



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2023/24 SEASON

Scheherazade

February 23-24, 2024 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Kelley O'Connor, Mezzo Soprano

LEANNA PRIMIANI

1001

PETER LIEBERSON

Neruda Songs

I. Si no fuera porque tus ojos tienen color de luna...

(If your eyes were not the color of the moon...)

II. Amor, amor, las nubes a la torre del cielo...

(Love, love, the clouds went up the tower of the sky...)

III. No estes lejos de mi un solo dia...

(Don't go far off, not even for a day...)

IV. Ya eres mia. Reposa con tu sueño en mi sueño.

(And now you are mine. Rest with your dream in my dream.)

V. Amor mio, si muero y tu no mueres...

(My love, if I die and you don't...)

Kelley O'Connor, Mezzo Soprano

INTERMISSION

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Scheherazade, Op. 35

I. The Sea and Sindbad's Ship

II. The Tale of Prince Kalendar

III. The Young Prince and the Young Princess

IV. The Festival at Bagdad; The Sea; The Ship Goes to
Pieces on a Rock; Conclusion



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.



Kelley O’Connor, Mezzo Soprano

Possessing a voice of uncommon allure, the GRAMMY® Award-winning mezzo soprano Kelley O’Connor is one of the most compelling performers of her generation. She is internationally acclaimed equally in the pillars of the classical music canon – from Beethoven and Mahler to Brahms and Ravel – as she is in new works of modern masters, from Adams and Dessner to Lieberson and Talbot.

In the 2023-24 season, Kelley O’Connor performs with the Houston Symphony in John Adams’ *El Niño* led by David Robertson and brings Peter Lieberson’s *Neruda Songs* to concerts with the New World Symphony under the baton of Stéphane Denève, with the Omaha Symphony and Music Director Ankush Bahl, and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra led by Johannes Fritzsich. Kelley O’Connor performs as a soloist in Mahler’s Second Symphony with the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra with Music Director Michael Stern and in the composer’s Third Symphony with the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen and she joins the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Fabio Luisi for Schmidt’s seldom-performed *Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln*. Additional performances of the season include *Messiah* with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Mozart’s Requiem with the Oregon Symphony under the direction of Music Director Michael Danzmayr. A vibrant chamber music schedule this season includes concerts in the Bay Area with New Century Chamber Orchestra and recitals with pianist Myra Huang at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and with pianist Robert Spano at Chamber Music in Napa Valley.

1001

Leanna Primiani

Born: 1978

Piece Length: Approximately 9 minutes.

Program Notes provided by the composer:

1001 for Orchestra and Prerecorded Electronics is a nine-minute retelling of *Scheherazade*, but through that character's eyes. With references to Rimsky-Korsakov, Leanna's composition concerns itself with time: Time as it relates to Scheherazade's storytelling to save her life, time as it relates to how the music unfolds, and time as it relates to the stories we tell ourselves now. Fascinated by the story, Leanna wondered what Scheherazade's life was like—her existence dependent on the quality of her narratives, finishing one story only to start the next in a seamless flow to prolong her life. Scheherazade lived in fear of the man she shared a bed with. It's a story especially resonant in today's climate, and one of the reasons Leanna felt compelled to write it. To illustrate Scheherazade's experience, Leanna uses electronics to explore the heroine's vacillating emotions. The piece asks us to consider what stories Scheherazade told herself in order to survive? And what stories do we tell ourselves in our own moments of uncertainty?

Neruda Songs

Peter Lieberman

Born: October 25, 1946 – New York, NY

Died: April 23, 2011 – Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel

Piece Length: Approximately 30 minutes.

While at the Albuquerque airport, composer Peter Lieberman came across a book of Pablo Neruda poems, *Cien sonetos de amor* (100 Love Sonnets). As he started reading the poems, he felt immediate inspiration to set them for his wife, the brilliant mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberman. The opportunity to compose the work came with a co-commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The work was premiered by Lorraine Hunt Lieberman on May 20, 2005, with the LA Philharmonic conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, and would receive its Boston Premiere with the BSO conducted by James Levine in November of that year. Sadly, Hunt Lieberman had been battling cancer for many years, and would eventually pass away on July 3, 2006, shortly after recording the work with the BSO and Levine. The recording would earn her a posthumous GRAMMY™ Award for Best Classical Vocal Performance.

It is under the shadow of his wife's illness that Lieberman composed this song cycle. While Neruda divided the poems in *Cien sonetos de amor* according to the four stages of the day--morning, afternoon, evening, and night--Lieberman states in his program notes that "each of the five poems that I set to music seemed to me to reflect a different face in love's mirror." The songs take us from the pure joy of love to the tragedy of death, yet even then, Neruda's words and Lieberman's music take away the sting. The final song seems to include the message of the entire cycle: "Pero este amor, amor, no ha terminal, y así como no tuvo nacimiento no tiene muerte, es como un largo río, sólo cambia de tierras y de labios." ("But Love, this love has not ended: just as it never had a birth, it has no death: it is like a long river, only changing lands, and changing lips.")

Program Notes

Scheherazade, Op. 35

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Born: March 18, 1844 – Tikhvin, Russia

Died: June 21, 1908 – Liubensk, Russia

Piece Length: Approximately 45 minutes.

In 1862, a group of young Russian nationalist composers led by Mily Balakirev and César Cui formed what is known today as “The Five.” Alexander Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov would complete the group. Their goal was to create a style of Russian music that would be distinct from the music written in western Europe. Characteristics of these composers include the use of folk songs and dances, invented scales that are distinguishable from the more traditional major and minor scales used in the west, and a more unpredictable harmonic vocabulary that results in fresh and exciting progressions previously unheard. Likewise, these composers were fascinated and influenced by the art of the Eastern world. Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade* showcases all of these elements. Completed in the summer of 1888, *Scheherazade* is loosely based on the tales found in *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern folktales. Rimsky-Korsakov’s note in the score states: “The Sultan Schahriar, convinced of the perfidy and faithlessness of women, vowed to execute each of his wives after the first night. But the Sultana Scheherazade saved her own life by interesting him in the tales she told him through 1001 nights. Impelled by curiosity, the Sultan continually put off her execution, and at last entirely abandoned his sanguinary resolve. Many marvels did Scheherazade relate to him, citing the verses of poets and the words of songs, weaving tale into tale and story into story.”

Over the course of the piece, you’ll meet the Sultan – bold and furious, usually in the brass; and Scheherazade – our concertmaster, Susanna Perry Gilmore, as Scheherazade weaves four epic stories across four movements, tales within her own tale of survival. *Scheherazade* is ultimately a Russian nesting doll, opening bombastically and ending in the most exquisite of solo features for our heroine.

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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

