



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2022/23 SEASON

Ancient Airs & Dances

Sunday, April 16, 2023 at 2 p.m.

Strauss Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor | Jack Rago, timpani

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite No. 3

I. Anon. (late 16th century): *Italiana*

II. Giovanni Battista Besardo (17th century): *Arie di Corte*

III. Anon. (late 17th century): *Siciliana*

IV. Lodovico Roncalli (1692): *Passacaglia*

GEORG DRUSCHETZKY

Concerto for Six Timpani and Orchestra

I. Allegro

II. Andante

III. Variazioni: Allegro

Jack Rago, timpani

SERGE PROKOFIEV

Classical Symphony, Op. 25 (Symphony No. 1)

I. Allegro con brio

II. Larghetto

III. Gavotte: Non troppo allegro

IV. Finale: Molto vivace

Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Variations on a Theme of Joseph Haydn, Op. 56a

I. Chorale St. Antoni: Andante

II. Variation I: Poco più animato

III. Variation II: Più vivace

IV. Variation III: Con moto

V. Variation IV: Andante con moto

VI. Variation V: Vivace

VII. Variation VI: Vivace

VIII. Variation VII: Grazioso

IX. Variation VIII: Presto non troppo

X. Finale: Andante

Featured Artists



Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor

Currently in his second season as Music Director of the Omaha Symphony, Ankush Kumar Bahl has delivered resonant performances of masterworks, new and old, championing American composers and artists while pursuing innovative, community-based concert design. Bahl is recognized by orchestras and audiences alike for his impressive conducting technique, thoughtful interpretations, and engaging podium 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.”

Highlights of previous and upcoming guest engagements include concerts with the New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, Richmond Symphony, Virginia Symphony, Louisiana Philharmonic, and the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO, in Washington, D.C.). Summer festival appearances engagements include the Copenhagen Philharmonic at Tivoli, Sun Valley Summer Symphony, Wintergreen Summer Music Festival, Chautauqua Institute, Wolf Trap with the NSO, and a debut at the Brevard Music Center in the summer of 2022. An experienced collaborator, Bahl has worked with many prominent soloists, among them Daniil Trifonov, Lang Lang, Sarah Chang, Lara St. John, Karen Gomyo, Aaron Diehl, Bhezod Abduraimov, Benjamin Grosvenor, Orion Weiss, Conrad Tao, Charlie Albright, Anthony McGill, Kelley O'Connor, Philadelphia Orchestra Concertmaster David Kim, and Vesko Eschkenazy, concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

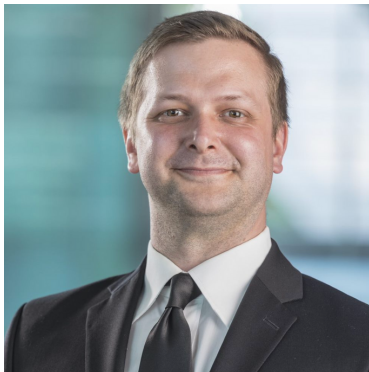


Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor

Appointed the Omaha Symphony’s Assistant Conductor in September 2022, conductor and violinist Alejandro Gómez Guillén is passionate about sharing music in a way that is compelling, uplifting, and educational. He is completing his sixth season as artistic director and conductor of Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, with which he recently led the Indiana premiere of Florence Price’s Fourth Symphony to local acclaim. He also completed a successful tenure as associate conductor of Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, leading multiple community classics, pops, outdoor, bilingual and educational concerts,

including collaborations with artists such as Time for Three and mezzo-soprano Cecilia Duarte. Additionally, he is also music director of Denver’s Sphere Ensemble which explores the intersection of masterpieces of string ensemble music with multi-part custom arrangements from piano pieces, pop, rock and world music masters. The group’s recordings are available through all music streaming platforms. Alejandro also serves as acting concertmaster/principal second violin of West Texas Symphony and violinist of the Permian Basin and Chasqui Quartets, and he has also served as Freeman conducting fellow with Chicago Sinfonietta, associate conductor of Boulder Symphony and music director of Cantabile.

Featured Artists



Jack Rago, timpani

Hailing from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Jack Rago joined the Omaha Symphony as Principal Timpanist in 2017. His formal music education includes a bachelor's degree from West Virginia University and a master's degree from Carnegie Mellon University, both in percussion performance. In addition to the Omaha Symphony, he has performed with several different groups including the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, and Erie Philharmonic. Outside of playing music, there is a good chance that he is following Pittsburgh sports or doing a crossword.

Program Notes

Ancient Airs and Dances, Suite No. 3

Ottorino Respighi

Born: Bologna, Italy, July 9, 1879

Died: Rome, Italy, April 18, 1936

Respighi may have the ultimate “before it was cool” bragging rights – nearly fifty years before most of his contemporaries were revisiting the Baroque era, he was transforming lute, harpsichord, and guitar works from the 17th century. Although this sensibility permeates many of Respighi's pieces, the most famous examples are his *Ancient Airs and Dances* suites, the third and final of which is scored exclusively for strings. Composed in 1931, this four-movement set dances – sometimes literally – to selections by Besard and Roncalli, as well as new iterations of anonymous melodies, and always showcases the vast timbres possible within the string family.

Concerto for Six Timpani

Georg Druschetzky

Born: Družec, Czechia, April 7, 1745

Died: Buda (western part of Budapest), Hungary, June 21, 1819

A virtuoso timpanist and composer, Georg Druschetzky wrote several works to highlight his own instrument, making a spectacular and righteous claim for the spotlight. His Concerto for Six Timpani employs the soloist in melodic lines, matching the strings and woodwind sections. Timpani concerti are often masterclasses in tuning, drum placement, and stick virtuosity, and this 19th century contribution is no exception. Editor and researcher Harrison Powell did extensive work to bring this concerto back into the repertoire, combining found, original scores, and parts with a 1932 recording edition. We're thrilled that Principal Timpani Jack Rago chose it to make his Omaha Symphony solo debut.

Program Notes

Classical Symphony, Op. 25 (Symphony No. 1)

Sergey Prokofiev

Born: Sontzovka (now Krasnoye), Ukraine, April 23, 1891

Died: Moscow, Russia, March 5, 1953

Prokofiev's desire to look back at the Classical era was spurred on by a self-guided challenge: could he write a piece not for, or inspired by, the keyboard? Much like Brahms, he turned to Haydn for inspiration... and the result is his Symphony No. 1, "Classical." Prokofiev remarked, "[...] if Haydn had lived into the present century, he would have preserved his own manner of writing, while taking a little from the new." We like to think that Haydn and Prokofiev might have gotten along splendidly, based on this work – Prokofiev's sly, sardonic humor glitters throughout vivacious leaps, delicately unfolding lines, a Gavotte that steps lightly and yet still seems to ding your toes... and a Molto Vivace that will possibly be over before you're fully aware it's begun.

Variations on a Theme by Joseph Haydn, Op. 56a

Johannes Brahms

Born: Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833

Died: Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897

Brahms was also very much inspired by Haydn for his fantastic pre-symphony symphony ... or at least, he thought he was. Historians now believe that the theme Brahms found prior to composing his Variations was not written by Haydn at all, but a student. Does it matter? Probably not; looking back at composers like Haydn, or the Baroque and Classical eras in general, was also an exercise in looking back at sensibilities, styles, and musical language, and Brahms' *Variations* has these facets in spades. A master of the theme and variations form himself, Brahms took the found "St. Anthony's Chorale" and created a series of variations, and a concluding passacaglia, that range from energetic and surprising to exquisite; fans of Elgar's *Enigma Variations* will especially enjoy Brahms' treatment of the viola section throughout. Now 150 years since its publication, Brahms' Haydn Variations remains one of his most fun, lighthearted, and extraordinarily well-crafted contributions to the symphonic repertoire.

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*program subject to change

