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## Omaha Symphony's two-night festival showcases the works of Russian, French, and American composers

*Festival includes Stravinsky's The Firebird suite, Gershwin's An American in Paris, Dukas' The Sorcerer's Apprentice*

- Jan. 11 program features groundbreaking harpist Ann Hobson Pilot, the first black woman principal player in a major symphony orchestra
- Concertmaster Susanna Perry Gilmore to perform pieces by Ravel and Massenet on January 19

OMAHA, Neb., Dec. 31, 2018- The Omaha Symphony invites you to lose yourself in the mystical and romantic tales from Russian folklore, French exoticism, and American adventure, in a two-night festival featuring different programs each evening. *Russian, French & American Tales: A Festival*, will take place Friday, Jan. 11, and Saturday, Jan. 19, 7:30 p.m. each night, at the Holland Performing Arts Center.

Conducted by Music Director Thomas Wilkins, festival highlights will include music by Ravel, Stravinsky, and Gershwin. The Jan. 11 program features suites from Stravinsky's *The Firebird* and Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé*, as well as Debussy's *Sacred and Profane Dances* and Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, featuring pathbreaking harpist Ann Hobson Pilot. The program opens with Glinka's *Overture to Ruslan and Lyudmila*.

The second program on Jan. 19 will feature Copland's *Billy the Kid Suite*, Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, and Dukas' popular *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. In addition, concertmaster Susanna Perry Gilmore will be featured on Massenet's *Meditation from Thaïs* and Ravel's *Tzigane*.

Russian and French composers are highlighted on the first night of the festival, including Stravinsky's *The Firebird* suite. Based on Russian folklore, Stravinsky's ballet tells the story of Prince Ivan, who captures a mythical Firebird, only to release her when she offers a magic feather. He later rescues 13 spellbound princesses from the curse of a powerful demon with the help of the feather and the Firebird. The ballet debuted in 1910, but it is best known to audiences through the composer's 1919 concert suite extracted from the full ballet. Told in six movements, the music is at once mysterious and dangerous, with angular rhythms and harsh outbursts representing the demon, while a dulcet duet between oboe and harp indicates the gentle princesses. The "Dance of the Firebird" sounds every bit as colorful and fantastic as the creature itself.

Also on the program are Debussy's *Danses sacrée et danse profane* and Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro*, both commissioned in 1904 at the behest of the Erard and Playel companies. The instrument manufacturers wanted to debut a new type of harp that featured a double pedal, and commissioned France's most well-known composers to showcase the new instrument's virtues. It is fitting, then, that the two pieces will be played by groundbreaking harpist Ann Hobson Pilot, the first black woman principal player in a major symphony orchestra.

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After 40 years with the Boston Symphony Orchestra as principal harp, Pilot retired in 2009. She has had an extensive solo career, and received many awards, including the coveted “Gold Baton” from the League of American Orchestras, its highest honor. She was recently featured in a PBS documentary, “A Harpist’s Legacy: Ann Hobson Pilot and the Sound of Change,” which has aired nationwide.

American composers are highlighted on the January 19 program, including Gershwin’s well-known *An American in Paris* and Copland’s *Billy the Kid* suite. Already famous for his *Rhapsody in Blue*, Gershwin visited Paris in 1926, bringing home with him a French taxicab horn and the sketch of a melody. A longer visit in 1928 prompted him to turn that melody into a full-fledged orchestral composition, capturing an American’s visit to Paris, complete with bustling traffic (utilizing the taxicab souvenir), bluesy homesickness, and a triumphant French atmosphere.

Susanna Perry Gilmore will be featured on Massenet’s *Meditation from Thaïs* and Ravel’s *Tzigane*. Gilmore enjoys a multi-faceted career as a solo artist, chamber musician, and orchestral concertmaster, becoming concertmaster of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra at the age of 26, and joining the Omaha Symphony in that role in 2011. She has led and conducted the Omaha strings in a performance of Telemann’s *Concerto Polonois*, and was the featured fiddle player and co-creator of the Symphony Pops series *Celtic Journey* program. She is also a frequent guest violinist and fiddler with acclaimed period music ensemble Apollo’s Fire, appearing on several of their albums.

Tickets to the *Russian, French & American Tales: A Festival* start at \$19. They can be purchased by visiting [www.omahasymphony.org](http://www.omahasymphony.org) or by calling Ticket Omaha at 402.345.0606. Patrons who wish to attend both nights of the festival will receive a 25% discount on each performance ticket by calling Ticket Omaha or ordering online.

Student Rush tickets are available one hour prior to the concert. Any student with a valid student ID may purchase up to two Student Rush tickets for \$10 each.

The Omaha Symphony MasterWorks series is sponsored by Omaha Steaks.

*The Omaha Symphony is a non-profit organization that presents more than 100 live orchestral performances from September through June. In addition to MasterWorks, Symphony Pops, Symphony Rocks, Movies, Symphony Joslyn, and Family series concerts, the Omaha Symphony’s nationally recognized education and community engagement programs touch the lives of more than 40,000 people each year. For tickets or information regarding the Omaha Symphony, call 402-345-0606 or visit [omahasymphony.org](http://omahasymphony.org).*

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