Curtis on Tour:
Curtis Symphony Orchestra
Wednesday, February 5, 2020, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Curtis on Tour:
Curtis Symphony Orchestra
Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Jonathan Biss, piano

\[ f(x) = \sin^2 x - \frac{1}{x} \]

Gabriella Smith (b. 1991)

Concerto no. 5 in E-flat major, op. 73 (Emperor)

I. Allegro
II. Adagio un poco mosso
III. Rondo: Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

INTERMISSION

Symphony no. 2 in D major, op. 43

I. Allegretto
II. Andante; ma rubato
III. Vivacissimo
IV. Finale: Allegro moderato

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Curtis on Tour is the Nina von Maltzahn Global Touring Initiative of the Curtis Institute of Music.
Program Notes

\[ f(x) = \sin^2 x - \frac{1}{x} \]

Gabriella Smith (b. 1991)

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay area, Gabriella Smith found herself drawn both to music and to the natural wonders of the Pacific Coast. If the propensity of Smith’s music toward propulsive, repetitive rhythmic patterns and “additive” motivic cells places her in the minimalist tradition of Steve Reich and John Adams, her fascination with nature brings to mind the works of John Cage, Alan Hovhaness, Olivier Messiaen, and even John Luther Adams. At the same time, she has not shied from playful allusions to postmodern “recompositions.” Smith is passionate about hiking, birding, and backpacking, and she has even taken to recording underwater soundscapes. Her music defies easy categorization, which is partly why it continues to draw interest from an ever-widening circle.

Already in her middle teens Smith was showing scores to John Adams, a fellow Bay Area resident; the elder composer would eventually become an avid supporter of her music, selecting Smith’s *Carrot Revolution* for the New York Philharmonic’s Nightcap Series, which he curates. She earned her bachelor’s degree at the Curtis Institute of Music and is currently a doctoral student at Princeton University.

Smith’s music has been performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Dover Quartet, Eighth Blackbird, Bang on a Can All-Stars, the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, the Nashville Symphony, the PRISM Quartet, and the Aizuri Quartet, among others. Recently she has received commissions from the Cincinnati Symphony, the Oregon Symphony, and the Omer Quartet.

Composers have long shown a fascination with numerological principles (J. S. Bach), geometric proportions (Béla Bartók), and even higher math (Milton Babbitt). For her \[ f(x) = \sin^2 x - \frac{1}{x}, \] Smith has mapped a composition according to an actual algebraic equation, but she has responded to it in a natural, intuitive manner. She uses unorthodox percussive sounds (including some from the string players, who are asked to perform *col legno* effects “at random,” she writes, using “a pen or pencil if you don’t want to use your bow”) in tandem with tonal moments which stand out as striking arrivals.

The composer has written the following about the piece:

“When I think about music (my own and others’), I often first think about it in terms of the overall arc and shape of the piece. I picture it as a curve that moves horizontally from left to right as time progresses and moves up and down as the energy and dynamic content of the music changes. You can describe any of these curves as a mathematical function. This way of thinking about the shape of music is independent of the normal way we think about form in music, which typically involves the recurrence of themes. So you can think of any piece of music this way regardless of whether it’s a sonata or a pop song or a work without any codified form—it’s fun, try picturing a curve as you listen to music. The energy and dynamic contour of this work look roughly like the following curve:
Program Notes, continued

“Mathematically, if you’re into that sort of thing, the curve follows a section of the function \( f(x) = \sin 2x - \frac{1}{x} \) (on the interval \( x = \frac{\pi}{2} \) to \( x = 0 \)) where the horizontal axis, \( x \), represents time and the vertical axis, \( f(x) \), indicates the energy and dynamic content of the piece. In practical terms, this means the music begins quietly and builds up to a small climax, decays, and then builds again and continues to build to the end of the piece.

“The function serves as an overall map for the piece, but the individual musical ideas were intuitively generated. The title \( f(x) = \sin^2x - \frac{1}{x} \) describes the form of the piece, in the same way that composers of the past titled pieces sonata or rondo in reference to their form. So while the inspiration for this work comes from a mathematical function, you don’t need to remember your high school math to experience and enjoy it!”

6 minutes • 1 movement

NATURE, MATH, AND MUSIC

“I get a lot of my inspiration from the forms, structures, and energies in the natural world, and I also like math, which can describe these forms, designs, and energies so elegantly and concisely.”

—Gabriella Smith

Piano Concerto no. 5 in E-flat major, op. 73 (Emperor)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven broke through his creative impasse of 1802 by being brutally honest with himself about the one thing that pained him most. In his Heiligenstadt Testament the composer finally admitted, in writing, that he was losing his hearing—the sum of all fears for someone who has built his or her very existence on composing and performing music. At the same time, he resolved to dedicate the rest of his life to creating the best music he possibly could.

During the ensuing years the clumsy hero from Bonn, whose 250th birthday is celebrated worldwide this year, delivered on that promise in spades: The period from 1802 to 1808 saw a floodgate of creativity the likes of which the world has rarely seen. During these years Beethoven composed the Third through the Sixth symphonies, the Third and Fourth piano concertos, the Violin Concerto, the Triple Concerto, the three Razumovsky Quartets, six piano sonatas including the Appassionata and the Waldstein, the opera Fidelio, the Choral Fantasy, the Mass in C, and numerous other works. The crowning achievement was the Emperor Concerto, written as a sort of joyous aftermath in 1809. The concerto received its public premiere in Leipzig in 1811, and Beethoven’s pupil, Carl Czerny, played the Vienna premiere the following year.

Many have attributed the concerto’s mirthful energy to Beethoven’s joy over his newfound financial security: In 1809 three of his most prominent patrons signed a pledge to “subsidize” the composer for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, one cannot downplay the impact that Vienna under siege had on the composer’s creative energies. France had taken up arms against Austria again, and during much of the summer of 1809 it engaged in a relentless bombardment of the Imperial capital. “Here is nothing but drums, cannons, and human misery of every sort,” the composer wrote in July. Vestiges of this harrowing experience seem to have seeped into the more defiant passages of the Emperor.

To be sure, the annuity pledged by the Archduke Rudolph and the Princes Lobkowitz and Kinsky offered a welcome promise of financial independence: Beethoven had struggled for years, unsuccessfully, to secure a position at the Viennese court. But when the ensuing war resulted in a devaluation of the Austrian currency, his patrons saw their fortunes nearly decimated—and in his later years the composer’s finances became ever more precarious.

The title Emperor, most likely bestowed (without the composer’s permission) by English publisher Johann Baptist Cramer, might have been a reference to the Austrian emperor; it probably does not reflect any remaining
admiration for the aspiring emperor Napoleon, whom Beethoven had denounced years earlier.

The concerto’s opening allegro upsets the 18th-century norm from the get-go, with a series of virtuoso roulades that introduce the soloist before having the piano fall silent through the rest of the lengthy exposition. Beethoven uses these orchestral chords to sketch a descending line that he forges into motivic material. In the coloristic adagio un poco mosso, the piano emerges pianissimo from the extremes of its register to state a breathless, poignant tune. In lieu of a full stop between this and the subsequent movement, Beethoven effects a weird transition through the barest means: He has the bassoons simply “slide” from B to B-flat, in preparation for E-flat major. After picking out fragments of the melody, the pianist lurches into the exuberant rondo: allegro ma non troppo with an upward-arching theme that propels the angular finale forward.

40 minutes • 3 movements

AN EMPEROR FOR THE ARCHDUKE

Beethoven dedicated the Emperor to his pupil and best friend, the Archduke Rudolph, an amateur pianist who played the actual first performance of the concerto—in January 1811, at a private affair at the palace of Prince Lobkowitz.

A LIVING, BREATHING THING

“It’s a complicated and difficult business, making a piece as old and as often-heard as the Emperor concerto seem like a living, breathing thing, rather than an artifact,” pianist Jonathan Biss recently wrote. “But the process is not just worthwhile; it is exhilarating. Playing a great piece of music makes you feel alive in a way and to a degree that few of life’s experiences can come close to. The Emperor may be over 200 years and thousands of performances old, but it is not only still alive: it is life-giving.”

Symphony no. 2 in D Major, op. 43
Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

If the first of Sibelius’s seven symphonies betrayed influences of Tchaikovsky and to some extent Wagner, his Second Symphony, composed from 1900 to 1902, takes a different point of departure altogether. Both the success of the composer’s patriotic tone poem Finlandia and his own immersion in the Kalevala, the chief body of Finnish folklore, for his Lemminkäinen Suite had inspired in Sibelius a growing sense of nationalist sentiment. In 1898 the Russians, who dominated Finland at the time, had declared Finnish rights void, and the public resentment against the Slavic aggressors was high.

At the same time, the spectacular success of the 1899 premiere of the composer’s First Symphony had inspired in him a strong desire to compose “non-programmatic” works—music that spoke in abstract rather than narrative terms. He began sketching out the Second Symphony during travels in Germany and Italy in the fall of 1900, and he conducted the work’s premiere in March 1902 in Helsinki.

Sibelius struck out on his own here musically, with notable advances in the formulation of a distinct compositional voice. Though he had initially envisioned a programmatic piece along the lines of his earlier Lemminkäinen cycle, once he was well along with the symphony he avoided placing non-musical associations on the piece. That did not stop others from doing so.

“My symphonies are music that has been conceived and worked out as a musical expression,” Sibelius wrote, “without the slightest literary basis. I am not a literary musician. A symphony should be music first and last.” Nevertheless, the conductor Georg Schneevoigt wrote the following about the Second Symphony: “I. Peaceful pastoral life of the Finns; II. Stirrings of the will for independence; III. Heroic resolution; IV. Confidence in eventual triumph over the oppressor.”
Program Notes, continued

The allegretto is built from a three-note motive that evolves into the principal thematic material. In the tempo andante, ma rubato, the composer mined some early compositions he had begun in Italy and abandoned, including tone poems on the Don Juan legend and on Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*: The dashing vivacissimo scherzo leads without pause into the final allegro moderato, which expands and accelerates into an extroverted and triumphant close.

45 minutes • 4 movements

LAND OF MUSIC

Until 20 or 30 years ago, Sibelius was the only musical Finn most people could name. The recent proliferation of prominent figures has altered our view of this immensely musical nation—from composers such as Einojuhani Rautavaara and Kaija Saariaho to conductors Esa-Pekka Salonen and Osmo Vänskä—and soloists Karita Mattila and Olli Mustonen.

Program notes by Paul Horsley
Curtis Symphony Orchestra

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Cherry Choi Tung Yeung, concertmaster
Matthew Hakkarainen, principal
second violin
Claire Bourg
Maya Buchanan
Angela Sin Ying Chan
Hana Chang
I-hao Cheng
Karisa Chiu
Josephine Chung
Tsutomu William Copeland
Lingyu Dong
Anna Do Gyung Im
Danny Yehun Jin
Gawon Kim
Haram Kim
Sumin Kim
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Lun Li
Hyun Jae Lim
Tianyou Ma
Emma Carina Meinrenken
Jieon Park
Michael Shaham
Emily Shehi
Takumi Taguchi
Hannah Tam
Eric Tsai
Ray Ushikubo
Jinyoung Yoon

CELLO
Sydney Lee, principal
Francis Carr
Hun Choi
Matthew Christakos
Sai Sai Ding
Jiayin He
Jiyeon Kim
John Lee
Chase Park
Andres Sanchez
Albert Seo
Nygel Witherspoon
Yoonsoo Yeo

DOUBLE BASS
Lena Goodson, principal
Marcus Elliott Gaved
William Karns
William McGregor
Gabriel Polinsky

FLUTE
Naomi Ford
Alejandro Lombo
Calvin Mayman
Fuki Wang
Jihoo Yu

OBOE
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Jacob Thonis

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Omri Barak
Justin Bernardi
Sarah Jessen
Raul Orellana
James Vaughan

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Diogo Fernandes
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TUBA
Cristina Cutts Dougherty

TIMPANI
Julien Bélanger
About Curtis Symphony Orchestra

Acclaimed for its “otherworldly ensemble and professional level of sophistication” (New York Times), the Curtis Symphony Orchestra offers a dynamic showcase of tomorrow’s exceptional young talent. Each year the 100 extraordinary musicians of the orchestra work with internationally renowned conductors, including Osmo Vänskä, Vladimir Jurowski, Marin Alsop, Simon Rattle, Robert Spano, and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who also mentors the early-career conductors who hold Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellowships at Curtis. This professional training has enabled Curtis alumni to assume prominent positions in America’s leading orchestras, as well as esteemed orchestras around the world.

About the Curtis Institute of Music

The Curtis Institute of Music educates and trains exceptionally gifted young musicians to engage a local and global community through the highest level of artistry.

With a small student body of about 175, Curtis provides each young musician with an unparalleled education alongside musical peers, distinguished by a “learn by doing” philosophy and personalized attention from a celebrated faculty that includes a high proportion of actively performing musicians. To ensure that admissions are based solely on artistic promise, Curtis makes an investment in each admitted student so that no tuition is charged for their studies.

Curtis students offer more than 200 orchestra, opera, and solo and chamber music performances to the public each year. They hone music advocacy skills through programs that bring arts access and education to the community, and they reach global audiences through Curtis on Tour and weekly live-streamed recitals (please visit curtis.edu/youtube).

This real-world training allows Curtis’ extraordinary young musicians to join the front rank of performers, composers, conductors, and musical leaders. Each season leading opera houses and chamber music series around the world feature Curtis alumni, and they hold principal chairs in every major American orchestra. Curtis graduates are musical leaders, making a profound impact on music onstage and in their communities. To learn more, please visit Curtis.edu.
OSMO VÄNSKÄ, conductor

Osmo Vänskä, music director of the Minnesota Orchestra for more than 15 years, begins his new role as music director of the Seoul Philharmonic in 2020. Vänskä is recognized for his compelling interpretations of repertoire from all ages, his energetic podium presence, and his democratic and inclusive working style.

With the Minnesota Orchestra Vänskä has undertaken five major European tours, performing at festivals and venues such as the BBC Proms, Edinburgh Festival, Barbican Hall, Royal Concertgebouw, Berliner Philharmonie, Tivoli Copenhagen, and Vienna’s Musikverein. In 2018 they embarked on the first visit by an America orchestra to South Africa as part of celebrations of the Nelson Mandela centenary, and in 2015 they toured to Cuba after the normalization of relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

Much in demand as a guest conductor, in North America Vänskä has appeared with the New York and Los Angeles philharmonics; the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras; and the Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and New World symphony orchestras. Internationally he has led the Berlin, Czech, Netherlands Radio, Seoul, Hong Kong, London, and Vienna philharmonics; the BBC and Berlin symphonies; and the Leipzig Gewandhaus and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras.

Formerly principal conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, chief conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and music director of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Vänskä holds honorary doctorates from the universities of Glasgow and Minnesota and in 2005 was named Musical America’s Conductor of the Year. In 2013 Vänskä received the Annual Award from the German Record Critics’ Association for his BIS recordings of the complete works of Sibelius.
JONATHAN BISS, piano

Jonathan Biss is a world-renowned pianist who continues to expand his reputation as a teacher and musical thinker. One of the great Beethoven interpreters of our time, Biss created the first massive open online course (MOOC) offered by a classical music conservatory, Exploring Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas, which has reached more than 150,000 people in 185 countries; the most recent set of lectures was released in 2019. A prolific writer, he is the author of a best-selling e-book, Beethoven’s Shadow (Rosetta Books, 2011). He has recorded the complete Beethoven piano sonatas for Onyx Classics; and leading up to the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth in December 2020, he is performing a whole season focused around the composer’s piano sonatas, with more than 50 recitals worldwide. He has initiated Beethoven/5, a project to commission five piano concertos as companion works for each of Beethoven’s piano concertos from composers Timo Andres, Sally Beamish, Salvatore Sciarrino, Caroline Shaw, and Brett Dean.

Biss has appeared repeatedly as soloist with the world’s foremost orchestras and given recitals in such renowned venues as Carnegie Hall, the Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Théâtre du Châtelet, and the Berliner Philharmonie. An enthusiastic chamber musician, he was named co-artistic director of the Marlboro Music Festival in 2018, alongside Mitsuko Uchida. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Leonard Bernstein Award (2005), Lincoln Center’s Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the 2003 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and the 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award.

Biss studied at Indiana University with Evelyne Brancart and at the Curtis Institute of Music with Leon Fleisher. In 2011 Biss joined the faculty of Curtis, where he holds the Neubauer Family Chair in Piano Studies.
Engagement Events

Thursday, February 4, 2020
MASTER CLASS WITH JONATHAN BISS, PIANO
Piano students in the School of Performing Arts performed and received coaching from guest soloist Jonathan Biss.

Friday, February 5, 2020
CLASS VISIT: DAVID LUDWIG, COMPOSER
Composer David Ludwig led a lesson in Introduction to Vocal/Choral Arranging in the School of Performing Arts.

Special thanks to Dwight Bigler, Hsiang Tu, Betsy Crone, and Richard Masters

Go Deeper

Beethoven began composing Concerto no. 5 in E-flat major, op. 73 (Emperor) in Vienna in 1809, while the city was under continual attack and occupation by the French; a circumstance that—translated musically—led Alfred Einstein to characterize the piece as “the apotheosis of the military concept” in the composer’s canon. Over 100 years later, many who experienced the premiere of Jean Sibelius’ Symphony no. 2 in D major, op. 43, in 1902 associated it with the concurrent movement for Finnish independence. Considering the historical context of political struggle that these pieces share, where do you hear themes of strife and liberation?
In the Galleries

Now on View
FIERCE WOMEN
Chakaia Booker, Guerrilla Girls, Jenny Holzer, Marilyn Minter, and Rozeal
Thursday, January 30-Saturday, April 25, 2020
All galleries and Cube

This suite of one-person exhibitions by some of the most acclaimed artists of our era presents exemplary works of art that are formidable, impactful, and fierce in both their dramatic visual power and the potency of ideas presented. Spanning the latter part of the 20th century up to the present time, the exhibition features sculpture, painting, works on paper, digital prints, and video, all of which give voice to a range of critical issues in our world today.

Beginning with the historical precedent of the Guerrilla Girls, a notorious (and still active) collective of activist artists, the exhibition continues with works by the internationally acclaimed artist Jenny Holzer, then proceeds up to the present with an enthralling large-scale video installation by Marilyn Minter. Ranging from Holzer’s iconic LED signs to Chakaia Booker’s audacious rubber tire compositions or Rozeal’s fantastical, cross-cultural mashups, these artists take on gender and racial inequality, the politics of identity, and a panoply of injustices surrounding power, morality, and corruption in our world.

GALLERY TALK
Art Herstory Talk Series, Part I: Women in the Ancient World
Thursday, February 13, 2020, 6 PM
Ann-Marie Knoblauch, Ph.D., associate professor of art history and associate director of academics, School of Visual Arts
Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery
Free; approximately 30 minutes

See artscenter.vt.edu for more talks, discussions, and events related to Fierce Women.

GALLERY HOURS
Monday-Friday, 10 AM-5:30 PM
Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu.
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