



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2023/24 SEASON

Ax Plays Mozart

Friday, September 22, 2023 | 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, September 23, 2023 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Emanuel Ax, piano

JOHN STAFFORD SMITH

The Star-Spangled Banner

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto No. 25 in C Major for Piano & Orchestra, K. 503

I. Allegro maestoso

II. Andante

III. Allegretto

Emanuel Ax, piano

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Andante spianato & Grande polonaise brillante, Op. 22

Emanuel Ax, piano

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio non troppo

III. Allegretto grazioso (Quasi andantino)

IV. Allegro con spirito

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Featured Artists



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.



Emanuel Ax, piano

Born to Polish parents in what is today Lviv, Ukraine, Emanuel Ax moved to Winnipeg, Canada with his family when he was a young boy. Mr. Ax made his New York debut in the Young Concert Artists Series, and in 1974 won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv. In 1975, he won the Michaels Award of Young Concert Artists, followed four years later by the Avery Fisher Prize.

The 2023/24 season will focus on the world premiere of Anders Hillborg’s piano concerto, commissioned for him by the San Francisco Symphony and Esa-Pekka Salonen with subsequent performances in Stockholm and New York. A continuation of the ‘Beethoven For 3’ touring and recording project with partners Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma will take them to the Midwest in January. In recital, Mr. Ax can be heard on the West coast in the fall and Midwest/East coast in the spring, culminating at Carnegie Hall in April. An extensive European tour will include concerts in Holland, Italy, Germany, France, and the Czech Republic.

Mr. Ax has been a Sony Classical exclusive recording artist since 1987 and following the success of the Brahms Trios with Kavakos and Ma, the trio launched an ambitious, multi-year project to record all the Beethoven Trios and Symphonies arranged for trio of which the first two discs have recently been released. He has received GRAMMY® Awards for the second and third volumes of his cycle of Haydn’s piano sonatas. He has also made a

series of GRAMMY®-winning recordings with cellist Yo-Yo Ma of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas for cello and piano. In the 2004/05 season, Mr. Ax contributed to an International Emmy® Award-Winning BBC documentary commemorating the Holocaust that aired on the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In 2013, Mr. Ax's recording *Variations* received the Echo Klassik Award for Solo Recording of the Year (19th Century Music/Piano).

Mr. Ax is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary doctorates of music from Skidmore College, New England Conservatory of Music, Yale University, and Columbia University. For more information about Mr. Ax's career, please visit www.EmanuelAx.com.

Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major, K. 503

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756 – Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791 – Vienna Austria

Piece Length: *Approximately 30 minutes.*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed 27 piano concertos, with himself in mind as the soloist. Twelve of them were composed after moving from Salzburg to Vienna in 1782, the last of which is featured on tonight's program. His Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major, K. 503, is also the longest of this set of twelve, and was completed on December 4, 1786, the cap of an extraordinarily productive year that included his opera, *Le nozze di Figaro*. The 25th Piano Concerto shares many traits that make *Figaro* and all of Mozart's operas so great: a fantastic sense of drama (first movement), beautiful lyricism (second movement), and even a direct opera quote (third movement). Throughout the entire work, Mozart proves his mastery of the standard concerto format of his time, filtered through deliberate, compositional havoc, and ultimately creates an exquisite showcase for soloist and orchestra.

***Andante spianato and Grande polonaise brillante* in E-flat Major, Op. 22**

Frédéric Chopin

Born: March 1, 1810 - Żelazowa Wola, Poland

Died: October 17, 1849 – Paris, France

Piece Length: *Approximately 14 minutes.*

Like Mozart before him, Frédéric Chopin was a composer-pianist who wrote a great deal of music in order to showcase his own talent. While Chopin preferred to perform in intimate salons throughout Paris, he gave a number of public performances with orchestras between 1828 and 1832, during which he wrote and performed his first two piano concertos. The *Grand polonaise brillante* in E-flat Major is a result of these years, and the soulful *Andante spianato* was added as an introduction in 1834 for a performance at the Paris Conservatory. The two works are now performed traditionally back-to-back as a single piece, the *Andante* a timeless reverie, and the *Grande polonaise* an exuberant tour-de-force. Those familiar with Chopin will hear his seemingly effortless ability to portray the soloist as an improviser, though we know now that writing down his virtuosic turns at the piano often caused him immense frustration.

Program Notes

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73

Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833 – Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897 – Vienna, Austria

Piece Length: *Approximately 40 minutes.*

While much has been written about the pressure Brahms felt to compose a symphony – no doubt exacerbated by Robert Schumann comparing him directly to Beethoven – once Brahms released his Symphony No. 1, the Second was completed within a year of the First. In a letter to his publisher, Franz Simrock, about the Second, we may even have a glimpse of some of Brahms' sense of humor. "The new symphony is so melancholy that you can't stand it. I have never written anything so sad, so minorish: the score must appear with a black border." Brahms is surely joking here, because his Symphony No. 2 is bright in character and wholly idyllic. His colleague, conductor Hans Von Bülow dubbed Brahms' first symphony "Beethoven's tenth" and would go on to call the Second "Brahms' *Pastoral*" in reference to Beethoven's famous Symphony No. 6. Shades of turmoil – melodies fragmenting, working together and against one another, rhythmic interruptions – appear alongside extraordinary gentleness, absolute serenity, and, at the close, a finale so triumphant, it fills your very soul with dazzling light.

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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

