



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2024/25 SEASON

Negrón, Grieg & Shostakovich 5

May 30–31, 2025 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Joyce Yang, piano

ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN

Moriviví

EDVARD GRIEG

Concerto in A minor for Piano & Orchestra, Op. 16

I. Allegro molto moderato

II. Adagio

III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato

Joyce Yang, piano

INTERMISSION

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47

I. Moderato

II. Allegretto

III. Largo

IV. Allegro non troppo

Featured Artists



THE PEREGRINE



Currently in his fourth season as Music Director of the Omaha Symphony, **Ankush Kumar Bahl** has delivered resonant performances of masterworks (new and old) and continues to champion American composers and artists while pursuing innovative, community-based concert design. Committed to expanding the American repertoire, the Omaha Symphony and Maestro Bahl have commissioned seven new works in their first four seasons together and in 2023, their live recording of Andy Akiho's *Sculptures* garnered the Omaha Symphony its first GRAMMY nominations in the orchestra's history. On the podium, Bahl is recognized by orchestras and audiences alike for his impressive conducting technique, thoughtful interpretations, innovative concert experiences, and engaging presence.



Blessed with “poetic and sensitive pianism” (*Washington Post*) and a “wondrous sense of color” (*San Francisco Classical Voice*), GRAMMY-nominated pianist **Joyce Yang** captivates audiences with her virtuosity, lyricism, and interpretive sensitivity. She first came to international attention in 2005 when she won the silver medal at the 12th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The youngest contestant at 19 years old, she took home two additional awards: Best Performance of Chamber Music (with the Takács Quartet), and Best Performance of a New Work. In 2006 Yang made her celebrated New York Philharmonic debut alongside Lorin Maazel at Avery Fisher Hall along with the orchestra's tour of Asia, making a triumphant return to her hometown of Seoul, South Korea. Yang's subsequent appearances with the New York Philharmonic have included opening night of the 2008 Leonard Bernstein Festival – an appearance made at the request of Maazel in his final season as music director. *The New York Times* pronounced her performance in Bernstein's *The Age of Anxiety* a “knockout.”

Moriviví

Angélica Negrón

Born: 1981 - San Juan, Puerto Rico

Piece Length: Approximately 8 minutes.

Program Notes by the composer.

Mimosa pudica (noun; from Latin: *pudica* “shy, bashful, or shrinking”)—Prostrate or semierect subshrub of tropical America, and Australia; heavily armed with recurved thorns and having sensitive soft grey green leaflets that fold and droop at night or when touched or cooled. Synonyms: action plant, humble plant, live-and-die, sensitive plant, shame plant, sleeping plant, touch-me-not.

Program Notes

Moriviví is a piece inspired by the *Mimosa pudica* plant. Commonly found in Puerto Rico, where it is known as moriviví (literally, died/lived), this sensitive shrub gently closes its leaves when touched. As a young girl, I loved playing with this plant, marveling at the magical effect of a gentle touch. I would brush my fingertips against every leaf I could, watching them transform over and over again before my eyes. As an adult, I find myself just as fascinated by the different translations of the word moriviví: shameful, fragile, humble, lazy, and resilient. Each conveys a very different narrative, all with a deep connection to the Puerto Rican experience. Historically, these adjectives have been weaponized and used to describe Puerto Ricans, becoming an entire vocabulary of oppression. Yet every one of these words contains multitudes of complexity, awakening countless feelings, entirely dependent on context. I'm interested in the contradictions inherent within these layered definitions and how, in the absence of spoken language, I might translate these intricacies into sound.

I want to embrace radical simplicity in this composition as a way to access my childhood memories of playing with this plant while delving into the intersection of innocence and melodrama built into *Moriviví's* literal translation. As someone who has maintained a strong connection to the island despite 15 years in the diaspora, I'm also interested in how sentimentalism and melodrama play into Puerto Rican culture at home and abroad, impacting the way we experience and share stories. *Moriviví* is a liminal exploration of memory, language, tradition, and identity from the lens of someone attempting to construct space and a sense of belonging in two places simultaneously. —Angélica Negrón

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16

Edvard Grieg

Born: June 15, 1843 – Bergen, Norway

Died: September 4, 1907 – Bergen, Germany

Piece Length: Approximately 30 minutes.

In 1858, Edvard Grieg attended a concert in Leipzig that included Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor, performed by Schumann's widow, the brilliant composer and pianist Clara Schumann. Grieg, who was taught piano by a friend of the Schumanns, was already influenced by Robert's work. When he started composing his own piano concerto ten years later, he modeled his concerto on Schumann's. Indeed, there are a number of obvious similarities between the two: both are in A minor, both start with a brilliant technical flourish on the piano that descends from the higher register to the lower, and structurally both are very similar. Likewise, both composers only composed one piano concerto during their lifetimes. That being said, it is a testament to the brilliance of Grieg's writing that his concerto would become not only one of his most popular works, but among the most popular piano concertos ever written. In fact, its popularity is so great that it was the first piano concerto ever recorded, albeit in condensed form due to the technology at the time, in 1909.

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born: September 25, 1906 – St. Petersburg, Russia

Died: August 9, 1975 – Moscow, Soviet Union

Piece Length: Approximately 50 minutes.

Early in his career, Shostakovich's works blended humor, surrealism, and avant-garde techniques used by composers in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1934, Shostakovich achieved greater renown with the premiere of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. The opera was an incredible success, receiving rave reviews from critics, government officials, and the general public, and receiving hundreds of performances around the world between 1934 and 1936. Shostakovich had become among the most famous and successful Soviet composers, with officials going as far as calling him "a Soviet composer brought up in the best tradition of Soviet culture." Shostakovich was invited to a performance of the work at the Bolshoi Theatre on January 26, 1936. Upon arrival, he discovered that both Joseph Stalin, the dictator who led the Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953 and Andrei Zhdanov, the Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the man responsible for developing Soviet cultural policy, were in the audience. The opera, which contains mature and explicit scenes, displeased Stalin to such a degree that he left between the third and fourth acts. Reportedly, as Shostakovich bowed to the audience, he was "white as a sheet."

Two days later, one of the most consequential articles in the history of music was published in the Soviet newspaper, *Pravda*. The article, titled "Muddle Instead of Music," was unsigned and its authorship has been attributed to Stalin, although more likely it was written by Zhdanov. The article condemned both the opera and Shostakovich, criticizing him for not composing music that was simple and accessible for all. For good measure, the article stated that "The power of good music to infect the masses has been sacrificed to a petty-bourgeois, 'formalist' attempt to create originality through a cheap clowning. It is a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly." The aftermath of the article was devastating for Shostakovich. He started sleeping in his suit in case the authorities came for him in the middle of the night so he would not wake his young family. His friends would avoid him on the street, often going as far as crossing the road when they saw him. He withdrew the premiere performance of his massive Symphony No. 4, a work influenced by Gustav Mahler (one of Shostakovich's favorite composers) and structurally unconventional, after being summoned by the Union of Soviet Composers who advised him to cancel a planned performance under threat from the authorities.

Yet, by April 1937, Shostakovich began work on his Symphony No. 5, working with a more conventional form and harmonic language. He completed it by July of that year, and the premiere was on November 21, 1937, by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Yevgeny Mravinsky. The premiere was a complete triumph from the perspective of both the audience and the Soviet officials. One of Shostakovich's favorite reviews called the symphony "a Soviet artist's no-nonsense response to fair criticism." However, there is debate as to what the actual meaning of the symphony is, and perhaps how the officials interpreted its meaning differed from what the audience heard. Nevertheless, Shostakovich's standing with the government had been temporarily redeemed. He would fluctuate between being honored and condemned throughout the rest of his life.