Minnesota Orchestra
Andrey Boreyko, conductor
Orion Weiss, piano

Thursday, May 30, 2019, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, May 31, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Victoria Borisova-Ollas
The Kingdom of Silence ca. 15’

George Gershwin
Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra
Allegro
Adagio – Andante con moto
Allegro agitato
Orion Weiss, piano

INTERMISSION ca. 20’

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

Witold Lutosławski
Concerto for Orchestra
Intrada
Capriccio notturno e arioso
Passacaglia, toccata e corale ca. 26’

Cultural Appropriation Panel Discussion with Garrett McQueen
Thursday, May 30, 10 am, Auditorium
Friday, May 31, 7 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

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.
Artists

Orion Weiss, piano

Orion Weiss, who made his Minnesota Orchestra debut in 2005, has performed with numerous American orchestras including the Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic. His 2018-19 season includes performances at the Lucerne Festival, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, University of Iowa, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center’s Fortas Series, the 92nd Street Y and the Broad Stage, as well as an engagement with the Albany Symphony. In 2017-18 he performed Beethoven’s Triple Concerto with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, toured with James Ehnes and soloed with 12 orchestras around the United States. Named the Classical Recording Foundation’s Young Artist of the Year in 2010, he made his debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood in 2011 as a last-minute replacement for Leon Fleisher. In 2004, he graduated from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax. More: orionweiss.com.

Andrey Boreyko, conductor

Now in his fifth season as music director of Artis—Naples, Andrey Boreyko is known for his inspiring leadership and for raising artistic standards, bringing a new intensity to the Naples Philharmonic, and leading the ensemble to commission new works by Fazil Say, Giya Kancheli, Gabriel Prokofiev and other composers. Beginning in the 2019-20 season, he will become the music and artistic director of the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra. His 2018-19 season started with a tour with the Filarmonica della Scala, and includes notable engagements with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Austrian Radio at the Musikverein, Frankfurter Museums-Gesellschaft, Hamburg Philharmonic at the Elbphilharmonie, Salzburg Mozarteum at the Grossesfestspielhaus, San Francisco Symphony, Toronto Symphony and Sydney Symphony. This week’s concerts mark his Minnesota Orchestra debut. Highlights of his past European engagements include concerts with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw and London Symphony. In North America, he has conducted major orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic. More: imgartists.com.

one-minute notes

Borisova-Ollas: The Kingdom of Silence

The Kingdom of Silence is a dreamlike perspective of the afterlife, a kind of lullaby in memory of another composer, Victoria Borisova-Ollas’ mentor Nikolai Korndorf.

Gershwin: Piano Concerto in F

Gershwin initially called this his New York Concerto, and indeed it captures the spirit of Manhattan in the Roaring Twenties. The outer movements employ dance rhythms, particularly the Charleston, while the Adagio is poetic and nocturnal.

 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.

Lutosławski: Concerto for Orchestra

A bold musical statement and a virtuoso vehicle for the entire ensemble, this music contains drama ranging from an almost inaudible percussion duet to screaming brass and a 14-part texture spanning five full octaves.
Often the question of “nationality” arises in music. Does a French composer necessarily write “French” music? Does a Russian composer sound “Russian,” especially if she is highly influenced by her studies in the West? This question is often put to contemporary composer Victoria Borisova-Ollas, born in 1969 in Vladivostok, nearly 6,000 miles from Moscow, in the far eastern corner of Russia. (Beijing is a relatively close 800 miles!) Rather than be pegged as a Russian composer—whatever that may mean—she asserts that “my music is just a healthy blend of everything.”

Indeed, Borisova-Ollas was born late enough to enjoy the freedoms of a changing Soviet political system—such as the freedom to travel and study in the West—but also early enough to benefit from the excellent Soviet system of music education. In this case, the aspiring young composer traveled to Moscow to attend the Central Music School and then the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. There, she studied with a brilliant teacher, the composer Nikolai Kondorf (1947–2001) to whom she dedicated her 2003 work *The Kingdom of Silence* as a musical memorial to her mentor. Kondorf—a highly-respected composer and larger-than-life personality among his generation of Russian composers—died suddenly while playing soccer with friends in 2001 at age 54. *The Kingdom of Silence* was commissioned by the Gothenburg Art Sounds Festival in 2003 in Rikskonserter, Sweden, and won the prestigious and financially-rewarding Rosenberg Prize, granted by the Society of Swedish Composers.

*“the mysterious country”*

Borisova-Ollas aims to write music meant to communicate images, sensations, perhaps even messages to her audience, all qualities evident in *The Kingdom of Silence*. Her messages are often religious in nature, her main source of inspiration being the Biblical book of Psalms. The titles she chooses for her works, often drawn from sacred texts, are the point of departure for her process. She says the moment she chooses a title, images begin to flood her imagination. She writes of this piece:

“The mysterious country where we all should go to after our lifetime has many different names, *The Kingdom of Silence* is one of them. The title is a free interpretation of one of the Psalms from the Bible. The words describe, in a very poetic way, the world to which all of us must go after we die. It is dedicated to Nikolai Kondorf, who was my teacher at the Moscow Conservatory. I guess it’s a kind of a Requiem in a very small format, dedicated to his memory.”

It takes a huge orchestra to perform this work, including triple and quadruple winds and brass, timpani, three percussionists, harp, piano, celesta and strings. Yet despite this large array of instrumental forces, *The Kingdom of Silence* starts as a hazy lullaby, with the glockenspiel and celesta etching out a simple melody, over pulsating string tremolos. Gradually we sink into a dream as different scenes appear in succession, with sudden change of moods. The opening “lullaby” bookends the piece, marking the end of the long series of dreamscapes. But the dream itself—does it ever end?

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling alto flute), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, 2 cymbals, 6 Thai gongs, mark tree, 3 tamtams, temple blocks, tom-toms, 4 wood blocks, marimba, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

Program note by Michael Adams.

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George Gershwin

**Born:** September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, New York  
**Died:** July 11, 1937, Beverly Hills, California

**Concerto in F for Piano and Orchestra**  
**Premiered:** December 3, 1925

The success of *Rhapsody in Blue* in February 1924 propelled Gershwin overnight from a talented Broadway composer to someone taken seriously in the world of concert music. When conductor Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Society asked Gershwin to compose a piano concerto the following year, the young composer accepted eagerly—the commission, signed in April 1925, would pay him $500 for the new concerto.

**Youth and enthusiasm**

There is no truth to the story, told many times, that Gershwin left the meeting with Damrosch and went straight to a bookstore to buy a book on musical form so that he would know what a piano concerto was. But this story does point to a larger truth: Gershwin was entering an unfamiliar musical world. Ferde Grofé had orchestrated *Rhapsody in Blue* for Gershwin, but now the composer...
was anxious to do that work himself. He wanted to be taken seriously as a classical composer.

Gershwin had at first planned to call the piece *New York Concerto*, but his desire for respectability won out, and he settled on *Piano Concerto in F* (it may be a mark of the breezy spirit of this music that it is always called that, rather than the more formal *Piano Concerto in F major*). F. Scott Fitzgerald nicknamed the twenties “The Jazz Age” (*The Great Gatsby* was published in the same year Gershwin wrote this concerto), and jazz was very much in the air in 1925—but Gershwin insisted that the *Concerto in F* was not a jazz piece. Though the concerto employs Charleston rhythms and a blues trumpet, Gershwin wanted it taken as a piece of serious music, one intended to represent “the young, enthusiastic spirit of American life.”

**the concerto in brief**

The *Concerto in F* takes the basic form of the classical concerto: a sonata-form first movement, a lyric second movement and a rondo-finale.

**allegro.** The *Allegro* opens with a great flourish of timpani followed by the characteristic Charleston rhythm. Solo bassoon introduces the first theme, gradually taken up by the full orchestra, and the piano makes its entrance with the wonderful second subject, sliding up from the depths on a long glissando into the lazily-syncopated tune. Gershwin was willing to bend classical form for his own purposes, and he described this first movement: “It’s in sonata-form—but.” It concludes with a *grandioso* restatement by full orchestra of the piano’s opening tune and an exciting coda based on the Charleston theme.

**adagio – andante con moto.** Gershwin said that the slow movement “has a poetic nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues...” He contrasts the trumpet’s bluesy opening with the piano’s snappy entrance on a variant of the same tune and then alternates these ideas across the span of the movement.

**allegro agitato.** Gershwin described the *Allegro agitato* finale as “an orgy of rhythm,” and the opening plunges the pianist and orchestra into a perpetual-motion-like frenzy. At the end, Gershwin brings back the *grandioso* string tune from the first movement, and the *Concerto in F* rushes to a knock-out close.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, gong, slaptop, triangle, wood block, xylophone, glockenspiel and strings

Program Notes

**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

This 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
the years following World War II were very difficult for Poland. After the devastation of the war and the Nazi occupation, Poland found itself under the domination of the Soviet Union, and in the icy early days of the Cold War the Polish government laid down a set of strictures on its composers: music was to be accessible to the masses, inspiring and uncomplicated. Anything that deviated from this model was forbidden. When Lutosławski’s First Symphony was premiered in 1949, Russian critics walked out, one of Poland’s cultural commissars remarked that the composer should be thrown under a streetcar, and further performances were banned. Lutosławski, then in his mid-30s, found himself writing film scores and children’s songs just to survive as a composer.

the tide turns

Things began to change in 1950, however. The conductor Witold Rowicki, who was re-forming the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra, asked Lutosławski to write a piece for the orchestra, stipulating that it was to be brief and not too difficult. What the orchestra got, however, was something quite different. And they had to wait for it.

As Lutosławski worked on the new piece, it grew longer and more complex; he did not finish it until August 1954, four years after the commission. The “brief piece” now stretched to nearly half an hour, and instead of being “not too hard,” it was music of incandescent difficulty, fully deserving the title Concerto for Orchestra. The premiere, conducted by Rowicki in Warsaw on November 26, 1954, was a triumph, and the work brought its composer fame outside the boundaries of Poland and the Soviet empire.

folk idioms à la Bartók

Any work titled Concerto for Orchestra inevitably faces comparison with Bartók’s magnificent work of that same title, composed only a decade earlier. Lutosławski, too, based his Concerto for Orchestra on folk music, though he turned to a published collection of Polish folk tunes from Mazovia—a region that includes Warsaw, home to the population known as the Mazurs and to the mazurka. Bartók’s themes were largely his own, but Lutosławski took the themes from Mazovia, broke them down into intervals and fragments, and from these made his own themes. The Concerto for Orchestra is in three movements, and Lutosławski consciously puts the emphasis on the finale, which is longer than the first two movements combined.

intrada. The first movement’s title, which sometimes refers to processional music, simply implies an opening. Lutosławski gives this music a grand beginning with the recurrent pound of a deep F-sharp powering the movement forward (was the beginning of Brahms’ First Symphony running through his mind as he imagined this?). This pulse continues throughout much of the Intrada, and very quickly cellos sing the main theme, a folk-music-derived theme that Lutosławski marks aggressivo on its every appearance. It alternates with more lyrical episodes marked cantando. As the Intrada progresses its character changes: the music grows soft, and suddenly the ear realizes that the pulsing F-sharp of the beginning has moved from the very bottom of the orchestra into its highest register. Now it rings very delicately in the celesta as the movement glides to its unexpected conclusion on a major seventh chord that Lutosławski marks perpendosi: “suspended.”

capriccio notturno e arioso. The work’s second movement, a scherzo, falls into the traditional ternary form. Its nocturnal quality is apparent from the first instant, as muted strings skitter along delicately (the composer marks this opening mormorando, “murmuring”). Out of this whirling tracery, the Arioso explodes to life on a strident fanfare for four trumpets, then the opening material is recalled, and the movement taps itself into silence on the sound of quietly-rolling drums.

passacaglia, toccata e corale. The huge finale falls into two different sections. It begins with a long Passacaglia whose ground bass is plucked out by harp and contrabasses. This bass-line repeats 18 times as a complex web of thematic transformations is heard above it, and then the Toccata races ahead on some quite brilliant music (its principal theme is derived from the passacaglia bass and material in the Intrada). The writing for orchestra is quite vivid here, and along the way Lutosławski interrupts its exciting progress with a somber chorale for winds. The rush of the toccata resumes, the music builds in power and speed, and at the climax the chorale theme blazes out before the Concerto for Orchestra races to its conclusion on a Presto coda that should send a shower of sparks throughout the hall.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, 3 snare drums without snares, field drum, tenor drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, tamtam, xylophone, glockenspiel, 2 harps, piano, celesta and strings

Program notes on the Gershwin, Debussy and Lutosławski works by Eric Bromberger.