

SCHOOL of MUSIC

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Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Robert Spano, Conductor

Tengku Irfan, Piano



Friday, October 4, 2019 | 8:00 PM

Dr. Bobbie Bailey & Family Performance Center, Morgan Hall

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Robert Spano, Conductor

Tengku Irfan, piano

Program

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)

PRELUDES TO ACTS I AND III OF LOHENGRIN (1850)

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

CONCERTO FOR PIANO AND ORCHESTRA NO. 2 (1931)

I. ALLEGRO

II. ADAGIO—PRESTO—ADAGIO

III. ALLEGRO MOLTO; PRESTO

TENGGU IRFAN, PIANO

—INTERMISSION—

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN C MINOR, OPUS 68 (1876)

I. UN POCO SOSTENUTO; ALLEGRO

II. ANDANTE SOSTENUTO

III. UN POCO ALLEGRETTO E GRAZIOSO

IV. ADAGIO; PIÙ ANDANTE; ALLEGRO NON TROPPO, MA CON BRIO

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Program notes

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Preludes to Acts I and III of *Lohengrin* (1850)

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Germany, on May 22, 1813, and died in Venice, Italy, on February 13, 1883. The first performance of the opera *Lohengrin* took place at the Hoftheater in Weimar, Germany, on August 28, 1850, conducted by Franz Liszt. The Preludes to Acts I and III are scored for three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, and strings. Approximate performance time is twelve minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances:

Prelude to Act I: February 23 and 25, 2012, James Gaffigan, Conductor.

Prelude to Act III: January 26, 1947, Henry Sopkin, Conductor

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances:

Prelude to Act III: January 18-20, 1979, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

The story of Wagner's opera, *Lohengrin*, takes place in Antwerp, in the early 10th century. The maiden Elsa is falsely accused of murdering her brother, the rightful heir to the throne. A knight arrives in a swan-drawn boat and agrees to defend Elsa's honor. The knight demands that Elsa never try to determine his origin or name. Elsa consents, and the knight defeats her accuser. Elsa and the knight wed, but soon, she becomes suspicious. Finally, she asks the knight the forbidden question. The knight reveals his identity. He is Lohengrin, a Knight of the Holy Grail. Because Elsa has violated her trust, the heartbroken Lohengrin must leave her forever. Before he departs, Lohengrin prays, and the swan is transformed back into the person of Elsa's brother.

Wagner saw the story of *Lohengrin* as a metaphor of the artist's attempt to gain understanding within society. He began work on the text of *Lohengrin* in 1845, finally completing the score on April 28, 1848. The opera received its premiere in Weimar, under the direction of Franz Liszt, on August 28, 1850. In time, *Lohengrin* emerged as one of Wagner's most beloved works. The orchestral Preludes to Acts I and III have also enjoyed a regular presence in the concert hall.

The Prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin* (*Langsam*) is one of Wagner's most sublime compositions. According to the composer, it is a depiction of the "miraculous descent of the Holy Grail, accompanied by an angelic host, and its consignment to the custody of exalted men."

"The infinitely delicate outline of a miraculous band of angels takes shape, floating imperceptibly down from Heaven and bearing a sacred vessel." Finally, the orchestra majestically proclaims the appearance of the Grail, "the precious vessel out of which our Savior drank at the Last Supper with His disciples; in which his blood was caught when, for love of His brethren, He suffered upon the cross." After entrusting the Grail to the knights, "the seraphic hosts disappear into the bright light of the celestial blue from which they first emerged."

The brief and "very lively" (*Sehr lebhaft*) Prelude to Act III depicts the celebrations attending the wedding of Elsa and Lohengrin.

Program notes

Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra (1931)

Béla Bartók was born in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now, Sînnicolau Mare, Rumania), on March 25, 1881, and died in New York on September 26, 1945. The first performance of the Second Piano Concerto took place in Frankfurt, Germany, on January 23, 1933, with the composer as soloist, and Hans Rosbaud conducting the Frankfurt Radio Symphony. In addition to the solo piano, the Concerto No. 2 is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, small snare drum, triangle, tambourine, tam-tam, and strings. Approximate performance time is twenty-eight minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: October 23-25, 1975, Michael Ponti, Piano, Otto-Werner Mueller, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: September 28-30, 1995, Garrick Ohlsson, Piano, Ádám Fischer, Conductor.

The Hungarian composer Béla Bartók completed his First Piano Concerto in 1926. Bartók, a superb pianist, was the soloist in the Concerto's world premiere, which took place as part of the Festival of the International Society of Contemporary Music at Frankfurt, on July 1, 1927. Wilhelm Furtwängler was the conductor. Four years later, Bartók completed his Second Concerto. Bartók was once again the soloist in that work's January 23, 1933 world premiere. Hans Rosbaud conducted the Frankfurt Radio Symphony.

In a 1939 Swiss newspaper article, Bartók contrasted the two Piano Concertos:

I composed my first piano concerto in 1926. I consider it a good composition although the structure is a bit—or indeed one might say very—difficult for orchestra and audience alike. That is why, a few years later, in 1930-31, I wished to compose as a counterpart the *Piano Concerto No. 2* with fewer difficulties for the orchestra and more pleasing in its thematic material. This is why most of the themes in the piece are more popular and light in character. Because of its lightness it is sometimes almost reminiscent of one of my early works, the *Suite No. 1* for orchestra, op. 3 (1905).

Both Concertos share the composer's stunning virtuoso writing for the soloist, propulsive rhythms, brilliant and varied deployment of instrumental colors, and a celebration of Bartók's affection for the folk music of his native land.

The Concerto is in three movements, each presenting a unique sound world. The opening *Allegro*, in sonata form (exposition, development, recapitulation of central themes) is scored for solo piano, winds, and percussion. The second movement features two *Adagio* episodes (scored for piano, muted strings, and timpani) framing a whirlwind *Presto* (piano, strings, winds, and percussion). The finale, the only movement featuring the full complement of the orchestra, is a rondo, based upon a propulsive theme, introduced by the soloist. Contrasting episodes feature reprises of music from the Concerto's opening movement. A final iteration of the rondo's central theme resolves to the scintillating closing measures.

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68 (1876)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna, Austria, on April 3, 1897. The first performance of the Symphony No. 1 took place in Karlsruhe, Germany, on November 4, 1876, with Felix Otto Dessooff conducting. The Symphony No. 1 is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings. Approximate performance time is forty-six minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: April 30, 1949, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: May 5-7, 2016, Lothar Zagrosek, Conductor.

As early as 1853, prominent musicians, Robert Schumann included, urged the young Johannes Brahms to try his hand at symphonic composition. Brahms, however, resisted the call. In 1870, Brahms wrote to conductor Hermann Levi: "I shall never write a symphony. You have no idea the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like *him* beside us." Here, Brahms referred to the great shadow cast by Ludwig van Beethoven and his epochal Nine Symphonies. And it was not until 1876, when Brahms was forty-three years old, that he completed his First Symphony. The November 4, 1876, premiere took place in Karlsruhe, under the direction of Felix Otto Dessooff.

Although Beethoven had been dead nearly half a century when the C-minor Symphony premiered, comparisons with the man Brahms called a "giant" were inevitable. The Brahms First presents a dramatic journey from C minor to C Major, as does Beethoven's Fifth. A four-note motif, also reminiscent of the famous opening theme of the Beethoven Fifth, plays a prominent role the first movement. A friend of Brahms noted the similarity of the finale's principal theme to the Ode "To Joy" in Beethoven's Ninth. To this observation, Brahms responded, "any ass can see that!" The eminent conductor, Hans von Bülow, dubbed the work "Beethoven's Tenth." Although Bülow certainly meant that as a compliment, it provided Brahms no great satisfaction.

For Brahms's part, it seems that the completion of his First Symphony liberated him from the paralyzing specter of Beethoven's imposing legacy. Three more Brahms Symphonies followed over the ensuing decade—each, like the first, a monument of the late 19th-century orchestral repertoire. In time, it became abundantly clear that in his Four Symphonies, Brahms, a musical descendent of Beethoven, spoke very much in his own voice—a voice of Romantic lyricism, passion, and grandeur.

The Symphony's opening movement begins with a dramatic introduction (*Un poco sostenuto*), featuring the timpani's relentless hammer-blows and hints of the ensuing *Allegro*'s thematic material. Another brusque chord launches the *Allegro* proper and the strings' forte presentation of the ascending and descending theme that forms the nucleus of the movement's thematic material. Two relatively brief movements follow. The beautiful slow-tempo movement (*Andante sostenuto*) concludes with a shimmering violin solo. The third movement (*Un poco Allegretto e grazioso*) is a graceful intermezzo. As with the opening movement, the finale begins with an extended introduction (*Adagio*). The principal section of the finale (*Allegro non troppo, ma con brio*) opens with the broad and majestic theme that bears a kinship to Beethoven's Ode "To Joy." Storm and stress finally resolve to the triumphant closing measures.

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• New this season

** One-year appointment

About the Soloist

Tengku Irfan



Malaysian pianist, composer and conductor Tengku Irfan, 20, began piano lessons at 7 and made his debut at 11, performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 and improvising his own cadenzas with Claus Peter Flor and the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO). He has performed as soloist with orchestras worldwide under Neeme Järvi, Kristjan Järvi, Robert Spano, Osmo Vänskä, David Robertson, George Stelluto,

Jeffrey Milarsky, among others.

Previous performances include at the Montreal la Virée classique Festival (invitation from Kent Nagano), with AXIOM, MDR Sinfonieorchester, Aspen Chamber Symphony, the Juilliard, Singapore Symphony, Sao Paulo State Youth, Estonian National Symphony, Malaysian & Lexington Philharmonic, Peoria Symphony, Aspen Philharmonic and Minnesota Orchestras, among others.

He won the Aspen Music Festival 2013 Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 2 Competition, followed by performances of this concerto worldwide. He served his fourth consecutive year as resident pianist for the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble in 2017.

In conjunction with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra's 20th Season Anniversary, Irfan was appointed as the MPO Youth Ambassador to cultivate appreciation in classical music among the new generation and inspire young musicians.

About the Conductor

Robert Spano



Robert Spano, conductor, pianist, composer and teacher, is known worldwide for the intensity of his artistry and distinctive communicative abilities, creating a sense of inclusion and warmth among musicians and audiences that is unique among American orchestras. Beginning his 19th season as Music Director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and first season as Principal Guest Conductor of the Fort Worth

Symphony Orchestra, this highly imaginative conductor is an approachable artist with the innate ability to share his enthusiasm for music. A fervent mentor to rising artists, he is responsible for nurturing the careers of numerous celebrated composers, conductors and performers. As Music Director of the Aspen Music Festival and School since 2011, he oversees the programming of more than 300 events and educational programs for 630 students and young performers. The Atlanta School of Composers reflects Spano's commitment to American contemporary music. He has led ASO performances at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and the Ravinia, Ojai, and Savannah Music Festivals.

Highlights of Spano's 2019/20 season include a return to the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, conducting the world premiere of George Tsontakis's Violin Concerto No. 3 alongside Vaughan Williams's A Sea Symphony. He returns to the Indianapolis Symphony, the Singapore Symphony and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the world premiere of Dimitrios Skyllas's Kyrie eleison, commissioned by the BBC.

Conducting debuts include the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia and Wroclaw Philharmonic. As the newly appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony, Spano appears on the Orchestra's Symphonic Series, conducting two of the ten scheduled concert weekends.

With the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, programs include Spano's quintessentially rich, diverse pairings of contemporary works and cherished classics, welcoming seasoned guest artists and many new faces. The Orchestra's 75th season features 16 ASO premieres and two world premieres. In celebration of Beethoven's 250th birthday, the ASO and Chorus travels to Carnegie Hall in April 2020 to perform *Missa solemnis* with soprano Susanna Phillips, mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, tenor Benjamin Bliss and bass Matthew Rose. The season concludes with the Atlanta premiere of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

With a discography of critically-acclaimed recordings for Telarc, Deutsche Grammophon, and ASO Media, Robert Spano has garnered six Grammy © Awards with the Atlanta Symphony. Spano is on faculty at Oberlin Conservatory and has received honorary doctorates from Bowling Green State University, the Curtis Institute of Music, Emory University and Oberlin. Maestro Spano is one of two classical musicians inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame and makes his home in Atlanta.

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The program will feature solo works and a special performance of Brahms' Double Concerto with KSU Professor of Violin Helen Kim and the KSU Symphony Orchestra.

"The GRAMMY-winning cellist Zuill Bailey... deployed his sumptuous tone and jaw-dropping technique... [and] the heart-stopping eloquence of which he is capable..."
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Thursday, 10/24/2019 at 8 pm

artsKSU presents: Anat Cohen Tentet, Musical Director Oded Lev-Ari

Saturday, 11/9/2019 at 8 pm

Ever charismatic, prolific, and inspired, GRAMMY-nominated clarinetist-saxophonist Anat Cohen has won hearts and minds the world over with her expressive virtuosity and delightful stage presence. Anat has been declared Clarinetist of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association every year since 2007 and has also been named the Top Clarinetist, Rising Star, and Jazz Artist of the Year by Downbeat Magazine. The tentet (rhythm section, horns, vibraphone, cello, and accordion) performs tunes from their recent album Happy Song which draws influence from Brazilian music and African grooves to vintage swing and touching ballads.



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