



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

program notes

2025/26 SEASON

## Beethoven's First

January 11, 2026 | 2:00 p.m.

Witherspoon Concert Hall | The Joslyn

Earl Lee, conductor

RICHARD WAGNER

*Siegfried Idyll*, WWV 103

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Concerto in E-flat (*Dumbarton Oaks*)

I. *Tempo giusto*

II. *Allegretto*

III. *Con moto*

### INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No 1 in C Major, Op. 21

I. *Adagio molto – Allegro con brio*

II. *Andante cantabile con moto*

III. *Menuetto: Allegro molto e vivace*

IV. *Finale: Adagio – Allegro molto e vivace*

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# Featured Artist



Winner of the 2022 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, Earl Lee is a renowned Korean-Canadian conductor who has captivated audiences worldwide. Music Director of the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra since 2022, he recently finished a successful three-year tenure as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to a full season of concerts with the Ann Arbor Symphony, Lee's 2025/26 season includes his subscription debut with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and several return engagements with the Boston Symphony. Further guest conducting includes returns to the

Calgary Philharmonic, the Colburn Orchestra at Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the orchestras of the Royal Conservatory Toronto and the San Francisco Conservatory, as well as debuts with the Omaha Symphony and Rhode Island Philharmonic. Lee starts his season in his native Korea with appearances at the Seoul Arts Center and the Tongyeong International Music Festival (TIMF) with the TIMF Festival Orchestra.

Previous seasons included subscription concerts with the Boston Symphony in Boston and at Tanglewood and guest conducting engagements with the Atlanta, San Francisco, Colorado, Saratoga, and Vancouver Symphonies, Seoul Philharmonic, Mostly Mozart Orchestra, and the Sejong Soloists at Carnegie Hall and in Seoul.

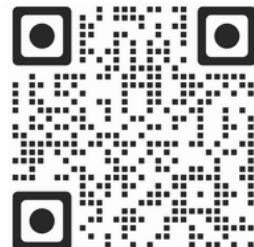
Lee previously held positions as Associate Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony and as the Resident Conductor of the Toronto Symphony. In 2022, he appeared with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam as a participant in the Ammodo masterclasses led by Fabio Luisi. He studied cello at the Curtis Institute of Music and the Juilliard School and conducting at Manhattan School of Music and the New England Conservatory. He lives in New York City with his wife and their daughter.

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\*program subject to change



# Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

## *Siegfried Idyll*

### **Richard Wagner**

Born: May 22, 1813 – Leipzig, Germany

Died: February 13, 1883 – Venice, Italy

*Piece Length: Approximately 23 minutes.*

Richard Wagner's early life was full of drama, often self-generated. True to form, Wagner had begun an affair with the wife of conductor Hans Von Bülow – the very same man giving the premiere of *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865. That wife? Franz Liszt's daughter Cosima. Von Bülow refused to grant Cosima a divorce until the third of Wagner and Cosima's children were born – all three named after characters in Wagner's operas – and the pair were married immediately. They remained devoted to each other until Wagner's death in 1883.

*Siegfried Idyll* was written as a birthday present for Cosima in 1870 – December 24 – and was first performed on Christmas morning, with musicians on the stairway of their residence, Tribschen. The tone poem beautifully captures their marital bliss and the newfound stability in Wagner's life. The work was composed in secret, and the scene is described in Cosima's diary entry:

As I awakened, my ear heard sound, ever richer it swelled, I could no longer imagine that I was dreaming, music rang out, and what music! As it faded away, R[ichard] came to me with the five children and presented me with the score of the 'Symphonic Birthday Greeting' - I was in tears, but the whole house also; R[ichard] had placed his orchestra on the stairway and so consecrated our Tribschen for eternity! The "Tribschen Idyll" is what the work is called.

In fact, the complete original title of this work is "Tribschener Idyll mit Fidi-Vogelgesang und Orange-Sonnenaufgang" ("Tribschen Idyll with Fidi's birdsong and the orange sunrise"). The title refers to the birth of Siegfried on June 6, 1869 – Fidi was an affectionate family nickname. The work was intended to be a private gift kept in the family; however, in 1877 Wagner found himself once again in debt and, wishing to pay off advances to his publisher, published the work with the title *Siegfried Idyll*. The first public performance took place in Mainz on November 30, 1877, and it quickly became popular throughout Europe. As Cosima recorded in her diary: "The Idyll is now being played ineptly everywhere." While it is clear Cosima may have been bitter about the piece no longer being a private work kept in the family, Wagner was pleased with the success, writing to King Ludwig II, "Cosima did not want it more widely known: finally, however, many friends heard news of it, – and, since I am a bit vain about this piece – I finally gave it up for publication."

## **Concerto in E-flat (*Dumbarton Oaks*)**

### **Igor Stravinsky**

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

Died: April 6, 1971 – New York, NY

*Piece Length: Approximately 15 minutes.*

The Concerto in E-flat, subtitled *Dumbarton Oaks*, was Stravinsky's final composition completed in Europe before he fled to the United States following the outbreak of the Second World War. The concerto's subtitle comes from the name of the home of Robert Woods Bliss and Mildred Barnes Bliss. The Blissess lived in Dumbarton Oaks until 1940 when they donated the home to Harvard University. This would later be the site of the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944, in which the plans to create the United Nations were developed.

# Program Notes

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In 1937, Mildred Bliss commissioned Stravinsky to compose a chamber concerto in honor of their thirtieth wedding anniversary, to be performed in the music room of Dumbarton Oaks. Stravinsky composed the work during what he described as “perhaps the most difficult time of my life.” His daughter, Ludmila, contracted tuberculosis and was confined to a sanatorium in the Haute-Savoie region of the Alps in eastern France, where she would tragically die in 1938. His first wife - who also contracted tuberculosis - and Stravinsky’s mother would die soon after. Perhaps to ease the pain, Stravinsky studied a great deal of Bach during this time and was particularly attracted to the Brandenburg Concertos.

Despite being written during this difficult time in his life, *Dumbarton Oaks* is a work of great exuberance. The composition generally follows the standard fast-slow-fast concerto format, with movements played continuously without pauses between. It takes the listener on a musical journey with influences from the Baroque era in the first movement to the Classical era at the end of the work, albeit through the distinctive contemporary lens of Stravinsky.

## Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op. 21

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

Born: December 16, 1770 – Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827 – Vienna, Austria

*Piece Length: Approximately 27 minutes.*

For over 200 years, the symphony has been seen by most composers as the highest form of artistic statement. In a meeting with the great Finnish symphonist Jean Sibelius, Gustav Mahler said “a symphony must be like the world, it must embrace everything.” This viewpoint of the symphony has its origins with the work of Beethoven. While Haydn would compose 104 symphonies and Mozart 41, Beethoven would compose only 9, each being completely distinctive from one another. Johannes Brahms, who wrote four masterpieces in the symphonic form, once said in reference to Beethoven, “You can’t have any idea what it’s like always to hear such a giant marching behind you!”

Beethoven’s Symphony No. 1 is an extraordinary debut in this genre. The British musicologist Sir Donald Francis Tovey described this work as a “fitting farewell to the eighteenth century,” a perfect summary of the work. The Symphony No. 1 seems to both draw from the past in that it adheres to the traditions of the form, expected by Beethoven’s teacher Franz Joseph Haydn, while also looking towards the future, revealing clues as to the revolutionary and transformative nature in which Beethoven would approach his future symphonies. Completed in 1800 - five years after Haydn’s last symphony, and fifteen years after Mozart’s final composition in the genre – the symphony made an immediate impact on audiences, with one reviewer noting the symphony’s “considerable art, novelty, and...wealth of ideas.” Reportedly, the Holy Roman Emperor Francis II attended the premiere and was impressed, saying “There is something revolutionary in that music!”