Vänskä Conducts the Reformation Symphony

Minnesota Orchestra
Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Adam Kuenzel, flute
Minnesota Chorale, Kathy Saltzman Romey, artistic director
Students from Concordia University, David Mennicke and Shari Speer, conductors

Thursday, November 2, 2017, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, November 3, 2017, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, November 4, 2017, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Johann Sebastian Bach
Suite No. 2 in B minor for Orchestra, BWV 1067
Overture
Rondeau
Sarabande
Bourées I and II
Polonaise and Double
Menuet
Badinerie
Adam Kuenzel, flute

Felix Mendelssohn
Symphony No. 5 in D major, Opus 107, Reformation
Andante – Allegro con fuoco
Allegro vivace
Andante
Chorale: Andante con moto – Allegro vivace

INTERMISSION

ca. 20’

Sebastian Currier
RE-FORMATION *
Mendelssohn Fragments
Broken Symphony
Fragments of Old Texts
A Hidden Voice
Chorale: The World
[The five parts are played without pause.]

Minnesota Chorale
Students from Concordia University choral program

* World premiere; Commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra in collaboration with LutheranArts, with generous support from Kathy and Charlie Cunningham.

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Sebastian Currier
Thursday, November 2, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, November 3, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium
Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Adam Kuenzel
Saturday, November 4, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

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.
Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Profile appears on page 6.

Adam Kuenzel, flute
Principal Flute Adam Kuenzel joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 1990. He has regularly appeared as soloist at Orchestra Hall, including for the 2007 world premiere of Stanislaw Skrowaczewski’s Fantasies for Flute and Orchestra, Il Piffero della Notte, with the composer conducting. In recent years he has also performed Bernstein’s Hallil and the premiere of Manuel Sosa’s Eloquentia: Espacio para Flauta y Orquesta; the latter work, which was written for Kuenzel, garnered the composer a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011. Kuenzel has been a guest artist at the Aspen Music Festival, St. Bart’s Music Festival in the French West Indies and Oregon Bach Festival, St. Bart’s Music Festival in the French West Indies and Oregon Bach Festival, St. Bart’s Music Festival in the French West Indies and Oregon Bach Festival, Spoleto Festival, St. Bart’s Music Festival in the French West Indies and Oregon Bach Festival. He has also appeared as guest principal flute with the Boston, Chicago and Dallas symphony orchestras, and with the Seattle Opera. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

Minnesota Chorale
Kathy Saltzman Romey, artistic director
Barbara Brooks, accompanist and artistic advisor

The Minnesota Chorale, the Minnesota Orchestra’s principal chorus since 2004, is now in its 23rd season under the leadership of Kathy Saltzman Romey. Founded in 1972, the Chorale is the state’s preeminent symphonic chorus, performing regularly with both this Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Among the Chorale’s initiatives are the acclaimed Bridges program, the Minneapolis Youth Chorus, Men in Music for high-school boys and InChoir for adults. More: mnchorale.org.

At today’s performance, the Minnesota Chorale is joined by students from the Concordia University (St. Paul) choral program. The students are drawn from two Concordia University choirs: Christus Chorus, which is conducted by David Mennicke, and Jubilate, which is conducted by Shari Speer. More: esp.edu.

soprano
Jill Apple
Kristi Bergland *
Ivy S. Bernhardson
Penny Bonsell
Alyssa Breece *
Claire Campbell
Deborah Carbaugh *
Lauren Chorowicz +
Charlotte Currier
Rachel Daddio
Deydra Dennis-Weiss *

Laurel E. Dreviow
Angie Eckel *
Kristin Elliott
Anne Gifford +
Carole Hofstad *
Heather Hood *
Mikaela Krause +
Cheryl E. LeBlanc
Vienna Lewin
Wendy
Łukaszewski
Pamela Marentette
Sommer McInerney

alto
Judy Arnstein
Sara Boss
Deanne Dohrman *
Elisabeth Drost *
Marcia K. Evans *
Sara Fanucchi *
Gloria Fredkove
Debra Gilroy *
Michelle Hackett
Tricia Hanson
Dee Hein
Katherine Scholl
Helisky
Sue Hotzel
Suzanne Kennedy *
Heather Kurtz
Maureen Long
Katherine Muller
Cassie Noll
Molly Palmer
Christy Peterson +
Barbara S. Prince *
Amanda
Samuelson +
Kristen Schweiloch
Patricia Seidl
Kathleen Stuebner
Elizabeth Sullivan *
Megumi Takeno
Jena Thorndomson +
Marcia VanCamp
Suzanne Wiebusch
Joanna Zawislaw

tenor
Eric Alman
Samuel Baker *
Charles Barrett
Mark Bergaas
Jevon Bindman
Patrick L. Coleman
Ben Cooper
Kenneth D. Duvio
Maurice Fields III +
Polly Strege
Richard D. Nelson *
Richard O’Connor
Bill Pederson *
Mark Pladson
Philip Reilly

bass
David Afdahl *
Nathan Ausk *
Peter Bolstad
James Bowen
Scott Chamberlain
James J. D’Aurora
David
Goudzwaard-Vaught *
John R. Henrich
James Hild *
Harrison Hintzsche *
Steven Hodulik *
Thomas Hollenhorst
Stephen Hughes
Adam Irving
Jon C. Lahann *
Robert J. Magil
Jon Nordstrom *
Robert Oganovic
Nathan Oppedahl
Bob Peskin *
Aaron Rosow +
Peter Scholtz
Eric Seifert
Chad Shultis *
Bob Simon
William Smale
Reilly Tillman
Michael Tomlinson *
Russ Vander Wiel
Logan Van Sickle +
Stefan Weijsla

* Minnesota Chorale section leader
+ Concordia University (St. Paul) choral program participant
We begin today's program with an orchestral suite by Bach—although the composer himself might disagree with the nomenclature. Bach reserved the name “Suite” for solo instrumental works, and his formal title for the four works we call orchestral suites was actually *Ouverture*, after the names of their first movements, which were patterned after the French overture.

Regardless of its original title, the B-minor Suite conforms in general terms to the suite as we think of it: a series of dance movements all in the same key. The conventional pattern for suites was a French overture followed by an *Allemande*, *Courante*, *Sarabande* and *Gigue*. This suite expands the norm with the addition of two other short movements, and further charts its own course by featuring a particularly soloistic role for flute.

**overture, then dance music for flute**

The suite's opening *Overture* follows the opera overture style popularized by French Baroque composer Jean-Baptiste Lully. It has a lengthy slow introduction with pronounced dotted rhythms; following is a faster, contrapuntal middle section, then a return to the ceremonial introduction at the close.

**Instrumentation:** flute, harpsichord continuo and strings

We often hear Mendelssohn compared to Mozart because of his youthful precocity. A work like the *Reformation* Symphony persuades us that the analogy is valid. The symphony is numbered the Fifth because it was published after Mendelssohn's death, but it actually dates from the winter of 1829-30, when the composer was only 20. For him to have

**Bach: Orchestral Suite No. 2**

The flute player in Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 2 is given the unique challenge of blending with strings while simultaneously standing out as the solo voice in this set of six characteristic dance movements preceded by a French Baroque-style overture.

**Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 5, Reformation**

Devotion and strength are the building blocks of this symphony, composed in 1830 to commemorate the tercentenary of the Lutheran Church's founding doctrines. A reflective opening ultimately leads to a grandiose finale built on Luther's hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. Along the way we hear a lighthearted scherzo and an eloquent slow movement featuring solo violin.

**Currier: RE-FORMATION**

Sebastian Currier's brand-new work *RE-FORMATION*, commissioned for this performance to mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, draws text from Psalms, Martin Luther and contemporary American writer Sarah Manguso. The music recalls the past—incorporating fragments of Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony—while also looking forward, ending with a choral hymn that encourages us to protect our natural environment for future generations.
composed such a polished, unified and powerful composition at such a young age is impressive indeed.

The Reformation Symphony takes its name from the circumstances of its commission. Mendelssohn intended the work to commemorate the tercentenary of the Augsburg Conference, which in 1530 set forth the Lutheran Church’s doctrines following the epochal split of Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. Young Mendelssohn was struck by the life of Martin Luther (which is further detailed in the program note for the Sebastian Currier work that follows Mendelssohn’s on today’s program), and by the image of Luther translating the Bible into German while hiding in Eisenach’s Wartburg Castle. The symphony is permeated with melodies from Protestant hymns, including one by Luther himself.

the symphony’s rocky beginnings

Due to touring obligations and a few bouts of ill health, Mendelssohn came short of finishing the work in time for the Augsburg tercentenary celebration in 1830. Upon its completion, the symphony was scheduled to have been premiered by the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra in 1831. Rehearsals there did not go well, however, and the players disliked the piece. Ultimately they rejected it, complaining that it was too learned and lacked melodies. (Perhaps their taste was influenced by the Lutheran message, for France is a predominantly Catholic country. On the other hand, French taste suspended that objection just a few years later, when Giacomo Meyerbeer’s opera Les Huguenots, incorporating one of the same themes that Mendelssohn had used, was the toast of Paris.)

Mendelssohn ultimately conducted the work’s premiere in the more Lutheran terrain of Berlin late in 1832, but he took the initial rejection hard, and retained bad feelings about the piece. Some years later he wrote to his friend Julius Rietz that the first movement was “a fat bristly animal,” and that he’d “rather burn it than any other of my pieces.” Such self-flagellation seems incredible today, especially when we consider how firmly the symphony has become entrenched in the repertoire.

the music: anchored in tradition

andante–allegro con fuoco. Mendelssohn’s use of the so-called “Dresden Amen” (familiar to many listeners as the motive of the Grail in Wagner’s Parsifal) in the first movement anchors the symphony in religious tradition. He employs Renaissance-style counterpoint to suggest the music of the Catholic Church. That, and his turbulent minor-mode Allegro, set up the implicit conflict between the two branches of the Christian faith.

allegro vivace; andante. The inner movements display Mendelssohn’s melodic gift, enriching the treasury within the

Reformation Symphony. His sprightly scherzo is a foot-tapper from start to finish. Expressive sighing figures and a reverential atmosphere lend eloquence to the gorgeous slow movement. Toward its conclusion, he recalls a theme from the first movement.

chorale: andante con moto–allegro vivace. The finale uses Luther’s hymn Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott (A Mighty Fortress is our God) as the basis of a symphonic chorale prelude. Here again, Mendelssohn reprises themes from earlier in the symphony. In this last movement only, he adds depth to the scoring by adding contrabassoon and serpent (an obsolete wind instrument made of leather-covered wood; some modern performances substitute a tuba or a second contrabassoon, while others opt for just the single contrabassoon). The triumphant conclusion resolves the issues of religious strife implied at the beginning—making for a whole that is even greater than the sum of its parts, for the Reformation is a tightly unified, cyclic work.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Sebastian Currier
Born: March 16, 1959, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania; now living in New York City

RE-FORMATION
Premiering: November 2, 2017

five hundred years ago, a professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg nailed a document containing 95 theses to the door of the university’s Catholic church. His name, of course, was Martin Luther. His action and subsequent writings sparked the Protestant Reformation, dividing the Catholic Church and altering the course of history and religion throughout Europe and beyond.

Luther’s doctrine: grace through faith

Luther had been educated as a Catholic monk. He became offended by the Catholic practice of indulgences, through which the faithful ostensibly “purchased” salvation by paying sums of money to agents of the Pope to fund Catholic causes, notably the building of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Recipients of indulgences supposedly reduced their time in purgatory. Luther believed instead that sinners were liberated from their burden by faith. He questioned the Pope’s authority, as well as the relationship between the clergy and the common man. His ideas evolved into
a doctrine of justification by grace, through faith. All this was anathema to the Vatican.

Resentment against Rome was a powerful force in German-speaking lands during the 16th century. Nevertheless, Luther's path was not smooth after posting his 95 theses. He was tried for heresy and, in 1521, was excommunicated from the Catholic Church. The following year, he published his translation of the Bible's New Testament in the vernacular—his mother tongue of German—making the sacred text available to literate members of the general populace. By 1534, he had completed translations of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. His impact on many levels was widespread, leading to a permanent schism between Protestant and Catholic factions within the Church.

**a new Reformation commission**

Several years ago, the creative arts resource organization LutheranArts approached Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä about the concept of commissioning a work to honor the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Longtime Orchestra supporters Kathy and Charlie Cunningham stepped forward with generous support for the commission, and Orchestra musicians on an artistic planning committee broached Sebastian Currier's name as a suitable composer. Once the invitation was extended, Vänskä and Currier discussed broad parameters for the piece: something for chorus and orchestra, with echoes of Mendelssohn in the music.

Much of Currier's music looks toward the present and the future, while maintaining strong links to the past. The commission triggered a steady stream of ideas. “It was not only the Reformation that fired my imagination,” the composer recalls, “but the subsequent commemorations of the event, particularly Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony, in which he used Luther's hymn *Ein feste Burg* (A Mighty Fortress), as Bach had done in the previous century. This connection became the starting point for me.” He named his piece *RE-FORMATION* to reflect the way in which later generations re-use, re-interpret, and re-imagine the past, in order to meet the needs of the present. “I came to think that, 500 years later, a hymn to protect the environment was a fitting way to honor Luther's vision.”

**Currier's outline of the music**

Currier's composer's note reveals his thoughtful approach to the past as well as his concerns about the present and our collective future on earth:

“As *RE-FORMATION* begins, we hear fragments from Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony ring out amidst a more obscure sound world, like decaying structures in a ruined landscape. It is a work that looks back to the Reformation and forward to the future of our planet. As it unfolds, it traces the process by which ideas are formulated, rethought, replaced and recycled.

“Mendelssohn's symphony employs the tune from Martin Luther's *Ein' feste Burg*, written in 1529. When Luther composed this hymn, he looked much further back in time to Psalm 46 from the Old Testament, adapting the text to his purposes.

“In *RE-FORMATION*, writer Sarah Manguso—who wrote text for the work's final segment—and I continue this process of using material from the past and reconfiguring it to suit contemporary needs. Luther's predominant concerns in 1517 were an individual's relationship to God and the corruption of the papacy. In 2017, Sarah Manguso and I have recast Luther's concerns from the sacred to the secular: to the environment, and the urgent need for humans to take responsibility for the safety of the planet. As the piece unfolds, this lineage becomes apparent. When the chorus enters, we hear first a fragment from Psalm 46 sung in the original Hebrew, then the same fragment in a Latin translation from Roman times. Following this is the first phrase of Martin Luther's hymn in German, then a translation into English from Luther's time. This is followed by Sarah Manguso's text.”

**a modern call to action**

Currier was particularly struck by the connection between Psalm 46—the basis for Luther's *Ein' feste Burg* text—to modern environmentalism. “In the Psalm's first stanza, God's strength is depicted by his ability to save us from the ravages of a destructive natural world, from apocalypse,” he notes. “Considering the world today, this viewpoint is reversed. We cannot stand by idly and permit our actions to destroy the planet. We need to take action.”

Currier describes *RE-FORMATION* as a choral symphony whose five parts flow into one another seamlessly; they are performed without pause. Three of them—*Mendelssohn Fragments*, *Broken Symphony* and *A Hidden Voice*—are for orchestra alone. The chorus only sings in *Fragments of Old Texts*—in which Currier primarily uses smaller groups from within the full chorus—and in the concluding segment, *Chorale: The World*. “Most of the psychological weight is in the last section, which sets Sarah Manguso's text,” Currier observes. “The orchestra is very sparse throughout this section, placing the focus squarely on the chorus.”

Currier has collaborated with Manguso several times, including in *Sleepers and Dreams* for chorus and orchestra (2012), and in the solo vocal song cycle *Deep-Sky Objects* (2011). “I think she is one of the major writers of her generation, and I really enjoy working with her,” he says. At Currier's request, she wrote the text for “The World” specifically for *RE-FORMATION*. 

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**Program Notes**

**nov 2, 3, 4**

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about the composer
Although this weekend marks the first time that the Minnesota Orchestra has performed Sebastian Currier’s music, Currier has long been a prominent figure in American composition. After completing his doctorate at New York’s Juilliard School, he joined the composition faculty at Columbia University. In 2007 he was awarded the prestigious Grawemeyer Award (which carries the largest financial prize in all of classical composition) for Static, a six-movement piece for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano.

Currier’s music, which spans solo, chamber and orchestral genres, has been performed by violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, the New York Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Kronos Quartet and the Boston Philharmonic, among many other musicians and ensembles. He enjoys an especially close collaborative relationship with members of the Berlin Philharmonic. In addition to winning the Grawemeyer Award, Currier has been the recipient of the Berlin Prize, a Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has held residencies at the MacDowell and Yaddo colonies, and was Artist in Residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, from 2013 to 2016.

Instrumentation: four-part mixed chorus with 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, anvil, brake drum, crotales, flexatone, hi-hat, guiro, ratchet, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, high wood block, glockenspiel, vibraphone, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings


The Minnesota Orchestra first performed Bach’s Orchestral Suite No. 2 on December 12, 1919, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Emil Oberhoffer conducting. Earlier that month, mezzo Gladys Swarthout debuted with the Orchestra at a Sunday “popular” concert; then a little-known 18-year-old, she would later become a Metropolitan Opera star and appear in five Paramount Pictures films.

The Orchestra added Mendelssohn’s Reformation Symphony to its repertoire on December 29, 1944, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, under the baton of Dimitri Mitropoulos. The Orchestra’s season ticket prices increased that year, in part due to the 20 percent entertainment tax brought on by World War II.

This week’s world premiere performance of Currier’s RE-FORMATION comes precisely 500 years after Luther disseminated his “95 Theses” in late October and early November of 1517, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation.