



# Applied Underwriters Presents Beethoven's Fifth & Bluebeard's Castle

April 24-25, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Center

Lidiya Yankovskaya, conductor | Ryan McKinny, *Bluebeard* | Michelle DeYoung, *Judith*  
Jon Hickerson, *The Bard* | David Murakami, projections designer

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante con moto

III. Allegro

IV. Allegro

## INTERMISSION

BÉLA BARTÓK

*Bluebeard's Castle*

(*A Kékszakállú herceg Vára*) op. 11 BB62

Ryan McKinny, *Bluebeard*

Michelle DeYoung, *Judith*

Jon Hickerson, *The Bard*

**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



**Lidiya Yankovskaya** is a conductor with powerful range—from Verdi and Wagner to Price and Prokofiev—and an unshakeable sense of classical music as a living, responsive art form. Her bold, collaborative leadership has shaped the development of dozens of world premieres—including over 20 new operas—and brought fresh urgency to performances with major orchestras and opera companies across the globe. This season, Yankovskaya makes her Scandinavian debut at Norwegian National Opera with Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. She conducts the same work at The Grange Festival in a return to the United Kingdom and brings her interpretation of Bartok masterwork *Bluebeard's Castle*, praised by *The Times* as “lyrical, polished, and compelling,” to Omaha Symphony. Elsewhere, she conducts orchestras around the world, including her first performances at Vienna's iconic Musikverein with Tonkünstler Orchester and return engagements with Phoenix Symphony and with London Philharmonic Orchestra, where she leads a world-premiere piano concerto.



Recognized by *Opera News* as “one of the finest singers of his generation,” American bass-baritone **Ryan McKinny** has earned his reputation as an artist with something to say. His relentless curiosity informs riveting character portrayals and beautifully crafted performances, reminding audiences of their shared humanity with characters on stage and screen.

This season, McKinny stars as Joseph De Rocher in the 25th-anniversary production of Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* at San Francisco Opera, following a critically acclaimed turn at the Metropolitan Opera, where the *Washington Post* praised his “figurative and literal muscular force” and “richly human performance.” He also brings his commanding bass-baritone to several role debuts, appearing as John Proctor in a new Francesca Zambello production of *The Crucible* at Washington National Opera;

as both Michele and Gianni Schicchi in Houston Grand Opera's first full presentation of *Il trittico*; and as Lieutenant Horstmayer in the Houston premiere of Puts' *Silent Night*, also at HGO, in a new staging by James Robinson. Elsewhere, McKinny joins Cincinnati Opera as Escamillo in *Carmen*, and Omaha Symphony and Opera Omaha for the title role in *Bluebeard's Castle*, an interpretation hailed by the *Boston Globe* for “a rare blend of dramatic force and subtlety.”



Mezzo-Soprano **Michelle DeYoung** appears regularly with the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Vienna Philharmonic, the Concertgebouworkest, and the Sydney Symphony. She has also performed at the prestigious festivals of Ravinia, Tanglewood, Saito Kinen, Edinburgh, and Lucerne. Equally at home on the opera stage, Ms. DeYoung has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Teatro alla Scala, Bayreuth Festival, Berliner Staatsoper, and the Paris Opera.

A multi-GRAMMY® award winning recording artist, Ms. DeYoung's impressive discography includes *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and *Götterdämmerung* with the Jaap van Zweden and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (Naxos), *Les Troyens* with Sir Colin Davis and the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live!), and various Mahler works with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Her most recent recording of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon) was released in July 2021 and she is a featured soloist in the Met Opera's *Verdi's Requiem: The Met Remembers 9/11* which was nominated for a 2023 GRAMMY® Award for Best Choral Performance.

Ms. DeYoung is the founder of *Ensemble Charité*, an organization which aims to support various charities while also fostering young, emerging musicians through community performances of chamber concerts with seasoned professional musicians, conducted by Ms. DeYoung. She was also recently named to the vocal faculty of the famed Jacob School of Music at Indiana University.



**Jon Hickerson** is thrilled to join Omaha Symphony for this production! Jon recently played the Legionnaire in the 2025 and 2023 productions of *What the Constitution Means to Me* (BLUEBARN). Other Omaha credits include Marlin in *Finding Nemo* and Grandpa Joe in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Rose Theatre), *Holiday Hootenanny* (BLUEBARN), Opera Omaha Chorus for *Sweeney Todd*, *La Traviata*, *The Rake's Progress*, and *El último sueño de Frida y Diego* (Orpheum), Narrator in *The Rocky Horror Show* (Rave On), Don in *Kinky Boots*, Ghost of Christmas Present in *Christmas Carol*, and *Respect* (Omaha Community Playhouse), Maxie in *Murder at Calumet Social Club* (Theatre-To-Go at Joslyn Castle), Grandpa George/Mr. Salt in *Willy Wonka* (Rave On), Harry in *Mamma Mia*, Man 2 in *World Goes Round*, and *Ring of Fire* (PART). Jon earned a BFA in Theatre Performance from Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University. Chicagoland credits

include *Promises, Promises* and *Sweeney Todd* (Porchlight), *The Fantasticks* (Metropolis), *Mikado* (Noble Fool), *Once Upon A Mattress* (Emerald City), *The Great American Trailer Park Musical* (Kokandy), and a season with Wagon Wheel Theatre in Indiana. Jon can also be seen in several regional commercials and is the proudest Papa to his fierce and fabulous 9-year-old daughter.



**David Murakami** is a projection designer and film director focused on the union between the cinematic and theatrical. As a collaborative artist trespassing across theatre, opera, themed entertainment, and immersive experiences, David's work carefully navigates the urgent needs of the arts in challenging political, cultural, and economic times, honoring traditions and challenging them. His designs has been seen on five continents and include *Ainadamar* at Opéra de Montréal, *Elektra* at Minnesota Opera, *American Idiot* and *Zoot Suit* at the Mark Taper Forum, *Das Rheingold* at Seattle Opera, *The Shining* and *La Belle et la Bête* with Opera Parallèle, *Rigoletto* with Pacific Symphony, *Figures of Speech* with Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and several musicals aboard Princess Cruises' flagship Royal-class vessels. Other companies include Atlanta Opera, Berkshire Theatre, Calgary Opera, Celebration Theatre, Dallas Opera, Des Moines Metro Opera, East West Players, LA Opera, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, McCoy Rigby, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Presidio Theatre, Red Mountain Theatre, Riyadh Season, Seattle Opera, SFJazz, Skylight Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Sun Valley Summer Symphony, Syracuse Stage, and Virginia Opera. [www.davidmurakami.com](http://www.davidmurakami.com)

# Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

## **Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67**

### **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Born: December 16, 1770 – Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827 – Vienna, Austria

*Piece Length: Approximately 35 minutes.*

On December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, Ludwig van Beethoven presented a mammoth concert lasting over four hours. It featured the premieres of his Choral Fantasy, Piano Concerto No. 4, and the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, as well as excerpts from his Mass in C Major, a concert aria for soprano and orchestra, and an improvised fantasia performed by Beethoven himself. Given the very busy time of year and a conflicting engagement by the members of the professional orchestra of the Theater, Beethoven had to fill an orchestra with mainly amateur and semi-professional musicians. To add to the difficulty for the musicians doing their best to learn so much new music, there was minimal rehearsal time to prepare. In addition, one reviewer noted the extreme cold that the audience had to endure. "There we sat, in the most bitter cold, from half past six until half past ten, and confirmed for ourselves the maxim that one may easily have too much of a good thing, still more of a powerful one."

Fortunately for Beethoven, despite the less than favorable initial response, the status of the symphony grew quickly over time. Johann Peter Salomon, a staunch supporter of Haydn, initially called the symphony "rubbish". He later retracted this statement, telling his orchestra "...I now consider it one of the greatest compositions I know." The critic E.T.A. Hoffmann described the symphony as being "indescribably profound". Its technical and structural innovations would go on to influence composers over the next two centuries, including Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler, as well as composers working today. It is arguably the most famous symphony in the genre.

The Fifth opens with one of the most famous motifs in Western classical music: the "Fate Motif." Beethoven's secretary Anton Schindler claimed that Beethoven himself described it as "Fate knocks at the door." However, this claim is somewhat dubious. Beethoven's student Carl Czerny claimed that it had been influenced "from a yellow-hammer's song, heard as [Beethoven] walked in the Prater-park in Vienna." The composer and pianist Antony Hopkins has noted that "given the choice between a yellow-hammer and Fate-at-the-door, the public has preferred the more dramatic myth, though Czerny's account is too unlikely to have been invented." Beethoven will use this motif throughout the entire symphony, adapting from movement to movement and creating a unified musical world that gradually transforms from darkness to light.

## ***Bluebeard's Castle*, Op. 11 BB62**

### **Béla Bartók**

Born: March 25, 1881 – Sânnicolau Mare, Romania

Died: September 26, 1945 – New York, NY

*Piece Length: Approximately 65 minutes.*

### ***This production contains themes of violence including domestic violence.***

In 1908, the Hungarian writer Béla Balázs wrote a libretto based on the French folk legend of Bluebeard. While there are many versions of the story, including a few found in the collection of fairy tales by The Brothers Grimm, Balázs' version was inspired by the French folktale published by Charles Perrault in his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (*Stories or Tales from Past Times*, more commonly known today as *Mother Goose Tales*). Balázs originally wrote the libretto for his roommate, Zoltán Kodály, but Kodály had trouble connecting to the text. Their mutual friend Béla Bartók took on the project instead. Bartók completed the opera in 1911 for submission of the Ferenc Erkel Prize, but the work did not win. He submitted the score to a second competition organized by the music publisher Rózsavölgyi, but again he was not successful. The judges deemed the opera, in which there are only two characters and all the action takes place in a castle, not dramatic enough for staging. The disappointment of these losses affected Bartók deeply; in 1915, he wrote to his wife Márta "Now I know that I will never hear it in this life." It was the subsequent success of his ballet *The Wooden Prince* that would change Bartók's fortunes. After the ballet, interest in his stage works grew, and in May 1918 the opera premiered at the Royal Hungarian Opera House.

*Bluebeard's Castle* is an important work in Bartók's musical development. It combines the influence of Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy with Bartók's growing mastery of Hungarian folk music. Starting in 1908, Bartók and Kodály traveled throughout the countryside, essentially starting the field of ethnomusicology by collecting and recording the Hungarian folk music they encountered. Bartók's incredible ability to blend melodic and rhythmic folk elements with contemporary musical techniques became a hallmark of his work, and in *Bluebeard's Castle*, one starts to see this masterful merging of musical languages. The opera also showcases Bartók's incredible structural designs that are so often found in his later instrumental works. *Bluebeard's Castle* easily functions as a large-scale arch form, moving from a dark musical world to stunning brightness before returning to darkness. The tonal centers Bartók chose also form a symmetry as the work begins and ends in F-sharp while the climax is in C, a key that is as far away from F-sharp as one can get. Bartók will use a similar approach to key structure in the first movement of his masterpiece *Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta* decades later.

The opera follows Bluebeard and his new wife Judith as they enter his castle together for the first time. It begins with a spoken prologue, purposefully ambiguous in its warning to the audience: what they are about to witness may or may not be real. As darkness falls on the pair, Judith asks Bluebeard to open each of the seven locked doors contained within the castle to allow in light. He is reluctant, but throughout the work she begs, persuades, pleads, and argues with him to progress from the first door to the last. Eventually, Bluebeard gives in, and seals both of their fates in doing so.

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***Bluebeard's Castle is a co-production with our friends at Opera Omaha.***

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