Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor | Juho Pohjonen, piano

Thursday, September 19, 2019, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, September 20, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, September 21, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

John Stafford Smith
arr. Stanislaw Skrowaczewski

The Star-Spangled Banner
ca. 2’

Einojuhani Rautavaara

A Requiem in Our Time, for Brass and Percussion
Hymnus | Credo et dubito | Dies Irae | Lacrymosa
ca. 10’

Edvard Grieg

Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16
Allegro molto moderato
Adagio
Allegro moderato molto e marcato
[There is no pause before the final movement.]
Juho Pohjonen, piano
ca. 30’

INTERMISSION
c. 20’

Elliott Carter

Three Illusions for Orchestra
Micomícón | Fons Juventatis | More’s Utopia
ca. 15’

Edward Elgar

Variations on an Original Theme, Opus 36, Enigma
Enigma: Andante
II. (H.D.S.- P.): Allegro  IX. (Nimrod): Moderato
III. (R.B.T.): Allegretto  X. (Dorabella): Intermezzo (Allegretto)
IV. (W.M.B.): Allegro di molto  XI. (G.R.S.): Allegro di molto
VI. (Ysobel): Andantino  XIII. (**): Romanza (Moderato)
VII. (Troyte): Presto  XIV. (E.D.U.): Finale (Allegro)
ca. 29’

CD Signing: Join us in the Orchestra Hall lobby following the September 19, 20 and 21 concerts as Osmo Vänskä will sign the Orchestra’s Mahler CDs, including the newly-released album of Mahler’s First Symphony.

Pre-Concert

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Minnesota Orchestra musicians
Thursday, September 19, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, September 20, 7 pm, Auditorium

Concert Preview with Akiko Fujimoto and Minnesota Orchestra musicians
Saturday, September 21, 7 pm, Auditorium

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.

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Artists

**Osmo Vänskä**, conductor
Profile appears on page 6.

**Juho Pohjonen**, piano
Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen makes his Minnesota Orchestra debut in these concerts. In the 2019-20 season, he also debuts with the New Jersey Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic and Orchestre Symphonique de Quebec, in addition to recital debuts at the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and Steinway Society of the Bay. He has performed as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Nashville Symphony, Pacific Symphony, Vancouver Symphony and Buffalo Philharmonic, and at the Mostly Mozart Festival. He has also performed with orchestras throughout Scandinavia including the Danish National Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Avanti! Chamber Orchestra in Finland, and the symphony orchestras of the Swedish Radio and Malmö. An ardent exponent of Nordic music, he has a growing discography which offers a showcase of compositions by such compatriots as Esa-Pekka Salonen and Kaija Saariaho. More: juhopohjonen.com, kirshbaumassociates.com.

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**Rautavaara: A Requiem in Our Time, for Brass and Percussion**
As a young man, the Finnish composer Rautavaara wrote *A Requiem in Our Time* in memory of his late mother. Scored for brass and percussion without strings, the work launched the composer's international career in 1954 when it won an American composition competition and was premiered in Cincinnati.

**Grieg: Piano Concerto**
This virtuosic keyboard showcase, written when its composer was only 25, reveals its heritage in evocations of traditional Norwegian song and dance, and contains a wealth of themes and dramatic gestures.

**Carter: Three Illusions for Orchestra**
This colorful work from a long-lived composer—premiered when he was 96—calls for a large orchestral complement but uses those forces sparingly. Its three movements draw inspiration from disparate sources: Don Quixote's imaginings, the quest for the fountain of youth, and Thomas More's dream of a utopian society.

**Elgar: Enigma Variations**
Thirteen of Elgar's closest friends, as well as the composer himself, are depicted in this musical portrait gallery. A highlight is the poignant *Nimrod*, which starts quietly and builds to a sonorous emotional climax.
Einojuhani Rautavaara called *A Requiem in Our Time* his “breakthrough piece”—the music that announced the arrival of an important composer and earned him an international reputation. He was only 25 when he wrote it in 1953, and the story behind its composition is both interesting and deeply personal.

**“to the memory of my mother”**

Rautavaara’s mother, a doctor, died during World War II when the composer was still in his teens, and the loss affected him so deeply that he resolved to write a piece of music in her memory. Composers have often written in memory of their parents (Gabriel Fauré’s gentle Requiem is one of the best examples), and now Rautavaara set out to compose what he called a “requiem” for his mother. That title inevitably calls up the text of the Requiem Mass for the Dead, and many composers have composed opulent settings of that text for full orchestra, chorus and soloists. Rautavaara went a different route entirely: *A Requiem in Our Time* is scored only for brass—four trumpets, four horns, three trumpets, baritone horn and tuba—and percussion. It sets no texts.

The piece—dedicated “To the Memory of My Mother”—was completed in 1953, and then came the breakthrough. The American conductor Thor Johnson, for many years conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony, sponsored an annual competition that solicited works for brass. Rautavaara’s *Requiem* was entered in that competition and promptly won it. Following its premiere in Cincinnati, the *Requiem* was performed widely in the United States and Europe, and that success quickly spun off another. When Johnson asked the aging Sibelius to recommend a young Finnish composer for a scholarship to study in the United States, Sibelius chose Rautavaara. That scholarship brought Rautavaara to the U.S., where he studied composition with Vincent Persichetti at Juilliard and with Aaron Copland and Roger Sessions at Tanglewood. When Rautavaara returned to Finland, he had already established an international reputation.

The composer’s choice of title is important. In a note in the score, Rautavaara stresses that this is a *Requiem in our time* and not *for* our time. That is, he was not trying to make this music a sweeping statement of the condition of the world at mid-20th century, but instead was simply writing a piece that came from mid-20th century. The *Requiem* is a personal statement, full of private meaning for its composer, and he did not want it taken as a large-scale liturgical utterance. Rautavaara retains for his movement titles some of the language of the Requiem Mass for the Dead, but those titles should be taken metaphorically rather than literally.

### the music: festivity, drama and grieving

**Hymnus.** The opening *Hymnus* is festive music, with the different brass sections often treated antiphonally. Built on constantly shifting meters, the music rises to a grand climax and a jubilant close.

**Credo et dubito.** That mood changes sharply in the second movement, for which Rautavaara created his own title *Credo et dubito*: “I believe and I doubt.” That title falls into two quite different parts, and so does his music: the movement alternates a skittering *Vivace*, full of the dry sound of xylophone and muted trumpet, with a solemn *Grave* built of deep, slow chords.

**Dies irae.** The *Dies Irae* (“Day of Wrath”) is usually the most dramatic movement in all Requiem settings, and so it is here. The music rips along its 12/8 meter with swirling trumpets sounding like plagues of locusts set against a somber plainchant melody from the low brass. Great rips of sound punctuate this movement and finally bring it to a sudden close.

**Lacrymosa.** Rautavaara titles the last movement *Lacrymosa* (“Weeping”) and marks it *Andante tranquillo*. The pace may be slow, but the music hardly feels tranquil, for it is marked throughout by the sound of grieving, keening trumpets, and it is within this subdued atmosphere that *A Requiem in Our Time* glides to its ambiguous conclusion.

Perhaps the composer himself best captures the impact of this music when he says that “it explores the borderline between belief and doubt and concludes more in sorrow than declamation.”

### instrumentation

4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, baritone, tuba, timpani, snare drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, xylophone, glockenspiel and bell
Edvard Grieg

Born: June 15, 1843, Bergen, Norway
Died: September 4, 1907, Bergen, Norway

Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16
Premiered: April 3, 1869

In June 1867 Edvard Grieg, then a struggling 24-year-old composer, married his first cousin, Nina Hagerup, a soprano. The following summer, wishing for a break from the busy musical life of Norway, the Griegs went to Denmark, where they hoped the milder climate would benefit the composer's often frail health. They rented a two-room garden cottage a few miles outside Copenhagen, and there Grieg began his Piano Concerto in A minor. He completed the score early the following year, and Edmund Neupert gave the first performance in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869. The concerto was an immediate success, but Grieg continued to revise it across the rest of his life: he made the final revisions in 1907, only a few months before his death.

A "splendid" success

Several years after the premiere, the Griegs traveled to Rome, where they visited Franz Liszt in his villa. Liszt sat down at his piano and sight-read this difficult concerto from Grieg's manuscript. Grieg reported that while Liszt played the first movement too fast, his reading of the cadenza was magnificent, and the older master was so taken with the music that he got up and strolled away from the piano with his arms upraised, "literally roaring out the theme." Best of all, Liszt recognized the way Grieg had amended one of the principal themes of the finale when it comes back for a triumphant reappearance at the end. He shouted out: "G-natural! G-natural! Not G-sharp! Splendid!" Liszt played that ending one more time, then told Grieg: "Keep on, I tell you. You have what is needed, and don't let them frighten you."

Liszt's judgment was sound: the Grieg Piano Concerto has become one of the most popular ever written. Its combination of good tunes alternating with stormy, dramatic gestures, all stitched together with brilliant writing for piano, has made it virtually irresistible to audiences. In a way, this music has become a victim of its own success: by the middle of the last century it had become almost too popular, and over the last generation or so it has virtually disappeared from the concert hall. Which makes a fresh performance all the more welcome.

The movement's march-like main theme, shared on its first appearance by winds and strings, is only the first of many attractive ideas. (One observer has counted seven different themes in this movement, and these range from a melting lyricism to heaven-storming violence.) The cadenza that Liszt sight-read so well is particularly effective. Though it begins quietly, the concerto soon unleashes great torrents of sound from hammered octaves and brilliant runs. It is altogether typical of this movement that Grieg should introduce a new theme after the cadenza. The piano's pounding, driving chords propel the music to its exciting close.

Adagio. The mood changes completely in the Adagio. Grieg mutes the strings here and moves to the key of D-flat major, which feels soft and warm after the powerful opening movement. A long orchestral introduction leads to the entrance of the piano, which sounds utterly fresh after the dark, muted strings. But this entrance is deceiving. The piano part soon turns dramatic and drives to its own climax; the music subsides and continues without a break into the finale.

Allegro moderato molto e marcato. After an opening flourish, the piano introduces the main theme, a dancing 2/4 idea that sounds as if its roots must be in Norwegian folk music. Once again, this movement is built on a wealth of ideas. At the coda Grieg moves into A major and ingeniously recasts his main theme in 3/4 meter, and the movement drives to its powerful close.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings
Elliott Carter had a fondness for the number “three” in the titles of his compositions. One of his earliest works was *Three Poems of Robert Frost* (1942). For the bicentennial celebration he wrote his *Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1975). In his 80s he wrote *Three Occasions* (1989). And one of his last works was *Three Explorations* for Baritone (2011), composed when he was 103. (One of history’s longest-lived major composers, he died five weeks shy of his 104th birthday.)

Carter’s *Three Illusions* for Orchestra, though, began as just a single piece. In 2002 the Boston Symphony Orchestra commissioned a brief work from Carter, and he responded with a movement he titled *Micomicón*. James Levine led the premiere of *Micomicón* in Boston on January 15, 2004, but at that point Carter decided that the piece was not complete, and over the next year he composed two more movements, *Fons Juventatis* and *More’s Utopia*. The completed work, now titled *Three Illusions* for Orchestra, was premiered on October 6, 2005, by Levine and the Boston Symphony. Carter dedicated the score to that conductor and orchestra.

**literary inspiration**

The title needs some explanation. Carter was one of the best-read of composers, and he drew his inspiration here from three quite different sources: the first movement was inspired by an episode in Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote*, completed in 1615. *Fons Juventatis* is based on the Roman myth of the fountain of youth that has been re-told in various ways across the centuries. The last movement was inspired by *Utopia*, originally written in Latin by Sir Thomas More in 1516. All three incorporate a measure of “illusion”: Don Quixote’s desperate imaginings, the desire for eternal youth, and the belief that a society based on humanistic ideals is possible.

The three movements are concise—they span a total of barely ten minutes. Carter writes for a large orchestra, then uses it with unusual economy. Textures are crystalline throughout, often only a few instruments are playing, and the music is full of a range of color—the 96-year-old composer was fully in command of the orchestra. The three movements are not programmatic—they do not tell a story—and listeners should not attempt to follow a “narrative” in these movements. Yet the swirling trills of *Fons Juventatis* may well echo the sparkling water of the fountain of youth, and the dramatic final movement, marked *Maestoso*, may suggest something of More’s turbulent life—it comes to a sudden, violent close.

**the composer’s own words**

The composer prepared a brief introduction to *Three Illusions*, which has been made available by his publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, and is excerpted here:

*micomicón*. Micomicón, invented by Sancho Panza and his friends to cure Don Quixote’s “madness,” is said to be a kingdom near Ethiopia stolen by a giant from its queen, Micomicona, who beseeches the adventurous Don Q. to put her back on the throne (in Cervantes’ great novel, chapters 29–30, book 1).

*fons juventatis*. According to a Roman myth that recurs in medieval French literature, Jupiter fell for the nymph Juventas (Youth) and turned her into a fountain, whose waters rejuvenate all who bathe in it.

*more’s utopia*. Thomas More invented the word Utopia [deriving from *Ou Topos*, Latin for “no place”], the name for his imagined completely happy society with no central government, which followed draconian laws that governed almost all human activities. For example: every able bodied person had to spend 2 years living and working on a farm, and was allowed to occupy the same house for only a period of 10 years before being forced to move. Sir Thomas More, a devout Catholic, who was Lord Chancellor to Henry VIII and opposed the King’s marriage to Anne Boleyn, was beheaded.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), bass clarinet (doubling contrabass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, bass drum, crash cymbals, 4 suspended cymbals, guiro, log drum, nipple gong, slapstick, tamtam, temple blocks, tom-toms, wood block, marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, harp, piano and strings
One evening in 1898, Edward Elgar was improvising for his wife at the piano and just for fun tried varying a theme to suggest the personalities of different friends. Suddenly a musical project occurred to him, and what had begun “in a spirit of humor…continued in deep seriousness.” The result was an orchestral theme and 14 variations, each a portrait of a friend or family member.

The subjects were soon identified, but mystery surrounded the theme itself, a six-bar melody full of rises and falls that make it an ideal candidate for variation. Elgar himself fed that mystery, naming the theme “Enigma” and stating that “its ‘dark saying’ must be left unguessed.” Hans Richter conducted the first performance in London on June 19, 1899, and the Enigma Variations quickly established Elgar’s reputation.

**portraits of friends—plus a self-portrait**

Elgar’s music is a charming depiction of late-Victorian England, with its civilized manners, garden parties, friends bicycling over for a visit, and long steamer trips abroad.

**Theme: Enigma.** Strings alone announce the noble, wistful theme, which Elgar marks molto espressivo. The music leads directly into:

I. **C.A.E.** This is a gentle portrait of the composer’s wife, Caroline Alice Elgar, musically similar to the first statement of the theme.

II. **H.D.S.-P.** Hew David Steuart-Powell was a piano teacher; this variation, marked Allegro, echoes his practicing staccato runs.

III. **R.B.T.** Elgar described Richard Baxter Townshend as “an amiable eccentric.”

IV. **W.M.B.** The variation for William Meath Baker, a bluff and peremptory country squire, thunders past in barely 30 seconds.

V. **R.P.A.** Elgar described Richard Penrose Arnold, as a “gentleman of the old school” and represents him with a noble violin line and flights of fancy from the woodwinds.

VI. **Ysobel.** Isabel Fitton, a viola player, is gently depicted via an exercise in string-crossing for violists.

VII. **Troyte.** Arthur Troyte Griffith was an argumentative architect. His Presto variation features brillante runs from the violins and ends with the sound of a slamming door.

VIII. **W.N.** Winnifred Norbury, a dignified older acquaintance of the Elgars, is heard in a “trilly laugh,” but some believe it actually pictures her family home.

IX. **Nimrod.** August Jaeger was one of Elgar’s closest friends and supporters; “Jaeger” (Jäger) is German for hunter, and Nimrod was the mighty hunter in the Biblical book of Genesis. This noble slow movement is sometimes performed separately as a memorial. Strings alone announce the theme, which grows to a triumphant climax and subsides to end quietly.

X. **Dorabella.** Dora Penny was a friend whose slight stammer is represented in the music as a brief hesitation at the start of each woodwind phrase. Elgar renamed her Dorabella for this variation, after the character in Così fan tutte.

XI. **G.R.S.** The variation for George Robertson Sinclair, the organist at the Hereford Cathedral, features the sound of his bulldog Dan in the growling lower instruments, and the tinkling sound of his bicycle bell in the triangle.

XII. **B.G.N.** Basil Nevinson was a cellist, and noble solos for that instrument open and close this cantabile variation.

XIII. (***) **Romanza.** Lady Mary Lygon was on a steamship to Australia when Elgar wrote this music, and he remembered her with a variation that suggests the sound of the ship’s vibrating engines as side drum sticks roll softly on the timpani. Over this low rumble, Elgar quotes Mendelssohn’s Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage Overture, putting quotation marks around the excerpt in his score.

XIV. **E.D.U.** “Edu” was his wife’s nickname for the composer, and this musical self-portrait, by turns powerful, striving and gentle, was “written at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraged as to the composer’s musical future.” Along the way we hear the whistle Elgar used to announce his arrival at home; he also weaves in a reminiscence of his wife’s variations before the music drives to a triumphant close.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, organ, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle and strings

Program notes by Eric Bromberger.