



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2024/25 SEASON

Brandenburg 5

Sunday, May 18, 2025 | 2 p.m.

The Joslyn | Witherspoon Concert Hall

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Serena Reuten, conductor

Christi Zuniga, harpsichord | Susanna Perry Gilmore, leader and violin | Maria Harding, flute

JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Strum for String Orchestra

Serena Reuten, conductor

J.S. BACH

Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D Major, BWV 1050

Christi Zuniga, harpsichord

Susanna Perry Gilmore, leader

Maria Harding, flute

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 56 (Scottish)

I. Andante con moto – Allegro un poco agitato

II. Vivace non troppo

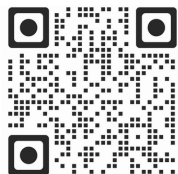
III. Adagio

IV. Allegro vivacissimo – Allegro maestoso assai

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



Featured Artists



Currently in his fourth season as Music Director of the Omaha Symphony, **Ankush Kumar Bahl** has delivered resonant performances of masterworks (new and old) and continues to champion American composers and artists while pursuing innovative, community-based concert design. Committed to expanding the American repertoire, the Omaha Symphony and Maestro Bahl have commissioned seven new works in their first four seasons together and in 2023, their live recording of Andy Akiho's *Sculptures* garnered the Omaha Symphony its first GRAMMY nominations in the orchestra's history. On the podium, Bahl is recognized by orchestras and audiences alike for his impressive conducting technique, thoughtful interpretations, innovative concert experiences, and engaging presence.



Serena Reuten is a German-Canadian conductor currently serving as the assistant conductor of the Omaha Symphony. Between 2024-2026 she will also join the third cohort of the Orchestre Métropolitain's Orchestral Conducting Academy mentorship program under the guidance of Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Recent activities include participating in the 2024 Järvi Conducting Academy in Pärnu, Estonia, under the mentorship of Paavo Järvi, Neeme Järvi, and Leonid Grin. She has served as guest assistant conductor for the Toronto Symphony and National Arts Centre Orchestra, as well as guest conductor with the Winnipeg Symphony during their annual Winnipeg New Music Festival. In 2023, she was the inaugural recipient of the Bernhard Gueller Conducting Fellowship with Symphony Nova Scotia as well as one of

CBC's 30 under 30 Classical Musicians. Over the past few summers, she has also attended several international conducting masterclasses, studying under such conductors as Alexander Shelley and Cristian Măcelaru.



Christi Zuniga has been Principal Keyboardist with the Omaha Symphony since 2000. She earned her Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from Clayton State College in Georgia and received a Master of Music degree in Chamber Music and Accompanying from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. In addition to her full-time position with the Omaha Symphony, Ms. Zuniga teaches piano privately and accompanies musicians in and around Omaha for various concerts and competitions. She has collaborated with many visiting artists, including Joseph Alessi, Thomas Bacon, and Peter Verhoyen.



Susanna Perry Gilmore enjoys a multifaceted career as solo artist, chamber musician, and orchestral concertmaster. Performing on both modern and period instruments and versatile in diverse styles from classical to fiddling, she is hailed as a player who is both "thrilling and sensitive" by the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, "luminous and hypnotic" by the *Omaha World-Herald*, and "authentic with exquisite good taste" and "rich in tone, bringing musical depth and a human touch" by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst



Colleagues and critics alike regard flutist **Maria Harding** as an “artistic anchor” and “a truly remarkable musician”. She is one of today’s most notable orchestral flutists, receiving much attention for her beautiful tone and her expressive, colorful phrasing. Principal Flute of the Omaha Symphony since 1997, Maria began her orchestral career at age 16 in the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of Gurer Aykal. She has played with the Saint Louis Symphony, the San Diego Symphony, the Kansas City Symphony, the Schlossfestspiele Orchestra in Heidelberg, Germany, and has held the position of Principal Flute with the Charleston (SC) Symphony Orchestra.

Strum

Jessie Montgomery

Born: December 8, 1981 – New York City, New York

Piece Length: Approximately 7 minutes.

Program Notes by the composer:

Strum is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition.

Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum* I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a *texture motive* and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.

— Jessie Montgomery

Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D Major, BWV 1050

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: March 31, 1685 – Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750 – Leipzig, Germany

Piece Length: Approximately 20 minutes.

The concerto grosso was the dominant concerto form used by composers during the 17th and early 18th centuries. It became a precursor to the more traditionally structured concertos written by composers of the

Classical era and beyond like Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms. The crucial difference is that, rather than a solo melodic line accompanied by the orchestra, the concerto grosso consistently passes the melodic material between the concertino (solo group) and ripieno (rest of the ensemble.) Composers such as Corelli, Handel, and Vivaldi composed brilliant concerto grossos, and perhaps some of the most famous today are the six Brandenburg Concerti by Bach.

The world owes a debt of gratitude to Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 – the first time a harpsichord was featured as soloist. Originally a continuo instrument, the harpsichord traditionally provided accompaniment that included a baseline and improvised harmonic embellishment. Here, however, the harpsichord takes center stage, delightfully supported by the brilliance of flute and violin.

Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 56 (“Scottish”)

Felix Mendelssohn

Born: February 2, 1809 – Hamburg, Germany

Died: November 4, 1847 – Leipzig, Germany

Piece Length: Approximately 40 minutes.

In 1829, Felix Mendelssohn visited England for the first time. It would certainly not be the last; he visited frequently during his lifetime and becoming an influential figure on the British musical scene. In 1829, however, he continued his travels north to Scotland where the country inspired two of his most famous works: *The Hebrides Overture* and his Symphony No. 3 in A Minor. In a letter to his family, Mendelssohn described his impressions of his visit to the ruins of Holyrood Chapel at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh, and how it inspired his work. Included with the letter was a sketch of a melody that he would eventually use in the introduction of the symphony’s first movement. Unfortunately, despite inspiration, work on the symphony would prove to be difficult for him. Mendelssohn struggled with the composition until 1831; he set it to the side, seemingly giving it up. Ten whole years later, Mendelssohn returned to the work and completed it on January 20, 1842. Although the symphony was his fifth and final completed, he numbered it three because it was third to be published.

The structure of the work is unique for symphonies of the era: while it is in four movements, Mendelssohn instructs in the score that “the movements of this symphony must follow one another immediately, and must not be separated by the customary long pauses” in contrast to the traditional pauses between movements of the time. Because of the novelty of presenting a symphony without pause, Mendelssohn also gives suggestions in the score on how the movements should be listed in the concert program, something that was rarely indicated in the scores of symphonies at that time, writing “Introduction und Allegro agitato; Scherzo assai vivace; Adagio cantabile; Allegro guerriero; und Finale maestoso.” What is also interesting about the structure is the fact that each movement is in sonata form. While many first and some last movements of symphonies are in sonata form, typically the second and third movements rely on other structures. Despite this more strict parameter, Mendelssohn’s treatment of the character of each movement is so distinctive that the symphony is never predictable.