



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2023/24 SEASON

# Tchaikovsky 6

May 31 - June 1, 2024 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor | Jacob Nissly, percussion

JOHN ADAMS

*Lollapalooza*

*Alejandro Gómez Guillén, conductor*

ADAM SCHOENBERG

*Losing Earth Percussion Concerto*

*Jacob Nissly, percussion*

## INTERMISSION

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74, TH 30

I. Adagio - Allegro non troppo

II. Allegro con grazia

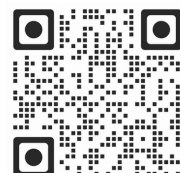
III. Allegro molto vivace

IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso

**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





## **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.



## **Alejandro Gómez Guillén, assistant conductor**

Conductor and violinist Alejandro Gómez Guillén is passionate about sharing music in a way that is compelling, uplifting, and educational. Recently named the Omaha Symphony’s assistant conductor beginning in November 2022, he will complete his sixth season as artistic director and conductor of the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, with which he recently led the Indiana premiere of Florence Price’s Fourth Symphony to local acclaim. He completed a successful tenure as associate conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, leading multiple community classics, pops, outdoor, bilingual and

educational concerts, including collaborations with artists such as Time for Three and mezzo-soprano Cecilia Duarte. He is also music director of Denver’s Sphere Ensemble which explores the intersection of masterpieces of string ensemble music with multi-part custom arrangements from piano pieces, pop, rock and world music masters. The group’s recordings are available through all music streaming platforms. Alejandro also serves as acting concertmaster/principal second violin of the West Texas Symphony and violinist of the Permian Basin and Chasqui Quartets, and he has also served as Freeman conducting fellow with Chicago Sinfonietta, associate conductor of Boulder Symphony and music director of Cantabile.



## **Jacob Nissly, percussionist**

Jacob Nissly is the Principal Percussionist of the San Francisco Symphony. Prior to his appointment in San Francisco, Nissly was the Principal Percussionist of the Cleveland Orchestra for two seasons and the Principal Percussionist of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for one season. Nissly also spent two years as a fellow in the New World Symphony.

# Program Notes

by Mathew Fuerst

Nissly is the Chair of the percussion department and Professor of Percussion at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Nissly is also a regular coach at the New World Symphony. He previously taught at the Eastman School of Music and Cleveland Institute of Music. He has served as a percussion coach for the Aspen Music Festival since 2019, National Youth Orchestra-USA, Verbier Festival and others. Nissly can be heard on recordings with the San Francisco Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and playing drum set on the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's GRAMMY Award-winning recording of John Adams' *City Noir*. In 2019, Nissly premiered Adam Schoenberg's Percussion Concerto *Losing Earth* with the San Francisco Symphony.

Nissly holds a Bachelor of Music and Jazz Studies degree from Northwestern University, where he studied with Michael Burritt, James Ross, and Paul Wertico. He received his Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Greg Zuber and Dan Druckman.

## **Lollapalooza**

### **John Adams**

Born: February 15, 1947 - Worcester, Massachusetts

*Piece Length: Approximately 6 minutes.*

*Program notes for **Lollapalooza** provided by the composer.*

*Lollapalooza* was written as a fortieth birthday present for Simon Rattle, who has been a friend and collaborator for many years. The term “lollapalooza” has an uncertain etymology, and just that vagueness may account for its popularity as an archetypical American word. It suggests something large, outlandish, oversized, not unduly refined. H.L. Mencken suggests it may have originally meant a knockout punch in a boxing match. I was attracted to it because of its internal rhythm: da-da-da-DAAH-da. Hence, in my piece, the word is spelled out in the trombones and tubas, C-C-C-Eb-C (emphasis on the Eb) as a kind of *idée fixe*. The “lollapalooza” motive is only one of a profusion of other motives, all appearing and evolving in a repetitive chain of events that moves this dancing behemoth along until it ends in a final shout by the horns and trombones and a terminal thwack on timpani and bass drum.

## **Losing Earth**

### **Adam Schoenberg**

Born: November 15, 1980 - New Salem, Massachusetts

*Program Notes for **Losing Earth** provided by the composer.*

On August 1, 2018, *The New York Times Magazine* published “Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change.” After reading this haunting article, I could feel myself becoming fearful of our future. Of what was to come. We’ve been aware of global warming for quite some time, but I was suddenly beginning to wonder how this would ultimately affect my children. Would they survive? Would the Earth survive? When I was first commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony to write this piece, I began to think about the history of percussion and how it can be traced back to the beginning of time. It is the most earthy and grounded of instruments, and in many cultures is considered to be the heartbeat of music. With the ability to make rhythm, keep time, and create melody, drums

# Program Notes

were a way for our ancestors to communicate love and joy, danger and survival. They have also traditionally been at the center of oral history, with percussionists being the storytellers. Second only to the human voice, this instrument has watched the earth endure all of its phases, including the devastation that is now beginning to emerge because of global warming. *Losing Earth* pays homage to this history.

*Losing Earth* is written for and dedicated to Jake Nissly. A dear friend, fellow father, and one of the greatest living percussionists in the world.

© 2019, Adam Schoenberg

## **Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 (“Pathétique”)**

### **Peter Tchaikovsky**

Born: May 7, 1840– Votkinsk, Russia

Died: November 6, 1893 – Saint Petersburg, Russia

*Piece Length: Approximately 45 minutes.*

*Content Warning: References to potential suicide.*

Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 6 in B minor (“Pathétique”) was premiered in October 1893, just nine days before the composer’s mysterious death. The official explanation was cholera, but questions arose due to the public’s shock. Soon, alternate theories began to emerge, the strongest that Tchaikovsky had killed himself after being outed as gay. There has never been enough evidence to draw any definitive conclusions. Likewise, the belief that the “Pathétique” exists as a sort of artistic final statement is also impossible to confirm; his brother, Modest, noted that “I had not seen him so bright for a long time past” after sending the score to his publisher. Even the “Pathétique” subtitle is deceiving; in Russian, the meaning is “passionate” or “emotional,” rather than “arousing pity.”

The sense of mystery isn’t helped at all by the music. The very opening is a tragic introduction that utilizes Henry Purcell’s famous “lament bass,” as heard in Purcell’s “When I am laid in Earth.” Another melody is possibly taken Bizet’s *Carmen*, specifically the line “to throw one glance at me, you took possession of my whole being,” from Don Jose’s aria, “Flower Song.” Finally, even the novel order of the movements hints at an ulterior meaning. If this were a more traditionally structured symphony, the work would end with the powerful and energetic coda experienced in the third movement. Tchaikovsky chooses to end with the slow finale, heartbeats ebbing away in the lowest strings into silence. The composer often hinted that he had a story in mind for this symphony, but he insisted it “will remain a mystery to everyone - let them guess.” He most likely had no idea how accurate this statement would become.

We will never know Tchaikovsky’s true inspiration for the Sixth; if the heartbeats heard in the finale movement were a beloved character, or his own. The work remains one of the absolute finest in the repertoire regardless, a cathartic, collective experience of the extremes in human emotion. As Thomas May put it, “Tchaikovsky declared that he had put his ‘whole soul into this work.’ And there it remains – beyond all attempts at reductive explanations, for us to encounter anew.”

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