



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2021/2022 SEASON

Daphnis et Chloé

Friday, April 29, 2022 - 7:30 PM | Saturday, April 30, 2022 - 7:30 PM

Holland Performing Arts Center

Lidiya Yankovskaya, conductor

Simone Porter, violin

LILI BOULANGER

D'un matin de printemps ("Of a Spring Morning")

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64

- I. Allegro molto appassionato
- II. Andante
- III. Allegretto non troppo - Allegro molto vivace

Simone Porter, violin

INTERMISSION

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Ibéria from Images pour Orchestre

- I. Par les rues et par les chemins ("In the Streets and Byways")
- II. Les parfums de la nuit ("Perfumes of the Night")
- III. Le matin d'un jour de fête ("Morning of a Festival Day")

MAURICE RAVEL

Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis et Chloé*

- I. Lever du jour ("Daybreak")
- II. Pantomime
- III. Danse générale ("General Dance")

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program notes by Steven Lowe and Dani Meier

D'un matin de printemps ("Of a Spring Morning")

Lili Boulanger

Born: Paris, France, August 21, 1893 | Died: Mézy-sur-Seine, France, March 15, 1918

Tragically short-lived Lili Boulanger was the younger sister of famed pedagogue Nadia. Lili got off to a bad start in life, suffering from chronic illness that compromised her health, especially after 1895, when she barely survived bronchial pneumonia. Almost constantly ill thereafter, she died from Crohn's Disease in 1918.

Nevertheless, she worked hard to develop her musical skills and by age 14 had already decided to focus on composition. Her choral work *Faust et Hélène* earned her the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1913 – the first woman to do so – which brought immediate fame both in Paris and abroad. Lili was highly regarded by Claude Debussy, not generally a cordial supporter of fellow composers; he noted that her music "undulates with grace."

At only three years of age she began accompanying her older and already famous sister Nadia to classes at the Paris Conservatory. Despite Lili's compromised health she eagerly studied piano, violin, cello and harp in addition to composition.

Before her death in 1918, she composed two lovely orchestral works, *D'un Soir Triste* ("Of a Sad Evening") and *D'un matin de printemps* ("Of a Spring Morning"). These were the last pieces she could even copy by herself, and Nadia had to fill in the dynamic and expressive marks. As befits the title *D'un Soir Triste* lives in a less sanguine realm but still maintains delicacy and touching beauty.

D'un matin de printemps, on the other hand, basks in a delicate orchestral palette—one guesses that this was what Debussy so liked. Airy, even chirpy—the music abounds in quick key changes. Showers of sparks frolic in the morning sun. A dancing clarinet seconded by other winds describe an animated, joyful spring morning. Sections alternate between brightness and sensuality, contrasted with dreamy emanations. A celesta adds further sparks. A yearning middle section recalls the opening before a violin solo appears. A flute converses with the piccolo. Energy is resumed before the piece ends suddenly and resolutely. Like a heaven-sent gift, Lili's short life promised much but left much unrealized. Her sister Nadia carried Lili's memory with her for the rest of her own storied career.

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64

Felix Mendelssohn

Born: Hamburg, Germany, February 9, 1809 | Died: Leipzig, Germany, November 4, 1847

A theme obsessed Mendelssohn in 1838; it was a compelling melody in E minor played by a violin in his "inner" ear. Excitedly, he wrote to his friend and colleague, violinist Ferdinand David, concertmaster of the famed Gewandhaus Orchestra Mendelssohn had directed since 1835. Once the irresistible tune entered the composer's consciousness, he had no one other than David in mind as intended soloist. Over the next seven years the violinist frequently examined the slowly evolving score, proffering copious technical advice to Mendelssohn (who was no mean fiddler himself).

From the initial performance forward, Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto quickly became a favorite among violinists and audiences alike, and despite a sudden and long-lasting lapse in Mendelssohn's posthumous reputation (happily on the rise of late), the E-minor concerto has always enjoyed a lofty perch in the violin concerto repertory. Though the composer is often described as a classicist within the Romantic era, the concerto opens in an unorthodox fashion by dropping the traditional lengthy orchestral exposition found in most concertos. The model was probably Beethoven's fourth piano concerto, which begins with a statement from the piano before the orchestra even whispers a note—or perhaps the earlier inspiration of Mozart's E-flat piano concerto, K. 271.

Mendelssohn accords the soloist right of first entry in a main theme of passion and individuality, a memorable tune that energizes the entire first movement, *Allegro molto appassionato*. A second, less sweeping tune provides balance and contrast. The movement seems to end as expected, but for a soft sustained note on the bassoon, sadly not often even heard by audiences who can't help but applaud. (We wouldn't blame you if you did!) The bassoon serves as a connective thread to the ensuing *Andante*. The prevailing mood here is quietly rapt, even spiritual, despite a brief interruption of the reverie during an agitated section midway through the movement.

Again, without pause, the *Allegretto non troppo*—*Allegro molto vivace* finale rises out of the introspective calm of the *Andante*, briefly recalling a theme just heard, before launching into a vigorous rondo, dance-like and elfin in its high spirits.

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Ibéria* from *Images pour Orchestre

Claude Debussy

Born: August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, just outside Paris, France | Died: March 25, 1918, Paris, France

The second of the three-part set *Images*, *Ibéria* began life as a work for two pianos but, as Orrin Howard wrote, “[Debussy] came to the realization that his visions required the full palette of colors of a symphony orchestra.” “Visions” is an appropriate term given that Debussy’s impressions of Spain came from what he had learned via transplanted cultural experiences and perhaps one delightful half-day in the country itself, expanded gloriously within his own imagination. As Michael Steinberg put it, “[...] he was ready to take the plunge and sing a love song on a grand scale to the country that so engaged him and that he did not need to see.”

Why? Or rather, how? As we explored in the final Symphony Joslyn concert of the season, French composers were naturally drawn to Spain, their minds and muses consistently across the southern border on dances, folk music, people and day-to-day life that seemed irresistible. This, combined with Debussy’s extraordinary imagination, was the genesis of *Ibéria*. Despite Debussy insisting that he had no connection to the visual impressionist movement begun by Monet, his memory of even that brief time in Spain is a masterclass in word painting. As Falla wrote, “[Debussy had an indelible memory of] the light in the bullring, particularly the violent contrast between the one half of the ring flooded with sunlight and the other half in deep shade.” If his imprinted memory started there, how could he fail to create such a rendering as *Ibéria*? Falla lauded the French composer further, writing, “Claude Debussy wrote Spanish music without knowing Spain, that is to say without knowing the land of Spain, which is a different matter. Debussy knew Spain from his reading, from pictures, from songs, and from dances with songs danced by true Spanish dancers.” Enhanced with his remembered vivid, visual contrasts, *Ibéria* is split into three movements spanning roughly two days.

“In the Streets and Byways” is an exploration of Spain’s cities, ducking along alleyways and down corridors past vibrant splashes of people – and their animals – living and thriving. “Perfumes of the Night” is hazy and luxurious; the oboe and members of the percussion section set up a languorous mosey, perhaps to a rooftop or vista, to gaze on the sleepy city below. Finally, “Morning of a Festival Day” is a slow burn toward what Steinberg called “happy chaos” – the meeting of myriad festivities and festival-makers, each with their own tune, instrument, and form of celebration, building to a joyous firework of a conclusion.

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Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis et Chloé*

Maurice Ravel

Born: Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875 | Died: 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.

In 1909, famed impresario Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Maurice Ravel to provide music for a ballet based on a pastoral romance drawn from the writings of a fifth-century writer, Longus. In 1928, Ravel reflected, “My aim in writing [*Daphnis et Chloé*] was to compose a vast musical fresco, and to be not so much careful about archaic details as loyal to my visionary Greece, which is fairly closely related to the Greece imagined and depicted by French painters at the end of the 18th century.”

Ravel conceived the ballet as a quasi-symphony in three movements (which, in the 18th century, was the norm in Paris). The plot line centers on the love between the eponymous couple, threatened by the kidnapping of Chloé by pirates. By the end of the ballet, they have been reunited through the intercession of Pan, the god of nature.

The Second Suite, heard tonight, derives from the final scene of the ballet, and consists of a truly splendid “Daybreak,” fashioned from a rising sequence taken from a horn solo heard at the beginning of the ballet. The next section, “Pantomime,” is a feast for the woodwinds, utterly shimmering in their brilliance. The suite (and ballet) concludes with a wild, frenetic and orgiastic “General Dance,” also derived from the above-mentioned horn solo, now cast in 5/4 time—which drove the dancers to distraction during the contentious rehearsals for the premiere. It is unequivocally unmatched in its beauty.

(c) 2021 Steven Lowe



Simone Porter, violin

Violinist Simone Porter has been recognized as an emerging artist of impassioned energy, interpretive integrity, and vibrant communication. In the past few years she has debuted with the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic; and with a number of renowned conductors, including Stéphane Denève, Gustavo Dudamel, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Nicholas McGegan, Ludovic Morlot, and Donald Runnicles. Born in 1996, Simone made her professional solo debut at age 10 with the Seattle Symphony and her international debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London at age 13. In March 2015, Simone was named a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Recent highlights include the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with New Jersey Symphony, the Brahms Violin Concerto with the Pacific Symphony, Barber Violin Concerto with the Seattle Symphony, and an extensive tour throughout the US, including concerts with the Santa Rosa, Amarillo, Pasadena, Fairfax, and Midland Symphonies; the Rochester, Westchester, Orlando and Greater Bay Philharmonics; the Sarasota Orchestra and the Northwest Sinfonietta.

At the invitation of Esa-Pekka Salonen, Simone performed his work *Lachen verlernt* ('Laughing Unlearned'), at the New York Philharmonic's "Foreign Bodies," a multi-sensory celebration of the work of the composer and conductor. In recent seasons, she has also appeared at the Edinburgh Festival performing Barber under the direction of Stéphane Denève, and at the Mostly Mozart Festival performing Mozart under Louis Langrée. She has also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl with both Nicholas McGegan and Ludovic Morlot, and at Walt Disney Concert Hall with Gustavo Dudamel. Other orchestras with whom she has appeared in recent seasons include the Detroit, Cincinnati, Houston, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Nashville, Utah, and Baltimore Symphonies, and the Minnesota Orchestra. Summer festivals have included Ravinia, Grand Teton and Aspen Music Festival where she had multiple solo performances as a guest artist.

Internationally, Simone has performed with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra with Gustavo Dudamel; the Orquestra Sinfônica Brasileira in Rio de Janeiro; the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica; the City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong; the Royal Northern Sinfonia; the Milton Keynes City Orchestra in the United Kingdom; and the Opera de Marseilles.

Simone made her Carnegie Zankel Hall debut on the Emmy Award-winning TV show *From the Top: Live from Carnegie Hall* followed in November 2016 by her debut in Stern Auditorium. In June 2016, her featured performance of music from *Schindler's List* with Maestro Gustavo Dudamel and members of the American Youth Symphony was broadcast nationally on the TNT Network as part of the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award: *A Tribute to John Williams*.

Raised in Seattle, Washington, Simone studied with Margaret Pressley as a recipient of the Dorothy Richard Starling Scholarship, and was then admitted into the studio of the renowned pedagogue Robert Lipsett, with whom she studied at the Colburn Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles. Summer studies have included many years at the Aspen Music Festival, Indiana University's Summer String Academy, and the Schlern International Music Festival in Italy.

Simone Porter performs on a 1740 Carlo Bergonzi violin made in Cremona, Italy, on generous loan from The Master's University, Santa Clarita, California.



Lidiya Yankovskaya, conductor

Russian-American conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya is a fiercely committed advocate for Russian masterpieces, operatic rarities, and contemporary works on the leading edge of classical music. She has conducted more than 40 world premieres, including 16 operas, and her strength as a visionary collaborator has guided new perspectives on staged and symphonic repertoire from *Carmen* and *Queen of Spades* to Price and Prokofiev. As Music Director of Chicago Opera Theater, Ms. Yankovskaya has led the Chicago premieres of Jake Heggie's *Moby-Dick*, Rachmaninov's *Aleko*, Joby Talbot's *Everest*, Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*, and the world premiere of Dan Shore's *Freedom Ride*. Her daring performances before and amid the pandemic earned recognition from the Chicago Tribune, which praised her as "the very model of how to survive adversity, and also how to thrive in it," while naming her 2020 Chicagoan of the Year.

In the 2021/22 season, Ms. Yankovskaya makes a trio of Texan debuts, leading performances of *Carmen* at Houston Grand Opera, a tribute to Ruth Bader Ginsburg at Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and concerts featuring works by Gershwin and Dawson at Fort Worth Symphony.

Elsewhere, she debuts with Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, makes her Minnesota Opera debut with *Voices United*, leads a program of Brahms and Wagner at Elgin Symphony, and makes her Pasadena Symphony debut conducting works by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Gabriela Lena Frank. At Chicago Opera Theater, she conducts the Chicago premiere of Mark Adamo's *Becoming Santa Claus* and a concert version of *Carmen*, starring Jamie Barton opposite Stephanie Blythe.

Ms. Yankovskaya has recently conducted *Don Giovanni* at Seattle Opera, *Pia de' Tolomei* at Spoleto Festival USA, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Wolf Trap Opera, *Ellen West* at New York's Prototype Festival, and the world premiere of *Taking Up Serpents* at Washington National Opera. On the concert stage, she has been recently engaged with Chicago Philharmonic, Rhode Island Philharmonic, and the symphony orchestras of Hawaii and Oviedo, Spain.

Ms. Yankovskaya is Founder and Artistic Director of the Refugee Orchestra Project, which proclaims the cultural and societal relevance of refugees through music, and has brought that message to hundreds of thousands of listeners around the world. In addition to a National Sawdust residency in Brooklyn, ROP has performed in London, Boston, Washington, D.C., and the United Nations. She has also served as Artistic Director of the Boston New Music Festival and Juventas New Music Ensemble, which was the recipient of multiple NEA grants and National Opera Association Awards under her leadership.

As Music Director of Harvard's Lowell House Opera, Ms. Yankovskaya conducted sold-out performances of repertoire rarely heard in Boston, including Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*, Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the U.S. Russian-language premiere of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*. Her commitment to exploring the breadth of symphonic and operatic repertoire has also been demonstrated in performances of Rachmaninoff's *Aleko* and the American premieres of Donizetti's *Pia de' Tolomei*, Rubinshteyn's *The Demon*, and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Kashchej The Immortal* and Symphony No. 1.

An alumna of the Dallas Opera's Hart Institute for Women Conductors and the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship, Ms. Yankovskaya has also served as assistant conductor to Lorin Maazel, chorus master of Boston Symphony Orchestra, and conductor of Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra. She has been featured in the League of American Orchestras Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview and Cabrillo Festival for Contemporary Music, and assisted Vladimir Jurowski via a London Philharmonic fellowship.

Ms. Yankovskaya holds a B.A. in Music and Philosophy from Vassar College, with a focus on piano, voice, and conducting, and earned an M.M. in Conducting from Boston University. Her conducting teachers and mentors have included Lorin Maazel, Marin Alsop, Kenneth Kiesler, and Ann Howard Jones.

Ms. Yankovskaya's belief in the importance of mentorship has fueled the establishment of Chicago Opera Theater's Vanguard Initiative, an investment in new opera that includes a two-year residency for emerging opera composers. Committed to developing the next generation of artistic leaders, she also volunteers with Turn The Spotlight, a foundation dedicated to identifying, nurturing, and empowering leaders – and in turn, to illuminating the path to a more equitable future in the arts.

Recipient of Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Awards in 2018 and 2021, Ms. Yankovskaya has been a featured speaker at the League of American Orchestras and Opera America conferences, and served as U.S. Representative to the 2018 World Opera Forum in Madrid.