



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2023/24 SEASON

# Beethoven's Emperor

January 12-13, 2024 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Tito Muñoz, conductor | Michelle Cann, piano

SILVESTRE REVUELTAS

*Sensemaya*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra,  
Op. 73, "Emperor"

I. Allegro

II. Adagio un poco mosso

III. Rondo: Allegro

*Michelle Cann, piano*

## **INTERMISSION**

IGOR STRAVINSKY

*Petrushka*

I. The Shrove-Tide Fair

II. Petrushka's Cell

III. The Moor's Cell

IV. The Shrove-Tide Fair (Towards Evening)

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# Featured Artists



## **Tito Muñoz, conductor**

Praised for his versatility, technical clarity, and keen musical insight, Tito Muñoz is internationally recognized as one of the most gifted conductors on the podium today. Now in his ninth season as the Virginia G. Piper Music Director of The Phoenix Symphony, Tito previously served as Music Director of the Opéra National de Lorraine and the Orchestre symphonique et lyrique de Nancy in France. Other prior appointments include Assistant Conductor positions with the Cleveland Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra and the Aspen Music Festival. Since his tenure in Cleveland, Tito has celebrated critically acclaimed successes with the orchestra, among others stepping in for the late Pierre Boulez in 2012 and leading repeated collaborations with the Joffrey Ballet, including the orchestra's first staged performances of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in the reconstructed original choreography of Vaslav Nijinsky.

As a proponent of new music, Tito champions the composers of our time through expanded programming, commissions, premieres, and recordings. He has conducted important premieres of works by Christopher Cerrone, Kenneth Fuchs, Dai Fujikura, Michael Hersch, Adam Schoenberg and Mauricio Sotelo. During his tenure as Music Director of the Opéra National de Lorraine, Tito conducted the critically acclaimed staged premiere of Gerald Barry's opera *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



## **Michelle Cann, piano**

Lauded as “exquisite” by *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and “a pianist of sterling artistry” by *Gramophone*, Michelle Cann has become one of the most sought-after pianists of her generation. She made her debut with The Philadelphia Orchestra in 2021 and has recently performed concertos with The Cleveland Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Orquestra Sinfônica Municipal de São Paulo, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, and Cincinnati.

Highlights of Cann's 2023-24 season include appearances with the Charlotte, Hawaii, Indianapolis, Québec, Sarasota, and Winnipeg symphony orchestras, and recitals in New York City, Portland, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, and Denver. She also has teaching and performance residencies at the University of Indiana South Bend and Meany Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Washington.

Recognized as a leading interpreter of the piano music of Florence Price, Cann performed the New York City premiere of Price's Piano Concerto in One Movement with The Dream Unfinished Orchestra in July 2016 and the Philadelphia premiere with The Philadelphia Orchestra and Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin in February 2021. Her recording of the concerto with the New York Youth Symphony won a GRAMMY Award in 2023 for Best Orchestral Performance. Her acclaimed debut solo album *Revival*, featuring music by Price and Margaret Bonds, was released in May 2023 on the Curtis Studio label. She has also recorded two Price piano quintets with the Catalyst Quartet. Cann was the recipient of the 2022 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the highest honor bestowed by the Sphinx Organization. She also received the Cleveland Institute of Music's 2022 Alumni Achievement Award and the 2022 Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award.

## ***Sensemaya***

### **Silvestre Revueltas**

**Born:** December 31, 1899 – Santiago Papasquiaro, Mexico

**Died:** October 5, 1940 – Mexico City, Mexico

*Piece Length: Approximately 7 minutes.*

From 1936-1937, the composer, violinist, and conductor Silvestre Revueltas was president of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (The League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists) in Mexico. He was a strong supporter and advocate for contemporary Mexican music and art throughout his life, and it was during this time that he met and heard a poetry reading by the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. One of the poems Revueltas must have heard was “Sensemayá: Canto para matar una culebra” (Chant for Killing a Snake). The poem depicts an Afro-Cuban ritual where a snake is offered as a sacrifice to a god, and its power goes beyond simply inspiring Revueltas to depict a scene. The composer possibly used Guillén’s own recitation of the poem to directly influence rhythm, emphasis, and the overall drive of the piece. Slithering lines in the bass clarinet and tuba preempt a tense, 7/8 ostinato, unstoppable and ominous underneath a short musical idea in the strings – Guillén’s repeated “mayombe-bombe-mayombé.” The tension, meticulously built, only eases with the dramatic, brilliant, and violent end.

## **Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73, “Emperor”**

### **Ludwig van Beethoven**

**Born:** December 16, 1770 – Bonn, Germany

**Died:** March 26, 1827 – Vienna, Austria

*Piece Length: Approximately 40 minutes.*

The Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major (“Emperor”), Beethoven’s last completed piano concerto, was composed in 1809 while Vienna was under attack by Napoleon’s army. To find shelter for safety as well as to protect his already diminishing hearing, Beethoven spent much of his time in the cellar of his brother’s home while composing this work. This time period was also during the middle period of Beethoven’s career, after he wrote his famous Heiligenstadt Testament. A letter to his brothers, reflecting his despair and contemplations of suicide due to his deafness, as well as his desire to overcome his turmoil to continue to compose, it led to some of his most famous works, including the 3rd to 8th symphonies, the violin concerto, his opera *Fidelio*, and the “Waldstein” and “Appassionata” piano sonatas. In these works, we find greater experimentation with form as well as an expansion of length and expressive drama. The Piano Concerto No. 5 showcases these traits while foreshadowing characteristics of piano concertos that would be written by other composers in the latter part of the 19th century. The work is much longer than any of his previous concertos, lasting around 40 minutes. Likewise, his orchestral writing in this work is far more symphonic, and his treatment of cadenzas was written out, as opposed to allowing the soloist to improvise on the themes, which was the tradition of that time. This decision may have been made in part by his realization that he would not be performing the work himself, and he was unwilling to relinquish artistic control.

# Program Notes

It is unclear as to where the label of “Emperor” originated, as it is highly doubtful Beethoven himself would have chosen the title given his disdain for Napoleon upon the man’s self-declaration as Emperor of France. One suggestion is that it came from a French officer who, after hearing it performed, is rumored to have called it “an emperor among concertos.” True or no, “Emperor’s” expansive and heroic qualities shine throughout.

## ***Petrushka***

### **Igor Stravinsky**

**Born:** June 17, 1882– Lomonosov, Saint Petersburg, Russia

**Died:** April 6, 1971 – New York, NY

*Piece Length: Approximately 35 minutes.*

*Petrushka* is the second of three ballets written by Stravinsky for the Ballet Russe that were produced between 1910 and 1913. Sandwiched between *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*, *Petrushka* contains musical elements that highlight its bookends. Similar to *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* shares colorful orchestration that would be expected from a composer who studied orchestration with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (whose fabulous *Scheherazade* will be featured by the Omaha Symphony later this season). But the music of *Petrushka* also foreshadows the use of dissonance found in *The Rite of Spring*, particularly in moments like the famous “Petrushka chord,” which you’ll hear – strikingly – in the clarinets. The ballet has three main characters, all of whom are supposedly puppets: Petrushka, a Moor, and a Ballerina, and it is set in four tableaux, revolving around an 1830s Shrovetide Fair in St. Petersburg. Against the backdrop of a celebrating, vibrant pre-Lenten crowd is the drama of a lovestruck Petrushka, whose actions cause increasing chaos – at first, personal, and by the end, public – after being brought to life by a Magician, who hovers over the scene. Stravinsky’s writing reflects how one might visually take in the extraordinary amount of action. He created a number of distinct musical fragments and cut and pasted them together as if one is looking around – a sensation that will hit you even without the actual ballet. In this way, *Petrushka* is classic Stravinsky: almost overwhelming in its conjuring of color, life, and vision – the Magician hovering over the orchestra, allowing the audience to see things that aren’t there.

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### **This printed program is a condensed version.**

For more info about the orchestra, guest artists, and the full program notes, download the Omaha Symphony app or scan this QR code with your mobile device.

\*program subject to change

