



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

program notes

2025/26 SEASON

# Debussy & Prokofiev

January 16-17, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Joseph Young, conductor | Robert Young, saxophone

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

*Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* (*Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*)

GUILLAUME CONNESSON

*A Kind of Trane* – Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra

I. There is none other

II. Ballade

III. Coltrane on the Dancefloor

*Robert Young, saxophone*

## INTERMISSION

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100

I. Andante

II. Allegro moderato

III. Adagio

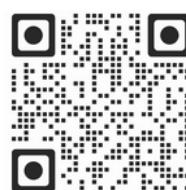
IV. Allegro giocoso

**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. *Para leer la información en español, utilice nuestro programa digital.*

\*program subject to change



# Featured Artists



American conductor **Joseph Young** has emerged as one of today's most compelling orchestral leaders, celebrated for his "expansive, ingenious style of conducting" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), his vivid interpretations, and his skill in forging powerful connections through music.

In recent seasons, Young has made notable debuts with major orchestras, including the San Francisco Symphony, the LA Phil at the Hollywood Bowl, Seattle Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony, Detroit Symphony, and Louisville Orchestra. Internationally, he has appeared with the London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfónica de RTVE in Madrid, and the Mzansi National Philharmonic Orchestra on tour throughout South Africa. His operatic work includes leading acclaimed productions at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, and Cincinnati Opera.

The 2025-2026 season begins with the release of composer *Joel Puckett's Short Stories in London*, an album featuring the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Young. Season highlights also include a performance of Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's opera *Blue* at Lincoln Center, honoring Tesori's contributions to American music, and a return to the Omaha Symphony.

In June 2025, Young concluded his tenure as Music Director of the Berkeley Symphony. Across six seasons, his dynamic performances and thoughtful programming were credited with expanding the orchestra's new audiences by more than 40%.

Young currently serves as Artistic Director of Ensembles at the Peabody Conservatory and sits on the board of New Music USA. From 2017 to 2023, he held a leadership role with Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute and National Youth Orchestra programs, culminating in his Carnegie Hall debut and an NYO2 tour of the Dominican Republic.



Fueled by a deep desire to create an enthusiasm surrounding the classical saxophone, **Robert Young** connects with audiences with his musicianship, virtuosity, and authenticity. Praised for his "effortless expression and facile technique" (*The Saxophonist Magazine*), Robert maintains an active career as a soloist, chamber musician, and educator. His artistry has afforded him opportunities to appear with ensembles and musicians from across the globe including the PRISM Quartet, The Crossing, Chris Potter, Ravi Coltrane, Uri Caine, Charlotte Symphony, Detroit Chamber Winds and Strings, and the Charleston (SC) Symphony Orchestra.

As a chamber musician, Robert collaborated with The Crossing and performed alongside the PRISM Quartet on the GRAMMY Award-winning album *Gavin Bryars: The Fifth Century* (available on ECM Recordings). *The New York Times* praised the collective performance on this album as "superb" and "eloquent." Young has appeared with the PRISM Quartet on numerous concerts including residencies at the Curtis Institute, Shepherd School of Music (Rice University), and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. He can be heard on several albums with this notable ensemble including *The Curtis Project, Heritage/Evolution, volume 2*, and *The Book of Days*.

Appearing with the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra as soloist in the 2023-24 season, he was hailed as "uncommonly expressive...and technically prodigious" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*) for his performance of Guillaume Connesson's acrobatic concerto, *A Kind of Trane*. He has also been a soloist with the United States Navy Band, performing *Quicksilver* by Chicago-based composer Stacy Garrop, and has been featured as a soloist with the Rock Hill Symphony Orchestra, Piedmont Wind Symphony, UNCSA Symphony, and Zagreb Soloists (Croatia).

Robert holds a teaching position at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts as the Associate Professor of Saxophone. Young's students have received honors at several local, regional and national competitions and have been featured at several clinics and conferences throughout the country. He previously has served on the faculties of The Crane School of Music - SUNY Potsdam and Wichita State University. Young is often invited to give guest lectures and classes throughout the country. In Fall 2022, Robert was invited to be guest teacher for the renowned University of Michigan saxophone studio as a sabbatical replacement for the award-winning saxophonist Timothy McAllister.

Robert earned his Doctor of Musical Arts (2011) and Master of Music (2008) degrees in saxophone performance from the University of Michigan where he studied with Professor Donald Sinta. At the University of Michigan, he studied jazz saxophone with Dr. Andrew Bishop and was a recipient of the Lawrence Teal Fellowship. Young received a bachelor's degree from the University of South Carolina (2006) in saxophone performance where he studied with Dr. Clifford Leaman.

As a Conn-Selmer Artist, Robert Young plays exclusively on Selmer saxophones. He also serves as a D'Addario artist/clinician and endorses Key Leaves products.

# Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

## *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un Faune (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun)*

### **Claude Debussy**

Born: August 22, 1862 – Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

Died: March 25, 1918 – Paris, France

*Piece Length: Approximately 10 minutes.*

“The flute of the faun brought new breath to the art of music.” This quote from the iconoclastic composer and conductor Pierre Boulez about Claude Debussy’s *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un Faune (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun)* reflects the influence and importance of Debussy’s compositional breakthrough in today’s piece. Composers and listeners have been under its spell since its premiere in 1894. Boulez would go further in describing the work as “the awakening of modern music.” Ravel called it “the only score ever written that is absolutely perfect,” and Leonard Bernstein once commented on the composition’s influence as “not just stylistic but radical change.” It may seem strange to us today to hear this beautiful and lush work as revolutionary, but the compositional techniques and formal narrative used by Debussy changed the ways composers thought about harmony, melodic development, and structure.

*Prélude à L'après-midi d'un Faune* is an orchestral tone poem based on the Stéphane Mallarmé poem “L'après-midi d'un Faune.” In Mallarmé’s poem, a Faun reminisces about two nymphs he encounters, though it is ambiguous whether the events are in fact a memory or a dream. In the end, the Faun’s desires seem to be an illusion as he falls asleep and at the end of the poem he bids the nymphs farewell in the final line: “I go to see the shadow you have become.” Debussy perfectly creates a dreamlike, magical world of the Faun in the music that is unlike anything in composition that had been produced before. As Bernstein would observe, Debussy made “Mallarmé’s dream come true.”

## ***A Kind of Trane – Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra***

### **Guillaume Connesson**

Born: May 5, 1970 – Boulogne-Billancourt, France

*Piece Length: Approximately 22 minutes.*

*Program Notes by the composer.*

This concerto is conceived as a tribute to the great jazz saxophonist John Coltrane (1926 – 1967). Coltrane’s phrasing, his complete freedom of invention, and his mystical virtuosity have nourished my writing. Whether through a melodic album like *Ballads* (1962) or in the Free Jazz inspired by the famous *A Love Supreme* (1964), his music made me want to write this *Kind of Trane*.

The first movement, “There is none other,” (a title taken from Coltrane’s poem for *A Love Supreme*), opens with the gong strike that began his album. After a slow introduction where the soloist unfolds capricious diatonic phrases, a five-beat bass line in a four-beat measure establishes itself and leads to the exposition of the main theme, which will be developed through imitation. The movement concludes with the calm music of the introduction. The second

# Program Notes

movement, “Ballade,” is a long, continuous melody played by the soloist, culminating in a grand, lyrical outburst from the orchestra. A second theme then appears, accompanied by a steady bass line that gives the music the character of a slow procession. When the first theme returns at the end, it will gradually deconstruct itself, ending in a final sigh of sadness.

The final movement, “Coltrane on the Dancefloor,” is an improbable encounter between two diametrically opposed musical worlds: Coltrane’s unpredictable rhythmic freedom and the robotic nature of techno music. This friction between freedom and constraint is the foundation of this movement, which culminates in a frenzied cadence. The soloist’s trance is then supported by a percussion pattern and leads to the unrestrained coda. It is a cry from the soloist, abruptly cut short by the orchestra, that concludes the piece.

©2015, Guillaume Connesson

## **Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 100**

**Sergei Prokofiev**

Born: April 27, 1891 – Sontsovka, Ukraine, Russian Empire

Died: March 5, 1953 – Moscow, Soviet Union

*Piece Length: Approximately 45 minutes.*

It is remarkable observing the numerical significance of symphonies on composers. For example, a composer’s fifth symphony seems consistently to mark an artistic achievement. This can absolutely be said for Prokofiev’s offering. In fact, Prokofiev would consider it his greatest work, calling it “the culmination of an entire period in my work. I conceived of it as a symphony on the greatness of the human soul.”

The Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major was composed during the summer of 1944, and the premiere took place on January 13, 1945, in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. The symphony was performed by the USSR State Symphony Orchestra conducted by Prokofiev. The great Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter, who attended the premiere, described an extraordinary moment when Prokofiev stepped on the podium to begin the work: “He stood like a monument on a pedestal. And then, when Prokofiev had taken his place on the podium and silence reigned in the hall, artillery salvos suddenly thundered forth. His baton was raised. He waited, and began only after the cannons had stopped.” These cannons were signaling a turning point in the war: Soviets had crossed the Vistula River in Poland, pushing back the Nazi army and heading towards inevitable victory. The premiere was an incredible success, and in the eighty years since, the symphony has remained a perfect encapsulation of Prokofiev’s compositional voice and humanity’s indomitable spirit.

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