



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2022/23 SEASON

# Brahms & Mahler 5

Friday, June 2, 2023 | 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 3, 2023 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Stella Chen, violin

CARLOS SIMON

*Fate Now Conquers*

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio

III. Allegro giocoso; ma non troppo vivace

*Stella Chen, violin*

## INTERMISSION

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor

### PART I

1. Trauermarsch (Funeral march)

2. Stürmisch bewegt (Moving stormily)

### PART II

3. Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell (Strong, and not too fast)

### PART III

4. Adagietto

5. Rondo-Finale

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# Featured Artists

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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.



## **Stella Chen, violin**

American violinist Stella Chen garnered worldwide attention with her first-prize win at the 2019 Queen Elizabeth International Violin Competition, followed by the 2020 Avery Fisher Career Grant and 2020 Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award.

Since then, Stella has appeared across North America, Europe, and Asia in concerto, recital, and chamber music performances. She recently made debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Baltimore Symphony, Belgian National Orchestra, and many others and appeared at the Vienna Musikverein and Berlin Philharmonie. In recital, recent appearances include Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, the Phillips Collection, Rockport Music Festival, and Nume Festival in Italy. She appears frequently with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center both in New York and on tour.

Stella has appeared as a chamber musician in festivals including the Ravinia, Seattle Chamber Music, Perlman Music Program, Music@Menlo, Bridgehampton, Rockport, Kronberg Academy, and Sarasota. Chamber music partners include Itzhak Perlman, James Ehnes, and Matthew Lipman.

# Featured Artists

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She is the inaugural recipient of the Robert Levin Award from Harvard University, where she was inspired by Robert Levin himself. Teachers and mentors have included Donald Weilerstein, Itzhak Perlman, Miriam Fried, and Catherine Cho. She received her doctorate from the Juilliard School where she serves as teaching assistant to her longtime mentor Li Lin.

Stella plays the 1700 ex-Petri Stradivarius, on generous loan from Dr. Ryuji Ueno and Rare Violins In Consortium, Artists and Benefactors Collaborative and the 1708 Huggins Stradivarius courtesy of the Nippon Foundation.

## Program Notes

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### ***Fate Now Conquers***

**Carlos Simon**

**Born:** Washington, D.C., 1986

Composer in Residence at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Carlos Simon was born in our nation's capital and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. With a childhood steeped in gospel, R&B, jazz, and Broadway, Simon gravitated toward composition and received the 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence award – only the second composer to do so. *Fate Now Conquers* is his response to Beethoven's symphonies, the inspiration deriving from a quotation from Homer's *Iliad*, which Beethoven himself had jotted down in a journal. "Beethoven strived to overcome many obstacles," says Simon. "In the end, it seems that he relinquished himself to fate." Listeners will hear allusions to Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies especially, works that would cast long nets across the centuries for Brahms and Mahler, as well as Simon.

### **Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77**

**Johannes Brahms**

**Born:** Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833

**Died:** Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897

By the time Brahms composed his Violin Concerto in 1878 he was already famous, a virtual icon in music-hungry Vienna. Any new work was bound, therefore, to elicit some manner of response from other noted musicians. The famous Spanish violinist/composer Pablo de Sarasate complained, "I don't deny that it is very good music, but do you think I could fall so low as to stand on the platform, violin in hand, to listen to the oboe playing the only real tune in the whole work?" Tchaikovsky—never a fan—noted that "[Brahms'] mastery overwhelms his inspiration...his music is not warmed by emotion...it lacks poetry." To conductor/pianist Hans von Bülow's assessment that "Bruch had written a concerto for violin, Brahms against it," the noted violinist Bronislaw Huberman later countered, "It is neither against the violin, nor for violin with orchestra, but it is for violin against orchestra—and the violin wins!" Now that legion of exceptional violinists have bent the concerto to their will, the Brahms Violin Concerto has enjoyed a dominant place in the repertoire. A truly symphonic work, rather than a showy entertainment piece, it's a tour-de-force, requiring the best of all musicians on stage, but especially our soloist, Stella Chen.

# Program Notes

## **Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp Minor**

**Gustav Mahler**

**Born:** Kalischt, Bohemia, July 7, 1860

**Died:** Vienna, Austria, May 18, 1911

In a life littered with crises, the year 1901 was an especially disruptive one for Gustav Mahler. A tireless workaholic whose ferocious drive toward perfection and limitlessness made him insensitive to somatic protests from within, he found himself near death's door on February 24th. Having already led a performance of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony earlier that day, a nighttime traversal of Mozart's *Magic Flute* proved more than the music director's overtaxed body could abide; he collapsed, victim to severe intestinal hemorrhage. Alarmed looks on the faces of the medical coterie that examined him convinced Mahler that he was perilously near death, a belief compounded by the urgency with which a series of surgical procedures were scheduled and performed. Luckily, he recovered quickly. His return to good health was no doubt facilitated by happier events that year—his meeting, romance and subsequent marriage to Alma Schindler.

In any case, the idea and reality of death had been a nearly constant companion to Mahler. His favorite brother Otto had committed suicide years earlier, and his erstwhile friend and fellow composer Hugo Wolf had sunk into full-blown psychosis before taking his life. In his Symphony No. 5 Mahler sought to work out through his music a resolution of dark passions past and present, as he would throughout his life. There is, however, a special intensity to the Fifth Symphony, a fierce struggle to combat Death to a willful triumph of vibrant life. His model, of course, came from Beethoven's Third, Fifth and Ninth symphonies.

Though cast in five distinct movements, Mahler conceived the Fifth Symphony as a vast triptych, its tripartite division marking the inner boundaries of a Dantean journey from infernal darkness, through cleansing purgatory, to ultimate light and joy.

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\*program subject to change

