



Bahl Conducts Mahler's "Titan"

May 29–30, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Anthony McGill, clarinet

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Tragic Overture

AARON COPLAND

Concerto for Clarinet & Orchestra

I. Slowly and expressively

II. Rather fast

Anthony McGill, clarinet

INTERMISSION

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 in D Major, "Titan"

I. Langsam schleppend

II. Kräftig bewegt

III. Feierlich und gemessen

IV. Stürmisch bewegt

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Featured Artists



Ankush Kumar Bahl is currently serving in the role of Artistic Partner with the Omaha Symphony after his tenure as the orchestra's 13th Music Director. Since first conducting the orchestra in 2019, Maestro Bahl has delivered resonant performances of masterworks (new and old), championed American composers and artists, and further promoted the orchestra's innovative and community-based concert design. Committed to expanding the American repertoire, the Omaha symphony and Maestro Bahl commissioned seven new works by American Composers 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. In concert, he has left the *Washington Post* "wanting to hear more" and has been praised by *The New York Times* for his "clear authority and enthusiasm" and "ability to inspire."

A protégé of former New York Philharmonic Music Director Kurt Masur, he served as his assistant conductor at the Orchestre National de France, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. From 2011 to 2015, he was assistant conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra under Christoph Eschenbach, leading a variety of concerts with the orchestra in over 100 performances. Bahl has been fortunate to also count Maestros Jaap van Zweden, Zdenek Macal, David Zinman, and Gianandrea Noseda among his mentors.

American born and of Indian descent, Ankush Kumar Bahl is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area and received a double degree in music and rhetoric from the University of California at Berkeley. He was a conducting fellow at the Aspen Music Festival with David Zinman and completed his master's degree in Orchestral Conducting at the Manhattan School of Music with Zdenek Macal, David Gilbert, and George Manahan. Bahl was also a frequent collaborator with jazz legend Wayne Shorter, conducting his quartet with orchestra in concerts at the Kennedy Center and Detroit Free Jazz Festival.



Clarinetist **Anthony McGill**, praised for his "trademark brilliance, penetrating sound and rich character" (*The New York Times*), is one of classical music's most recognizable and multifaceted figures. He serves as Principal Clarinet of the New York Philharmonic—the first African-American principal in the orchestra's history—and enjoys a dynamic solo and chamber music career.

McGill is the 2024 *Musical America* Instrumentalist of the Year and recipient of the 2020 Avery Fisher Prize. He appears regularly as a soloist with leading orchestras including the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and the Chicago and Detroit Symphonies.

He has released acclaimed recordings with the Pacifica Quartet (*American Stories, Mozart & Brahms Quintets*), and pianist Gloria Chien (*Here With You*), and performed at President Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration. His advocacy for racial equity includes founding the viral #TakeTwoKnees campaign and partnering with Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative, with whom he performed in Montgomery, AL on Juneteenth 2024.

McGill is a faculty member at Juilliard and Curtis, where he directs the Music Advancement Program (MAP), focused on young musicians from underrepresented communities. He helped launch the MAP Summer Scholarship Fund and supported its \$50 million Crankstart endowment.

McGill is a graduate of the Curtis Institute, a board member of Cedille Records and the Harmony Program, and an advisor to several youth initiatives. He is a Backun Artist.

Tragic Overture

Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833 – Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897 – Vienna, Austria

Piece Length: Approximately 13 minutes.

In 1880, Johannes Brahms composed two overtures that would act as contrasts to one another. The first was *Academic Festival Overture*, written as a token of gratitude to Breslau University for the honorary doctorate they bestowed upon him. Lightly scored, it comically uses a variety of drinking songs popular in the day. The second was *Tragic Overture*, a perfect title for a work of great turbulence and drama. As Brahms wrote to a friend, “One of them weeps, the other laughs.” Tragic though the work might be, it serves as a powerful feature for the entire orchestra.

Clarinet Concerto

Aaron Copland

Born: November 14, 1900 – New York, NY

Died: December 2, 1990 – Sleepy Hollow, NY

Piece Length: Approximately 18 minutes.

In 1947, two of the most famous clarinetists and bandleaders of the big band era, Benny Goodman and Woody Herman, separately approached Aaron Copland with the request for a new work. Goodman, who had already commissioned works from Béla Bartók and Paul Hindemith, wanted a work for solo clarinet and orchestra. Herman, who had previously commissioned Igor Stravinsky’s *Ebony Concerto* for his band, wanted a new work to be written for the same instrumentation. Copland eventually accepted the commission from Goodman, stating “I had long been an admirer of Benny Goodman, and I thought that writing a concerto with him in mind would give me a fresh point of view.”

The *Clarinet Concerto* shares the same structure as Copland’s 1926 *Piano Concerto*: a two-movement work in which a slow first movement is bridged to a faster second movement by a cadenza for the soloist. Both concertos also share the influence of jazz. While the earlier *Piano Concerto* is a more youthful work – written while pursuing elements of jazz, more modernist techniques, and studying composers of the ‘20s – the *Clarinet Concerto* was written in what we call Copland’s “Populist” period. The works in this part of his career are his most popular, distinctive by their strong American flavor achieved through use of folk tunes like “Simple Gifts” and “Bonaparte’s Retreat,” as well as the use of open harmonies that suggest the vastness of the open prairie. Truthfully, the *Clarinet Concerto* bridges the world of Copland’s *Piano Concerto* and his “Populist” period beautifully and remains a hallmark of the clarinet repertoire.

Program Notes

Symphony No. 1 in D Major, “Titan”

Gustav Mahler

Born: July 7, 1860 – Kaliště, Bohemia

Died: May 18, 1911 – Vienna, Austria

Piece Length: Approximately 65 minutes.

In a conversation with Jean Sibelius, Gustav Mahler once proclaimed “The symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.” There may be very few composers who have expressed their compositional and aesthetic philosophy more clearly than Mahler did in this statement. Indeed, each of his nine completed symphonies, as well as his symphonic song cycle “Das Lied von der Erde” (a work so symphonic in nature that Bernstein called it Mahler’s “greatest symphony”) and the first movement from his incomplete Symphony No. 10 are each worlds unto themselves. Mahler’s symphonies are immense masterpieces that are large in scope, profound in expressive power, and brilliant in experimentation with compositional techniques.

One can already see Mahler’s view of the symphony on display with the Symphony No. 1 in D Major. The initial inspiration was programmatic in nature, taking a cue both from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 6 (“Pastoral”) and composers such as Franz Liszt, in which the form or inspiration of a composition is derived from extramusical elements, such as nature, historical events, poems, or the composer’s own life experiences. It was life experiences that served as the foundation for the first symphony. Mahler would describe the work as a symphonic poem rather than a symphony at its premiere in Budapest in 1889.

A few early, unsuccessful performances drove Mahler to spend the next few years revising the work. The new, definitive version cut out a fifth movement, bringing the symphony down to a standard four, and replaced Mahler’s detailed program with the more abstract, and thus potentially universal, human experience. The revised version is what we’ll hear today and yet, despite the changes, still seems to contain the world.

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*program subject to change

