



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2022/23 SEASON

Higdon & Mendelssohn 5

Sunday, May 21, 2023 at 2 p.m.

Strauss Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Thomas Kluge, viola

CHARLES IVES

Symphony No. 3, "The Camp Meeting"

I. Old Folks Gatherin'

II. Children's Day

III. Communion

JENNIFER HIGDON

Concerto for Viola

Thomas Kluge, viola

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Symphony No. 5 in D Major, Op. 107, "Reformation"

I. Andante - Allegro con fuoco

II. Allegro vivace

III. Andante

IV. Chorale: Andante con moto - Allegro vivace

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.



Thomas Kluge, viola

Thomas Kluge is the principal viola of the Omaha Symphony, an active chamber musician, recitalist, and soloist. Prior to moving to Omaha, Thomas was a freelance musician in New York City. He performed with the New York Philharmonic, orchestras in Connecticut, and a number of chamber orchestras.

Thomas was educated in New York at the Manhattan School of Music, where his teacher was New York Philharmonic Principal Violist Leonard Davis. Before earning his master of music degree in viola performance, he studied in

Stuttgart, Germany, with Hermann Voss of the Melos Quartet and in Bern, Switzerland, where he earned a diploma in violin pedagogy and viola performance and pedagogy from the Bern Conservatory of Music and Theater, where his violin/viola teacher was Max Rostal, who for decades was one of Europe’s most prominent concert violinists and teachers.

Thomas teaches viola and is the orchestra director at Creighton University. He has been on the faculties of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Brevard Music Center in Brevard, North Carolina, and Omaha Conservatory of Music. Thomas also maintains a private violin and viola studio and was a founding member of the Omaha Chamber Music Society, where he served as artistic director for several years.

He plays a viola made for him by the eminent American luthiers Carl F. Becker and daughter Jennifer.

Featured Artists



Jennifer Higdon

Jennifer Higdon is one of America's most acclaimed figures in contemporary classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, a 2010 GRAMMY® for her Percussion Concerto, a 2018 GRAMMY® for her Viola Concerto and, most recently, a 2020 GRAMMY® for her Harp Concerto.

Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere, and the opera recording was nominated for two

GRAMMY® awards. In 2018, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University, which is awarded to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. Higdon enjoys several hundred performances a year of her works, and her works have been recorded on more than seventy CDs.

Program Notes

Symphony No. 3, “The Camp Meeting”

Charles Ives

Born: Danbury, Connecticut, October 20, 1874

Died: New York City, May 19, 1954

Son of a Connecticut bandmaster, Charles Ives is unquestionably the father of modern music in America. Classically trained at Yale, Ives' innovations in polytonality – music composed to be played in two or more different keys, often simultaneously or layered upon one another – had a local inspiration. He grew up hearing different bands playing different music in different parades across his hometown, an experience that would lead him to mix American hymns and folk music with often startling dissonance and unexpected twists. Ives earned his living through selling insurance and has been called the inventor of estate planning. He believed that by not relying on music as his livelihood, he was free to compose according to his own inner voice.

Ives' Symphony No. 3, “The Camp Meeting,” could have had its premiere done by no less than Gustav Mahler in 1911, but the Music Director of the New York Philharmonic returned to Vienna – Ives' score in hand – due to his failing heart, and died that May. It was not until composer Lou Harrison reconstructed the work from Ives' original pencil manuscript in 1946 that the piece finally had its premiere, the first performance of a major work by Charles Ives since 1932. “The Camp Meeting” would go on to win a Pulitzer Prize. The symphony abounds in American hymn tunes, which often served as raw material in Ives' music. The profusion of nostalgic, familiar music, and the traditional harmonic language of classical music, combine to produce a work of touching beauty that transcends mere nostalgia and achieves a touching non-sectarian spirituality.

Program Notes

Viola Concerto

Jennifer Higdon

Born: Brooklyn, New York, December 31, 1962

Pulitzer Prize-winning Jennifer Higdon has continued to entice legions of fans for her accessible but finely crafted music. Higdon is known for a neo-Romantic style that sounds resolutely modern yet comfortably tonal. This may be due to her studies in composition with Ned Rorem and George Crumb. The former fostered her gift at incorporating beguiling romance, and the latter helped develop a sincere appreciation of the avant-garde.

Higdon composed the Viola Concerto for Chilean-American violist Roberto Diaz, director of the Curtis Institute, where she holds the Rock Chair in Composition. The work is divided into three, untitled movements, often leaning into the dark, rich chocolate tonal palette that is the provenance of the viola. Higdon has the soloist focusing on warmth, trading harmonically satisfying dissonances and pockets of virtuosity with romantic raptures. The concerto concludes with a thumping final chord.

Symphony No. 5 in D Major, Op. 107, “Reformation”

Felix Mendelssohn

Born: Hamburg, Germany, February 3, 1809

Died: Leipzig, Germany, November 4, 1847

Grandson of the esteemed Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Felix Mendelssohn enjoyed great success during his relatively brief lifetime. The composer balanced romantic impulse and classical poise in a fluent manner especially pleasing to the taste of the conservative, though discerning, Victorian mindset. He was among the most precocious musicians in history, a budding pianist at four and a composer at eight. In his teen years, he produced works that have proudly stood the test of time, including his magical Octet for strings (age 16) and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (an ancient 17).

In 1829, Mendelssohn re-introduced new audiences to Bach’s towering St. Matthew Passion, and the following year completed his Symphony No. 5 in D Major, “Reformation,” written for the 300th anniversary of Martin Luther’s Augsburg Confession. Mendelssohn’s family was Jewish and had converted to Protestantism; the entire finale of the work is based on Luther’s best-known chorale, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, or “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” Given the immense popularity of his Symphony No. 4, the “Italian,” he was disappointed by the tepid reception he endured for the new work. Today, however, it’s considered one of his greatest compositions, combining his study of the Baroque masters with his own extraordinary voice.