



# OMAHA SYMPHONY

Thomas Wilkins, Music Director

2020 - 2021 SEASON

Celebrating 100 Years

## Stilian Kirov Conducts William Grant Still

March 5 & 6 at 7:30 p.m. | Holland Performing Arts Center

Stilian Kirov, conductor (biography on pg. 4)

Christi Zuniga, piano (biography on pg. 4)

ERIC EWAZEN  
(b. 1954)

### *Symphony in Brass*

Andante, Allegro molto  
Andante con moto  
Allegro vivace

WALTER PISTON  
(1894-1976)

### *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra*

*Christi Zuniga, piano*

WILLIAM GRANT STILL  
(1895-1978)

### *Mother and Child*

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN  
(1732-1809)

### *Symphony No. 104 in D Major, "London"*

I. Adagio - Allegro  
II. Andante  
III. Menuet: Allegro  
IV. Spiritoso

## program notes

by Steven Lowe

### *Symphony in Brass*

**Eric Ewazen**

**Born:** Cleveland, Ohio, March 1, 1954

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Eric Ewazen earned his Bachelor of Music degree from the Eastman School of Music, and further studies at the Juilliard School netted him Master of Music and Doctor of Music degrees. His major teachers included some of the most notable figures among American composer/teachers, such as Milton Babbitt, Joseph Schwantner, and Gunther Schuller. His music has been recorded by both American and European labels and has been performed both in the States and abroad.

He has demonstrated an affinity for writing for brass ensembles including his *Symphony in Brass*, commissioned by the Detroit Chamber Winds and composed in 1991. The engaging and celebratory work (recorded by Summit Records) has enjoyed many performances throughout the U.S. and Europe, energized by well-placed percussion and a heady arsenal of brass instruments that produce a world of both forceful and restrained sonorities. Alert listeners may recognize the music of the third movement from its use on NPR's political entries.

The opening *Andante–Allegro molto* begins with a slow chordal episode spiced with mild dissonances. Echoes of Aaron Copland's music create his colleague's outdoorsy voicings. The music gains in velocity, urged onward with insistent percussion. This section is upbeat compared with the *Andante* introduction.

An *Andante con Moto* ensues, launched by crescendo cymbals before morphing into an easygoing episode spiced by quirky harmonies that alternate with chorale-like sonorities. Again, Copland hovers nearby, reminding us of the *Fanfare for the Common Man*. Energy is on the rise but does not overwhelm the proceedings. A short emphatic trumpet solo enters before a tutti section creates an ambience of unforced stateliness.

The concluding *Allegro vivace* is announced by a triumphant fanfare followed by solo entries from each instrument. After a very brief pause—as if for breath—the piece ends in a joyful flourish that reprises the opening fanfare. The entire work celebrates a distinct sound that still permeates scores to “Western” films.

## Concertino for Piano and Orchestra

**Walter Piston**

**Born:** Rockland, Maine, January 20, 1894

**Died:** Belmont, Mass., November 12, 1976

Piston was a New Englander born of English and Italian ancestry. From age 10, Piston was raised in Boston, enlisted in 1916, and spent three years in the Navy (where he played saxophone in the Navy band) and was educated primarily at Harvard (*summa cum laude*, 1924) where he joined the faculty in 1926 following two years in Paris for lessons with Paul Dukas and the legendary Nadia Boulanger. He remained at Harvard until 1960 when he was named professor emeritus. An esteemed pedagogue, his students included Elliott Carter, Irving Fine, Harold Shapero, and Leonard Bernstein. Among many honors he received were a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1934 and Pulitzer Prizes for his third (1948) and seventh (1960) symphonies. In 1951, he became the first recipient of the Walter W. Naumberg Chair of Music.

Piston's 1952 *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* shares with Igor Stravinsky a wry, energetic, Neo-classic and somewhat acerbic accent. Though cast in a single movement it can be virtually parsed as a three-movement work. Quiet and lyrical interludes bask in introspective reverie. The lovely wind and string writing blends well with finely chiseled piano sonorities. A quietly energetic mid-section suggests the opening measures and is followed by a gently rhapsodic section. Another sweet string-led episode flows that yields to a punctuating piano part. This entire middle section has frequent fugal implications. Overall, the mood is generally positive.

## Mother and Child

**William Grant Still**

**Born:** Woodville, Mississippi, May 11, 1895

**Died:** Los Angeles, California, December 3, 1978

The current cultural and political climate has happily led to an increasingly rich emergence of classical (and other) music by Black composers, including William Grant Still, often described as the “Dean of Afro-American Composers.” Born in Mississippi, reared in Little Rock, Arkansas, the peripatetic artist's final resting place was Los Angeles. His first studies in composition took place at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music (Ohio) under the tutelage of George Whitfield Chadwick, whose conservative/Romantic harmonic vocabulary derived from study in Germany. Eventually, Still studied with Edgard Varèse at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. A strong jazz influence resulted from his stint with W.C. Handy's band in 1918 as well as after World War I when Still served in the U.S. Navy.

The composer's daughter Judith Anne relates that the lovely *Mother and Child* (1943) appeared initially as the second movement of the composer's *Suite for Violin and Piano*, adding that this brief work was a favorite of her father, as well as with countless music lovers. Here, the composer drew inspiration from a lithograph by Sargent Johnson. The composition quickly gained increased popularity as a stand-alone heart-warmer in various instrumental versions including one for string orchestra.

The composer said that *Mother and Child* reminded him of his much-loved mother. Laid out in A-B-A song form, the music limns a sonic portrait of his mother's sweetness balanced by her rigorous espousal of proper behavior, thereby creating a double-edged balance poised between lullaby and insistence that employs both major- and minor-key tonalities. The work ends in the dream-state ambience of both mother and child.

## Symphony No. 104 in D Major, "London"

**Franz Joseph Haydn**

**Born:** Rohrau, Austria, March 31, 1732

**Died:** Vienna, Austria, May 31, 1809

One of the bromides of pre-20th century cultural history is that England can't produce great composers, but it sure appreciates great music imported from the Continent. To the extent that judgment holds at least some water, it certainly characterizes the late 18th century and the immense popularity accorded Franz Joseph Haydn during his first and subsequent visits to London beginning in 1791.

Haydn had, in fact, refused several previous invitations, but was finally persuaded by Johann Peter Salomon, a decent violinist and an even more gifted impresario, to compose and lead performances of his works in the English capital. Haydn's two London sojourns bore 12 precious offspring, the dozen orchestral masterpieces known collectively as the "London" or "Salomon" symphonies (Nos. 93-104), works that epitomized the flowering of the late classic style. Complementing Salomon's efforts were those of violinist/composer Giambattista Viotti, director of London's "Opera Concerts," who arranged Haydn's second tour.

The premiere of Symphony No. 104 was an artistic and financial triumph for the composer, who wrote in his diary, "The whole company was delighted and so was I. I took in this evening 4,000 gulden. One can make as much as this only in England."

The first movement opens with a starkly dramatic *Adagio* stated in unison and based on "open intervals" (tonic and dominant tones). This gripping theme alternates with quiet passages whose emotionally intense harmonies reinforce the feeling of a powerful "command" for the audience to sit up and take notice! After this riveting statement, Haydn shifts gears and delivers a scintillating and disarmingly graceful *Allegro* to calm and raise the spirits.

The second movement *Andante* reverses things by beginning with a light, gentle tune that competes with turbulent episodes in this rondo-like set of variations.

The ensuing *Menuet* unmistakably (if through our hindsight) points in the direction of the burly scherzos of Beethoven and beyond (e.g., Schubert's Ninth Symphony and virtually all of Bruckner's symphonies). The sweet *Trio* offers emotional respite.

For the *Spiritoso* finale, Haydn borrowed his theme from a Croatian peasant song identified as such by Belá Bartók, who in addition to his compositional gifts was an uncommonly knowledgeable ethnomusicologist. This movement teems with bracing energy and élan, providing a fitting climax to a long, even astonishing, symphonic legacy.

(c) Steven Lowe



## Stilian Kirov, conductor

Bulgarian conductor Stilian Kirov is Music Director of the Illinois Philharmonic in Chicago's Southland, the Bakersfield Symphony in California and New Jersey's Symphony in C. A 2017 and 2016 recipient of the Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award, Mr. Kirov has proven to be not only a dynamic artistic director, but also an enthusiastic educator and community leader, continuing to build upon his previous successes as Associate Conductor of the Seattle Symphony and Associate Conductor of the Memphis Symphony.

Stilian Kirov is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, including an Emmy for the Memphis Symphony's Soundtrack Project, the Orchestra Preference Award, and Third Prize at the 2010 Mitropoulos Conducting Competition, as well as Juilliard's Bruno Walter Memorial Scholarship and the Charles Schiff Conducting Award for outstanding achievement. He is also the recipient of France's 2010 ADAMI Conducting Prize, culminating in a showcase concert at the Salle Gaveau with the Orchestre Colonne. Following the performance, Mr. Kirov was invited to conduct the orchestra's opening concerts of the 2011/2012 season in Paris.

Worldwide, Kirov has appeared with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Leopold Chamber Orchestra/Ukraine, Orchestra of Colors/Athens, Orchestre Colonne/Paris, Sofia Festival Orchestra, State Hermitage Orchestra/St. Petersburg, Thüringen Philharmonic Orchestra, the Zagreb Philharmonic, the Musical Olympus. Kirov is a graduate of The Juilliard School in orchestral conducting, where he was a student of James DePreist. He holds a Master of Music degree in conducting from the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, where he studied with Dominique Rouits.

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## Christi Zuniga, piano

Christi Zuniga has been Principal Keyboardist with the Omaha Symphony Orchestra since 2000. She earned her Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from Clayton State College in Georgia and received a Master of Music degree in Chamber Music and Accompanying from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

In addition to her full-time position with the Omaha Symphony, Ms. Zuniga teaches piano privately and accompanies musicians in and around Omaha for various concerts and competitions. She has collaborated with many visiting artists, including Joseph Alessi, Thomas Bacon, and Peter Verhoyen.

Christi Zuniga resides in Ralston, Nebraska, with her husband and their little Chihuahuas.