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10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON



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BAMBERG SYMPHONY JAKUB HRŮŠA, CONDUCTOR HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD, PIANO

Friday, April 26, 2024, 7:30 PM

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BAMBERG SYMPHONY
JAKUB HRŮŠA, CONDUCTOR
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This performance is supported in part by
Minnis and Louise Ridenour and David and Judie Reemsnyder.

PROGRAM

LOHENGRIN: PRELUDE ACT I

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883)

**SYMPHONY NO. 3,
OP. 90, F MAJOR**

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante

III. Poco allegretto

IV. Allegro

————— **INTERMISSION** —————

**PIANO CONCERTO
OP. 54, A MINOR**

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

I. Allegro affettuoso

*II. Intermezzo. Andantino
grazioso*

III. Allegro vivace

**TANNHÄUSER OVERTURE
(DRESDEN VERSION)**

WAGNER



PROGRAM NOTES

Shortly after he completed the opera *Tannhäuser* in 1845, **Richard Wagner** immersed himself in legends of the Holy Grail and began to draft the plot of a new opera featuring a medieval knight, secretly known as Lohengrin, in service to the Grail. This should have been his next major project for the court theatre in Dresden, but in 1848 the spirit of revolution overtaking much of Europe swept into town, and Wagner's sympathies lay with the revolutionaries; this caused him to forfeit his post at the court theatre, and he finished *Lohengrin* in exile. His friend, Franz Liszt, to whom he dedicated the opera, conducted its premiere in Weimar on August 28, 1850. It was the first of Wagner's operas to achieve widespread acclaim, a success for which he gave credit to the efforts of his "versatile and abundantly gifted friend," Liszt.

Unlike more traditional overtures, which usually feature contrasting sections, the prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin* unfolds a single thematic idea, in one slow tempo, in a prolonged crescendo that reaches a rapturous culmination and then subsides once again into silence. Wagner himself suggested that the Prelude was meant to

PROGRAM NOTES, CONT.

represent the Holy Grail, borne by angels in a long descent from heaven to Earth, and their return to heaven. The prelude opens with a riveting aural effect, as divided strings play an A-Major chord high in their range, with four solo violins performing the same chord in shimmering harmonics alongside the flutes and oboes. The transparency and lack of bass create a sound that is disembodied and ethereal, beginning with gradations of pianissimo and strengthening as, slowly, the other instruments of the orchestra are allowed to merge with the texture. The work reaches a climactic point with the addition of full brass and the punctuation of glittering cymbals; thereafter the strings gradually return to the stratosphere as the rest fades away.

Johannes Brahms was 50 years old when he completed his Third Symphony in 1883. He was at the peak of his career, fully booked with engagements as pianist and conductor on tours throughout Europe, and equally committed to a dense program of composition. Brahms wrote most of the symphony in Wiesbaden during the summer, and it received its premiere in Vienna that December. In order for eager amateurs to have ready access to it, he also produced a two-piano version; it was this score that he sent to his close friend, Clara Schumann, and her response overflowed with warmth and enthusiasm: "I have spent such happy hours with your creation ... What a work! What a poem! What a harmonious mood pervades the whole! All the movements seem to be of one piece, one beat of the heart, each one a jewel! From start to finish one is wrapped about with the mysterious charm of the woods and forests. I could not tell you which movement I loved most."

There is an extraordinary sense of unity and coherence to this work, which is shorter than Brahms's other symphonies, with well-balanced structures that seem classical in spirit. A potent three-note motive, F–A-flat–F, opens the first movement and links

it to the second and fourth. According to Brahms's friend and biographer Max Kalbeck, the motto F–A–F meant *frei aber froh* (free but happy), a conscious and deeply felt commitment to his unencumbered path as an artist. These notes form tonic chords in F Major and F minor, the interlocking tonalities of the opening movement. The central movements are both richly lyrical and delicately colored, and the smaller orchestras of Brahms's time would have allowed the individual timbres of the instruments to emerge with clarity. Part of the work's "mysterious charm," as Clara Schumann put it, may have to do with its calm, quiet endings; never bombastic, always subtle, even the restless expression of the finale concludes in hushed resonance.

For some years before **Robert Schumann** married the great pianist Clara Wieck in 1840, he had devoted much of his creative energy to becoming a pianist and to writing piano music; however, he never possessed the gifts that made his wife one of the foremost pianists of her age, and moreover suffered damage to his right hand in the 1830s that prevented him from playing. Clara was the primary inspiration for Schumann's piano music, and after their marriage she became his pianistic voice and the chief promoter of his work. In 1845 he took up an A minor *fantasie* for piano and orchestra that he had written four years earlier but not yet been able to publish on its own; he added two movements to create a concerto, probably thinking to make it more marketable. Clara premiered it in Dresden on December 4, and it would eventually turn out to be one of his most popular works. It is noteworthy that Schumann had carefully studied Clara's own A minor piano concerto, which she had written in the 1830s with his assistance in orchestration. He paid homage to her concerto by quoting a motive from its finale in his own work.

PROGRAM NOTES, CONT.

We know that Clara was deeply attached to the concerto that her husband wrote for her. In one of her diaries she wrote, "it must give the greatest pleasure to those who hear it. The piano is most skillfully interwoven with the orchestra; it is impossible to think of one without the other." That is an apt description for the unconventional first movement, which after the piano's opening cascade of ringing chords does not offer a lengthy orchestral exposition, but introduces a theme that is quickly shared with the piano. There is a sense of rich, dynamic dialogue between soloist and orchestra throughout, which makes the solo *cadenza* — written out by Schumann as an integral part of the movement — an especially affecting moment of assertion on the part of the pianist. It is the pianist who delicately launches the *intermezzo*, with a light reply coming from the strings. At the heart of the movement the cellos take over with a soaring melody, over which the piano spins a colorful filigree of sound. The *intermezzo* flows directly into an exuberant finale, full of melodic invention, which Clara singled out in her diary as "a beautiful last movement . . . I always wanted a great bravura piece from him."

By 1845, after a turbulent period that took him and his wife from Riga to London to Paris, **Wagner** had settled into a career as music director for the court theatre in Dresden. He completed the first full version of *Tannhäuser* in April 1845 and conducted its premiere on October 19. Wagner based his libretto on medieval legends of a heroic poet-knight, Tannhäuser, and a courtly song contest. Over the course of the drama, which opens in the sensual, orgiastic world of Venusberg, Tannhäuser quests after spiritual fulfillment that he achieves only after an arduous pilgrimage to Rome and his final commitment, at the point of death, to a sacred love. The

overture to *Tannhäuser* received its first performance as a concert work in 1846, under the baton of Felix Mendelssohn in Leipzig.

Wagner's own program notes, published for a May 1873 concert, show how closely the overture's themes link it to the drama that would follow in an opera house: "At first the orchestra introduces us to the *Pilgrims' Chorus* alone. It approaches, swells to a mighty outpouring, and finally passes into the distance. — Twilight: dying echoes of the chorus. — as night falls, magic visions show themselves. A rosy mist swirls upward, sensuously exultant sounds reach our ears, and the blurred motions of a fearsomely voluptuous dance are revealed.

This is the seductive magic of the Venusberg, which appears by night to those whose souls are fired by bold, sensuous longings. Lured by the tempting visions, the slender figure of a man draws near: it is Tannhäuser, the minstrel of love. Proudly he sings his jubilant chant of love, exultantly and challengingly, as if to force the voluptuous magic to come to him."

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BIOGRAPHIES

BAMBERG SYMPHONY

The Bamberg Symphony is the only world-renowned orchestra that is not based in a major metropolis. The orchestra is known worldwide for its characteristically dark, somber, and warm sound, sharing the musical echo of its hometown with the world since 1946. With almost 7,500 concerts in over 500 cities and 64 countries, the symphony has become a cultural ambassador for Bavaria and the whole of Germany. The Bamberg Symphony therefore describes its mission in short words as "resonating worldwide."

The circumstances of its founding make the Bamberg Symphony a mirror of German history: in 1946, ex-members of Prague's German Philharmonic Orchestra met fellow musicians in Bamberg who also had to flee their homes because of the war and its aftermath. Starting with the Prague orchestra, the orchestra's lineage can be traced to the 18th century, reaching as far back as Mahler and even Mozart.

Bamberg Symphony revisits its historic roots more than 75 years after it was founded, with Czech-born Jakub Hrůša as its fifth chief conductor, leading the orchestra since September 2016. The symphony also performs regularly with honorary conductors Herbert Blomstedt, Christoph Eschenbach, and Manfred Honeck.

This year marks the orchestra's ninth U.S. tour; tonight they play their debut at Moss Arts Center.

Since 2022 the Bamberg Symphony has set itself the goal of acting and traveling in a more climate-friendly manner. For trips abroad, efforts are being made to optimize travel routes and tour procedures. For this tour, the orchestra will offset most of the CO² emissions caused by its travels by financially supporting the environmental project Running Tide, a global leader in ocean carbon removal. The Bamberg Symphony's donation will support critical R&D in Iceland, related to the safe, effective, and durable removal of carbon through the natural pathways of the ocean.

JAKUB HRŮŠA

Jakub Hrůša is chief conductor of the Bamberg Symphony and principal guest conductor of both the Czech Philharmonic and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Beginning in autumn 2025 Hrůša will take up the post of music director at the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in London.

Hrůša appears frequently as a guest-conductor with the world's greatest orchestras, including the Berlin, Vienna, Munich, and New York philharmonics; the Bavarian Radio, NHK, Chicago, and Boston symphonies; the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Lucerne Festival, Royal Concertgebouw, Mahler Chamber, and Cleveland orchestras; and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Dresden Staatskapelle, Orchestre de Paris, and Tonhalle Orchester Zürich.

BIOGRAPHIES, cont.

He has led opera productions for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Vienna State Opera, Royal Opera House, Opéra National de Paris, Zurich Opera, and the Glyndebourne Festival. In 2022 he made his debut at the Salzburg Festival with a new production of *Kát'a Kabanová*.

For his recordings with the Bamberg Symphony, Hrůša received an ICMA for Hans Rott's First Symphony in 2023, previously an ICMA for Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, as well as the Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik for Mahler's Fourth Symphony and a *BBC Music Magazine* Award for Dvořák and Martinů Piano Concertos with Ivo Kahánek; *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine* Award nominations for Martinů Violin Concertos with Frank Peter Zimmermann; and a Grammy Award nomination for Dvořák's Violin Concerto with Augustin Hadelich.

Hrůša studied at Prague's Academy of Performing Arts, where his teachers included Jiří Bělohlávek. He is president of the International Martinů Circle and the Dvořák Society. He was the inaugural recipient of the Sir Charles Mackerras Prize and in 2020 was awarded the Antonín Dvořák Prize by the Czech Republic's Academy of Classical Music, and — with Bamberg Symphony — the Bavarian State Prize for Music. In 2023 Hrůša was awarded honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD

Renaissance woman Hélène Grimaud is not just a deeply passionate and committed musical artist whose pianistic accomplishments play a central role in her life. Grimaud's multiple talents extend far beyond the instrument she plays with such poetic expression and technical control: her deep dedication to her musical career is reflected in and amplified by the scope and depth of her environmental, literary, and artistic interests.

She has been an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist since 2002. Her recordings have been critically acclaimed and awarded numerous accolades, among them the Cannes Classical Recording of the Year, Choc du Monde de la musique, Diapason d'or, Grand Prix du disque, Record Academy Prize (Tokyo), Midem Classic Award, and the Echo Klassik Award.

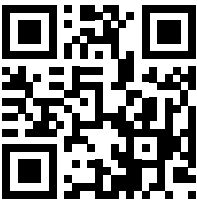
Forthcoming highlights of Grimaud's schedule include performances with Camerata Salzburg of the Schumann Piano Concerto at the Vienna Konzerthaus, Dresden Music Festival, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival (together with Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto) and Évian Festival (May/June). Following the success of *Silent Songs*, she and Konstantin Krimmel will perform songs from Silvestrov's cycle in Luxembourg and Dortmund (June).

Hélène Grimaud was born in 1969 in Aix-en-Provence and began her piano studies at the local conservatory. She was accepted into the Paris Conservatoire at just 13 and won first prize in piano performance a mere three years later. In 1987 she gave her well-received debut recital in Tokyo. That same year, renowned conductor Daniel Barenboim invited her to perform with the Orchestre de Paris: this marked the launch of Grimaud's musical career, characterised ever since by concerts with most of the world's major orchestras and many celebrated conductors.

It is through her thoughtful and tenderly expressive music-making that Hélène Grimaud most deeply touches the emotions of audiences. Fortunately, they have been able to enjoy her concerts worldwide, thanks to the extensive tours she undertakes as a soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. Grimaud's prodigious contribution to and impact on the world of classical music was recognised by the French government when she was admitted into the Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur (France's highest decoration) at the rank of Chevalier (Knight).

This is the first performance at the Moss Arts Center for the Bamberg Symphony, Hruša, and Grimaud.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!



We'd love your feedback on this performance. If you complete the short survey, you can enter for a chance to win two tickets to *Celebrating 20 Years of the Crooked Road* on Friday, July 12, 2024. bit.ly/bamberg-feedback

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024

TALK: ALEX ROSS, MUSIC CRITIC

Directly preceding the Bamberg Symphony's performance, *New Yorker* music critic Alex Ross led an invigorating discussion of the history and cultural context of Wagner's works featured in the program.

UNIVERSITY CLASS VISIT: EURO-AMERICAN MUSIC ANALYSIS

Alex Ross shared his knowledge and engaged with students in a discussion of select composers and works of the late-19th and 20th centuries.

WORKSHOPS

Musicians from the Bamberg Symphony coached students in percussion and flute during two sessions in the School of Performing Arts.

Special thanks to Elizabeth (Betsy) Lantz, Kimberly Loeffert, and Annie Stevens

GO DEEPER

Read the program notes on pages 6-10. What connections do you perceive among the selected composers and works? What's the significance and effect of bookending the program with the works by Wagner in reverse chronological order?

K-12 PROGRAMS AT THE MOSS ARTS CENTER

Experiences with the arts cultivate the next generation of creative thinkers, engage learners of diverse backgrounds, and foster community dialogue. The Moss Arts Center has been dedicated to providing K-12 students in the region with free, high-quality, and exciting arts programming since opening our doors in 2013. Through school-day matinee programs, gallery tours, in-school performances, and workshops with artists, we are passionate about serving our youngest community members and schools.

Learn more at bit.ly/moss-K12.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Moss Arts Center's 2013-2014 inaugural season offered a dynamic range of programming, featuring 21 performances by international, national, and regional touring performing artists and companies — from timeless classics and family-friendly offerings, to works with deep meaning and global themes, to events with a fresh and sometimes unexpected perspective. The center celebrated its successful first season on April 26, 2014, with a special gala celebration featuring R&B and jazz vocalist Natalie Cole and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra.

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If you have questions and would like more information, please contact Katie Gehrt at kgehart@vt.edu.

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Virginia Tech acknowledges that its Blacksburg campus sits partly on land that was previously the site of the Smithfield and Solitude Plantations, owned by members of the Preston family. Between the 1770s and the 1860s, the Prestons and other local White families that owned parcels of what became Virginia Tech also owned hundreds of enslaved people. Enslaved Black people generated resources that financed Virginia Tech's predecessor institution, the Preston and Olin Institute, and they also worked on the construction of its building.

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We are grateful for the generosity of our patrons and donors who sustain the Moss Arts Center with their annual gifts. The impact of all contributions, no matter the amount, is significant in helping us transform lives through exploration and engagement with the arts and the creative process. We are honored to have received cash donations during the period of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, from the following:

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YMCA at VIRGINIA TECH

Meet Seth & Connor, two incredible young men who volunteer every week to cook in our Mobile Kitchen to serve the fresh meals to our constituents in Christiansburg.

Seth is a Line Cook and Connor is a Dishwasher, both working at 622 North in Blacksburg. Late last year they decided that they wanted to feed people facing food insecurity. They were planning to set up in our Thrift Shop parking lot and pay for the food out of their own pockets. After a meeting with our Executive Director, Ryan, and Director of Food Insecurity, Karys, a plan was hatched and a beautiful partnership began!



Every week Seth and Connor give up many hours of their time to shop for, prepare, cook and serve fresh meals at one of our meal distribution sites. Funding for the meals comes through the YMCA at VT as a USDA sponsor and a grant from the Town of Christiansburg. Connor and Seth have developed a wonderful relationship with our Mobile Kitchen which they have affectionately named "Becky" or Rebecca when she misbehaves!

The guys truly enjoy helping others have access to good food and see food as a right, not a luxury. They want everyone to know that it's easy to make a difference and believe that anyone could do what they are doing. They are excited to be offering new recipes and types of food to our constituents and are enjoying the reactions to the delicious meals they provide. Their goal is to help this program grow, hoping that others will step up to work in Becky on the days when they cannot be there.

We think Connor and Seth are pretty darn special and we truly value their tremendous dedication to helping feed others. Thank you Seth & Connor!

YMCA AT VIRGINIA TECH

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MAY 3-8, 2024 • 9 AM - 7 PM

WHY VOLUNTEER?

- Help create a more sustainable campus
- Prevent dorm items from going to waste
- Support the YMCA at Virginia Tech
- Get early access to Y-TOSS sale in August

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Y-TOSS NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!

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