



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2022/23 SEASON

Elgar & Bolero

Friday, September 23, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. | Saturday, September 24, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director | Gabriel Martins, cello

WINSTON SCHNEIDER

Anniversary Overture
(World Premiere)

ELGAR

Cello Concerto

I. Adagio

II. Lento

III. Adagio

IV. Allegro

Gabriel Martins

Cello

DEBUSSY

La Mer

I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer

[From Dawn to Noon on the Sea]

II. Jeux des vagues [Play of the Waves]

III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer

[Dialogue of Wind and Sea]

Christina Narwicz

Artist

RAVEL

Boléro

*program subject to change

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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.

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



Gabriel Martins, Cello

Cellist Gabriel Martins (b. 1998) has established himself as one of the world's most enthralling young artists, with a deep commitment to the timeless masterpieces of classical music. His artistry has already been recognized through an extensive list of accolades including the 2020 Concert Artists Guild - Young Classical Artists Trust Grand Prize, the 2020 Sphinx Competition Gold Medal, the David Popper International Cello Competition Gold Medal, the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians Silver Medal, the Schadt String Competition Gold Medal, the Orford Music Award, and the Prague Spring Czech Music Fund Prize. These successes have led to a number of high-profile debuts including Wigmore, Carnegie, and Merkin Halls, the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Maison Symphonique in Montréal, and the Arkansas, Memphis, Indianapolis, New Russian State, Pacific, and Phoenix Symphony Orchestras. According to legendary cellist Ralph Kirshbaum, he has "revealed heart, passion, intellect, and a finely-nuanced palette of colors in a compelling manner worthy of a seasoned artist."

For Martins, great masterpieces require great patience and solemnity in order to reveal their true, extraordinary capabilities. His powerful belief in this is what drives his distinctive, emotive performances. In 2021, Martins gave his first performance of the complete Bach Suite Cycle, in collaboration with Kaufman Center and the Alphadyne Foundation, where he played all Six Cello Suites back to back in New York City. In the spring of 2022 he debuted his first complete Beethoven Cycle, in collaboration with pianist Audrey Vardanega and the Lakes Area Music Festival, performing and recording all of the works for Cello and Piano. In addition to his commitment to the great classics of the cello repertoire, Martins composes his own works and arranges many others. His "Songs of Solitude" received their World Premiere in the spring of 2021 in collaboration with the Brooklyn Public Library, and his new cello arrangements of Bach's Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas have received high acclaim and a feature in *The Strad Magazine*. Martins' performances have been broadcast on NPR, WQXR, KUSC, WFMT, and more. He is also a passionate educator, teaching privately and giving a number of masterclasses. He served as a teaching assistant both at the IU Jacobs School of Music and the USC Thornton School of Music, and his students have gone on to achieve major success in competitions and performances around the world.

Born of American and Brazilian heritage, Martins grew up in Bloomington, Indiana. He began playing the cello when he was five, studying with Susan Moses at the Indiana University String Academy. He went on to receive his B.M. as a Presidential Scholar at the USC Thornton School of Music with Ralph Kirshbaum. In his freshman year at USC, he won the school's concerto competition as well as its Bach competition. He received his M.M. at the New England Conservatory of Music. His festival appearances include Ravinia's Steans Music Institute, where he toured with Miriam Fried, and the Aspen Music Festival, where he won the concerto competition. He now resides in Boston, Massachusetts with his partner, violinist Geneva Lewis, whom he frequently collaborates with as a duo. He plays on a composite Francesco Ruggieri cello made in Cremona, c. 1690 and a François Nicolas Voirin bow made in Paris, c. 1880.

featured artists



Winston Schneider, Composer

Fourteen-year-old composer Winston F. Schneider's work is described as "inventive and original... impressive and masterfully done.... the array of orchestral gestures is, frankly, stunning" (Albert Mendoza, composer, editor and author, Alfred Music). Schneider began composing at age 5, and has won over 30 awards for his compositions, including national and international awards.

Since 2018, Schneider has won first place nationally at all three major, pre-college student composition competitions: Music Teachers National Association (2022), National Federation of Music Clubs (2022), and National Association for Music Education (2018), and at age 10 was selected internationally as a Music At The Anthology Jr. composer. Perhaps most notably, in 2021, Schneider received a prestigious American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) Morton Gould Young Composer Award, a competition for composers up to 30 years of age, with 400 - 500 applicants each year. He was the youngest student ever to be included in the Curtis Institute of Music's esteemed Summerfest composition program at age 12. He's also been a member of the New York Youth Symphony Composing and Conducting Program. In July, he was invited to be on NPR's From the Top.

Schneider has written works that have been performed across the country, including by the New York Youth Symphony, the Omaha Symphony, Face the Music (NYC's premiere teen ensemble), Ars Futura (Cleveland contemporary music ensemble), Orchestra Omaha, SoundWaves String Orchestra, Rocky Mountain Summer Conservatory ensemble, numerous other string ensembles, as well as renowned musicians including Mimi Stillman, Jessica Meyer, Benjamin Fingland, Philip Sheegog and Hanna Landrum. He's received commissions from the Omaha Symphony, the Omaha Conservatory of Music, the Rocky Mountain Summer Conservatory, KVNO classical music station, and Project Harmony.

Schneider is a home-schooled student in Omaha and is a pianist and cellist. He's the current and three-time MTNA state piano performance winner. He studies at the Omaha Conservatory of Music and plays cello with the Omaha Area Youth Orchestra. You can learn more at www.winstonfschneider.com, and follow him on Instagram and YouTube: Winston F. Schneider.

featured artists



Christina Narwicz

Christina Narwicz bases much of her work on the natural world. Although often abstracted, the painter's organic themes clearly reference botany, the Caribbean Islands, the constantly changing environment as well as her own garden. Narwicz has exhibited nationally and internationally in both solo and group shows. Her paintings have been featured in publications such as Metropolitan Home, Omaha Magazine, Florida Design Magazine, The Palm Beacher, the World Herald and Vail Luxury Real Estate. Awarded an Artist-in-Residence at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, she has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Mid America Arts Alliance as well two Individual Artist Fellowship awards. Most recently Narwicz has been nominated for the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant.

program notes

***Anniversary Overture* (World Premiere)**

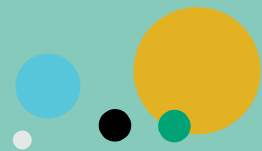
Winston Schneider

Born: Omaha, Nebraska, October 3, 2007

Winston Schneider inherits the mantle of astonishing young musical talents. Is he a new Mozart destined for greatness? His gifts manifested at a preternaturally early age; as he put it, he began piano lessons “twenty-nine days after my fifth birthday.” Possessed of perfect pitch and the ability to mimic the styles of many composers, he early on was able to simultaneously play in different keys. He is a “phenomenon” holding great promise for the future. He has already garnered many awards from musical organizations here and abroad. At 12, he was the youngest composer to be accepted into the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music’s summer program, just one of many awards earned during his budding tenure.

Time will tell if Schneider will continue channeling this budding genius into a career in composition, or if he’ll turn his focus to other potentials in this vast firmament. Still, many music-lovers in Omaha are captivated by this young and already prolific composer. It will be exciting to watch his remarkably ascendant career. He was kind enough to provide his own program notes for *Anniversary Overture*, here:

program notes



The Overview: Anniversary Overture celebrates the 50th anniversary of KVNO, Omaha's only classical music station. What an amazing milestone for a radio station. However, the real beneficiaries are the listeners like you and me.

The Background: I was eight years old when I was selected to be a KVNO Classical Kid in 2016. I was interviewed, and I toured the radio station. When it aired, my family, grandparents and I gathered excitedly around a radio to listen. There was a special concert, and I remember I played Erik Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1, and there was a video interview. A photo from that interview is still in my dad's office. KVNO Classical Kids has been giving unforgettable moments like these and inspiring kids like me for over 20 years. My love of classical music runs deep, and is fostered by my amazing music teachers, recordings of great works, and of course, KVNO. When I listen to KVNO, I may be inspired by a piece I've never heard before or awed by something familiar. I hear moments of beauty, intensity, or some other feeling that words cannot express.

The Inspiration: The main theme you'll hear at the beginning of the piece is comprised of four notes, D-A-G-A. These aren't just any four notes; using a code-chart that translates pitches on the staff to letters of the alphabet, those four notes spell K-V-N-O. This four-note motive is the bedrock of the piece. Once I had this, a fascinating journey began. Tonight, I present to you the final work, Anniversary Overture, a celebratory piece dedicated to KVNO. In it, you'll hear moments of celebration and the spirit of triumph. I hope you enjoy the piece and sense the appreciation and celebration of 50 years of beautiful musical moments. Thank you, KVNO, for inviting me to be a part of this special celebration. I'd like to especially thank Dr. Ken Meints and Maestro Ernest Richardson for their input and guidance on my piece.

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85

Edward Elgar

Born: in Broadheath, near Worcester, England, June 2, 1857

Died: in Worcester, England, February 23, 1934

It has long been a curiosity that in England, with its rich—one might even say dominating—literary history, music should suffer in pronounced comparative inferiority. Since the death of Henry Purcell in 1695, England's greatest musical voices seemed to come from abroad, beginning with Handel, later Haydn, and eventually Mendelssohn. Had not Mozart died so young, even he—with urgings from his friend Stephen Storace—would have crossed the channel to ply his trade in the English capital. (Mozart did visit London as a child of 8 and established a life-long cordial and mutually respectful relationship with Johann Christian Bach, youngest son of the great Johann Sebastian.) Not until the closing years of the 19th century did Great Britain renew its native voice in the person of Sir Edward Elgar, the first in a succession of English worthies whose voices would come to the fore after.

Elgar enjoyed a special niche. Not only did he achieve high status among the cognoscenti for his orchestral and chamber works, but the English laity found immediate (and lasting) favor with his lighter works. He was, in his own ripely romantic way, a throwback to the 18th century, when the line between “popular” and “serious” music was not so firmly maintained by the guardians of culture. By the time he wrote his Introduction and Allegro for Strings in 1905, he had already established himself firmly in the musical public's consciousness through such major works as the Variations on an Original Theme (aka the Enigma Variations, 1899) and the oratorio The Dream of Gerontius (1900).

program notes



Though Elgar lived until 1934, he essentially stopped composing after the death of his wife, Alice, in 1920. In a sense his valedictory work was his Cello Concerto, written as his beloved lay dying. She had occupied more than a supportive role during their life together, functioning equally as a maternal spirit and spouse. He never fully recovered from the loss.

Elgar spent the summer of 1918 working on the Cello Concerto while in close contact with Felix Salmond, who gave the première and eventually became a highly regarded teacher at the Juilliard School and Curtis Institute. Because insufficient rehearsal time (not Elgar's fault) precipitated an inadequate performance, initial audience response was less than enthusiastic. In the intervening years, however, Elgar's Cello Concerto has become a staple of the repertoire.

The work opens with a portentous recitative-like statement entrusted to the solo cello. Orchestral violas posit a lyrical tune repeated by the soloist, who maintains dominance throughout the movement. A series of plucked chords by the cello segues into the ensuing Scherzo, an understandably melancholy paragraph that belies the original meaning of the word "scherzo," Italian for "joke" or "jest." As in the opening movement, the cello's clear dominance is further reinforced by Elgar's spartan orchestration.

A brief slow movement follows—a sad and heartfelt virtually unbroken solo by the cellist. The concluding Rondo begins with eight measures in which the opening theme is reprised before it is interrupted by a passionate outburst from the soloist. The remainder of the finale finds Elgar refashioning fragments from earlier themes in the concerto. Despite moments of exhilaration, the prevailing mood is unshakably melancholy, aptly reflected in the composer's parting words at the end of the score: Finis. R.I.P...

La Mer

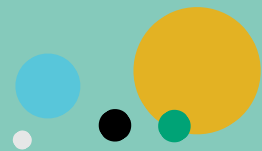
Claude Debussy

Born: in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, August 22, 1862

Died: in Paris, France, March 25, 1918

Though we tend to think of the dramatic first performance riot of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring in 1913 as the great symbolic clash between the old and the new worlds of music, it is Claude Debussy who truly set the table for musical modernism by demolishing traditional Western harmony. By absorbing non-Western scales from Asian and Pacific Island cultures, he broke away from our sacrosanct system of tonal harmony. As the Renaissance moved into the future in the late 16th century, ancient modes dissolved into "modern" tonality whose harmonic language paralleled the contemporaneous development of the novel: a push more toward goal orientation. Music thus assumed a narrative flow in which changing harmony created forward momentum. By the closing years of the 19th century, Debussy had tired of traditional harmony and found renewal in Asian music - a true "Eureka moment." Hearing Javanese music at the 1893 Paris Exhibition, he was smitten by this exotic "new" vocabulary, which was a major factor in the evolution of new music.

In October 1905, he composed La Mer, his openly symphonic orchestral work, which disappointed those devotees who remained in the dream-state of Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun. Yet others, such as Puccini, extolled this new direction.



Debussy loved the sea, with its mystery and ever-changing moods and hidden secrets. His father was a sailor who regaled the youngster with wondrous stories of his wanderings. In a letter to fellow composer André Messager Debussy wrote, “You may not know that I was destined for a sailor’s life and that it was only by chance that fate led me in another direction. But I have always held a passionate love for the sea.” As Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring* (1962) opined, “like the sea itself, the surface of Debussy’s music hints at the brooding mystery of its depths, and ultimately the profound enigma of life itself—after all, mankind carries the primordial salt of the sea in our blood.”

The first movement of *La Mer*, “From Dawn to Noon on the Sea,” abounds in sudden changes in mood mirroring the familiar changes in the surface that hide its “eternal and static” world of the ocean’s mysterious depths.

“Play of the Waves” follows, its lighter and often percussive textures suggesting sparkling, dancing light of the waves. The music’s swirling motion simply dies away rather than ending on firm resolution.

The concluding “Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea,” is nothing less than a dramatic and threatening sea storm that conjures Hokusai’s famed *The Wave* (views of Mount Fuji). That iconic wood cut adorns the printed score of *La Mer* and remains to this day one of the world’s most famous portrayals of two-thirds of the earth’s surface and power. It also reaffirms Debussy’s fascination with the East.

Boléro

Maurice Ravel

Born: in Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875

Died: in Paris, France, December 18, 1937

Though often compared with the voluptuous, sensuous and intentionally ambiguous music of Debussy, Maurice Ravel’s compositions are precise, clear in design, and economical in their unfailingly skillful orchestration. Igor Stravinsky characterized Ravel as a Swiss watchmaker, an apt metaphor that captured the French composer’s stated objective—technical perfection. “I can strive unceasingly to this end,” Ravel wrote, “since I am certain of never being able to attain it.” This artistic creed is typically French and recalls similar thoughts uttered by as disparate a pair of composers as Camille Saint-Saëns and the Russian-born Stravinsky, who spent critical years in Paris absorbing French esthetics. Nonetheless, Ravel’s music seldom fails to engage the emotions.

He was greatly influenced by Debussy and Fauré. Although he adopted some impressionistic techniques, that soft-edged style never overcame his basic affinity for the clean melodic contours, distinct rhythms, and firm structures of classicism. Also, his harmonies, while complex and sophisticated—and based on the new impressionism—remained functional, i.e., each chord moved the music in a forward, goal-oriented direction.

With the death of Debussy in 1918, Ravel’s style changed dramatically, becoming sparer in tone and more abstract in character, much closer to the neo-classical style of Stravinsky and others of that persuasion. Like them, he used early jazz harmonies and rhythms to color his music. Throughout his changing styles he remained a master of orchestral and piano writing, with a harmonic style instantly recognizable as his own.

program notes



Ravel composed Boléro—by far his best-known composition and one of the most popular works of the 20th century—in 1928. He explained, “At the request of [dancer/choreographer] Ida Rubinstein, I composed a boléro for orchestra. It is a rather slow dance, and uniform throughout its melody, harmony and rhythm, the latter tapped ceaselessly by the side-drum. The only element of variety is supplied by the orchestral crescendo.”

Perhaps puzzled by its wildly enthusiastic public reception, he wrote to his friend, composer Arthur Honegger: “I have written only one masterpiece. That is the Boléro. Unfortunately, it contains no music.” Many would take exception to Ravel’s assertion.

The enormously popular Boléro has retained a steadfast place in the orchestral repertoire. Slowly unfolding in measured time and bearing essentially a single, much-repeated theme, its cumulative hypnotic rhythm and brilliant orchestration win the day.

(c) Steven Lowe