



OMAHA  
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2024/25 SEASON

# Wu Man & Beethoven 6

January 10–11, 2025 | 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center

Ankush Kumar Bahl, conductor | Serena Reuten, conductor | Wu Man, pipa (Chinese lute)

CHEN YI

*Shuo*

*Serena Reuten, conductor*

LOU HARRISON

Concerto for Pipa with String Orchestra

I. Allegro

II. Bits & Pieces

III. Threnody for Richard Locke

IV. Estampie

*Wu Man, pipa*

## INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68, “Pastoral”

I. Awakening of Cheerful Feelings on Arrival in the Country

II. Scene by the Brook

III. Merry Gathering of the Countryfolk

IV. Thunderstorm

V. Shepherd's Song, Glad and Grateful Feelings After the Storm

# 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.



**Serena Reuten** is a German-Canadian conductor currently serving as the assistant conductor of the Omaha Symphony. Between 2024-2026 she will also join the third cohort of the Orchestre Métropolitain's Orchestral Conducting Academy mentorship program under the guidance of Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Recent activities include participating in the 2024 Järvi Conducting Academy in Pärnu, Estonia, under the mentorship of Paavo Järvi, Neeme Järvi, and Leonid Grin. She has served as guest assistant conductor for the Toronto Symphony and National Arts Centre Orchestra, as well as guest conductor with the Winnipeg Symphony during their annual Winnipeg New Music Festival. In 2023, she was the inaugural recipient of the Bernhard Gueller Conducting Fellowship with Symphony Nova Scotia as well as one of CBC's 30 under 30 Classical Musicians. Over the past few summers, she has also attended several international conducting masterclasses, studying under such conductors as Alexander Shelley and Cristian Măcelaru.

Serena recently completed her graduate studies in orchestral conducting at the Eastman School of Music with Neil Varon. Also active in Rochester's broader musical community, she served as the director of the New Horizons String Ensemble at the Eastman Community Music School and worked with ensembles such as OSSIA, the Eastman Chamber Orchestra, and the Eastman Graduate Composers Sinfonietta. Serena holds degrees in flute performance from the University of Ottawa and University of Montreal, and in her spare time enjoys learning languages and dancing.



**Wu Man** belongs to a rare group of musicians who have redefined the role of their instruments, in her case, the pipa, a pear-shaped, four-stringed Chinese lute with a rich history spanning centuries. Not only is she recognized as the foremost pipa player in the United States, but she is also celebrated as an accomplished composer, educator, and one of the most prominent instrumentalists of traditional Chinese music. She has premiered hundreds of new works for the pipa, while spearheading multimedia projects to both preserve and create awareness of China's ancient musical traditions. Her adventurous spirit and virtuosity have led to collaborations across artistic disciplines, allowing her to reach wider audiences as she works to cross cultural and musical borders. Her efforts were recognized when she was named

Musical America's 2013 "Instrumentalist of the Year," marking the first time this prestigious award has been bestowed on a player of a non-Western instrument, and in 2021 when she received an honorary Doctorate of Music from the New England Conservatory of Music and an Honorary University Fellowship from Hong Kong Baptist University. Ms. Wu is a recipient of the 2023 National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), one of the United States' most prestigious honors in folk and traditional arts. In 2023 she was additionally honored with the Asia Society's Asia Arts Game Changers Award, an annual award presented in New York City which recognizes and honors artists and arts professionals for their significant contributions to contemporary art.

# Program Notes

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## ***Shuo***

### **Chen Yi**

Born: April 4, 1953 – Guangzhou, China

*Piece Length: Approximately 9'.*

Kansas City-based composer Chen Yi began musical studies at the age of three when she started piano lessons, and added violin lessons at age four. As a teenager during the Chinese Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, she was taken to the countryside to farm. She brought her violin with her to keep in shape, playing only songs she was allowed to perform: the revolutionary songs of the time. Her first steps toward becoming a composer occurred during these years, when she would incorporate Western classical techniques into Chinese revolutionary music. She currently teaches in the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

*Shuo* showcases her interest in the blending of Chinese folk music and Western classical traditions. Originally written as the first movement of a string quartet in 1982, Chen orchestrated the work for full strings, and it was premiered by the San Jose Chamber Orchestra on January 22, 1995. The word “shuo” means “initiate” and represents the first day of each month in the lunar calendar.

## **Concerto for Pipa with String Orchestra**

### **Lou Harrison**

Born: May 14, 1917 – Portland, OR

Died: February 2, 2003 – Lafayette, IN

*Piece Length: Approximately 26'.*

Starting at the age of nine, Lou Harrison’s family moved from Portland, Oregon, to numerous locations throughout the Northern California area, eventually settling in San Francisco. Here, Harrison was surrounded by the influences of its large Asian American population. His mother decorated the home with Japanese lanterns, Persian rugs, and replicas of Chinese artifacts. The Harrison family listened to music from all over the world along with Western classical music. In 1943, Harrison moved to New York City to become a music critic for the *Herald Tribune*. While he met many modernist composers living and working in the city, his time in New York was filled with loneliness and anxiety, which eventually led to a nervous breakdown in 1947 that resulted in prolonged hospitalization. Upon leaving the hospital, Harrison moved back to the West Coast. This physical move also signaled a compositional shift; moving away from the influence of his teachers Arnold Schoenberg and the iconoclastic Henry Cowell to the inspirations of his youth: the lyrical writing of non-Western music.

# Program Notes

This shift is on display in his Concerto for Pipa with String Orchestra, composed in 1997 for Wu Man. The pipa is a traditional Chinese plucked instrument, and one of the most popular – it has been played for nearly two thousand years. It is sometimes called the “Chinese lute,” and there are variations of this instrument in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. This was the first concerto for a pipa written by a Western composer. Harrison’s writing perfectly complements Wu’s extraordinary abilities, culminating in a playful, virtuosic and enchanting piece.

## **Symphony No. 6 in F Major (“Pastoral”), Op. 68**

### **Ludwig van Beethoven**

Born: December 16, 1770 – Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827 – Vienna, Austria

*Piece Length: Approximately 40 minutes.*

Beethoven loved nature and the countryside, and there are letters that reveal the depth of this love, including one from May 1810 that states “How delighted I shall be to ramble for a while through bushes, woods, under trees, over grass and rocks. No one can love the country as much as I do.” With this Sixth Symphony, Beethoven expresses this perhaps more clearly than in any other of his works, and while the symphony makes multiple references to nature, bird calls, and thunderstorms, his purpose was to convey “more the expression of feeling than tone poem.” Regardless, the Sixth would provide inspiration for future programmatic music such as Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*. Everything about this symphony - the compositional development, the vivid depictions of nature at its most glorious and overwhelming, and the remarkable feelings of peace and joy - culminate in a work that has become indispensable in the classical repertoire.

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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

