

Minnesota Orchestra

Roderick Cox, conductor

Alessio Bax, piano

William Schimmel, accordion

Thursday, October 5, 2017, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, October 6, 2017, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

*We are deeply grateful to the **Minnesota State Arts Board**, through which the people of Minnesota provide significant support to the Minnesota Orchestra.*

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|----------------------------|---|---------|
| Dominick Argento | <i>Valentino Dances: Suite for Orchestra from <i>The Dream of Valentino</i>
William Schimmel, accordion</i> | ca. 10' |
| Edvard Grieg | Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16
Allegro molto moderato
Adagio
Allegro moderato molto e marcato
[There is no pause before the final movement.]
<i>Alessio Bax, piano</i> | ca. 30' |
| I N T E R M I S S I O N | | ca. 20' |
| Sergei Rachmaninoff | Symphonic Dances, Opus 45
Non allegro
Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)
Lento assai - Allegro vivace | ca. 35' |

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.



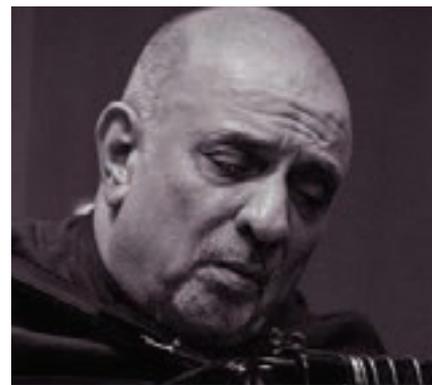
Roderick Cox, conductor

Roderick Cox, now in his second full season as the Minnesota Orchestra's associate conductor after one year as assistant conductor, won critical and audience praise for his debut subscription performances with the Orchestra this past January. He regularly conducts Young People's Concerts, family programs, outdoor community concerts and special performances such as this month's "Send Me Hope" concert and a December 2016 "Spirit of the Season" concert at Shiloh Temple International Ministries in north Minneapolis. A native of Macon, Georgia, he served as assistant conductor of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra and music director of the Alabama Symphony Youth Orchestra. His recent honors include winning a Solti Foundation Career Assistance Award and being selected by the League of American Orchestras for the prestigious Bruno Walter National Conducting Preview. In August 2017 he debuted with the Johannesburg Philharmonic in South Africa. More: minnesotaorchestra.org, roderickcox.com.



Alessio Bax, piano

Alessio Bax debuted with the Orchestra in July 2015, when he performed in two Sommerfest concerts under Andrew Litton's direction. A First Prize winner at the Leeds International Piano Competition—and the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award—he has appeared as soloist with more than 100 orchestras, including the London and Royal philharmonic orchestras, the Dallas, Houston and Cincinnati symphonies, Japan's NHK Symphony, St. Petersburg Philharmonic and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. In 2017 he was appointed artistic director of Italy's Incontri in Terra di Siena Festival for a three-year term. His discography includes works by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky, as well as a Russian album and a lullaby collection, *Lullabies for Mila*, which is dedicated to his daughter Mila. More: artsmg.com, alessiobax.com.



William Schimmel, accordion

William Schimmel is a virtuoso accordionist, author, philosopher and composer. He is one of the principal architects in the tango revival in America, the resurgence of the accordion and the philosophy of Musical Reality. Regarded as the world's greatest accordionist by National Public Radio, he has performed with virtually every major symphony orchestra in America and the Kirov, as well as nearly every chamber music group in New York. He has performed with pop stars ranging from Sting to Tom Waits, and can be heard on numerous film soundtracks. He is a prolific composer whose output ranges from concert music to Broadway and off-Broadway. Dr. Schimmel received degrees from the Neupauer Conservatory of Music and the Juilliard School, and has taught at numerous prestigious institutions. He now heads the Neupauer Conservatory Order of the Shield program. More: billschimmel.com.

one-minute notes

Argento: *Valentino Dances*

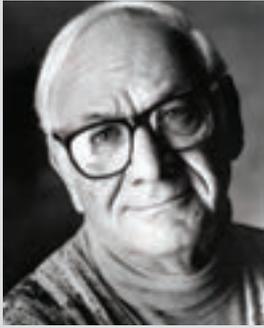
Extracted from the opera *The Dream of Valentino*, Argento's suite of dances for orchestra is enriched by the addition of the accordion, whose distinctive sound is essential to the tango.

Grieg: *Piano Concerto*

This virtuosic keyboard showcase, written when its composer was only 25, reveals its heritage in evocations of traditional Norwegian song and dance, and contains a wealth of themes and dramatic gestures.

Rachmaninoff: *Symphonic Dances*

Rachmaninoff's final composition is full of rhythmic energy and colorful orchestration. The alto saxophone makes a rare orchestral appearance in this three-movement work, which closes with a breathtaking setting of the *Dies Irae*.



Dominick Argento

Born: October 27, 1927,
York, Pennsylvania;
now living in Minneapolis

Valentino Dances: Suite for Orchestra from *The Dream of Valentino*

Premiered: July 13, 1994

If, nestled among one of our state's scenic limestone bluffs, there were one day a Mount Rushmore of Minnesota-connected composers, Dominick Argento's likeness would surely figure prominently. Considered the preeminent American composer of lyric opera, Argento is the recipient of numerous high honors, including a Pulitzer Prize, a Grammy Award and a McKnight Distinguished Artist Award. Perhaps as importantly, he has been a guiding light to generations of composers during his decades as a professor, and now Regents Professor Emeritus, at the University of Minnesota—where his former students included the Minnesota Orchestra's first composers in residence, Libby Larsen and Stephen Paulus. In another first, Argento was named this Orchestra's composer laureate in 1997, part of a nearly 60-year relationship that has brought about numerous performances, commissions and premieres. Last year, Governor Mark Dayton declared a Dominick Argento Day in the state of Minnesota, recognizing him as a master composer, revered educator and beloved Minnesotan.

Each year, Argento's music is performed by opera companies, orchestras and universities worldwide. This fall, the Minnesota Orchestra is among many organizations celebrating the composer's 90th birthday. In November, the New York City Opera will mark the occasion by performing two of his one-act operas at Carnegie Hall. His home state of Pennsylvania is honoring the milestone with a concert of his songs presented by Philadelphia's Song Fest. Here in Minnesota, his adopted home since 1958, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra is presenting a semi-staged production of Argento's opera *The Boor* on October 15. At today's concert, we have the good fortune to hear *Valentino Dances*, an orchestral suite Argento extracted from his opera *The Dream of Valentino*. The suite was premiered by the Minnesota Orchestra on July 13, 1994, under the direction of David Zinman.

Program note introduction by Carl Schroeder.

Renowned for his vocal music—operas, songs and choral works—as well as praised for his brilliantly scored instrumental music, Dominick Argento is a graduate of the Peabody Conservatory, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees, and the Eastman

School of Music, where he received his Ph.D. He used Fulbright and Guggenheim Fellowships to study in Italy with Luigi Dallapiccola. His early one-act opera buffa based on Chekhov, *The Boor* (1957), proved to be a remarkable first-published opera, soon mounted on stages all over the U.S. and Europe. Since then, Argento has delivered more than a dozen operas, including *The Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe*; the Dickens-based *Miss Havisham's Fire*, commissioned and premiered by the New York City Opera; and *The Aspern Papers*, drawn from Henry James and telecast nationally by PBS following its 1988 Dallas premiere, spurring productions in Germany and Sweden.

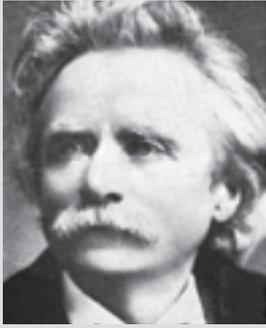
evoking the flamboyant '20s

Set in the silent film era of Hollywood, but also exploring the Italian immigrant experience, *The Dream of Valentino* received its premiere in 1994 by Washington's National Opera, conducted by the late Christopher Keene. Argento has extracted a series of tangos (all his own tunes) from the opera, and collectively titled them *Valentino Dances*. No ballroom number better evokes the bold sensuality of the flamboyant 1920s than the tango. For Argento, the dance symbolizes the glamour of the film actor's era.

For this orchestral suite, Argento has expanded and re-orchestrated several numbers from the *Valentino* opera. The first is associated with the subject's work as a taxi dancer in New York; the second is identified with the woman he is destined to marry; and the last relates to the opera's second act, when the film star, because of contractual litigation in Hollywood, is performing in theaters on the road. The composer, who admits that he himself has never indulged in the tango (nor, for that matter, any other dance), notes that this is his first piece to call for an accordion. Its reedy color plumbs a ready nostalgia for another time and place.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), alto saxophone, 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, bell tree, castanets, claves, maracas, tambourine, timbales, triangle, glockenspiel, accordion, harp, piano and strings

Program note by Mary Ann Feldman.



Edvard Grieg

Born: June 15, 1843,
Bergen, Norway
Died: September 4, 1907,
Bergen, Norway

Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16

Premiered: April 3, 1869

In June 1867 Edvard Grieg, then a struggling 24-year-old composer, married his first cousin, Nina Hagerup, a soprano. The following summer, wishing for a break from the busy musical life of Norway, the Griegs went to Denmark, where they hoped the milder climate would benefit the composer's often frail health. They rented a two-room garden cottage a few miles outside Copenhagen, and there Grieg began his Piano Concerto in A minor. He completed the score early the following year, and Edmund Neupert gave the first performance in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869. The concerto was an immediate success, but Grieg continued to revise it across the rest of his life: he made the final revisions in 1907, only a few months before his death.

a "splendid" success

Several years after the premiere, the Griegs traveled to Rome, where they visited Franz Liszt in his villa. Liszt sat down at his piano and sight-read this difficult concerto from Grieg's manuscript. Grieg reported that while Liszt played the first movement too fast, his reading of the cadenza was magnificent, and the older master was so taken with the music at one point that he got up and strolled away from the piano with his arms upraised, "literally roaring out the theme." Best of all, Liszt recognized the way Grieg had amended one of the principal themes of the finale when it comes back for a triumphant reappearance at the end. He shouted out: "G-natural! G-natural! Not G-sharp! Splendid!" Liszt played that ending one more time, then told Grieg: "Keep on, I tell you. You have what is needed, and don't let them frighten you."

Liszt's judgment was sound: the Grieg Piano Concerto has become one of the most popular ever written. Its combination of good tunes alternating with stormy, dramatic gestures, all stitched together with brilliant writing for piano, has made it virtually irresistible to audiences. In a way, this music has become a victim of its own success: by the middle of the last century it had become almost too popular, and over the last generation or so it has virtually disappeared from the concert hall. Which makes a fresh performance all the more welcome.

the music

allegro molto moderato. Grieg greatly admired the music of Robert Schumann, and the similarity between the beginnings of their respective piano concertos is striking: each opens with a great orchestral chord followed by a brilliant passage for the solo piano that eases gently into the movement's main theme. Grieg makes his opening even more dramatic by beginning with a long timpani roll that flares up like a peal of thunder; the piano's entrance then flashes downward like a streak of lightning.

The movement's march-like main theme, shared on its first appearance by winds and strings, is only the first of many attractive ideas. (One observer has counted seven different themes in this movement, and these range from a melting lyricism to heaven-storming violence.) The cadenza that Liszt sight-read so well is particularly effective. Though it begins quietly, the concerto soon unleashes great torrents of sound from hammered octaves and brilliant runs. It is altogether typical of this movement that Grieg should introduce a new theme after the cadenza. The piano's pounding, driving chords propel the music to its exciting close.

adagio. The mood changes completely in the *Adagio*. Grieg mutes the strings here and moves to the key of D-flat major, which feels soft and warm after the powerful opening movement. A long orchestral introduction leads to the entrance of the piano, which sounds utterly fresh after the dark, muted strings. But this entrance is deceiving. The piano part soon turns dramatic and drives to its own climax; the music subsides and continues without a break into the finale.

allegro moderato molto e marcato. After an opening flourish, the piano introduces the main theme, a dancing 2/4 idea that sounds as if its roots must be in Norwegian folk music. Once again, this movement is built on a wealth of ideas. At the coda Grieg moves into A major and ingeniously recasts his main theme in a 3/4 meter, and the movement drives to its powerful close.

Instrumentation: solo piano with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note by *Eric Bromberger*.



Sergei Rachmaninoff

Born: April 1, 1873,
Semyonovo, Russia
Died: March 28, 1943,
Beverly Hills, California

Symphonic Dances, Opus 45

Premiered: January 3, 1941

In the summer of 1940 Rachmaninoff set to work on what would be his final complete work, a set of dances for orchestra that would ultimately be known as his Symphonic Dances, premiered by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra on January 3, 1941.

opulent, sumptuous—and subtle

This score is remarkable for the opulence of its color, and Rachmaninoff seems intent on finding and exploiting new orchestral sonorities. More remarkable still is Rachmaninoff's subtle compositional method. He evolves this music from rhythmic fragments, bits of theme, simple patterns—which are then built up into powerful movements that almost overflow with rhythmic energy.

non allegro. The music opens with some of these fragments, just bits of sound from the first violins, and over them the English horn sounds the three-note pattern that will permeate this work, reappearing across its span in endless forms. Rachmaninoff plays it up into a great climax, which subsides as the opening fragments lead to the central episode, sung at first entirely by woodwinds. This slow interlude—the reedy sound of the alto saxophone is exactly right for this wistful music—makes its way back to the big gestures of the beginning section, now energized by explosive timpani salvos. In the closing moments, Rachmaninoff rounds matters off with a grand chorale for strings, beautifully accompanied by the glistening sound of bells, piano, harp, piccolo and flutes, and the movement winks into silence on the fragments with which it began.

andante con moto (tempo di valse). The opening of the second movement takes us into a completely different sound-world with the icy tones of trumpets and horns, played *forte* but stopped. Rachmaninoff calls for a waltz tempo, but he sets the music in the untraditional meters of 6/8 and 9/8 and has the waltz introduced by the unlikely sound of solo English horn. This music evolves through several episodes, some soaring, some powerful, before subsiding in a sudden, almost breathless close.

lento assai-allegro vivace. The slow introduction to the final movement is enlivened by the strings' interjections of the three-note pattern. Gradually these anneal into the *Allegro vivace*, and off the movement goes, full of rhythmic energy and the sound of ringing bells. A central episode in the tempo of the introduction sings darkly; after wonderful sounds including eerie string glissandos, the *Allegro vivace* returns to rush the Symphonic Dances to a close guaranteed to rip the top off a concert hall.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, glockenspiel, chimes, xylophone, harp, piano and strings

Program note by *Eric Bromberger*.

coda

The Minnesota Orchestra gave the world premiere performance of **Argento's *Valentino Dances*** on July 13, 1994, at Orchestra Hall, under the baton of David Zinman, who was then the Orchestra's Sommerfest artistic director. Later that month, the planet Jupiter was hit by 21 large fragments of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9, providing the first modern observation of a collision of significant objects in our solar system.

The Orchestra's first performance of **Grieg's *Piano Concerto*** came on March 9, 1906, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting and Raoul Pugno as soloist. That December, the Orchestra inaugurated a series of Sunday matinee popular concerts featuring classical and "semi-classical" fare. Tickets were priced at 25 and 50 cents, leading to high demand and regular sellouts.

The Orchestra introduced **Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*** to its repertoire on November 20, 1942, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with Dimitri Mitropoulos conducting. Rachmaninoff himself was that evening's soloist, performing his Second Piano Concerto. Coming just four months before Rachmaninoff's death, it was the last of the composer-pianist's seven appearances with the Orchestra between 1920 and 1942.

