



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2022/23 SEASON

Beethoven Triple

Sunday, October 2, 2022 at 2 p.m.

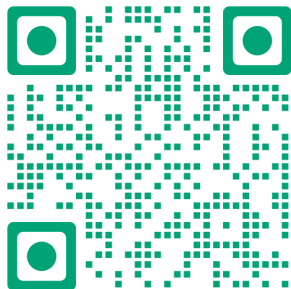
Strauss Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor

Ahra Cho, violin | Paul Ledwon, cello | Christi Zuniga, piano

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CAROLINE SHAW

Entr'acte for String Orchestra

BEETHOVEN

**Concerto in C Major for Violin, Cello,
Piano and Orchestra, Op. 56, "Triple
Concerto"**

I. Allegro

II. Largo

III. Rondo all polacca

Ahra Cho, violin

Paul Ledwon, cello

Christi Zuniga, piano

MOZART

Symphony No. 36 in C Major, K. 425 "Linz"

I. Adagio - Allegro spiritoso

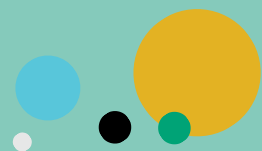
II. Poco adagio

III. Menuetto

IV. Presto

*program subject to change

Meet the Maestro



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 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.

Bahl is a proud recipient of four separate Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Awards between 2011 and 2016 and the 2009 Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Scholarship. 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 over the course of 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 and George Manahan. In recent years, Bahl has been a frequent collaborator with jazz legend Wayne Shorter, conducting his quartet in concerts of his orchestral music at the Kennedy Center and Detroit Free Jazz Festival.

Featured Artists



Ahra Cho, violin

Violinist Ahra Cho recently joined the Omaha Symphony as an associate concertmaster in January 2022. She previously served as substitute musician for the New York Philharmonic, as well as concertmaster of the Manhattan Chamber Sinfonia, Manhattan Soloists Ensemble in New York, Texas Music Festival Orchestra, Duxbury Orchestra, and Manhattan School of Music Symphony Orchestra. In more recent months, she was appointed as a first section violinist of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra.

A versatile and enthusiastic musician, Ms. Cho has continued to enjoy her musical career of solo, chamber music, teaching artist, and orchestra musician appearances throughout North America and Asia. A native of Seoul, South Korea, Ms. Cho started playing violin when she was just four years old. As a soloist, she has earned numerous invaluable experiences performing with renowned orchestras including the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra as her debut at age eleven, as well as the Jeonju Philharmonic Orchestra, Korean Chamber Orchestra, Sejong soloists Concert, Seoul National Symphony Orchestra, Manhattan Soloists Ensemble, and the Duxbury Festival Orchestra.



Paul Ledwon, cello

Paul Ledwon is currently principal cellist of the Omaha Symphony, a position he has held since 1999. His frequent solo appearances with the orchestra have included works by Haydn, Schumann, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky. Ledwon began his musical training at the age of four on the piano and violin, discovering the cello a few years later. He studied with Hans Jorgen Jensen at Northwestern University, earning his Bachelor of Music with Distinction and his Master of Music with Program Honors. While a student at NU, he performed recitals annually in Evanston and in Detroit, for the Detroit Institute of Arts' subscription concert series. He was also a frequent soloist with Chicago area orchestras including the Northwestern and North Shore Chamber Orchestras, and performed at the master classes of such cellists as Anner Bylsma, Harvey Shapiro, John Sharp, Paul Katz, Lynn Harrell, and Mstislav Rostropovich. At this time, Ledwon was principal cellist of both the NU Symphony and the Chicago Symphony Civic Orchestras, as well as a substitute with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. His summers included performing as principal with the Schleswig-Holstein (Germany) and Pacific Music Festival (Japan) orchestras.



Christi Zuniga, piano

Christi Zuniga has been Principal Keyboardist with the Omaha Symphony since 2000. She earned her Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from Clayton State College in Georgia and received a Master of Music degree in Chamber Music and Accompanying from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

In addition to her full-time position with the Omaha Symphony, Ms. Zuniga teaches piano privately and accompanies musicians in and around Omaha for various concerts and competitions. She has collaborated with many visiting artists, including Joseph Alessi, Thomas Bacon, and Peter Verhoyen.

Program Notes



Entr'acte

Caroline Shaw

Born: Greenville, North Carolina, August 1, 1982

A precocious musical talent, Caroline Shaw began playing violin at age two under the tutelage of her mother. Shaw showed compositional ability by age ten, inspired by chamber works by Mozart and Brahms. Her résumé is also graced by her gifts as a singer. She earned a Bachelor of Music in violin performance at Rice University in 2004, a Master's degree, also in violin, from Yale three years later, and was accepted at Princeton in 2010 to pursue composition.

Just three years later, in 2013, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music, the youngest person ever to earn that prestigious acknowledgment, for her *Partita for 8 Voices*. In 2022, she won the Grammy Award for Best Classical Composition for *Narrow Sea*.

In 2011, Shaw composed *Entr'acte* for string quartet and, upon a commission by ensemble *A Far Cry* in 2014, expanded the work to string orchestra. The composer has written, "I love the way some music suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice's looking glass (from *Alice in Wonderland*), in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition." She has also noted that *Entr'acte* "was written...after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn's Op. 77, No. 2—with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. *Entr'acte* is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further, a play on that pivot to "technicolor."

By expanding the work to full string orchestra, Shaw was able to employ a greater dynamic range and texture. The work opens with a sequence of well-spaced chords followed by a section abounding in pizzicatos. A very quiet, somewhat mysterious paragraph ensues. Though the music is essentially diatonic, occasional dissonances add spice to the material, as do stratospheric passages, and slides with dissonant intervals. In the closing minutes a solo cello quietly intones very quiet pizzicatos and closes the work as if in a dream.

On a personal note, this writer suggests listening to Haydn's Op. 77, No. 2, his final completed string quartet, a brilliant work filled with good humor balanced and darkened by occasional harmonic shadows via shifts into the minor mode. Shaw, shall we say, has very good taste.

Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra in C Major, Op. 56

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: Bonn, Germany, December 16, 1770

Died: Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

The venerable string quartet may have established itself as the mainstay of chamber music in the second half of the 18th century, but the development of the piano would bring about the golden age of the piano trio. The early pianoforte's undernourished bass required a cello to add heft to the nascent piano trio's feeble nether region. As the power of the evolving piano grew, it freed the cello from its hitherto supportive role. In so doing, the cello became an increasingly independent voice, able to match the soloistic nature of both piano and violin. By the early years of the 19th century the piano trio had established itself as a worthy adversary to the string quartet. Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio set the stage for the future, inspiring Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms, amongst many others.

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Beethoven's early biographer Anton Schindler wrote that his subject composed the so-called "Triple Concerto" (1803-05), a concerto for piano trio and orchestra, for the composer's patron and piano student Archduke Rudolf of Austria. Apparently, the archduke never actually performed the work. When published, the composer dedicated it to another patron, Prince Lobkowitz.

If many of the works of Beethoven's so-called middle period celebrate his power and passion—the third ("Eroica") and fifth symphonies, the third and fifth ("Emperor") piano concertos, the "Appassionata" piano sonata, for example—he was equally apt to alternate such blockbusters with poetic and lyrical outpourings, such as the fourth and sixth ("Pastorale") symphonies and the fourth piano concerto. His triple concerto for violin, cello and piano is just such a work, short on high drama but possessed of tenderness, warmth and fetching melodies.

The unhurried beginning of the first movement, marked *Allegro*, begins quietly with a theme that is repeated as the motive ascends in stepwise fashion. After the orchestra presents the exposition, the three soloists expound on the material, all the while building a gradual crescendo. The entire movement abounds in a series of variants, often amplified by dotted rhythms (short-long, short-long) that are reserved and understated rather than martial. Perhaps the absence of conflict – so often a Beethoven mainstay – may have disappointed early commentators and audiences.

A comparatively brief but lovely *Largo* movement begins with a short introduction before the cello presents a theme in his high register, bathed in muted orchestral strings. The pianist joins the proceedings with understated and beguiling lyricism. Without a pause, the work moves straight into the rondo finale, bearing the heading, *Rondo alla Polacca* in the so-called Polish style (based on the *polonaise*, an old dance in slow 3/4 time, later much used by Chopin in heroic vein). The movement is light in mood and fluent in its writing for the three solo instruments. It was a particular favorite, incidentally, of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who quite rightly noted its thematic similarity to "Home on the Range."

Symphony No. 36 in C Major, K. 425, "Linz"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: Salzburg, Austria, January 27, 1756

Died: Vienna, Austria, December 5, 1791

A year after their marriage in August 1782, Wolfgang and Constanze Mozart visited Salzburg in hopes of mending fences with Leopold Mozart, the composer's domineering father, whose opposition to their union bordered on the psychotic. Mozart *père* had nurtured (and exploited) his son's musical gifts to both good and bad effect from early childhood; he was not ready to relinquish parental authority, and blindly attacked poor Constanze's character. The visit—naturally, given Leopold's animus—failed to accomplish its mission, and in late October 1783 the couple left the city of Mozart's birth, never to return. In route to Vienna, they visited Count Thun, father-in-law of a student of Mozart, who received the composer and his wife warmly. The Count, ever the consummate host, arranged a concert in Linz, and Mozart needed to come up with a suitable musical offering. In four days, the Symphony in C major was born, a remarkably quick gestation, even by Mozartian standards. In truth, such alacrity testifies to Mozart's *modus operandi*: he tended to compose in his head, and then write down the finished score as if taking dictation. No doubt he had already been at work "internally" on the "Linz" before arriving at the city gates.

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The symphony opens with a majestic slow introduction—the first time he had done so in a symphony—then slips into a brief chromatic and emotionally dark transitional passage before launching into the *Allegro*'s forceful main theme. The more lyrical secondary theme emerges shortly, prepared by energetic activity in the orchestra's basses.

The ensuing Poco adagio borders on the melancholy and stands as an expressive harbinger of Romanticism. *The Menuetto e Trio* brings Mozart back into classical decorum—up to a point, given the movement's distinctly Haydn-inspired boisterous good humor.

The finale, marked Presto, maintains the good spirits of the *Menuetto*, beginning with an infectious main theme. The movement abounds in irresistible energy and strong contrasts of mood, including some darker moments before closing on a note of upbeat optimism.

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