Minnesota Orchestra
Kent Nagano, conductor
Till Fellner, piano

Thursday, June 6, 2019, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, June 7, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart
Concerto No. 20 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, K. 466 ca. 28’
Allegro
Romance
Rondo: Allegro assai
Till Fellner, piano

INTERMISSION ca. 20’

Anton Bruckner
Symphony No. 6 in A major ca. 54’
Maestoso
Adagio: Very solemn
Scherzo: Not fast – Trio: Slow
Finale: Moving, but not too fast

Minneapolis 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**

**Till Fellner, piano**

Austrian pianist Till Fellner debuted with the Minnesota Orchestra in 1997, when he performed Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 25, and was last heard here in 2000 playing Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 20. The stormier of Mozart’s two minor-key piano concertos, No. 20 was a powerful and popular solo vehicle for the young Beethoven. The high-energy *Allegro*, with a witty exchange between soloist and orchestra, gives way to a songful second movement and a finale full of surprises, including an enchanting theme playfully offered by woodwinds.

**Bruckner: Symphony No. 6**

Though it is rarely performed—only twice before by the Minnesota Orchestra—the Sixth Symphony has a tone which is unmistakably Brucknerian, from blazing brass and strings to sonorous woodwind solos, with an ostinato rhythm that unites the work’s beginning and end.

**Kent Nagano, conductor**

Grammy Award-winning conductor Kent Nagano has been music director of the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal since 2006. In 2013 he became artistic advisor and principal guest conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. In 2015 he took up the position of general music director of the Hamburg State Opera and chief conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra. Since 2006 he has been appointed honorary conductor of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. His 2018-19 season includes a tour with Orchestre symphonique de Montréal into the arctic Quebec and a tour through Spain with the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg, plus premieres of Schumann’s *Scenes from Goethe’s Faust* and George Benjamin’s *Lessons in Love and Violence* with the Hamburg State Opera, as well as performances of a complete Wagner *Ring* cycle. This week’s performances are his first with the Minnesota Orchestra since his debut here in 1995, when he led Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*. He has worked with most of the world’s finest orchestras and has an ongoing recording relationship with Decca and Sony Classical. More: harrisonparrott.com.

**Beethoven’s First Piano Concerto**

His 2018-19 season also includes return performances with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and the Pittsburgh Symphony, and an extensive tour with cellist Johannes Moser around Europe and the U.S. His other recent performance highlights include his debut with the New York Philharmonic and a return visit to the Chicago Symphony. He came to the world’s attention by winning first prize at the distinguished Clara Haskil International Piano Competition at Vevey, Switzerland, in 1993. Since then, he has appeared as a guest soloist with many of the world’s foremost orchestras, including recent performances with the Montreal Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, le Concert Olympique, Mozarteumorchester Salzburg and Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. He has an impressive discography on the EMI, Claves, Erato, Philips and ECM labels, the most recent release being a CD of Harrison Birtwistle’s chamber music. More: colbertartists.com.

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**Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 20**

The stormier of Mozart’s two minor-key piano concertos, No. 20 was a powerful and popular solo vehicle for the young Beethoven. The high-energy *Allegro*, with a witty exchange between soloist and orchestra, gives way to a songful second movement and a finale full of surprises, including an enchanting theme playfully offered by woodwinds.
Wolfgang Amadè Mozart
Born: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria
Died: December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria
Concerto No. 20 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, K. 466
Premiered: February 11, 1785

Mozart entered his Concerto No. 20 into his catalogue on February 10, 1785, and was the soloist at the first performance at the Mehlgrube casino in Vienna the very next day. A letter of Leopold Mozart’s suggests that Wolfgang wrote out cadenzas for this concerto, but they do not survive.

Leopold Mozart, just arrived in Vienna from Munich by way of Salzburg in February 1785, sent his daughter, Nannerl, news of her famous younger brother in the capital: “[I heard] an excellent new piano concerto by Wolfgang, on which the copyist was still at work when we got here, and your brother didn’t even have time to play through the rondo because he had to oversee the copying operation.”

K. 466 is the stormier of the two Mozart piano concertos in a minor key. It is no surprise that the young Beethoven made a stunning impression as an interpreter of this work, and the pair of superbly intelligent and powerfully expressive cadenzas that he wrote for it are still played more often than any others. During the 19th century, when Mozart was often dismissed as a gifted forerunner of Beethoven’s, this work was one of the very few Mozart piano concertos to hold a firm place in the repertory.

A brilliant and tempestuous concerto

Allegro. It shows its temper instantly in an opening that is all atmosphere and gesture—no theme. Violins and violas throb in agitated syncopations. Their energy is concentrated on the rhythm, and the pitches change little at first; meanwhile, the low strings anticipate the beats with upward scurries of quick notes. A general crescendo of activity, and the full orchestra enters with flashes of lightening to illuminate the scene.

Most of what follows in the next two minutes is informed more by pathos than by rage, the most affecting moment being reserved for the first entrance of the solo piano—with an almost new melody over an already familiar accompaniment. Now the witty and serious play of conversation, the exchange of ideas and materials, can begin, and the pianist has the opportunity to ravish with the plangency of simulated song and to dazzle with the mettlesome traversal of brilliant passagework. The tempests eventually recede in a pianissimo fascinatingly seasoned with the distant thud of drums and the curiously and hauntingly hollow low tones of the trumpets.

Romance. The second movement, after this, is by intention mild. Mozart’s designation Romance does not denote a specific form as much as it suggests a certain atmosphere of serene songfulness. An interlude brings back the minor mode of the first movement and something of its storms, but this music is far more regular and less agitating; Leopold Mozart wrote to Nannerl in 1786 that “the tempo...[is] to be taken at the quickest speed at which you can manage the noisy part with the fast triplets...” With all its formality, Mozart’s gradual application of the brakes as he approaches the return of his Romance melody is one of the most masterly strokes of rhythmic invention.

Rondo: allegro assai. The piano launches the finale, a feast of irregularities, ambiguities, surprises and subtle allusions to the first movement. Its most enchanting feature is the woodwind tune that is first heard harmonically a bit off center, in F major; next in a delicious variant whose attempt to be serious about being in D minor is subverted by the coquettish intrusion of F-sharps and B-naturals from the world of D major; and again after the cadenza, now firmly in major and on the home keynote of D, made more delightful by perky remarks from the trumpet, and determined to lead the ebullient rush to the final double bar.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

No great composer, not even Bach, was as devout as Anton Bruckner. Known to interrupt his university lectures to kneel for devotional prayers, he dedicated his Ninth Symphony to God—"that is, if He will accept it." Such piety brought a lofty loneliness that made his life painful, and his career difficult. A solitary figure in a Vienna of cliques and factions, Bruckner doggedly kept writing symphonies (not having begun one until he was past 40) even when there was little hope of performance. His spiritual energy sustained him, carrying him over chasms of depression.

Toiling in obscurity

Bruckner began his Sixth Symphony just after the summer holiday of 1879. Already at 55, he was still relatively obscure. To the extent that he was known at all, he was the object of derision (a baggy-trousered simpleton, in the eyes of the sophisticated Viennese). The press wrote of him in a malicious tone to which he could never respond stoically, no matter how great his faith in himself and in God.

Bruckner's days were crowded with lectures and private lessons, his time so rationed that he adhered to a rigid schedule that brooked no patience with tardy pupils. Despite such a teaching load and the fact that he was revising the Fourth Symphony at the same time, he completed the Sixth almost two years to the day he had begun it, the manuscript dated September 3, 1881.

Seemingly Job-like in his misfortunes, Bruckner never heard this symphony in its entirety. The premiere on February 11, 1883, consisted only of the inner movements—a shell-less presentation that must have projected a distorted sense of the whole. But Bruckner was grateful even for small favors, and that fragmented performance marked the first time the Vienna Philharmonic tried his music. Brahms was present, and he applauded; so was Eduard Hanslick, the powerful critic infamous for his fanged pen, but he remained motionless in his seat, "cold as a Sphinx," according to one observer.

After Bruckner's death, Mahler led the same orchestra in the Sixth; again the performance was incomplete. Though a disciple of Bruckner, Mahler nevertheless made excisions in it, though it is by no means a long symphony as Bruckner scores go. Ironically, the Symphony No. 6 is the only work that the composer himself never revised.

The music: serenity and gleaming sonorities

The least weighty of Bruckner's major works, the Symphony No. 6 is also among the most neglected, and for no discernible reason. In certain ways it is not as idiosyncratic as his other symphonies; the Scherzo movement, for example, does not spring from the traditional Austrian Ländler folk dance. On the other hand, the unmistakable Brucknerian tone prevails—serenity of mood coupled with gleaming sonorities.

Maestoso. The first movement follows the expected sonata form, with three theme groups followed by a development and recapitulation. Softly, but with sharp accents, violins tap out a rhythmic pattern that is a dominant force in the movement, one that reappears in the symphony's finale. Below, the rich voices of cellos and basses sound the main theme, calm yet assertive. The falling fifth that propels it is characteristic of Bruckner's grandest themes, and in the sweeping course of the opening, it quickly mounts to a climax, thundered out by the full ensemble. The second theme is a gentle strain first presented by violins with the lightest pizzicato accompaniment below. In contrast, the third theme is cast in powerful unison, struck by a rugged rhythm, brass penetrating the robust summons.

A soft bridge links the exposition with its working-out, shorter than most Bruckner developments and inverting the themes so that they are explored upside down. Its climax and the beginning of the reprise come as simultaneous events; now the rhythmic ostinato (as persistent as the Italian word for stubborn from which it derives) is bowed by all the strings while the majestic main theme is called out by winds and brass. After the subsidiary themes have returned as expected, theoda allows the brass a field day with the main theme, eminently suited to their language, while the rest of the orchestra is preoccupied with the ostinato upon which the movement rests.

Adagio: very solemn. The slow movement is the heart of any Bruckner symphony, and in that sense, this lofty Adagio (very solemn, the heading stresses) is typical. What is unique about it is that structurally—unlike his other slow movements—it unfolds in true sonata form, again with a trio of theme groups. (Like other beloved symphonists, Haydn through Mahler, Bruckner was an extraordinarily fertile melodist.)

The first theme has two components: a glowing strain cast on the mellow G-string of violins, promptly followed by a lamenting counterpoint from the oboe. The second strain is pure love song,
Program Notes

so radiant in its soaring lyricism that the listener almost imagines human voices instead of instruments. In dramatic contrast, the foreboding third theme invades the music as a somber march, revealing Bruckner as a source for Mahler’s symphonic funeral marches.

The opening theme is the focus of the compact development; it is first awarded to a solo horn. The remainder of the movement brings not only variation of all the themes but a broad coda of exceptional beauty. The main theme finds repose in its final statement, as it quietly culminates in a pianissimo descending scale sealed by a rising chord from violas.

scherzo: not fast–trio: slow. Another unusual aspect of the Sixth Symphony is the Scherzo, for it does not stem from the Austrian Ländler that generates other Bruckner dance movements. Nor does it wing off with speed and tension. Scarcely have the basses set the moderate gait than the main substance is unfolded all at once: it consists of a blend of three distinct ideas, one softly plucked by second violins and violas, another interjected by first violins, and a third (the dominant one) piped by winds. The combination marshals great force.

The leisurely Trio, preoccupied with a horn call, is full of tonal surprises as it wanders from key to key, only to be governed by C major after all. The Scherzo returns in full.

finale: moving, but not too fast. The finale is the most complicated as well as the most restless of the movements. Despite its firmly planted tonal roots, it explores many keys; one of its unsettled motifs is hauntingly reminiscent of Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde. The music is shaped according to the sonata principle, but the outlines are sometimes blurred in the flood of expression.

Sparse and monochromatic (a single clarinet embedded in the thin string texture), the movement’s beginning seems bleak, only to blossom with a triumphant call of brass, proclaimed four times. A suspenseful general pause, always a Bruckner hallmark, alerts us to the second subject, a tender theme decorated with counterpoints and richly extended. Once introduced by oboes and clarinets, the sharply angled third theme retains its heroic status in the development—again concise, trimming some of the potential length of the symphony.

The tension built in the working-out is released by a colossal tutti that marks the reprise with the triumphant brass signal (given first to horns), dispensing with the moody figure of the beginning, which would have been out of place in these festivities. As the zenith of the work, the coda resurrects the ostinato rhythm of the first movement, tying beginning and end together. A surprising halt and suspenseful quiet give thrust to the blazing peroration of the close, as gleaming brass punctuate the symphony.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

Program note by Mary Ann Feldman.

The Minnesota Orchestra, then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, first performed Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 20 on December 29, 1921, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting and Alfredo Casella as piano soloist. Casella was also an accomplished composer who studied in Paris with Gabriel Fauré alongside fellow students George Enescu and Maurice Ravel. The Orchestra’s performance featured two of Casella’s compositions: a suite from the ballet The Convent by the Sea and Italia. This week Till Fellner becomes the 24th pianist to perform this Mozart concerto with the Orchestra; others have included Dame Myra Hess, Arthur Rubinstein, Jon Kimura Parker, Hélène Grimaud and William Eddins, the last of whom conducted from the piano.

The Orchestra’s initial performance of Bruckner’s Sixth Symphony came on November 12, 1975, at Orchestra Hall, under the baton of Edo de Waart. That was de Waart’s second-ever appearance with the Orchestra—and his first at Orchestra Hall—11 years before he would become the ensemble’s ninth music director. Later that month, former California Governor Ronald Reagan entered the race for the Republican presidential nomination, challenging incumbent President Gerald Ford. Until this week, the Orchestra performed Bruckner’s Sixth Symphony on only one other program, in November 1995.