



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2022/23 SEASON

Romeo & Juliet

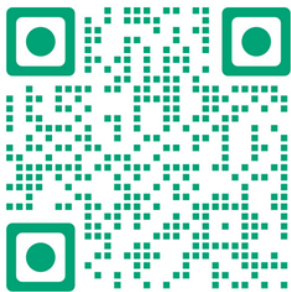
Friday, February 10, 2023 at 7:30 p.m. | Saturday, February 11, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Susanna Perry Gilmore, violin

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PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture

WILLIAM WALTON

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

I. Andante tranquillo

II. Presto capriccioso alla napoletana

III. Vivace

Susanna Perry Gilmore, violin

INTERMISSION

SERGE PROKOFIEV

Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*

The Montagues and the Capulets

Juliet—The Young Girl

Gavotte: Non troppo allegro

Masks

Romeo and Juliet

Dance

Friar Laurence

The Death of Tybalt

Romeo and Juliet before Parting

Romeo at Juliet's Grave

*program subject to change

Sponsored by:

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 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.



Susanna Perry Gilmore, violin

Susanna Perry Gilmore enjoys a multifaceted career as solo artist, chamber musician, and orchestral concertmaster. Performing on both modern and period instruments and versatile in diverse styles from classical to fiddling, she is hailed as a player who is both “thrilling and sensitive” by the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, “luminous and hypnotic” by the *Omaha World-Herald*, and “authentic with exquisite good taste” and “rich in tone, bringing musical depth and a human touch” by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

Ms. Gilmore frequently appears as a soloist with the Omaha Symphony on the Masterworks, Symphony Joslyn, and Symphony Pops series. Recent

performances include the *Scottish Fantasy* by Max Bruch and *Celtic Journey: Magic of the Emerald Isle*. In recent seasons Omaha audiences have heard Ms. Gilmore perform the *Tzigane* by Ravel, Berg's Violin Concerto, Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, Mozart Violin Concerto No. 5, and the Korngold Violin Concerto as well as major concertmaster solos such as Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade* and Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*.

featured artists

After beginning her career as a chamber player, at the age of twenty-six Ms. Gilmore became concertmaster of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. She joined the Omaha Symphony as concertmaster in 2011. Since 2014 she has been a frequent soloist and co-concertmaster on baroque violin and fiddle with the acclaimed period instrument ensemble and Grammy Award winner Apollo's Fire (Cleveland), with whom she tours nationally and internationally and appears on the CD *Sugarloaf Mountain: An Appalachian Gathering* (Billboard Top 10 classical bestseller), the CD *Sephardic Journey: Wanderings of the Spanish Jews* (Billboard Top 10 classical bestseller), and *Christmas on Sugarloaf Mountain*.

Ms. Gilmore holds a Bachelor's degree from Oxford University (UK), where she studied musicology and performed both early music and symphonic repertoire while studying privately with Yfrah Neaman. She spent a post-graduate year in the Advanced Solo Studies Program at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. Upon returning to the United States, she earned a Master's in Violin Performance from the New England Conservatory, where she studied with James Buswell. Prior to her studies in England, Ms. Gilmore studied with Christian Teal at the Blair School of Music in the pre-college program and as a child began her violin studies with Mimi Zweig at Indiana University. Ms. Gilmore learned to play Celtic fiddle in her youth through sitting in on Irish sessions during her years living in Nashville and England.

When not working as a classical and baroque violinist and fiddler, Ms. Gilmore spends time with her two daughters, Katy and Zoe, and her husband, Viseslav Drincic. She performs on a 1776 Joseph Odoardi violin.

Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture

Piotr Tchaikovsky

Born: St. Petersburg, November 6, 1893

Died: Votkinsk, district of Viatka, Russia, May 7, 1840

Tchaikovsky composed his first version of the *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture* when he was just 29 years old. Supported by his mentor and colleague Mily Balakirev – the driving force behind the Russian composer titans known as “The Five” – Tchaikovsky created a work whose goal was not to necessarily follow Shakespeare’s exact plotline, but rather to express the feelings evoked by particular scenes. In doing so, he gave us – besides a tremendous piece of a music – one of the most famous melodies of all time, a love theme that fellow composer Rimsky-Korsakov called “the greatest melody ever written by a Russian composer.”

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

William Walton

Born: Oldham, United Kingdom, March 29, 1902

Died: Ischia, Italy, March 8, 1983

William Walton would spend his life working to co-exist with the titans of 20th century British music: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Edward Elgar, and Benjamin Britten. That said, his *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, commissioned for the world-renowned Jascha Heifetz, would recall a glorious, love-filled visit to Italy in the late 1930s, and would receive its premiere in Cleveland, Ohio, shortly after the onset of World War II. The work is a crafty tour de force, with homages to the drama and glorious melodies of Italian opera, the frenetic tarantella, a refreshing take on the 16th century madrigal, and a Vivace that practically burns the barn down. Beyond being one of Walton’s most ingenious commissions, it’s truly a treatise on unrestrained joy for soloist and orchestra, featuring Omaha Symphony Concertmaster Susanna Perry Gilmore.

program notes

Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*

Sergei Prokofiev

Born: Sontzovka, Ukraine, April 23, 1891

Died: Moscow, Russia, March 5, 1953

Shakespeare's play about star-crossed young lovers has tempted composers far and wide to express its romantic ardor and anguish. One can argue, however, that in the 20th century, Prokofiev's colorful evocation reigns supreme. Prokofiev's musical style—basically tonal but spiced up by piquant “modern” harmonies—teases the ear with its sarcasm-tinged lyricism. Yet he also had a romantic side, as evidenced in such lushly beautiful reveries as the second movement of his second violin concerto, and a seemingly natural inclination for ballet. Although the Kirov and Bolshoi Ballet would both turn down Prokofiev upon his initial pitch for *Romeo and Juliet*, the production by Czechoslovakia's Brno Opera House would be so successful as to cause them both to reconsider and stage Prokofiev's work in the 1940s.

For this performance, Maestro Bahl curated a custom suite, drawing from Prokofiev's own two main suites and the full ballet to create a linear, plot-based walk-through of Shakespeare's drama.

The “Montagues and Capulets” establishes the interfamily conflict with an expectant, dissonant crescendo followed by ominously quiet strings. Prokofiev creates a sense of palpable menace that is followed by a heavily accented brass-inflected episode that furthers the feeling of threat. A quiet middle section portrays Juliet reluctantly dancing with her arranged suitor.

In “Juliet – The Young Girl,” vivacious, youthful music fills the air with hope and dreams of love. This is Prokofiev at his most disarmingly lyrical and provides powerful contrast with the anxiety of the previous movement.

The “Gavotte: Non troppo allegro,” begins with tongue-in-cheek mock-stately pomposity of self-important guests. Relief comes as more modest guests arrive, graced by contrasting lyrical phrases.

“Masks” opens quietly with percussion and clarinet; the strings present a jaunty and unreservedly sardonic evocation of the Act I Ball Scene.

“Dance” is a quick-paced interlude that provides a bit of revelry tinged with Prokofiev's trademark sarcasm.

The string-dominated “Friar Laurence” music is quiet and reserved, suggesting the wisdom and grave concern of the cleric.

“Tybalt's Death” pulses with feverish energy. The sword fight between Mercutio and Tybalt conveys mounting anger and youthful intemperance. The music flies by as a veritable *moto perpetuo* with suppressed dynamics until a rhythmically stomping section brings the scene to a catastrophic close.

“Romeo and Juliet before Parting” derives from the third act of the ballet. The music conveys the love of the clandestinely married couple, understandably darkened with intimations of their inevitable fates.

Introduced by the strings, “Romeo at Juliet's Grave” touches the heart through its evocation of grief and loss. Its pained anxiety reminds us of how badly the potion-ruse devised by Friar Laurence has gone fatally astray. Subtle echoes of the Montague-Capulet music acts as a leitmotif of doom. Near the end, the music becomes reflective and tender, suggesting Romeo's beatific vision of Juliet.

Both the original ballet and its various suites remain among Prokofiev's best-known and well-loved scores.