Brahms’ Fourth Symphony

Minnesota Orchestra
Rafael Payare, conductor
Virginie Verrez, mezzo

Thursday, November 16, 2017, 11 am Orchestra Hall
Friday, November 17, 2017, 8 pm Orchestra Hall

Paul Dukas
The Sorcerer’s Apprentice
ca. 10’

Maurice Ravel
Shéhérazade
Asia
The Enchanted Flute
The Indifferent One
Virginie Verrez, mezzo

INTERMISSION
ca. 20’

Johannes Brahms
Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Opus 98
Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato
ca. 40’

Text and translation for Ravel’s Shéhérazade appears on page 39.

OH+ Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Virginie Verrez
Thursday, November 16, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, November 17, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium (with additional guest Rafael Payare)

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
Virginie Verrez, mezzo

French mezzo Virginie Verrez, now welcomed for her Minnesota Orchestra debut, was a winner of the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and the 2016 Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition. Her opera roles have included Stéphano in Gounod’s Romeo and Juliet and Enrichetta in Bellini’s I Puritani with the Metropolitan Opera, and Mercédès in Bizet’s Carmen at the Festival d’Aix-en Provence. Highlights of her concert appearances include singing Berlioz’ Romeo and Juliet and Schumann’s Paradise and the Peri with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Barber’s Vanessa with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and Duruflé’s Requiem with the Netherlands Radio Choir. Her 2017-18 season includes debuts with the Opéra national de Paris, Glyndebourne Festival, Dallas Opera and Opéra de Lille, and a concert appearance with the Orchestre National de Lyon in Haydn’s Nelson Mass. She is a recent graduate of New York’s Juilliard School. More: askonasholt.co.uk.

Rafael Payare, conductor

Venezuelan conductor Rafael Payare makes his Minnesota Orchestra debut at these concerts. His profound musicianship, technical brilliance and charismatic presence on the podium has made him one of the most sought-after young conductors. He works regularly with the world’s leading orchestras, including the Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony and London Symphony, as well as the Munich Philharmonic, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and NHK Symphony Orchestra. In 2014, he was appointed chief conductor of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland. Highlights of his tenure with that ensemble have included his debut at the BBC Proms in 2016 and a successful Beethoven and Tchaikovsky cycle, with many concerts broadcast on BBC Radio 3. He has conducted all of the major orchestras in Venezuela, including the Simón Bolívar Orchestra. In 2012, he was awarded first prize at the Malko International Conducting Competition; that same year he was personally invited by his mentor, the late Lorin Maazel, to conduct at his Castleton Festival in Virginia, which led to Payare’s 2015 appointment as the festival’s principal conductor. More: askonasholt.co.uk.

Dukas: The Sorcerer’s Apprentice

Dukas’ witty scherzo chronicles the misadventures of a young man and his enchanted broom. A gradual accumulation of orchestral power leads to an outburst of chromatic scales, after which musical order is restored.

Ravel: Shéhérazade

Ravel’s mastery of creating evocative musical pictures is showcased in this vocal-orchestral setting of three poems written by his friend Tristan Klingsor. Ravel found his inspiration in the fantastical tales of the Orient, Klingsor’s colorful text and Debussy’s vivid musical imagery.

Brahms: Fourth Symphony

Brahms’ Fourth is a passionate work filled with high drama. From a first movement both warm and tragic, the symphony proceeds through a moody intermezzo and a rambunctious scherzo to a most unusual conclusion: a beautifully abstract set of variations on a Bach cantata.
Dukas composed *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* in 1897, precisely 100 years after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote the ballad on which it was based. The work was premiered on May 18, 1897, at a Société Nationale concert in Paris, with the composer conducting.

**the importance of being able to stop**
The story—inscribed in popular culture, of course, by Disney’s *Fantasia*—is that of a sorcerer-in-training who, in his master’s absence, thinks to save himself trouble by commanding a broom to assume something like human form. The enchanted broom sprouts two legs and a head, and begins fetching the bathwater from the river, but the apprentice has forgotten the command to stop, and no amount of verbal abuse does the trick. Meanwhile the house is flooded. He thinks of a solution—to take a cleaver and destroy the relentlessly industrious broom. This gives him two water-carrying brooms instead of one. Panicked, he calls the sorcerer: “Master, the peril is great/I cannot be rid/Of the spirits I called.” The sorcerer restores order and lays down the law: only he, and for his purposes alone, will summon these spirits.

**“the calm before the brainstorm”**
The brilliant music of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* begins with a slow introduction that provides a frame for the story and depicts the calm before the brainstorm. Debussy remembered this beautiful page when he came to write his ballet *Jeux*, and it is also part of the storehouse on which Stravinsky drew for *The Firebird*. But even in this calm, something is germinating. For the moment it is a quiet phrase, first played by the clarinet, its outline reinforced by bright harmonics on the harp. Then the music bursts into crazily energized life, and after a thud on the timpani and a long silence the story begins. The broom gets to its newly found feet and begins its work to the clarinet tune, now given to the bassoon and, by being made staccato, quite transformed in character. It is one of those themes that are so simple one can hardly conceive of their needing to be invented.

In an ingenious, brilliantly scored series of continuing variations, the piece builds to its first crisis, the hacking to bits of the broom.

What follows—the coming to life of the fragments, the flood, the panicked call to the sorcerer, the sorcerer’s command—is all vividly set before us. The quiet opening music returns to complete the frame. This time Dukas adds a regretful phrase for a single viola, alone unmuted among all the strings. And the last two bars remind us that this is, after all, a scherzo.

**Instrumentation:**
2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, triangle, glockenspiel, harp and strings

Excerpted from a program note by Michael Steinberg.

Ravel, the dapper Parisian, had a penchant for foreign lands, which colored a number of his compositions. The taste came early: he was only 14 when he encountered the Javanese Gamelan music and gypsy bands featured at the 1889 World Exposition held in Paris. There he also heard two Russian programs conducted by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who a year earlier had introduced his symphonic suite, *Scheherazade*, which transferred Eastern melodic patterns into the Russian idiom, while highlighting the solo violin as the beguiling “voice” of the legendary storyteller. The impression on young Ravel was lasting.

**a captivating heroine**
In 1897, when Ravel entered the advanced composition class taught by Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire, he began an opera whose heroine was the narrator of the Persian tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Only portions of it were finished, but the composer himself conducted his Overture to *Shéhérazade* at the concert of the Société Nationale, after which catcalls mingled with applause.

The opera project was abandoned, but not its heroine. In the meantime, Ravel became active in a coterie of Parisian poets and artists who called themselves the “Apaches,” and who passionately upheld all that was new in the arts. One of the group’s poets, Tristan Klingsor, published a book of verses entitled *Shéhérazade*,...
Coincidentally the subject of Ravel’s aborted opera. The poems intrigued Ravel for both their metrical freedom and expressive imagery, unlocking for him an enduring fascination with the French language and the challenge of setting its inflections to music. By 1903 he had set three of the most opulent poems to music—his first big venture with the orchestra, used as coloristically as by Rimsky-Korsakov, but with a svelte transparency that is unmistakably Ravel.

The song cycle was introduced on May 17, 1904, at a concert of the Société Nationale, with Alfred Cortot conducting and soprano Jane Hatto, to whom the first movement is dedicated, as soloist. The subsequent songs are inscribed to Madame René de Saint-Marceaux, and to Emma Bardac, who was to become Ravel’s second wife. Speaking of the work in later years, Ravel noted that “the influence of Debussy is fairly obvious. Here again I yielded to the profound attraction which the East has always held for me since my childhood.”

**the music: an imaginary journey**

**Asia.** Ravel’s *Shéhérazade* is an imaginary journey to Arabic and Eastern lands, evoking their legends and essence in strains that are at once rhapsodic and suggestive. It was typical of Ravel’s fondness for difficult tasks that he chose first to set Klingsor’s *Asia*, the longest and most complex narrative of the three. The music and text vividly describe these wide-ranging lands and diverse people—from merchants to beggars to queens—woven together in a sumptuous tapestry of sound. Changing like a kaleidoscope with each contrasting passage, the orchestra provides the heady, sensuous dimension while the vocal line, free and declamatory, describes the journey.

**the enchanted flute.** The suppleness of the poetic line is sustained in *The Enchanted Flute*, whose languor is prophetic of Ravel’s ballet *Daphnis and Chloe*. The setting exhibits Ravel’s penchant for combining a vocal line with a single instrumental color, flowing in counterpoint. A tender lyricism pervades the vocal articulation, while the orchestration is slender and sylph-like, as if to contrast with the sumptuous textures of the first song. The image is bewitching: while her “master” sleeps, a woman listens to the distant flute-playing of her lover. Each note brushes her face like a kiss.

**the indifferent one.** In the final song, *The Indifferent One* is a handsome youth who speaks in a tongue as foreign as Eastern music, disinterested in the woman who quietly observes him. The ambiguous encounter is evoked by the provocativeness of Ravel’s score.

Brahms knew from the outset that his Fourth Symphony was different from the other three, and he apparently entertained fears that it might not be received as warmly. Composed in 1884 and 1885, on the heels of the extroverted Third Symphony of 1883, the Fourth was at once the composer’s most passionate and his most abstract symphonic outpouring. As with the Second Symphony, he joked self-consciously about its unique quality, stating in a letter that it consisted of “a few entr’actes and polkas that I happened to have lying around.”

Like the first two symphonies, the Third and Fourth also form a pair, one clear-eyed and direct, the other gray and troubled. The English critic Donald Francis Tovey called the Fourth “one of the rarest things in classical music, a symphony which ends tragically.” (The torrid First had broken into triumphant C-major at the end.)

Evidence suggests that the source of the Fourth’s high drama was not personal crisis but Brahms’ interest during the 1880s in the Greek tragedies of Sophocles and others. Brahms’ friendship with conductor Hans von Bülow beginning in 1881 was also a factor. Bülow, who had just been named director of the Meiningen Court Orchestra, offered Brahms a first-class ensemble with which the composer could “try out” the Fourth and other works.

Bülow prepared the Meiningen Orchestra’s first performance of the Fourth Symphony, which Brahms conducted on October 25, 1885. The composer then took the piece on tour with the Orchestra, performing it throughout northern Germany and the Netherlands, before allowing Hans Richter to present it to the Viennese public in January 1886.
The initial response was surprisingly cool, considering the extent to which the city had lionized Brahms throughout the 1870s and early 1880s. The Fourth was declared “un-Brahmsian.” (At an earlier private performance of a four-hand piano version, the biographer Max Kalbeck reportedly suggested that the fourth movement be omitted altogether.)

Brahms did not lay a finger on the work. And sure enough, by the end of the composer’s life the Viennese public had gained a deeper appreciation not only for the Fourth, but for a whole career of symphonic music that it seemed to sum up. A performance of the Fourth in 1897, a month before the composer’s death, indicated the depth of the shift of opinion.

Here is Florence May’s description of the emotional evening: “A storm of applause broke out at the end of the first movement, not to be quieted until the composer, coming to the front of the artists’ box in which he was seated, showed himself to the audience. An extraordinary scene followed the conclusion of the work. The applauding, shouting audience, its gaze riveted on the figure standing in the balcony, so familiar and yet in present aspect so strange, seemed unable to let him go.

“Tears ran down his cheeks as he stood there shrunken in form, with lined countenance, a strained expression, white hair hanging lank; and through the audience there was a feeling as of a stifled sob, for they knew that they were saying farewell.”

Four weeks later, hordes of admirers turned out for the composer’s funeral.

tragedy of the classical kind

allegro non troppo. The first movement is uniquely tragic in tone, yet glowing with an inner warmth that is unprecedented in Brahms’ orchestral output. “It acts its tragedy with unsurpassable variety of expression and power of climax,” Tovey writes. One is tempted to wonder why tragedy should sound so beautiful. Some have also found echoes of Beethoven’s Hammerklavier Sonata in the obsessive descending thirds. (Brahms’ appreciation of late Beethoven had deepened recently as a result of hearing his works played by Bülow, who was also one of the great pianists of his day.)

andante moderato. The slow movement is a moody intermezzo, lightening the tone to take some of the first movement’s weight from the listener’s chest.

allegro giocoso. Likewise is the third movement, one of the composer’s splashiest and most “bacchanalian” scherzos. Its finale-like fervor caused Tovey to ask, “After three movements so full of dramatic incident, what finale is possible?”

allegro energico e passionato. The finale Brahms devised for the Fourth Symphony was indeed singular, and was the chief point of controversy when the symphony was introduced. It was perhaps also the work’s chief point of contact with the last Beethoven piano sonatas, and with the Renaissance and Baroque music that had recently occupied Brahms the scholar. It is a set of variations on the bass from Bach’s Cantata No. 150, Nach Dir, Herr, verlanget mich (For Thee, Lord, Do I Long).

Brahms inflects the bassline with a tiny, “Romanticizing” chromatic alteration before submitting it to a set of variations that gradually reduces the “theme” to a vague, schematized scaffolding. Such a procedure calls to mind not only Baroque works such as Bach’s Chaconne for solo violin but also the variation movements of late Beethoven. The Opus 111 Sonata, Beethoven’s last, also ends with an ethereal set of variations whose theme is slowly reduced, bit by bit, to little more than an abstract harmonic skeleton.

In retrospect, the orchestral variations were perhaps the only way Brahms could have ended the Fourth Symphony—with a conservative twist that set musical limits by evoking Baroque harmonic ideals, yet creating closure through subtle thematic reminiscences and a reduction to harmonic essentials.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle and strings

Program note by Paul Horsley.

The Minnesota Orchestra first performed Dukas’ The Sorcerer’s Apprentice on January 8, 1909, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting. This performance took place more than three decades before the work became famous for its use in the Walt Disney animated film Fantasia. During a tour in 1940, the year of Fantasia’s release, the Orchestra performed The Sorcerer’s Apprentice in six U.S. states and Winnipeg, Canada.

Minnesota Orchestra audiences were introduced to Ravel’s Shéhérazade on November 24, 1940, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with Dimitri Mitropoulos conducting and Enya Gonzalez as soprano soloist. The Orchestra’s most recent performance of the work came in 1996, under the direction of Eiji Oue, with Frederica von Stade as soloist. The English translation of the sung text that appears on the following page was created by former Orchestra staff member John Swanson for that 1996 performance.

The Orchestra’s initial performance of Brahms’ Fourth Symphony came on November 11, 1910, at the Minneapolis Auditorium with Emil Oberhoffer conducting. This symphony is a staple of the Orchestra’s repertoire, having been performed multiple times under the direction of each of the Orchestra’s ten music directors, and by conductors such as Klaus Tennstedt, Frederick Fennell, Henry Charles Smith, David Alan Miller and Herbert Blomstedt.
Pour interrompre le conte avec art…
De temps en temps jusqu’à mes lèvres
Et puis m’en revenir plus tard
Je voudrais voir des roses et du sang;
Je voudrais voir des pauvres et des reines;
Avec son grand sabre courbé d’Orient.
Je voudrais voir des assassins souriant
Avec un personnage au milieu d’un verger;
Sur des étoffes en des cadres de sapin
Contempler à loisir des paysages peints
Et comme un voyageur étranger
Je voudrais m’attarder au palais enchanté
Sur la poésie et sur la beauté;
Et les lettrés qui se querellent
Et les princesses aux mains fines,
Les mandarins ventrus sous les ombrelles,
Je voudrais voir la Perse, et l’Inde, et puis la
Accordent vie ou mort au gré de leur désir.
Et des cadis, et des vizirs
Je voudrais voir d’âpres marchands aux
Tout entourées de barbes blanches;
Et des habits à longues franges.
Je voudrais voir des vêtements de velours
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Et des prunelles brillantes de joie
Je voudrais voir des yeux sombres d’amour
Above black faces with shining teeth;
Et des beaux turbans de soie
Avec les minarets légers dans l’air.
Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes de Perse
Je voudrais m’en aller vers des îles de fleurs
Comme un immense oiseau de nuit dans le
ciel d’or.

I. Asia
Asie, Asie, Asie!
Vieux pays merveilleux des contes de nourrice
Où dort la fantaisie comme une impératrice
En sa forêt tout emplie de mystères.
Asie!
Je voudrais m’en aller avec la goélette
Qui se berce ce soir dans le port,
Mystérieuse et solitaire.
Et qui déploie enfin ses voiles violettes
Comme un immense oiseau de nuit dans le
ciel d’or.
Je voudrais m’en aller vers des îles de fleurs
En écoutant chanter la mer perverse
Sur un vieux rythme ensorceleur.
Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes de Perse
Avec les minarets légers dans l’air.
Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de soie
Sur des visages noirs aux dents claires;
Je voudrais voir des yeux sombres d’amour
Et des prunelles brillantes de joie
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir des vêtements de velours
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir des vêtements de velours
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de soie
Avec les minarets légers dans l’air.
Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes de Perse
Je voudrais m’en aller vers des îles de fleurs
Comme un immense oiseau de nuit dans le
ciel d’or.

II. La flûte enchantée
L’ombre est douce et mon maître dort
II. La flûte enchantée
L’ombre est douce et mon maître dort
En écoutant chanter la mer perverse
Sur un vieux rythme ensorceleur.
Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes de Perse
Avec les minarets légers dans l’air.
Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de soie
Sur des visages noirs aux dents claires;
Je voudrais voir des yeux sombres d’amour
Et des prunelles brillantes de joie
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir des vêtements de velours
En des peaux jaunes comme des oranges;
Je voudrais voir de beaux turbans de soie
Avec les minarets légers dans l’air.
Je voudrais voir Damas et les villes de Perse
Je voudrais m’en aller vers des îles de fleurs
Comme un immense oiseau de nuit dans le
ciel d’or.

III. L’Indifférent
Tes yeux sont doux comme ceux d’une fille,
Jeune étranger, et la courbe fine
De ton beau visage de duvet ombragé
Est plus séduisante encore de ligne.
Ta lèvre chante sur le pas de ma porte
Une langue inconnue et charmante
Comme une musique fausse.
Entre! Et que mon vin te réconforte…
Mais non, tu passes
Et de mon seul je te vois t’éloigner
Me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce
Et la hanche légèrement ployée.
Par ta démarche féminine et lasse.

– Tristan Klingsor

I. Asia
Asie, Asie, Asie!
Old, marvelous land of fairy tales,
Where fantasy sleeps like an empress
In a forest filled with mystery.
Asia!
I want to set forth in the schooner
That’s lulling tonight in the port,
Mysterious and solitary,
And when I draw near the window,
A song by turns languorous or frivolous
That’s lulling tonight in the port,
Mysterious and solitary,
And when I draw near the window,
A song by turns languorous or frivolous
That’s lulling tonight in the port,
Mysterious and solitary,
And when I draw near the window,
A song by turns languorous or frivolous
That’s lulling tonight in the port,
Mysterious and solitary,
And when I draw near the window,
A song by turns languorous or frivolous

II. The Enchanted Flute
The shade is gentle and my master is asleep,
Wearing a cone-shaped bonnet of silk,
His long yellow nose in his white beard.
But I, I’m already awake
And I hear in the distance
The song of the flute from which flows
By turns sadness and joy.
A song by turns languorous or frivolous
That’s lulling tonight in the port,
Mysterious and solitary,
And when I draw near the window,
A song by turns languorous or frivolous
That’s lulling tonight in the port,
Mysterious and solitary,
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