



Don Juan & the Lark Ascending

October 25–26, 2024 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Susanna Perry Gilmore, violin

Doug Fitch, visual artist | Heartland Youth Ballet, choreographed visual effects

RICHARD STRAUSS

Don Juan

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

The Lark Ascending

Susanna Perry Gilmore, violin

BÉLA BARTÓK

Rhapsody No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra

I. *Lassú*

II. *Friss*

Susanna Perry Gilmore, violin

INTERMISSION

MATHEW FUERST

Prelude to Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Four Sea Interludes and *Passacaglia* from *Peter Grimes*, Op. 33a

I. *Dawn*

II. *Sunday Morning*

III. *Passacaglia* – Op. 33b

IV. *Moonlight*

V. *Storm*

Heartland Youth Ballet, choreographed visual effects

Featured Artists



Currently in his fourth 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 commissioned seven new works in their first four seasons together and in 2023, their live recording of Andy Akiho's *Sculptures* garnered the Omaha Symphony its first GRAMMY nominations in the orchestra's history. On the podium, Bahl is recognized by orchestras and audiences alike for his impressive conducting technique, thoughtful interpretations, innovative concert experiences, and engaging presence.



Susanna Perry Gilmore enjoys a multifaceted career as solo artist, chamber musician, and orchestral concertmaster. Performing on both modern and period instruments and versatile in diverse styles from classical to fiddling, she is hailed as a player who is both "thrilling and sensitive" by the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, "luminous and hypnotic" by the *Omaha World-Herald*, and "authentic with exquisite good taste" and "rich in tone, bringing musical depth and a human touch" by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.



Doug Fitch has directed and designed projects for the New York Philharmonic, including Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*, Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and *A Dancer's Dream* (combining Stravinsky's ballet scores for *The Fairy's Kiss* and *Petrushka*), as well as HK Gruber's *Gloria - A Pig Tale*, which the NY Phil co-presented with MetLiveArts and The Juilliard School. He has also directed several NY Phil Young People's Concerts and Very Young People's Concerts. Fitch's career highlights include designing and directing Puccini's *Turandot* at Santa Fe Opera; Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* at Los Angeles Opera; and *Peter and the Wolf in Hollywood* at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which became an award-winning app narrated by Alice Cooper.

Don Juan **Richard Strauss**

Born: June 11, 1864 – Munich, Germany

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

Piece Length: Approximately 20 minutes.

Certain themes never seem to get old, and the legend of *Don Juan* is one of them. The deplorable rake has been gracing our collective cultures since the Renaissance and is making two appearances in Omaha this fall: Opera Omaha's *Don Giovanni* this past weekend, and tonight's tone poem by Richard Strauss. They both meet the same end, but their journeys are very different – not least of which in that Strauss' dastardly hero has to present his entire story without the benefit of words. Never fear – Richard Strauss' mastery of the tone poem is here. Influenced by Wagner's *leitmotifs*, Liszt's programmatic symphonic poems, and Strauss' own father Franz as an exemplary French hornist, *Don Juan* was written and premiered by the composer at age 24. It is one of the most glorious, most swashbuckling pieces in the repertoire – and if you're secretly hoping the Don pulls through at the end, you won't be alone.

(Spoiler alert, though – he gets what he truly, truly deserves.)

Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

The Lark Ascending

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Born: October 12, 1872 – Down Ampney, United Kingdom

Died: August 26, 1958 – Hanover Terrace, London

Piece Length: Approximately 15 minutes.

The Lark Ascending, written in the 20th century for violin and orchestra, consistently appears as one of the most popular pieces of classical music in listener rated polls. It is easy to see why: the folk-like melodies, the lush orchestration, and the imitation of a lark's call help create a beautiful musical imagery of the English countryside. Originally composed in 1914 for violin and piano, the premiere was delayed by the outbreak of World War I. On December 15, 1920, the work premiered, and shortly after Vaughan Williams orchestrated the piece, creating the version that is most known today. The piece, subtitled a "Romance for violin and orchestra," follows a form suggested by an excerpt of George Meredith's poem "The Lark Ascending," printed below:

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur, and shake.

* * *

For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes.

* * *

Till lost on his aërial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

Rhapsody No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra

Béla Bartók

Born: March 25, 1881 – Sânnicolau Mare, Romania

Died: September 26, 1945 – New York, NY

Piece Length: Approximately 10 minutes.

Bartók's interest in folk music happened by chance: in 1904 while on holiday, he overheard a nanny singing a Transylvanian folk song to some children under her care. This sparked Bartók's interest in folk music and soon he, along with his lifelong friend and colleague Zoltán Kodály, traveled to the countryside to start collecting and studying folk music, effectively creating the field of ethnomusicology -the study of music in its cultural context. The musical characteristics of folk music found their way into Bartók's original compositions as well. Rhapsody No. 1 was originally composed for violin and piano in 1928 and orchestrated a year later. Bartók composed both this rhapsody and a second one simultaneously, and it appears neither were commissions. According to Zoltán Székely, a wonderful violinist and friend of Bartók's, he was visiting the composer in 1928 when out of nowhere Bartók announced he had a surprise for him and produced both manuscripts stating "one is for you; one is for Szigeti. You may choose which one you like for the dedication." Both are delights, and feature the soloist in unbridled, rhapsodic glory.

Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

Prelude to Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*

Mathew Fuerst

Born: July 25, 1977 – Covina, CA

Piece Length: Approximately 2 minutes.

I have greatly enjoyed writing program notes for you all over the past season plus, and it is a wonderful, and somewhat surreal, experience sitting here and writing a note for a piece I composed. This work was commissioned by Ankush Kumar Bahl (to whom it is also dedicated) and the Omaha Symphony specifically for this concert program. Intended to serve as a prelude to the Britten, I took musical material from “The Storm” interlude and wanted to create music that went from the lowest octaves of the strings to the higher octaves of the violins. The work opens with a depiction of the ocean in the oscillating, irregular ostinati in canon with each other in the basses and cellos. The violas present the pitches of the second half of the fugal theme, and they are soon joined by the violins. Each of these rhythmic groupings in the various strings are derived from the names of my wife and children using either Morse code or a cryptogram of my own invention. The music builds to a climax before all the instruments fade away except the violins, leading directly into the first movement of the Britten, “Dawn.”

Four Sea Interludes* and *Passacaglia* from *Peter Grimes

Benjamin Britten

Born: November 22, 1913 – Lowestoft, United Kingdom

Died: December 4, 1976 – Aldeburgh, United Kingdom

Piece Length: Approximately 23 minutes.

Benjamin Britten's first large scale opera, *Peter Grimes*, was commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky while Britten and his partner, Peter Pears, were in the United States as conscientious objectors to World War II. The story is based on a poem by George Crabbe called *The Borough*, in which a character, Peter Grimes, buys orphans to abuse them and work them to death. Upon returning home to England in 1942, Pears and Britten set to work on the story, softening the character of Peter Grimes into a more sympathetic character trying to live in an intolerant society. The opera, premiered on June 7, 1945, was a tremendous success and helped launch Britten's standing as one of the greatest opera composers of the 20th century. A week after the premiere, Britten took five of the six interludes found in the opera and made a suite consisting of the first, third, fifth and second interludes, adding the passacaglia (published separately) that is the fourth interlude of the opera. The premiere of the *Four Sea Interludes* was presented by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Britten, and the five interludes (the *Four Sea Interludes* and *Passacaglia* performed today) were first performed in October 1945. Their order for this performance is almost chronological, “Storm” being the only selection out of place. The narrative scope, however, feels accurate to the opera as events become intense to the point of unthinkable, unstoppable tragedy.

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

