra] there were raptly expressive solos from oboist John Snow and piccolo player Roma Duncan at the start of the central ‘Elegia.’”
—Terry Blain, Star Tribune, February 14, 2020

“[Osmo] Vänskä’s conducting [of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony] sounds attentive both to the letter of the score as well as the spirit...[Soprano] Carolyn Sampson in the finale sings fabulously, making the movement the true climax of the entire work. It is also here that Vänskä best manages to sound both attentive to the music’s fantastic coloristic detail, but also natural and spontaneous. Typically excellent sonics make this release easily the best in the [Mahler symphony] series thus far.”
—David Hurwitz, Classics Today, February 1, 2020
Summer at Orchestra Hall: The Beethoven Influence

Pianist Jon Kimura Parker, creative partner for Summer at Orchestra Hall

Early last month, the Minnesota Orchestra announced plans for a newly-named and reimagined summer festival, Summer at Orchestra Hall. Running from July 17 to August 9, 2020, it features the theme “The Beethoven Influence,” marking the 250th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven’s birth in creative and unexpected ways. Each of the festival’s four weeks uses an overarching theme—nature, rebellion, destiny and unity—as a starting point for explorations of Beethoven’s influences as well as the composers, artists and causes he influenced. The festival’s Creative Partner, Jon Kimura Parker, will be featured as piano soloist or host for many of the festival’s 14 orchestral and chamber music concerts.

“Our vision is to build a summer season that evokes what came before it—and also springs forward in new directions with new partners,” Parker said. “We decided to approach a Beethoven theme in a slightly different way, looking through the lens of ‘influence.’ This inevitably has led us into some really exciting partnerships with artists who will riff on Beethoven to create new works this summer.” Parker was appointed the Orchestra’s first-ever Creative Partner for Summer at Orchestra Hall in September 2019, marking a new leadership model for the organization’s summer festival. He will serve in the role through the summer of 2022.

Highlights of Summer at Orchestra Hall include the Orchestra’s first free outdoor performance on Peavey Plaza since 2008, as part of the third annual International Day of Music; a collaboration with In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre around South Korean composer Unsuk Chin’s Mannequin; a Grand Piano Spectacular featuring four pianists onstage playing four pianos; a movies and music performance of Disney animated classic Fantasia; and the Minneapolis debut of Jon Kimura Parker’s chamber ensemble, Off the Score, featuring percussionist Stewart Copeland and other collaborators, in a program including an improvisatory version of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring. In addition, a key part of the festival will be collaborations with local performing arts organizations including Free Black Dirt, BRKFST Dance Company and The Moving Company, which will each create new works around Beethoven’s music.

“Summer at Orchestra Hall speaks to the importance of place,” said Orchestra President and CEO Michelle Miller Burns. “The Orchestra is fortunate to make its home in downtown Minneapolis, next to the City’s beautifully-restored Peavey Plaza. Our new festival title embraces our venue as a captivating setting for music during a Minnesota summer—and opens up so many possibilities for new annual themes and a very broad collection of music to celebrate.” Summer activities on Peavey Plaza include “Sounds and Bites,” an eclectic assemblage of food vendors and free music offerings before and after all concerts, as well as pre- and post-concert programming inside the Hall, and a Friday and Saturday evening pop-up Night Market that will sell locally-made artisan goods and crafts. Tickets and full information on Summer at Orchestra Hall are available now at minnesotaorchestra.org/summer.

a collaboration with Sphinx Virtuosi

From April 2 to 4, the Minnesota Orchestra collaborates for the first time with the Sphinx Virtuosi, a chamber orchestra comprising 18 of our nation’s top African American and Latinx string performers, who will perform two string orchestra works on their own, and then join the Orchestra in Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade. The Sphinx Virtuosi answered our questions on the performance and the collaboration.

How did the Sphinx Virtuosi choose the repertoire it will perform at these concerts?

As we reflect on the historical and current challenges in the country, we chose the music of Aldemaro Romero, who invoked traditional dance and improvisatory qualities to entice his audiences and celebrate the culture. Astor Piazzolla’s Fuga y misterio uses some of these same elements, speaks to the virtuosity, and highlights one of our most beloved composers.

What are you most looking forward to about collaborating with the Minnesota Orchestra?

In this historic, first-time comprehensive collaboration, we are looking forward to collaborating on the artistic and leadership fronts. Our premiere Sphinx LEAD works to transform the leadership landscape in our sector, and 10 of our fellows will be present to engage and collaborate with and learn alongside the leadership of the Minnesota Orchestra and the community. We also look forward to the performance aspects, attracting new audiences, advancing the ideas of inclusion and musical camaraderie. Our hope is to not only sit together, as equals, on the stage of Orchestra Hall but to also leave the audience and musicians overjoyed with a sense of artistic excellence and belonging.
Join us for dinner before any Orchestra Hall show. We offer complimentary valet for the evening when you dine with us at Monello.

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FRIENDS of the Minnesota Orchestra

ACCENT: up-close connections with musicians

Are you a Minnesota Orchestra supporter who wants a different kind of up-close connection with musicians and the music? You’re invited to Meet a Musician/ACCENT, an educational program for adults launched in 2008 by FRIENDS of the Minnesota Orchestra. The series includes a social hour, buffet dinner and musical program highlighting one or more Minnesota Orchestra musicians.

The most recent sold-out ACCENT event was among the most memorable: on March 12, retired Minnesota Orchestra violinist Roger Frisch told the story of a medical recovery that has made headlines around the world and was detailed in Ken Burns’ recent documentary The Mayo Clinic. In 2009, after Frisch began experiencing Essential Tremors—a career-threatening condition for a violinist—he was treated at the Mayo Clinic by Dr. Kendall Lee, a neurosurgeon who was willing to explore deep brain stimulation. This required Frisch to be awake and play his violin during the surgery, so the surgeons could fine-tune the operation. At the ACCENT event, Frisch and Dr. Lee spoke about this remarkable operation and recovery that extended Frisch’s career until his retirement in 2018, and Frisch performed alongside pianist Hanna HyunJung Kim and Rui Du, the Orchestra’s assistant concertmaster. Topping off the evening was a dinner buffet prepared by Chef Rikki Giambruno of Hyacinth Restaurant.

Mark your calendar now for the next ACCENT/Meet a Musician events. On April 9, Associate Principal Cello Silver Ainomäe and First Associate Concertmaster Susie Park will give a preview of their upcoming performance of Brahms’ Double Concerto in May 2020. On May 7, Principal Bassoon Fei Xie will discuss his journey from China to the U.S. and talk about his preparation for soloing with the Orchestra in Mozart’s demanding Bassoon Concerto. And in the ACCENT season finale on June 4, Principal Percussion Brian Mount and bass player Matthew Frischman will appear with their rock band, the Minnesota Orchestra Band (MOB). The April 9 and May 7 events take place at the HGA Ford Building, while the June 4 event is held at Orchestra Hall. Visit friendsofminnesotaorchestra.org for more information and to purchase tickets.

on the road: Common Chords in Austin

The Minnesota Orchestra is coming to the southeastern Minnesota city of Austin from April 20 to 25, as part of the Orchestra’s annual Common Chords residency program. This community-wide celebration of music includes free public performances by small ensembles of Orchestra musicians at locations ranging from the Austin City Hall and K’nyaw Market to the Spam Museum and the Gravity Storm Brewery. The week culminates in a performance by the full Orchestra on April 25 at Austin High School’s Knowlton Auditorium, at which Associate Conductor Akiko Fujimoto leads works by Copland, Debussy, Dvorák, Still and Stravinsky. Follow the week’s events at minnesotaorchestra.org and on the Orchestra’s social media channels.
As the weather continued to warm in March, Minnesota Orchestra audiences flocked to concerts including a Russian Century performance that explored the past 120 years of Russian music and history, two performances with indie rock band Cloud Cult and a “Star Wars and Beyond” Relaxed Family Concert. We invite you to share your favorite Minnesota Orchestra photos and concert memories on social media—use the tag #mnorch, and you may see them in a future issue of Showcase magazine! While you’re online, stop by the Orchestra’s Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages for online-only features including an interview with guest trumpet soloist Tine Thing Helseth, a comprehensive Concertgoer’s Guide, concert photos, video clips, links to critics’ reviews and more. We’ll see you online!

#mnorch: social media spotlight

Associate Concertmaster Felicity James with an audience member following a concert.

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Audience members at a concert in January 2020.

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Walt Whitman, the great music lover among our poets, says this wise line in "A Song of Occupations": *All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments.* Now listen for the next violin in earshot, be it six-year-old Sven scratching away on his Suzuki, or the ghost of Jascha Heifetz playing the Bach *Chaconne* on an old record. That violin awakes in me the existence of magnificent orchestras manned by a whole sea of violins, but it also reminds me of the determination of stubborn human beings to make and possess music, thus beauty, whatever their unlikely circumstances.

I grew up in a world without violins on a farm in western Minnesota. One neighbor, Old Steve, played fiddle for barn dances; Frank, the town druggist, collected and sold old violins but didn’t play them. In high school we had a band, no orchestra. I played alto saxophone, a far cry from a violin. We marched for parades and football games, much Sousa, no Mozart. The Minneapolis Symphony did not include little Minneota on its tours.

Rural high school teachers in the fifties were paid a starvation pittance so we often found ourselves with odd ducks, desperate for any work. Mr. Peabody, my English teacher, surely qualified as an oddity—a small reserved man with wire-rimmed spectacles. Every day he wore the same heavy gray wool tweed suit with vest and watch chain, precisely knotted tie with a collar pin. He spoke in a soft and cultivated voice, useful for the poets he loved: Keats, Shelley and Tennyson. He lived alone in a rooming house. Rumor had it that his family, in The Cities, had suffered some great tragedy. He seemed old to me then, perhaps in his mid-fifties. His English students inflicted unspeakable cruelty on this shy mild man who exhaled clouds of loneliness. We pelted him with spitballs, giggled when he recited Keats, chatted noisily while he diagrammed sentences. As the class nerd, my heart went out to him. One afternoon after school I went to his classroom to show him some of my poems. I stopped in the hallway. I heard the sound of a violin practicing music of sublime beauty, playing (I thought) with great skill and feeling. I didn’t disturb him, only stood in the hall, listening, transfixed.

Whenever I could I eavesdropped on his afternoon practice. Finally he discovered me, and invited me to sit and listen. He seemed pleased that someone liked this music. It was the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, that noble E-minor tune. Eventually Mr. Peabody disappeared back to the city, back presumably to his private loneliness. But something had awakened in me. I pestered my parents to buy the LP of that concerto, though after 45 years it is now lost or worn out.

I’ve heard the Mendelssohn many times since with many orchestras and many soloists, good and mediocre. But as Walt Whitman assured us, the power of the violin still reminds me of the interior orchestra that, once awakened, plays whenever you need it. It requires no electricity, only desire. There are still not many violins or visits by fine orchestras in western Minnesota, but one is enough. That’s why it is necessary for the great orchestras with their great players to come to unlikely, even woebegone places to offer their gifts. Maybe one human being waits to be awakened who, at the sound of that violin, will be stabbed at the core of his heart and reminded of his true humanity.

*This was the first of several essays written for Showcase by the late Bill Holm, a poet, essayist, professor and music lover extraordinaire. A native of Minnesota, Minnesota, he lived there until his death in 2009, except for a year he spent in China, which yielded the essay collection Coming Home Crazy, and summers he spent in north Iceland. Two of his books in particular reflect his love for music: Boxelder Bug Variations and Playing the Black Piano. His final book, published posthumously, is The Chain Letter of the Soul: New and Selected Poems.*

**essay**

*The Violin in Greater Minnesota*

by Bill Holm
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Minnesota Orchestra and the Sphinx Virtuosi

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Martin Grubinger, percussion

Thursday, April 2, 2020, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, April 3, 2020, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, April 4, 2020, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Aldemaro Romero
Fuga con Pajarillo, from Suite No. 1 for Strings
Sphinx Virtuosi
ca. 7'

Astor Piazzolla
Fuga y misterio
Sphinx Virtuosi
ca. 6'

Kalevi Aho
Sieidi, Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra
[in one movement]
Minnesota Orchestra
Martin Grubinger, percussion
ca. 36'

INTERMISSION
ca. 20'

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Scheherazade, Opus 35
ca. 47'
The Sea and Sindbad’s Ship (Largo e maestoso – Allegro non troppo)
The Story of the Kalendar Prince (Lento – Allegro molto)
The Young Prince and the Young Princess (Andantino quasi allegretto)
Festival at Baghdad – The Sea – The Ship Goes to Pieces on a Rock
Surmounted by the Bronze Statue of a Warrior (Allegro molto)
Sphinx Virtuosi and Minnesota Orchestra
Erin Keefe, violin

The national Sphinx Virtuosi Tour is made possible with the generous support of JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Robert F. Smith, with additional support from Aetna and National Endowment for the Arts/Art Works.

pre-concert

Pre-Concert Panel with Members of the Inaugural Sphinx LEAD Program
Thursday, April 2, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, April 3, 7 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine
Visit minnesotaorchestra.org/experiences for additional times and locations.

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Percussionist Martin Grubinger, who makes his Minnesota Orchestra debut this week, possesses a broad repertoire ranging from solo works to chamber music with his Percussive Planet Ensemble to orchestral percussion concertos. This season he tours with both the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and debuts with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra and Singapore Symphony Orchestra. He also returns to the WDR Symphonieorchester and the Brucknerorchester Linz, among many other ensembles. Alongside his ongoing residency at the Wiener Konzerthaus, he is currently an artist in residence at the Bodenseefestival. Among the numerous works written for him are Avner Dorman's Frozen in Time, Friedrich Cerha's Percussion Concerto and Tan Dun's Tears of Nature. His first recording, Drums 'n' Chant, was followed by a live DVD recording of The Percussive Planet, both for Deutsche Grammophon. More: harrisonparrott.com, martingrubinger.com.

Sphinx Virtuosi

Since its founding in 2004, the Sphinx Virtuosi has distinguished itself as the most diverse professional chamber orchestra in the country. Comprising 18 of our nation's top Black and Latinx classical soloists, the ensemble tours annually as cultural ambassadors to communities far and wide. At once a bridge between communities of color and the classical music establishment, the ensemble continues to garner critical acclaim during its annual national tours to many of the leading venues around the country, including annual performances at Carnegie Hall.

Dedicated to new music and advancing the social impact of music upon our greater society, the Sphinx Virtuosi has pioneered the discovery of gems by composers of color, with the aim of expanding the canon and amplifying new and important voices. Collaborations with composers like Michael Abels, Kareem Roustom, Jimmy López, Gabriela Lena Frank, Jessie Montgomery, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Terence Blanchard and Xavier Foley are among the ensemble's artistic highlights.

As individual artists, members of the Sphinx Virtuosi have performed as soloists with America's major orchestras and hold professional orchestral positions, and several have been named Laureates of prestigious international competitions, including the Queen Elizabeth and Yehudi Menuhin competitions. Roster members are graduates of the nation's top music schools, including the Juilliard School, the Curtis and Cleveland Institutes of Music, the Eastman School and beyond. The Sphinx Virtuosi’s first recording was released on the White Pine label and features music of Felix Mendelssohn, Jean Sibelius, Gabriela Lena Frank and George Walker. Sphinx Virtuosi members are passionate about empowering the next generation of artists and audiences, and as such, enjoy building interactive, bilingual programs and working with schools in underrepresented communities. More: sphinxmusic.org.
Aldemaro Romero was a beloved figure in 20th-century Latin and Caribbean music, and his activities ranged far beyond his native Venezuela. Largely self-taught, as a young man he played piano in saloons and dance orchestras, touring throughout Central America. By 1950 he had emigrated to New York, and soon found work as an arranger at the record company RCA Victor. Thereafter he divided his time between the Americas, working with Dean Martin, Jerry Lee Lewis, Stan Kenton, Tito Puente and other musicians. Eventually his activities expanded to Europe and Japan. In the classical music world, he founded the Caracas Philharmonic in 1979 and was a popular guest conductor, particularly in the U.K. He was a key figure in developing Venezuela’s Onda Nueva (New Wave), a fusion of joropo—a fandango-like genre of Venezuelan creole music—and Brazilian bossa nova.

Fuga con Pajarillo, from Suite No. 1 for Strings
Premiered: ca. 1976

A unique fugue
The first movement from Romero’s Suite No. 1 for Strings has a unique name, Fuga con Pajarillo, that spans cultural and historical lines. Fuga is Spanish for fugue, the stringent form of imitative counterpoint perhaps made most famous by Bach, while Pajarillo is a diminutive of the Spanish word pájaro (bird).

In classical music, the fugue is the most rigorous type of musical counterpoint, or interacting melodies. A fugue generally begins with a main theme, or subject, stated alone, then joined by two or more additional musical lines, known as counter-subjects, which “answer” or restate the fugue subject. This musical chase continues for the duration of the fugue as subject and imitation are interwoven, punctuated by brief passages of transition between fugue entrances called free counterpoint.

Romero’s title—Fuga con Pajarillo—describes the movement’s structure: pajarillo is also a popular Venezuelan and Colombian dance in triple meter, usually accenting the second beat rather than the first. Latin flavor surfaces in the counter-subjects that embellish his angular fugue subject, which is clearly set forth in the opening measures. Romero’s limitation of the harmony to two chords is a solid foundation for his extraordinary variations complementing the fugue and his improvisatory episodes.

Instrumentation: strings

Romero: Fuga con Pajarillo
Pajarillo, a diminutive of the Spanish word for bird, is also the name of a popular Venezuelan and Colombian dance in triple meter, which inspired this fugal movement from a Suite for Strings by Venezuelan Aldemaro Romero.

Piazzolla: Fuga y misterio
Piazzolla’s complex fugue subject flirts with chromaticism and dissonance, using both Baroque traditions and jazz influences to speak in a new musical language.

Aho: Sieidi, Percussion Concerto
An imaginative tour de force for both soloist and orchestra, Aho’s Sieidi calls for a virtuoso percussionist playing hand-beaten drums, wooden mallet instruments and metal instruments, carefully set up to create both an audio and visual progression for the audience. The orchestra is tasked with such an important role that Aho has described the work as something of a concerto for orchestra as well as a concerto for percussion.

Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade
Scheherazade brings to life a fairy-tale world of palace romances, jubilant festivities and danger on the high seas. Solo violin portrays the title character in one of the most colorfully-orchestrated classical scores ever composed.
adia Boulanger, the legendary French composition teacher, once told Astor Piazzolla that he should write tangos, nothing but tangos, for that is where he would find his greatest success. He later recalled that “Nadia asked where, in all my works, was Piazzolla, for [my music] seemed to represent all kinds of things—but not Piazzolla. Once, she heard me play tango on the piano, and said to me, ‘There is Piazzolla—and there is the direction you must take.’” He took her advice, returned to his cultural roots, and went on to become one of Argentina’s most beloved popular musicians. Except for an 11-year stint in Paris from 1974 to 1985, he spent most of his career in Argentina, performing and composing operas, theatre pieces, film scores and chamber music.

“king of the tango”
Piazzolla found great success in capitalizing on the universal appeal of his native Argentina’s most famous dance. Nearly three decades after his death, he is still known as the “king of the tango” in his homeland. His list of works is peppered with examples: *Etudes tanguistiques* for flute, *Tango Suite* for two guitars, *Seven Tangos and Milongas* for solo guitar, and *Histoire du Tango* for flute and guitar, to name just a few. At the Minnesota Orchestra’s 2019 Sommerfest, two of his tango-themed orchestral works were performed: *The Four Seasons in Buenos Aires* and *Oblivion* from the film *Henry IV*.

*Fuga y misterio* is an instrumental interlude from Act I of Piazzolla’s 1968 operetta *Maria de Buenos Aires*. As the title suggests, it is dominated by a complex fugue subject that encapsulates Piazzolla’s style: rhythmically complex, harmonically tonal but flirting with unexpected chromaticism and dissonance, and strongly jazz-influenced. The combination of fugue and tango is representative of his eclectic means, in this case adapting a Baroque form to his own musical language. Piazzolla often used a three-part formal structures, as he does here; the *misterio* passage is a contrasting slow section between the fugue and a dynamic, truncated coda.

Fug y misterio became extremely popular in Argentina. In 1969, an influential Argentinian journalist, Bernardo Neustadt, chose *Fuga y misterio* as the theme music for his long-running evening news program, *Tiempo Nuevo*, which helped to make this piece one of Piazzolla’s best-loved compositions.

Instrumentation: strings

### Kalevi Aho

**Born:** March 9, 1949 in Forssa, Finland; currently living in Helsinki, Finland

**Sieidi, Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra**

**Premiered:** April 14, 2010

Thanks to the advocacy of Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä, Kalevi Aho has become a familiar name in the Twin Cities. In Vänskä’s and Aho’s homeland of Finland, Aho is one of the deans of composition. Throughout Europe he is widely regarded as the most significant Finnish symphonist since Sibelius. He completed his First Symphony in 1969, while studying with Einojuhani Rautavaara at the Sibelius Academy. To date he has completed 17 symphonies, three chamber symphonies, four operas and some three dozen concertos. Over the past two decades, he has focused on the concerto genre, intent upon composing one for every instrument—including some off-the-beaten-track instruments like theremin.

In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001), Ilkka Oramo describes Aho as “essentially a composer of large-scale works, which show the influence and spirit of Mahler and Shostakovich.” His percussion concerto *Sieidi*, which dates from 2010, is in keeping with this pattern, clocking in at about 36 minutes. Aho wrote *Sieidi* at the request of British percussionist Colin Currie, who introduced the work with the London Philharmonic eight years ago, with Osmo Vänskä conducting. Martin Grubinger has since added *Sieidi* to his repertoire, and has now performed it more than any other percussionist. The concerto has also become Aho’s most frequently-performed composition. This season alone has included performances in Hong Kong and Oulu, Finland, in addition to here in Minneapolis.

“a universal approach to ritual”

According to Aho’s composer’s note (translated into English by Susan Sinisalo), the title *Sieidi* is in Sámi, a language spoken
by an indigenous Finno-Ugric people living in the northernmost regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. **Sieidi**'s scope, however, extends beyond the musical traditions and customs of this region, as the composer states:

“**Their ancient culture is by nature shamanistic, and **Sieidi** denotes an ancient cult place such as an unusually shaped rock. The central idea behind the choice of title was [the premiere in a huge city], London. I wanted to remind the audience that there are many endangered cultural minorities around the world, and **Sieidi** thus also speaks for them.”

“**However, **Sieidi** does not represent only the Sámi of Finnish shamanistic ritual. The music opens with African **djembe** drumming followed by an Arabian **darabuka**. The soloist proceeds from European percussion instruments to [Asian] tamtam before returning in the reverse order. Some of the scales carry echoes of Arabian classical music. The starting point has thus been a universal approach to ritual and shamanism.”

**a visual boomerang**
Aho's score specifies the placement of the three orchestral percussionists (behind the orchestra, to its left, and to its right). He thus creates spatial effects, since the orchestral percussion plays a significant role in the work. The soloist's percussion complement at stage front is also carefully arranged so that the listener may follow the visual and sonic progression from hand-beaten instruments to those played with drumsticks, thence to the wood instruments, both pitched (marimba) and unpitched (wood blocks and temple blocks) and, finally, metal instruments: vibraphone (pitched) and tamtam (semi-pitched). Aho surprises us with a cadenza for tamtam, then reverses the soloist’s progression across the stage, in a sort of visual boomerang in slow motion.

Soloist Martin Grubinger points out that all the solo instruments have a spiritual tradition in their respective cultures: Africa and the Middle East, Europe, North America, Latin America and South America. Among these instruments are the **djembe**, a rope-tuned West African drum with a goblet shape, played with bare hands; and the **darabuka**, another goblet-shaped drum prominent in North African and Middle Eastern music.

Although **Sieidi** technically comprises one enormous movement, volcanic changes unfold as it progresses. While the solo percussionist rarely plays slowly, Aho includes some exquisite lyrical moments, such as a marimba duet with English horn. For the most part, however, the sectional structure is a **tour de force** for both soloist and orchestra. Aho has written with his customary coloristic imagination—for example, two startling and lovely saxophone solos, one migrating to oboe, the second migrating to clarinet. Ultimately, however, the audience's attention is likely to be riveted on the solo percussionist, whose hands often move at speeds that are a blur to the naked eye.

**Instrumentation:** solo percussion (darabuka, djembe, snare drum, tamtam, 4 temple blocks, 5 tom-toms, 2 wood blocks, marimba and vibraphone) with orchestra comprising piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drums, cymbals, suspended cymbals, castanets, handbells, tambourines, triangles and strings

**Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**
**Born:** March 18, 1844, Tikhvin, Russia  
**Died:** June 21, 1908, Liubensk, Russia

**Scheherazade, Opus 35**  
**Premiered:** October 28, 1888

In the artistic circles of late 19th-century Russia, a fascination with Middle Eastern and Asian cultures was very much in the air. Geography played a role in this movement, as Russia itself spans thousands of miles from west to east, subsuming vastly different cultures within its boundaries.

The rhythms and harmonies of Eastern music exerted a strong influence on Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite **Scheherazade**, inspired by the famous folk tale collection *One Thousand and One Nights*. When he began work on it in 1887, he had recently completed his friend Alexander Borodin's unfinished opera, *Prince Igor*, the music of which is heavily tinged with Eastern flavor. (Five years later, another Russian composer, Tchaikovsky, would produce well-known music along these cross-cultural lines, the Chinese and Arabian Dances from *The Nutcracker*.)

“**varied fairy-tale wonders**”
In his memoirs, Rimsky-Korsakov wrote of **Scheherazade**: “I had in view the creation of an orchestral suite in four movements, closely
knit by the community of its themes and motives, yet presenting, as it were, a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of Oriental character....All I desired was that the hearer, if he liked my piece as symphonic music, should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders.”

He placed a note at the head of his score recapitulating the story. Sultan Shahriar, convinced that all women are faithless, determines to put each of his wives to death after the first night. Clever Sultana Scheherazade saves herself one night after another by captivating her husband with different fairy tales and adventures. Driven by curiosity, the sultan repeatedly postpones her execution, eventually abandoning his bloodthirsty plan.

Curiously, in later life Rimsky-Korsakov spoke of aversion to an overly specific program for the Suite. While he acknowledged that the solo violin represented the silken voice of the gifted Sultana as she related her stories, he held that his technique was a musical unifier, rather than a programmatic device. The composer wanted the story to act as a catalyst for each individual listener’s imagination, rather than having us interpret the music as a literal illustration of the literary program.

Closing a chapter
Scheherazade was sketched in Petersburg in early 1888, completed during the summer while Rimsky-Korsakov was on holiday in the country, and premiered in St. Petersburg that late October. Along with his Russian Easter Overture and Capriccio espagnol, Rimsky-Korsakov felt that Scheherazade “...close[d] a period in my work, at the end of which my orchestration had attained a considerable degree of virtuosity and warm sonority without Wagnerian influence, limiting myself to the normally constituted orchestra used by Glinka.”

Rimsky-Korsakov rightly regarded Scheherazade as the peak of his orchestral achievement, though not necessarily his finest musical achievement. Perhaps the greatest glory of this suite is that the composer succeeded so completely in evoking his conception of an “Eastern” sound using the standard instruments of a Western orchestra. It is a veritable festival of sonic color: colorful cameo solos for nearly every instrument ingeniously weave together the different melodic lines that connect the music and evoke the magical spirit of the 1001 Arabian nights.

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


Concerto or Spotlight Solo?
A Q&A with Concertmaster Erin Keefe

The concertmaster has a unique role in Rimsky-Korsakov’s Scheherazade, a work that is not only an audience favorite, but also required repertoire for any orchestral concertmaster audition. Program annotator Laurie Shulman interviewed Minnesota Orchestra Concertmaster Erin Keefe about her approach to this iconic work.

How important is Scheherazade to your instrument’s solo literature?
Scheherazade contains undoubtedly one of the most famous violin solos in the entire orchestral repertoire.

How do you juggle the dual role of being a soloist as well as a section leader?
One of the most challenging aspects of a concertmaster’s job (and that of any other string principal, for that matter) is to play orchestral solos. It’s one thing to play a concerto where your only role is to be a soloist in front of the orchestra, but it’s quite different to be playing along with your section and then all of a sudden have to play a solo. I tend to approach it the way I do when I play chamber music: hardly ever am I playing completely by myself, so I try to interact and listen as much as possible to whichever other musicians are playing with me at that given moment. In this piece, it is often the harp.

Do you have a favorite spot in Scheherazade?
The end! After playing 40 minutes of intense and dramatic music, it finally winds down, and the concertmaster gets to play an incredibly beautiful solo which represents Scheherazade finally securing her life after the Sultan has realized he has fallen in love with her.

What special qualities do you strive for in your interpretation, in terms of violin tone or technique?
I find this piece quite challenging to play because many of the violin solos are so similar. The “main” melody is seemingly simple, but to make it sound fresh and different every time is very important. Most of the time I try to have a very rich, sultry sound, but there are other moments which are sweet and innocent. Generally I practice with certain timings and phrasing in mind, but when it comes to the concert I try to stay in the moment and leave it up to inspiration!

Does the concertmaster “drive the bus” in Scheherazade, or does the conductor?
It is a bit of both. For the majority of the piece everything is in the conductor’s hands; however, during the solos the concertmaster is more “in charge” and has the flexibility to make the artistic decisions.

Anything else that you would like to share?
This is only my second time performing this piece, and the first was [right after I joined] the Orchestra in 2011. I think I’d been here about three weeks! We only had one performance that time, which was [right after I joined] the Orchestra in 2011. I think I’d been here about three weeks! We only had one performance that time, so I’m looking forward to being able to change my interpretation from night to night.
Minnesota Orchestra
Pablo Heras-Casado, conductor
Augustin Hadelich, violin

Thursday, April 9, 2020, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, April 10, 2020, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, April 11, 2020, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Anton von Webern
Passacaglia, Opus 1  
ca. 11’

Benjamin Britten
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 15  
Moderato con moto
Vivace
Passacaglia: Andante lento (un poco meno mosso)
Augustin Hadelich, violin

INTERMISSION
ca. 20’

Johannes Brahms
Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Opus 98  
Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato

c. 40’

pre-concert
Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Augustin Hadelich  
Thursday, April 9, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, April 10, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine
Saturday, April 11, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

thank you
We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Kathy and John Junek in the presentation of these concerts.

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Webern: Passacaglia
Webern’s Passacaglia blends lush Romantic orchestration with the expanded harmonic language of the 20th century. Pizzicato strings announce the theme in the opening measures, and 23 imaginative variations follow.

Britten: Violin Concerto
In Britten’s musical statement of anguish over the Spanish Civil War, Spanish rhythms and dance figures interweave with a long lyrical melody for solo violin, leading to a cadenza (in these concerts, Augustin Hadelich performs his own) and a passacaglia, or set of passionate variations on a Spanish theme.

Johannes Brahms: Symphony No. 4
Brahms’ Fourth is a passionate work filled with high drama. From a first movement both warm and tragic, the symphony proceeds through a moody intermezzo and a rambunctious scherzo to a most unusual conclusion: a beautifully abstract set of variations on a Bach cantata.
This week’s performances of Anton Webern’s Passacaglia, his official first publication, come on the 75th anniversary year of the composer’s death. Webern had begun studying privately with Schoenberg in 1904, and the completion of the Passacaglia in the early months of 1908 marked the unofficial end of those studies. Webern led the Tonkünstlerverein Orchestra in the first performance in Vienna on November 4, 1908, just a month before his 25th birthday.

Looking Back–and Forward

A passacaglia was originally a dance form built on a repeating ground bass over which a composer would create a series of melodies, but it gradually evolved into one of the strictest of variation forms. As a form, the passacaglia was already old when Bach used it, and when Webern wrote his Passacaglia he was probably thinking of a more recent example: the finale of Brahms’ Fourth Symphony—the work that concludes this program—composed only 23 years earlier, in 1885.

If the form itself looks backward, Webern’s handling of it in many ways looks ahead to his mature music. He calls for a very large orchestra, then uses the ensemble with great delicacy and precision, often with just a handful of instruments playing. Also evident is another characteristic of the mature Webern: the most intense expressiveness compressed into the shortest spans. And already the composer is willing to experiment and make a form his own. The passacaglia was originally in a triple meter, but Webern’s Passacaglia is in 2/4 throughout.

To open the finale of his Fourth Symphony, Brahms shouted out his eight-bar ground bass with brass and woodwinds. By contrast, Webern’s presentation of his ground bass is striking for its understatement: it is announced ppp by pizzicato strings. Those stark and solitary notes, surrounded by silences, will form the foundation of the Passacaglia.

The Variations

In the first variation a solo flute, marked both pianissimo and espressivo, sings a lovely counter-theme to the ground bass, and this melody will figure importantly across the work’s 11-minute span—it evolves immediately into the clarinet theme of the second variation. Webern offers a total of 23 variations, and some observers have been at pains to see in the progression of these variations a sort of sonata form. But it is far better to take this music for itself rather than trying to shoehorn it into another pattern.

The Passacaglia is in D minor (Webern, who later became an exponent of atonality and 12-tone technique, is still willing to use a key signature in this work, despite the fact that the home tonality is under considerable tension throughout), though for four variations (Nos. 12 to 15) the music eases into D major for a sort of moonlit central episode. After this, the return to D minor, though very quiet, feels unusually ominous. As the Passacaglia drives to its extremely dramatic climax, Webern recalls several of his earlier variations, and a coda further develops several of these before the music subsides into inaudibility.

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

Program note by Eric Bromberger.

Benjamin Britten

Born: November 22, 1913, Lowestoft, England
Died: December 4, 1976, Aldeburgh, England
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 15
Premiered: March 28, 1941

Benjamin Britten came to the United States in 1939, when all was not well in the world, nor in Britten’s nascent career. “A discouraged young composer—muddled, fed-up, and looking for work, longing to be used”—that is how he described himself later. It was in St. Jovite, Quebec, that he finished his Violin Concerto in the summer of 1939, just before war engulfed Europe.
The Violin Concerto is in three movements, but, as in Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1, a work that had impressed Britten, the design is the familiar Classical and Romantic fast-slow-fast plan turned inside out. There is no actual slow movement, but an extremely quick and virtuosic scherzo is bracketed by two movements in varying tempos that range from fairly slow to fairly fast.

expression. Britten begins with his Spanish figure for drums and cymbal. Its third statement releases a series of sighs in the orchestra, and, while the Spanish figure continues, more elaborately scored, the solo violin enters with a long paragraph of lyric melody. A striking feature of that melody is the way it sways back and forth between major and minor. This conflict will be an issue throughout. After the orchestral winds extend and vary this melody, the violin, in percussive triple stops and backed by timpani, introduces another Spanish dance rhythm. This passage opens up into a march which you had best enjoy now, for it will not return. After a brief and agitated development Britten makes a poignant transition into the recapitulation: the violin plays rhapsodic figurations for the solo violin against a background of slow chords for just a few strings, with woodwinds recalling fragments of the march and muffled drums dropping in a single sinister reminder of the Spanish dance rhythms.

That tragic conflict has a bearing on the Violin Concerto. Britten's sympathies were with the Republicans, who were defeated with Fascist aid in March 1939. He had friends among the British volunteers who went to Spain to fight on the Republican side, and on a tour with the Spanish violinist Antonio Brosa, he himself witnessed some of the slaughter. It was to Brosa that Britten entrusted the editing and the first performance of the Violin Concerto, which was given with the New York Philharmonic under John Barbirolli on March 28, 1940 (we hear it today in Britten's Festival in 1937; and the Piano Concerto, in which he was soloist in the 1938 Proms in London. Critics at home, however, were generally hostile to anyone outside the English pastoral tradition. The foreign influences on Britten's music—notably Mahler and Shostakovich—did not help his position. Neither did his brilliance: “Too clever by half,” was the consensus. His loyalty to left-wing causes and his ties to such writers as W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood also made him a suspect figure.

Britten's discouragement was political as well as musical. The appeasement policies vis-a-vis Hitler and Mussolini of successive Tory governments enraged and depressed him. When Auden and Isherwood moved to the United States in January 1939, Britten made arrangements to follow. He took two unfinished scores, the Rimbaud song cycle Les illuminations and the Violin Concerto. His companion on the journey—and for life, as it turned out—was the tenor Peter Pears, whom he had met three years before when they had given a benefit recital for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War.

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an "inside-out" concerto: conflict, wit and a passacaglia finale

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mind another Britten’s passionate and formative musical loves, the
great 17th-century predecessor, Henry Purcell.

It is for this moment that Britten has saved the trombones, who
quietly cut across the end of the cadenza with the passacaglia
theme. This is a scale ascending and descending in alternating
whole- and half-steps, that pattern symbolizing another aspect
of the major-minor ambivalence. Britten begins with a series of
overlapped statements of this scale. Then come nine variations,
several of which also encompass more than one statement of
the theme: (1) “speaking” violin figurations over tremolando
strings; (2) the theme in the winds with more elaborate
violin commentary; (3) orchestra alone with oboe solo; (4) a
rhythmically free violin melody over a clear 3/4 accompaniment;
(5) the violin inverts the theme, then picks up the decorative
scales begun by the woodwinds; (6) a march; (7) a pedal E, the
theme in the bassoon, with swift, featherweight violin figurations;
and (8) grand, for orchestra alone.

The final variation is the keening lament toward which the whole
Concerto has tended. Over solemn orchestral chords the violin
sings out its anguish. At the close, Britten achieves extraordinary
intensity by having the violin climb to great altitudes, but on
the lowest string. The orchestra, ppp, comes to rest on an empty
D-chord, one without either the F sharp or the F natural that
would fix major nor minor. It is on just those two notes that the
violin sobs its final trill.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising
3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes
(1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons,
4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba,
timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum,
cymbals, suspended cymbals, triangle,
glockenspiel, harp and strings

Program note by the late Michael Steinberg, used with permission.
Brahms did not lay a finger on the work. And sure enough, by the end of the composer's life the Viennese public had gained a deeper appreciation not only for the Fourth, but for a whole career of symphonic music that it seemed to sum up. A performance of the Fourth in 1897, a month before the composer's death, indicated the depth of the shift of opinion.

Here is Florence May's description of the emotional evening: "A storm of applause broke out at the end of the first movement, not to be quieted until the composer, coming to the front of the artists' box in which he was seated, showed himself to the audience. An extraordinary scene followed the conclusion of the work. The applauding, shouting audience, its gaze riveted on the figure standing in the balcony, so familiar and yet in present aspect so strange, seemed unable to let him go.

"Tears ran down his cheeks as he stood there shrunken in form, with lined countenance, a strained expression, white hair hanging lank; and through the audience there was a feeling as of a stifled sob, for they knew that they were saying farewell."

Four weeks later, hordes of admirers turned out for the composer's funeral.

**tragedy of the classical kind**

*allegro non troppo.* The first movement is uniquely tragic in tone, yet glowing with an inner warmth that is unprecedented in Brahms' orchestral output. "It acts its tragedy with unsurpassable variety of expression and power of climax," Tovey writes. One is tempted to wonder why tragedy should sound so beautiful. Some have also found echoes of Beethoven's _Hammerklavier_ Sonata in the obsessive descending thirds. (Brahms' appreciation of late Beethoven had deepened recently as a result of hearing his works played by Bülow, who was also one of the great pianists of his day.)

*andante moderato.* The slow movement is a moody intermezzo, lightening the tone to take some of the first movement's weight from the listener's chest.

*allegro giocoso.* Likewise is the third movement, one of the composer's splashiest and most "bacchanalian" scherzos. Its finale-like fervor caused Tovey to ask, "After three movements so full of dramatic incident, what finale is possible?"

*allegro energico e passionato.* The finale Brahms devised for the Fourth Symphony was indeed singular, and was the chief point of controversy when the symphony was introduced. It was perhaps also the work's chief point of contact with the last Beethoven piano sonatas, and with the Renaissance and Baroque music that had recently occupied Brahms the scholar. It is a set of variations on the bass from Bach's Cantata No. 150, *Nach Dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (For Thee, Lord, Do I Long).

Brahms inflects the bassline with a tiny, "Romanticizing" chromatic alteration before submitting it to a set of variations that gradually reduces the "theme" to a vague, schematized scaffolding. Such a procedure calls to mind not only Baroque works such as Bach's Chaconne for solo violin but also the variation movements of late Beethoven. The Opus 111 Sonata, Beethoven's last, also ends with an ethereal set of variations whose theme is slowly reduced, bit by bit, to little more than an abstract harmonic skeleton.

In retrospect, the orchestral variations were perhaps the only way Brahms could have ended the Fourth Symphony—with a conservative twist that set musical limits by evoking Baroque harmonic ideals, yet creating closure through subtle thematic reminiscences and a reduction to harmonic essentials.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle and strings

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**Program note by Paul Horsley.**

The Minnesota Orchestra, then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, gave its initial performance of *Webern's Passacaglia* on December 10, 1948, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with Dimitri Mitropoulos conducting. Later that month, the New York Philharmonic designated Mitropoulos and Leopold Stokowski as its next co-principal conductors, making 1948-49 Mitropoulos' final season in Minnesota.

The Orchestra first performed Britten's *Violin Concerto* on January 9, 1991, at Orchestra Hall, under the baton of Edo de Waart with the Orchestra's concertmaster, Jorja Fleezanis, as soloist. A week later, Operation Desert Storm, the military campaign to liberate Kuwait, began as a U.S.-led coalition launched an aerial bombardment of Iraq.

The Orchestra introduced audiences to Brahms' *Fourth Symphony* on November 11, 1910, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer on the conductor's podium. That same year, the Orchestra launched its first regional performance tour financed by the Orchestra itself; its three prior tours had been funded personally by Oberhoffer.
Park and Ainomäe Play Brahms  
May 1–2 8pm  
Klaus Mäkelä, conductor  
Susie Park, violin  
Silver Ainomäe, cello  

Troupe Vertigo: Cirque Dances with the Minnesota Orchestra  
May 8 8pm / May 9 2pm  
Kazem Abdullah, conductor  
Troupe Vertigo  

Gerstein Plays Rachmaninoff: Paganini Rhapsody  
May 14 11am / May 15–16 8pm  
Osmo Vänskä, conductor  
Kirill Gerstein, piano  
Minnesota Chorale  

Anthony Ross, Stravinsky and Mozart  
May 28 11am / May 29 8pm  
Michael Francis, conductor  
Anthony Ross, cello  

Symphony in 60: Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony  
May 30 6pm  
Michael Francis, conductor  

Yoga Class at Orchestra Hall  
May 31 10am  
Adam Kuenzel, flute  
Courtney Perry, instructor  

Chamber Music Series Finale  
May 31 2pm  

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PHOTOS: Park, Ainomäe: Nate Ryan; Troupe Vertigo: George Simian. All programs, artists, dates, times and prices subject to change.
Common Chords: The Minnesota Orchestra in Austin

Minnesota Orchestra
Akiko Fujimoto, conductor

Saturday, April 25, 2020, 7 pm | Knowlton Auditorium, Austin High School, Austin, Minn.

This concert 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. Additional support is provided by The Hormel Foundation and U.S. Bank.

William Grant Still  Lento, con risoluzione – Piu mosso, from Symphony No. 1, Afro-American  ca. 9’

Antonín Dvořák  Largo, from Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Opus 95, From the New World  ca. 12’

Aaron Copland  Appalachian Spring (1945 orchestration)  ca. 24’

INTERMISSION  ca. 20’

Claude Debussy  Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun  ca. 10’

Igor Stravinsky  Suite from The Firebird (1919 revision)
   Introduction and Dance of the Firebird
   Dance of the Princesses
   Infernal Dance of King Kashchei
   Berceuse
   Finale  ca. 23’
Still: Lento, con risoluzione – Piu mosso, from Symphony No. 1, Afro-American
Still's Afro-American Symphony blends two musical cultures into one, combining elements of jazz and African American spirituals with European classical forms. The fourth movement of his symphony—which opens tonight's program—originally carried the title Aspiration, and the music is appropriately filled with hope and optimism.

Dvořák: Largo, from Symphony No. 9, From the New World
While visiting America in the early 1890s, Dvořák composed the New World Symphony, drawing inspiration from Native American and African American music, although the melodies are Dvořák's own—most famously the poignant tune introduced by English horn in the slow second movement.

Copland: Appalachian Spring
Copland's ballet suite is pure musical Americana, telling the tale of a young pioneer couple in rural Pennsylvania through square dances, country fiddling and a famous finale built on the Shaker song Simple Gifts.

Debussy: Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun
A sleeping faun, represented by a languid, sensual flute solo, dreams of a romantic tryst with forest nymphs. Like the poem it is based on, this music is impressionistic—offering a series of sensations without formal structure.

Stravinsky: Suite from The Firebird
The heroic Prince Ivan and a magical Firebird are revealed with brilliant orchestral colors. The gentle dance of captive princesses, the prince's effort to free them, the evil sorcerer's defeat by the Firebird—all is painted in the most vivid musical imagery.
William Grant Still's achievements in classical music were impressive and groundbreaking: he was the first African American to have a symphony performed by the New York Philharmonic, the first to conduct the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the first to have an opera staged by a major opera company, the New York City Opera, to name just a few landmarks. The son of a bandmaster and a high school English teacher, he began his musical career working as an arranger for W.C. Handy and Artie Shaw. Following his naval service during World War I, he made his home in Harlem, where he took part in the African American Harlem Renaissance artistic and cultural movement. By the time of his death in 1978, he had composed nearly 200 works, including five symphonies.

Many of Still's works, particularly those composed in the 1920s and '30s, deal expressly with African American history, identity and musical traditions, including the orchestral works African Suite, Symphony No. 1—known as the Afro-American Symphony—and In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy. The Afro-American Symphony, which remains Still's best-known and most frequently-heard work, was premiered in October 1931 by the Rochester Philharmonic, marking the first time a major orchestra performed a symphony by an African American composer. (Two years later, Florence Price followed suit as the first African American woman to achieve the feat.)

Today's performance features the symphony's final movement, titled Lento, con risoluzione – Piu mosso. In it, a slow and noble 12-bar blues theme, initially marked “organ-like,” is freely developed through assorted tempos. Still employs surprising key changes, sonic effects such as muted trumpets, and—as just as we think the symphony may be set for a slow and soft close—a sudden leap to a rapid Vivace in 6/8 time, followed by a triumphant Maestoso finale.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, small cymbal, tam-tam, wood block, glockenspiel, vibraphone and strings

Program note by Carl Schroeder.

Dvořák's Symphony No. 9, the New World Symphony, was one of many works the composer wrote during his sojourn in America from 1892 to 1895. Although the New World Symphony was written in the New World, it is not specifically about the New World. True, there are themes that could be construed as being “authentic” songs of American Indians or African Americans, but in fact, he did not quote from folk songs—he composed his own, based on study of the source material.

One “New World” aspect of this symphony is the role played by Longfellow's epic poem The Song of Hiawatha, which Dvořák had read in Czech translation some 30 years earlier. He re-read the poem in America and claimed that the scene of Minnehaha's funeral in the forest inspired the Largo movement of his symphony.

A famous Largo movement
The New World Symphony's second movement contains one of the most famous themes in all classical music, known to many as the song “Goin' home.” The theme, though inspired by African American spirituals, is Dvořák's own; one of his students, William Arms Fisher, superimposed the words of “Goin' home” after Dvořák had completed the symphony. This theme, presented by the English horn, is in the key of D-flat major, which is harmonically

Program Notes
distant from the key of the first movement, E minor. Dvořák arrives at the new key through a sequence of just seven somber chords played by low woodwinds and brass, beginning in E minor and ending in D-flat major. The effect is effortless, even magical, “like the drawing back of a curtain revealing the scene to the spectators’ gaze,” to quote biographer Otakar Šourek.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

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Innovative modern style. (Copland's original working title for the ballet was “Ballet for Martha.”)

“When I wrote Appalachian Spring, I was thinking primarily about Martha and her unique choreographic style, which I knew well,” the composer wrote. “Nobody else seems quite like Martha: she's so proud, so very much herself. And she's unquestionably very American: there's something prim and restrained, simple yet strong, about her which one tends to think of as American.”

Graham and Copland had often planned to collaborate, but it was not until Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge attended a Graham performance in early 1942 that funding became available. The fabulously generous benefactress commissioned Graham to create three new ballets for the 1943 Fall Festival of the Coolidge Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Appalachian Spring was one of those three, but it didn't get to the stage that year. Graham's script was delayed, so Copland didn't finish the score until June 1944. The premiere that October in Washington—with Graham, Merce Cunningham and May O'Donnell in the company—was a full year later than originally planned. Louis Horst conducted the 13-member chamber ensemble for which the piece was originally composed.

**Appalachian Spring**

Premiered: October 30, 1944 (original ballet for chamber ensemble);
October 4, 1945 (suite for full orchestra)

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Onality in serious music seems to come in waves. In the 1980s it became “permissible” among academic composers to write accessible music again, in a sea-change that some called “the new Romanticism.”

But such shifts in fashion and dogma are seen through the centuries. When Aaron Copland returned to the United States from Paris in 1924, he entered what he called a “period of austerity,” during which he explored 12-tone composition and other modern techniques. Then, toward the end of the 1930s, he found himself dissatisfied with the state of American music, and with the relationship of composers to their audiences.

“The conventional concert public continued apathetic or indifferent to anything but the established classics,” he wrote in 1941. “It seemed to me that we composers were in danger of working in a vacuum. I felt it was worth the effort to see if I couldn't say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.” It was in this spirit that Copland embarked upon a series of enduring works that assured his position as the quintessential American classical composer: Fanfare for the Common Man, the ballet Rodeo, A Lincoln Portrait and Appalachian Spring.

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**the Martha Graham factor**

The spark for Appalachian Spring was choreographer Martha Graham, who had helped re-make American dance with her

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The suite from the ballet created for full orchestra in 1945, and given its premiere that year by Artur Rodzinski and the New York Philharmonic, is the form in which it is best known today. The suite is in eight sections played without pause. Copland himself summarized it:

**very slowly.** Introduction of the characters, one by one.

**fast.** Sudden burst of unison strings in A-major arpeggios starts the action.

**moderate.** Duo for the bride and her intended; scene of tenderness and passion.
quite fast. The revivalist and his flock.
still faster. Solo dance of the bride; presentiment of motherhood.
very slowly. Transition scene.
calm and flowing. Scenes of daily activity for the bride and her farmer husband. There are five variations on a Shaker theme... published under the title “The Gift to be Simple.”
moderato. The bride takes her place among her neighbors. At the end the couple are left in their new house.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, claves, tabor, triangle, wood block, glockenspiel, xylophone, harp, piano and strings

Program note by Paul Horsley.

Claude Debussy
Born: August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France
Died: March 25, 1918, Paris, France

Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun
Premiered: December 22, 1894

His shimmering, endlessly beautiful music is so familiar to us—and so loved—that it is difficult to comprehend how problematic it was for audiences in the years after its premiere in December 1894. Saint-Saëns was outraged: “[It] is pretty sound, but it contains not the slightest musical idea in the real sense of the word. It’s as much a piece of music as the palette a painter has worked from is a painting.”

We smile, but Saint-Saëns had a point. Though it lacks the savagery of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring, the Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun may be an even more revolutionary piece of music, for it does away with musical form altogether. This is not music to be grasped intellectually, but simply to be heard and felt.

Debussy based this work on the poem “L’après-midi d’un faune” by his close friend, the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. The poem itself is dreamlike, a series of impressions and sensations rather than a narrative. It tells of the languorous memories of a faun on a sleepy afternoon as he recalls an amorous encounter the previous day with two passing forest nymphs. This encounter may or may not have taken place, and the faun’s memories—subject to drowsiness, warm sunlight, forgetfulness and drink—grow vague and finally blur into sleep.

a soft and sensual world
Like the faun’s dream, Debussy’s music lacks specific direction. The famous opening flute solo (the faun’s pipe?) draws us into this soft, sensual world. The middle section, introduced by woodwinds, may be a subtle variation of the opening flute melody—it is a measure of this dreamy music that we cannot be sure. The opening theme returns to lead the music to its glowing close.

Audiences have come to love this music precisely for its sunlit mists and glowing sound, but it is easy to understand why it troubled early listeners. Beneath its shimmering and gentle beauties lies an entirely new conception of what music might be.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, antique cymbals, 2 harps and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.

Igor Stravinsky
Born: June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia
Died: April 6, 1971, New York City

Suite from The Firebird (1919 revision)
Premiered: June 25, 1910 (original ballet)

In 1909, following a successful visit of the Ballets Russes to Paris, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev and his choreographer Michel Fokine made plans for a new ballet to be presented in Paris the following season and based on the old Russian legend of the Firebird. They decided to take a chance on an unknown young composer named Igor Stravinsky. Recognizing that this was his big chance, Stravinsky set to work in November 1909 and finished the score the following spring. The first performance, in Paris on June 25, 1910, was a huge success. Though Stravinsky would go on to write quite different music over the remainder of his long career, the music from The Firebird remains his most popular creation. Of the three concert suites Stravinsky drew from the ballet score, the 1919 revision heard here is performed most often.

a tale of enchantment
The Firebird tells of a young prince, Ivan Tsarevich, who pursues the magic Firebird—part woman, part bird—into the garden of
the ogre Kashchei, who imprisons maidens in the castle and turns all knights who come to rescue them to stone. Ivan captures the Firebird, who gives him a magic feather when he releases her. The prince sees 13 princesses playing with golden apples, and when at dawn they hurry back to Kashchei’s castle, he follows them. The monsters there capture him and he is about to be turned to stone himself when he waves the magic feather—and the Firebird returns, puts the ogres to sleep and shows him where a magic egg is hidden. When Ivan breaks the egg, Kashchei and his fiends disappear, the petrified knights return to life, the maidens are freed, and Ivan marries the most beautiful of the princesses.

magical music

The Introduction brings one of Stravinsky’s most striking orchestral effects: a series of rippling string arpeggios played entirely in harmonics. The composer wanted to create here a Catherine-wheel effect, that of fireworks spinning and throwing off light. The music proceeds into the shimmering, whirling Dance of the Firebird, Stravinsky’s own favorite music from this score.

In the Dance of the Princesses Stravinsky uses the old Russian folk tune “In the Garden.” The Infernal Dance of King Kashchei begins with one of the most violent orchestral attacks ever written. Sharply syncopated rhythms and barbaric growls depict the fiends’ efforts to resist the Firebird’s spell.

In its aftermath, solo bassoon sings the gentle Berceuse with which the Firebird lulls Kashchei and his followers to sleep, and this leads through a magical passage for tremolo strings into the Finale. Here solo horn announces the main theme, based on another Russian folksong, “By the Gate.” Beginning quietly, this noble tune drives The Firebird to a magnificent conclusion on music of general rejoicing.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.

The Minnesota Orchestra, originally known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, first visited Austin, Minnesota, in 1911, returning subsequently in 1912, 1947, 1949, and 10 times in the 1950s and ’60s. Its most recent performance at Austin High School came on October 17, 1971, in a concert conducted by Stanislaw Skrowaczewski that included the work that concludes tonight’s program, Stravinsky’s Firebird.

The Minnesota Orchestra—in one of its final concerts under the name Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra—first performed a movement from Still’s Afro-American Symphony on July 22, 1968, at Minneapolis’ Sumner Field, on July 22, 1968, with Paul Freeman conducting. The following month, Vice President and former Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey was nominated as the Democratic candidate for President at a contentious convention in Chicago.

The Orchestra’s initial performance of Dvořák’s New World Symphony came on December 1, 1903—in the ensemble’s third-ever concert—at Minneapolis’ International Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting. Later that month, the Wright Brothers made the first-ever controlled powered airplane flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

The Orchestra gave its first performance of Copland’s Appalachian Spring on February 28, 1947, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium. Earlier that month the Orchestra performed for the first time at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York—the first concert of its kind in the post’s history arranged entirely by the cadets, who sponsored the event and hustled all the baggage, instruments and scores from the station to the war department theater.

The Orchestra introduced audiences to Debussy’s Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun on December 19, 1913, at the Minneapolis Auditorium under the baton of Emil Oberhoffer. It recorded the work nearly 90 years later, in May 2002, under the direction of Eiji Oue for the Reference Recordings label.

Orchestra audiences heard music from Stravinsky’s Firebird on November 3, 1916, also at the Minneapolis Auditorium with Oberhoffer conducting. Stravinsky himself conducted the Orchestra in the Firebird Suite on December 20, 1940, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium.
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Francesco Piemontesi performing Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G major with the Orchestra, February 2020. Photo: Greg Helgeson

The Orchestra’s trumpet section playing Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra, February 2020. Photo: Greg Helgeson
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Soprano Danielle Beckvermit and Lisa Marie Rogali performing Theo Chandler’s Songs from Brooches at a MusicMakers concert, January 2020. Photo: Greg Helgeson

Music Director Osmo Vänskä leading the Orchestra in a Midwest tour performance at the University of Michigan, January 2020. Photo: Peter Smith

Trumpet soloist Tine Thing Helseth at center stage in Tomasi’s Trumpet Concerto under Eivind Gullberg Jensen’s direction. Photo: Joseph Scheller
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