



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2023/24 SEASON

# Maestro Conducts Respighi

May 19, 2024 | 2 p.m.

Strauss Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor

Heather Baxter, English horn | Federico Montes, trumpet | Mark Kurtz, organ

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

Suite in G Major, P. 58, for Strings and Organ

I. Preludio

II. Aria

III. Pastorale

IV. Cantico

*Mark Kurtz, organ*

AARON COPLAND

*Quiet City*

*Heather Baxter, English horn*

*Federico Montes, trumpet*

**INTERMISSION**

ELENA RUEHR

*Shimmer*

*Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor*

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

*Trittico botticelliano*, P. 151

I. La primavera (Spring)

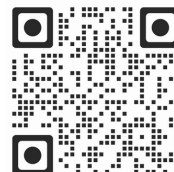
II. L'adorazione dei Magi (Adoration of the Magi)

III. La nascita di Venere (The Birth of Venus)

This printed program is a condensed version.

For more info about the orchestra, guest artists, and the full program notes, download the Omaha Symphony app or scan this QR code with your mobile device.

\*program subject to change



# Featured Artists

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## **Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor**

Currently in his third 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 already commissioned or premiered five new works in their first three seasons together by celebrated composers including Andy Akiho and Stacy Garrop. On the podium, Bahl is recognized by orchestras and audiences

alike for his impressive conducting technique, thoughtful interpretations, innovative concert experiences, and engaging 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 Bahl’s classical series guest engagements include performances with the New York Philharmonic, Detroit Symphony, Houston Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México, and the National Symphony Orchestra (D.C.). An experienced collaborator, Bahl has worked with many prominent soloists, among them Daniil Trifonov, Lang Lang, Emanuel Ax, Sarah Chang, Bhezod Abduraimov, Conrad Tao, Anthony McGill, and Kelley O’Connor.



## **Alejandro Gómez Guillén, assistant conductor**

Conductor and violinist Alejandro Gómez Guillén is passionate about sharing music in a way that is compelling, uplifting, and educational. Recently named the Omaha Symphony’s assistant conductor beginning in November 2022, he will complete his sixth season as artistic director and conductor of the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, with which he recently led the Indiana premiere of Florence Price’s Fourth Symphony to local acclaim. He completed a successful tenure as associate conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, leading multiple community classics, pops, outdoor, bilingual and

educational concerts, including collaborations with artists such as Time for Three and mezzo-soprano Cecilia Duarte. He is also music director of Denver’s Sphere Ensemble which explores the intersection of masterpieces of string ensemble music with multi-part custom arrangements from piano pieces, pop, rock and world music masters. The group’s recordings are available through all music streaming platforms. Alejandro also serves as acting concertmaster/principal second violin of the West Texas Symphony and violinist of the Permian Basin and Chasqui Quartets, and he has also served as Freeman conducting fellow with Chicago Sinfonietta, associate conductor of Boulder Symphony and music director of Cantabile.

# Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst



**Heather Baxter** joined the Omaha Symphony in 2015 as Assistant Principal/Second **Oboe and English Horn**. Prior to her move to Omaha, Heather performed with several orchestras throughout Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, including the Richmond Symphony, Evansville and Lexington philharmonics, Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, Kentucky Symphony Orchestra, and Orchestra Kentucky of Bowling Green, among others, while completing her doctorate in oboe performance at the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) of the University of Cincinnati.



Born in Caldas, Colombia, **Federico Montes** started to play the **trumpet** when he was twelve years old at his high school in Villamaria. At the age of 15, Montes was invited to perform with Banda Municipal de Manizales and was offered a job with this institution after finishing high school a year later.

In May of 2016 he finished his undergraduate studies at the University of South Florida in Tampa. In May of 2018 he obtained his MM at The Juilliard School as a William Vacchiano Fellow in New York, the first student born and raised in Colombia accepted in Juilliard's 111-year history as a Masters student in trumpet.

## **Suite in G Major, P. 58, for Strings and Organ**

### **Ottorino Respighi**

**Born:** July 18, 1879 – Bologna, Italy

**Died:** April 18, 1936 – Rome, Italy

*Piece Length: Approximately 20 minutes.*

Ottorino Respighi - composer, violinist, pianist, and teacher - remains one of the most performed Italian composers from the early part of the 20th century. He is perhaps best known for his three brilliantly orchestrated tone poems that focus on Rome: *Fountains of Rome*, *Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. He was also an important musicologist who was intensely interested in the music of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, ultimately editing critical editions of music by Monteverdi and Vivaldi, as well as orchestrating and publishing three suites of dances based on early lute music. This love of historical music is obvious within his original compositions, especially highlighted in his two works on today's program. The first, the Suite in G Major for Strings and Organ, was completed in 1905, and takes its inspiration from the Baroque concerto grosso. Although the Suite's material is original, Respighi was inspired by and paid homage to many Baroque composers, including Arcangelo Corelli and J.S. Bach, resulting in a majestic feature for UNO's glorious pipe organ.

## **Quiet City**

### **Aaron Copland**

**Born:** November 14, 1900 – New York, NY

**Died:** December 2, 1990 – Sleepy Hollow, NY

*Piece Length: Approximately 7 minutes.*

Irwin Shaw, an important American writer best known for his novels *The Young Lions* and *Rich Man, Poor Man*, started his career as a dramatist, writing scripts for radio shows including *Dick Tracy*. Aaron Copland was approached to compose incidental music to Shaw's 1939 *Quiet City*, a story about a half-Jewish businessman named

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Gabriel Mellon who “rejected his liberal Jewish background and his youthful dream of becoming a poet.” Throughout Mellon’s life, his choices lead him to become nostalgic, often imagining the sound of a trumpet in the distance as he looks back at what might have been. Copland leaned into the stage direction during his compositional process, such as “The horn is muted, sounds little, and infinitely far, like a slight wind, musical, restless, dying,” and after the play closed, extracted some of the music to create, in essence, a miniature suite. This version of *Quiet City* premiered in New York in 1941 and has become a soulful yet delicate feature piece for trumpet and English horn.

## ***Shimmer***

**Elena Ruehr**

**Born:** 1963 – Ann Arbor, Michigan

Piece Length: Approximately 11 minutes.

Program Notes for *Shimmer* provided by Metamorphosen Ensemble.

Elena Ruehr says of her music “the idea is that the surface be simple, the structure complex.” *Shimmer* was commissioned by Metamorphosen for their premiere season in 1994-95. Strongly inspired by the energetic string music of Vivaldi, *Shimmer* uses imitative counterpoint as its basis. However, the harmony, rhythm, and form are structured using a cyclical 10-note series instead of traditional tonality. The piece starts with a four-part canon in mid-range, overlaid with two-part counterpoint in the treble and bass. Undergoing constant variation, the music finally culminates in an extended passage of five-voice counterpoint. After a brief recapitulation, it continues building to an energetic and percussive end. The name refers to the shimmering texture that is created through bowing, trilling, and ornamentation.

## ***Trittico botticelliano***

**Ottorino Respighi**

**Born:** July 18, 1879 – Bologna, Italy

**Died:** April 18, 1936 – Rome, Italy

Piece Length: Approximately 20 minutes.

In 1927 Elsa Respighi, an accomplished soprano, went on an American concert tour, accompanied by her husband Ottorino. This tour was sponsored by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, a great patron of the arts. We can thank Coolidge for supporting and commissioning many of the 20th century’s leading composers, including Copland and *Appalachian Spring*! Respighi personally promised Coolidge, following a performance at the Library of Congress, that his next composition would be dedicated to her. A few weeks later, he visited the Uffizi Gallery in Florence where, among the artistic treasures contained in the museum, were three paintings by Sandro Botticelli. Thus, the title of Respighi’s next work: *Trittico botticelliano*, featuring *La Primavera* (Spring), *L’adorazione dei Magi* (The Adoration of the Magi), and *La nascita di Venere* (The Birth of Venus). Each movement is an exquisite construction of 20th century neo-romanticism, Respighi’s masterful work of combining old and new colors on display as vividly as the Botticelli’s originals.