



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Program Notes

2026/27 SEASON

Falletta Conducts Gershwin & Strauss

September 25-26, 2026 | 7:30 PM
Holland Performing Arts Center

JoAnn Falletta, Conductor | Joyce Yang, Piano

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK

Fanfare on Amazing Grace

GEORGE GERSHWIN

Piano Concerto in F

I. Allegro

II. Adagio - Andante con moto

III. Allegro agitato

Joyce Yang, piano

Intermission

RICHARD STRAUSS

Dance of the Seven Veils
from *Salome*

RICHARD STRAUSS

"Suite" from *Der Rosenkavalier*



This printed program is a condensed version.

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Featured Artists



JOANN FALLETTA

Multiple GRAMMY® Award-winning conductor JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Connie and Marc Jacobson Music Director Laureate of the Virginia Symphony, Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center, and Conductor Emeritus of the Hawaii Symphony. She was recently named one of the “Fifty Great Conductors”, past and present, by Gramophone Magazine, and is hailed for her work as a conductor, recording artist, audience builder and champion of American composers, and a leading force for music of our time.

As Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American orchestra and has been credited with bringing the Philharmonic to an unprecedented level of national and international prominence. The Buffalo Philharmonic has become one of the leading recording orchestras for Naxos, with two GRAMMY® Award-winning recordings and a 2024 Best Orchestral Performance GRAMMY® nomination for Alexander Scriabin: Poem of Ecstasy and Symphony No.2 (Naxos).

Falletta has conducted many of the world’s finest orchestras, including over a hundred orchestras in North America across 46 states. Internationally, Falletta has conducted many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, and South America, including recent and upcoming concerts in France, England, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Brazil, Croatia and Mexico. Her vast repertoire includes nearly 1700 works by more than 600 composers including well over 100 world premieres.

With a discography of over 135 titles, Falletta is a leading recording artist for Naxos. She has won two individual GRAMMY® Awards, including the 2021 GRAMMY® Award for Best Choral Performance as conductor of the world premiere Naxos recording, Richard Danielpour’s The Passion of Yeshua. In 2019, she won her first individual GRAMMY® Award as conductor of the London Symphony in the Best Classical Compendium category for Spiritualist by Kenneth Fuchs. Her Naxos recording of John Corigliano’s Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan received two GRAMMYS® in 2008. Her 2020 Naxos recording of orchestral music of Florent Schmitt with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra received the prestigious Diapason d’Or Award.

Falletta is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, has served by Presidential appointment as a Member of the National Council on the Arts during the Bush and Obama administrations, and is the recipient of many of the most prestigious conducting awards.



JOYCE YANG

GRAMMY®-nominated pianist Joyce Yang captivates audiences with her virtuosity, lyricism, and interpretive sensitivity. After winning the silver medal at the twelfth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition at just nineteen, Yang has showcased her colorful musical personality in solo recitals and collaborations with the world’s top orchestras in more than 1,000 debuts and re-engagements. Yang has released ten studio albums, including kaleidoscopic solo discs, chamber music repertoire with Augustin Hadelich and the Alexander String Quartet, and concerti recordings ranging from Tchaikovsky to Torke. As a champion of new music, Yang has premiered four different piano concerti. She served as the guest artistic director for the Laguna Beach Music Festival, curating concerts that explore the “art-inspires-art” concept. Yang’s collaboration with choreographer Jorma Elo for the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet was a marriage between music and dance to illuminate the ingenuity of Schumann’s musical language. Born in Seoul, South Korea, Yang received her first piano lesson from her aunt at the age of four. Yang moved to the United States at age eleven to begin studies at the pre-college division of The Juilliard School with Yoheved Kaplinsky. She graduated from Juilliard as the recipient of 2010 Arthur Rubinstein Prize and received the Avery Fisher Career Grant in the same year. She is a Steinway artist.

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by Mathew Fuerst

Fanfare on Amazing Grace

Adolphus Hailstork

Born: April 17, 1941 – Rochester, New York

Piece Length: Approximately 4 minutes.

Adolphus Hailstork is an American composer whose teachers included Nadia Boulanger, a legendary pedagogue whose studio also included Aaron Copland, Philip Glass, and Quincy Jones. As a prolific composer with works in nearly every genre, Hailstork describes his compositional style as “I tried just about everything, musically speaking. There wasn’t a single thing in 20th-century music that I didn’t dabble in, from 12-tone to aleatoric to whatever. While I’m writing to embrace any technical thing that might help me achieve what I want, my true musical heart is based in song.”

Fanfare on Amazing Grace was originally written for organ in 2003 and later orchestrated for multiple ensembles. Hailstork became just the second African-American composer featured at a Presidential inauguration when the work was performed by the President’s Own United States Marine Band in January 2021. Maestro JoAnn Falletta first met Adolphus Hailstork in Norfolk, Virginia, shortly after becoming Music Director of the Virginia Symphony in 1991. The Symphony had co-commissioned a Piano Concerto by Hailstork, with Maestro Falletta conducting the premiere. They have been firm friends and artistic partners ever since.

Piano Concerto in F

George Gershwin

Born: September 26, 1898 – New York City, New York

Died: July 11, 1937 – Los Angeles, California

Piece Length: Approximately 35 minutes.

On February 12, 1924, Paul Whiteman presented a concert in Aeolian Hall in New York City entitled “An Experiment in Modern Music.” Whiteman selected a number of compositions which he felt highlighted the “melodies, harmony, and rhythms which agitate the throbbing emotional resources of this young restless age.” For much of the concert, the audience was underwhelmed. The final work on the program, however, was *Rhapsody in Blue* by George Gershwin, and the audience response was tremendous. The work became an instant hit, helping encourage Gershwin’s ambition to compose works for the concert hall. Among the audience members at this concert was the conductor Walter Damrosch. Impressed by what he heard, he contacted Gershwin the next day to commission a large-scale piano concerto for the New York Symphony Orchestra.

Gershwin’s concert works were always met with mixed reactions during his lifetime. Audiences were generally extraordinarily enthusiastic. His contemporaries, however? Mixed opinions. Maurice Ravel adored his work, and one can easily see Gershwin’s influence on Ravel’s later music, such as the jazz-hued Piano Concerto in G. The English composer William Walton raved about Gershwin’s orchestration in the Concerto in F. Perhaps most surprising, the great modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg—who lived near Gershwin and would come over to his house to play tennis—wrote a touching tribute to Gershwin shortly after his death, stating “...he expressed musical ideas, and they were new, as is the way he expressed them... He has something to say and he says it.”

But other musicians were not so complimentary. Aaron Copland, who would compose his own jazz-influenced Piano Concerto the year after the premiere of the Concerto in F, never acknowledged Gershwin’s work when discussing American music.

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Once, when asked about him by a student, Copland merely commented “He was a good Broadway composer.” After hearing the Concerto in F, Prokofiev found it “amateurish.” The influential *New York Times* critic Olin Downs—who loved the *Rhapsody in Blue*—criticized Gershwin’s formal approach in the work and wrote of the concerto: “Gershwin has tried earnestly and sincerely.... He has not succeeded because the form he employs is not native to a composer of his experience.”

While the criticism from Downs is harsh, he may have inadvertently hit upon what makes this masterpiece actually work. Downs may be correct that the traditional concerto form isn’t “native” to a composer and songwriter famous for his contributions to Tin Pan Alley, he doesn’t understand that it is Gershwin’s musical language, combined with the concerto structure, that evokes the fantastic, magical imagery of New York City in the 1920s. Energetic rhythms, fresh harmonies, melodic invention... Gershwin’s natural voice might have been stifled if he stuck within the box of eighteenth century form developed in Europe. By having a freer approach, Gershwin created a uniquely American piano concerto that has remained one of the most frequently performed works of the genre from its premiere on.

Dance of the Seven Veils from Salome

Suite from Der Rosenkavalier

Richard Strauss

Born: June 11, 1864 – Munich, Germany

Died: September 8, 1949 – Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Dance of the Seven Veils Piece Length: Approximately 9 minutes.

Suite from Der Rosenkavalier Piece Length: Approximately 20 minutes.

Tonight’s concert pairs excerpts from two of Richard Strauss’ most famous operas, *Salome*, premiered in 1905, and *Der Rosenkavalier* (*The Cavalier of the Rose*) which debuted six years later. It is fascinating to see the transformation of Strauss’ musical language through these two vastly different works, particularly through Strauss’ use of the waltz.

In *Salome*, a depiction of the Biblical princess who had John the Baptist beheaded, Strauss’ treatment of the waltz is violent, dissonant, and harmonically adventurous. He distorts harmony in a way that can be seen as a precursor to the Expressionism of avant-garde European art in the early part of the 20th century – for example, Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*. In *Der Rosenkavalier*, however, the waltz is used with elegance and beauty, a reflection of its setting in 1740s Vienna. Strauss’s ability to pivot between adventurous tonality and odes to times gone by would solidify his reputation as a genius, though he would be left behind in the push toward the avant-garde by composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Regardless, his bold approach to harmony and dissonance, his sheer mastery of orchestration, and his flair for the dramatic shocked and dazzled audiences both at the premieres of these two operas and to this day.

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