

# Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor  
 Timothy Zavadil, bass clarinet  
 Víkingur Ólafsson, piano

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Thursday, April 25, 2019, 11 am	Orchestra Hall
Friday, April 26, 2019, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall
Saturday, April 27, 2019, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall

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*With these concerts we gratefully recognize Kita McVay and Jim Johnson for their generous contribution to the Minnesota Orchestra's Investing in Inspiration campaign.*

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Ludwig van Beethoven	Overture to <i>The Creatures of Prometheus</i> , Opus 43	ca. 5'
Geoffrey Gordon	<i>Prometheus</i> , Concerto for Bass Clarinet and Orchestra (after the treatment by Franz Kafka) * [in four untitled movements] <i>Timothy Zavadil, bass clarinet</i>	ca. 24'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Haukur Tómasson	Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra [in one movement] <i>Víkingur Ólafsson, piano</i>	ca. 17'
Jean Sibelius	<i>Tapiola</i> , Opus 112	ca. 19'

\* North American premiere; co-commissioned by the Philharmonia Orchestra, Malmö Symphony Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra

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Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Timothy Zavadil  
 Thursday, April 25, 10 am, Auditorium  
 Friday, April 26, 7 pm, Auditorium  
 Saturday, April 27, 7 pm, Auditorium

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.



**Timothy Zavadil**, bass clarinet

Timothy Zavadil joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 2007 as clarinetist and bass clarinetist, and he has since also performed on E-flat clarinet, contrabass clarinet, basset horn and saxophones. This week marks his first solo appearance on the Orchestra's classical subscription series. Previously a member of the Louisville Orchestra, Toledo Symphony

and Civic Orchestra of Chicago, he has also performed with the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, and the Chicago, Pittsburgh, National, Toronto and St. Louis symphony orchestras. He currently serves as bass clarinetist of the Peninsula Music Festival Orchestra in Door County, Wisconsin. His prior summer engagements have included appearances at the Spoleto (Italy) Festival Orchestra, Grant Park Symphony Orchestra, National Repertory Orchestra and American-Russian Youth Orchestra, as well as the 1994 Solti Orchestral Project at Carnegie Hall. An active chamber musician, he regularly performs in Minnesota Orchestra chamber concerts, and with a number of other ensembles based in the Twin Cities, Louisville and Toledo. More: [minnesotaorchestra.org](http://minnesotaorchestra.org)



**Víkingur Ólafsson**, piano

Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson, who makes his Minnesota Orchestra debut in

these concerts, has won all the major prizes in his native country, including four Musician of the Year prizes at the Icelandic Music Awards and the Icelandic Optimism Prize. In September 2018 he released his new album on Deutsche Grammophon, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, featuring an eclectic selection of the composer's keyboard works. His 2018-19 season includes a return to the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, and performances with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lille, Detroit Symphony Orchestra and London's Philharmonia Orchestra, as well as collaborations with composer Philip Glass for performances of his works at the Philharmonie de Paris in May 2019. He also gives recitals across Japan, the U.S. and in Europe. He is the artistic director of Vinterfest in Sweden and the award-winning Reykjavík Midsummer Music, of which he is also the founder. More: [harrisonparrott.com](http://harrisonparrott.com).

**one-minute notes**

**Beethoven: Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus***

The overture to Beethoven's only full-length ballet begins solemnly and expressively before it builds to a brisk and energetic main theme.

**Gordon: *Prometheus***

Sailing from low to high and through all varieties of dynamic expression, the complex character of Geoffrey Gordon's *Prometheus* is perfectly suited to the unexpected versatility of the bass clarinet.

**Tómasson: Piano Concerto No. 2**

Dedicated to Víkingur Ólafsson, the piano soloist on this program, Tómasson's Second Piano Concerto weaves an imaginative tale through one single movement that traverses a glistening, unpredictable sound world.

**Sibelius: *Tapiola***

*Tapiola*, Sibelius' last major composition, and a high point among his symphonic poems, evokes the beauty, mystery and magic of the Scandinavian forest. It provided a magnificent capstone to Sibelius' composing career—though he went on to live another three decades.



## Ludwig van Beethoven

**Born:** December 16, 1770,  
Bonn, Germany

**Died:** March 25, 1827,  
Vienna, Austria

### Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Opus 43

**Premiered:** March 28, 1801

When Beethoven collaborated with the Italian Salvatore Vigano in providing an overture and a chain of sixteen short pieces for the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Vigano was at the height of his fame as a dancer, and he was emerging as a major choreographer. Vigano intended the new ballet as a tribute to the Empress Maria Theresa, a gesture that could only win extra favor for him and his Spaniard wife, fellow dancer Maria Medina—and as court ballet master, he didn't hesitate to request that the commission for the ballet's music be awarded to Beethoven.

#### a heroic ballet

This was an opportunity that the young Beethoven had been seeking—a chance to write for the theater, and for a handsome fee at that. Moreover, the mighty hero of the title appealed to him: in Greek mythology, it was the titan Prometheus who brought enlightenment to mankind by stealing the sacred fire from Olympus.

Not much is known about the hastily-assembled production, which debuted on March 28, 1801. While hardly a triumph, it was successful enough to be repeated fourteen times and revived in the following season. The program announced the work as “The Creatures of Prometheus, a heroic ballet, allegorical in two acts, from the ingenuity and interpretation of Herr Salvatore Vigano.” Only after the synopsis was Beethoven credited—perhaps an understandable slight, as the 30-year-old was not yet at the peak of his powers, and had just one symphony to his credit.

In the ballet, Prometheus implants the new force into two “creatures” (danced by Vigano and his wife, the Spaniard Maria Medina) sculpted from clay. They come to life, but neither feel nor understand, whereupon he escorts them to Parnassus, where their teachers include Euterpe, muse of lyric poetry, who uses the power of harmony to awaken them to human passion, and Orpheus, who instructs them in music.

When performed with the complete ballet, the Overture was linked with a stormy introduction and the subsequent numbers. It begins in solemn, stately terms, enhanced by a rich orchestral texture as it gives out an expressive theme. This leads to a swiftly bouncing tune, full of verve as it is briskly announced by the violins. Floating

upward in the woodwinds, the contrasting theme is equally buoyant. The form is conventional, culminating in a substantial coda that further develops the main idea.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Program note by Mary Ann Feldman.



## Geoffrey Gordon

**Born:** August 26, 1968,  
Flint, Michigan;  
now living in New York City

### *Prometheus*, Concerto for Bass Clarinet and Orchestra (after the treatment by Franz Kafka)

**Premiered:** January 19, 2019

There is something quite unfair about the distribution of concertos by instrument. The vast majority are written for only two instruments: piano or violin (cello comes in a distant third). Thereafter, concerto opportunities for other instruments diminish sharply. We have, of course, a few distinguished examples for clarinet—Mozart's being the jewel of the bunch, and others including Copland's and Artie Shaw's, both of which were performed earlier this year by the Minnesota Orchestra's Principal Clarinet Gabriel Campos Zamora. There are, though, almost none for the bass clarinet—which makes Geoffrey Gordon's *Prometheus* all the more unique, and attractive. *Prometheus*, which receives its North American premiere at these concerts, is not just a depiction of the famous Greek myth, it is also that rarest of things: a concerto for bass clarinet and orchestra.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus revolted against the rule of Zeus and gave man the gift of fire, only to face a horrifying punishment. The Prometheus myth has been retold by many artists over the centuries: it was the subject of a play by Aeschylus, a poetic drama by Shelley, a tone poem by Scriabin and a ballet by Beethoven, the overture to which is also featured on this week's program. Franz Kafka turned to that myth in the years immediately after World War I, and his short story—which appears in full on the following page—became the inspiration for Gordon's new work *Prometheus*. The concerto was premiered by London's Philharmonia Orchestra in January of this year, with Martyn Brabbins conducting and Laurent Ben Slimane as soloist.

### a note from the publisher

According to the composer, the concerto's architecture is not literally dictated by Franz Kafka's story, but is instead intended to capture the essence of the Kafka treatment. Gordon's publisher has made available the following introduction to *Prometheus*, which has been lightly edited:

"The concerto is in four movements, which generally follow the sections of the short story by Franz Kafka treating the legend of Prometheus, the Greek mythological hero who is punished for helping man by giving him fire, hitherto known only to the Gods.

"Kafka divided the story into four parables. In the first, Prometheus' punishment is set: being chained to a cliff as eagles are sent to devour his liver, which re-grows incessantly. In the second, the eagles continue to devour, and to escape torture, Prometheus tries to hide in the rock, interlocked and merged with it. In the third, the Gods forget their hatred and leave Prometheus. In the fourth, the torture is ended, the whole story having become forgotten, obscure and meaningless. And finally, there remains the inexplicable mass of rock.

"Within this structure, Gordon has created a highly dramatic musical response to the Kafka treatment, describing, considering and retelling the four parables and the obscure ending. So much is clear thematically that from the opening movement, listening becomes as seeing. The listener quickly comes to know the place, the characters and their story in the opening movement. The solo bass clarinet identifies as Prometheus, the falling second heard in the orchestra as the Rock, the orchestra's rhythmic punctuation the Gods and the piercing trumpet figures the eagles. This readily expounds what unfolds. For example, in the second movement, the listener is immediately led to imagine the gigantic creatures descending on flesh, pecking savagely, and the pain of Prometheus' torture. Gordon treats this in such a way that there is a sense of experiencing through textures, instrumentation and motif, not just the perspective of the hero, in random glimpses of terrorizing feathers coming, through eyes, half shut of a deep agony, screaming pain, but also that of the Gods overseeing all and also that of the audience itself."

### the soloist's view

The soloist at these performances of *Prometheus* is bass clarinetist Timothy Zavadil, who has been a member of the Minnesota Orchestra since 2007. He offers these insights into what it is like to perform *Prometheus*:

"I am thrilled to be sharing Geoffrey Gordon's bass clarinet concerto *Prometheus* with our Minnesota Orchestra audience in its North American premiere. The piece is a joint commission between the Minnesota Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra (London) and Malmö Symphony Orchestra (Sweden), and is based on Franz Kafka's reflection on the myth of Prometheus.

"Kafka explores four 'versions' of the myth, hence this concerto is in four movements. To me, one of the most wonderful aspects of the bass clarinet is its wide range of expressive components, and Geoffrey Gordon utilizes these fully throughout the four movements. The piece goes from the lowest notes on the instrument and sails into the upper register three and a half octaves higher. This concerto also showcases the bass clarinet's ability to play a wide dynamic range, asking the instrument to play everything from *ppp* (very, very soft) to *molto f* (very loud!). The character of Prometheus is a complicated one, and the bass clarinet is a wonderful choice to depict him in all of his complexities. I look forward to giving our audiences the opportunity to hear how versatile and expressive this instrument can be."

**Instrumentation:** solo bass clarinet with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bell plate, bell tree, bongos, crotales, 2 Chinese cymbals, 3 suspended cymbals, gong, mark tree, 4 tamtams, temple blocks, 2 triangles, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.

## PROMETHEUS

There are four legends concerning Prometheus:

According to the first, he was clamped to a rock in the Caucasus for betraying the secrets of the gods to men, and the gods sent eagles to feed on his liver, which was perpetually renewed.

According to the second, Prometheus, goaded by the pain of the tearing beaks, pressed himself deeper and deeper into the rock until he became one with it.

According to the third, his treachery was forgotten in the course of thousands of years, the gods forgotten, the eagles, he himself forgotten.

According to the fourth, every one grew weary of the meaningless affair. The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily.

There remained the inexplicable mass of rock. – The legend tried to explain the inexplicable. As it came out of a substratum of truth it had in turn to end in the inexplicable.

– Franz Kafka (1917)



## Haukur Tómasson

**Born:** January 9, 1960,  
Reykjavík, Iceland

### Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra

**Premiered:** February 10, 2017

Icelandic composer Haukur Tómasson, whose music is heard for the first time at Orchestra Hall this week, began his studies at the Reykjavík College of Music, then went on to the U.S. for graduate work. He received a master's in composition from the University of California, San Diego, in 1990, and has since been based in his native Iceland. He has written for the stage, for orchestra, for a variety of chamber ensembles, for keyboard and for the voice. In his compositions, Tómasson has sometimes made use of native Icelandic music and myth, and perhaps his best-known work is his chamber opera *Gudrun's Fourth Song* of 1996. Based on Norse legends from the old Icelandic Edda, it tells of Gudrun's harrowing revenge on the man who murdered her husband. Widely performed and recorded, it was in 2004 awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize, the most distinguished award for Nordic composers.

Tómasson's Second Piano Concerto was commissioned jointly by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester. Composed in 2016, it was premiered in Hamburg on February 10, 2017, with Víkingur Ólafsson as soloist and Esa-Pekka Salonen conducting. The American premiere took place two months later in Los Angeles, when once again Ólafsson (who is also today's soloist) and Salonen were the principals. Tómasson dedicated the concerto to Ólafsson, who recorded it with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra last year.

#### an evolving, restrained musical narrative

The Second Piano Concerto is original in many ways, and one of its most striking features is its unusual form. Instead of writing in the three movements of the traditional concerto, Tómasson casts this concerto in one continuous movement that spans only 17 minutes. Further, he does away with the conflict and resolution commonly employed in the concerto form, and in their place the composer creates an evolving musical narrative over those 17 minutes: certain basic ideas are stated at the beginning and evolve constantly across the span of the concerto.

Just as striking as this concerto's form is the sound-world Tómasson generates. He writes for a huge orchestra, but then uses that orchestra in the most sparing and economic fashion. Almost never

does he unleash the full power of the orchestra at once—there are no big, lush tunes for the massed string sections, for example, and during much of this concerto the piano soloist is interacting with only a handful of instruments from the orchestra. Beyond this, Tómasson creates a very particular sound in this music—it is sparkling, pointillistic, glittering, crystalline, ringing. Some of this comes from the lean writing for piano, but much of it comes from his imaginative writing for percussion, and the silvery sound of the vibraphone is an important part of this concerto's distinctive sonority.

The writing for piano soloist is just as unusual as the orchestral sonority. The piano line is not chordal but linear in the extreme: often the two hands will have lines that are completely unharmonized and exist as two separate, almost skeletal statements. Some have suggested that at the beginning of this concerto, Tómasson is invoking the old Icelandic folk tradition of *tvisöngur*, or “twin-singing.” Early Icelandic folk music was not harmonized with the full chords of Western classical music but instead consisted of two lines set a fifth apart (it is for this reason sometimes called “Quint-song”). The exceptionally spare writing for the piano soloist at the beginning of this concerto recalls that tradition (though the two hands are not always exactly a fifth apart). To be sure, there are moments of full chordal textures for both soloist and orchestra here, but one comes away from this concerto most struck by its glistening sound and the leanness of its textures.

#### the concerto in brief

The beginning of the concerto is deceptively simple: the piano lays out the principal idea in individual notes from each hand, encased in the most subtle of orchestra textures, mere flickers of sound around the piano's bell-like sonority. Gradually textures and dynamics intensify, and after what might be described as a first climax, the piano resumes its lonely journey, once again accompanied by lean orchestral accompaniment: sometimes this is the sound of solo winds or solo strings, sometimes it is the glint of percussive sound from such instruments as xylophone or Almglocken, and sometimes the soloist's right hand has extended passages by itself. The music gradually builds to another climax, rushing ahead as it goes. Then—the climax over—the music seems to collapse into fragments, wisps of unusual sound such as flutter-tongued flutes or the pianist's left hand, half-pedaled. All the energy of that climax now falls away, the piano part rises into its highest register, and suddenly the music vanishes delicately into silence.

**Instrumentation:** solo piano with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, Almglocken, bass drum, crotales, flexatone, tuned gongs, handbells, tamtam, triangle, xylophone, marimba, vibraphone, chimes and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.





## Jean Sibelius

**Born:** December 8, 1865,  
Tavastehus, Finland

**Died:** September 20, 1957,  
Järvenpää, Finland

### *Tapiola*, Opus 112

**Premiere:** December 26, 1926

One of Sibelius' most powerful and original compositions, *Tapiola* was also his last major work. Sibelius composed it during the summer of 1926, then lapsed into the silence that marked the final 30 years of his life. But *Tapiola* is a masterpiece, a magnificent conclusion to Sibelius' career as a composer.

### spirit of the forests

In Finnish mythology, Tapio was the god or spirit of the vast forests of the north. With his wife Mielikki, Tapio presided over those forests, inhabiting the woodlands, protecting animals, and receiving the prayers of hunters. The title *Tapiola* has generally been understood to mean “the realm of Tapio,” and in the score Sibelius prefaced the music with these four lines:

Widespread they stand, the Northland's dusky forests,  
Ancient, mysterious, brooding savage dreams;  
Within them dwells the forest's mighty God,  
And wood-sprites in the gloom weave magic secrets.

*Tapiola* is not a musical depiction of “the realm of Tapio”—it is not scene-painting—but is instead a powerful evocation of the mystery, magic, beauty and strength of those deep forests. The concentration of this music is remarkable: the entire piece grows out of its opening two measures, and that opening is simplicity itself: the timpani sounds a stark call to order, and strings stamp out a powerful chorale-like statement. This is the fundamental gesture of *Tapiola*, and over the next 20 minutes it will be repeated, fragmented, elongated and concentrated. It will move between sections of the orchestra, colored differently and heard at different speeds at the same time. Sometimes this theme builds up to moments of overwhelming tension, sometimes it sings, sometimes it dances, sometimes it turns playful. Sibelius was 61 when he wrote *Tapiola*, he had completed all seven of his symphonies, and now, at the end of his composing career, he wrote with the hand of a master.

### endlessly ingenious music

Everyone who hears *Tapiola* feels that this is evocative music, and it is easy to seem to sense the darkness and mystery of the deep forests, to “feel” snow whipping past, to detect the “wood-sprites” flitting about in the darkness. The English musicologist Donald Francis

Tovey offers audiences the best possible approach to *Tapiola*: just “listen to it.” Don't search for musical structures here (there are none), and don't search for precise musical scene-painting (there is none). Instead, listen for Sibelius' endlessly ingenious expansion of that opening figure, the many shades of color he creates, his sudden evolutions of mood and atmosphere. Some listeners have made out a gradual building-up to a great storm, with pine forests pitching in the snow and wind, but that must remain speculation, and it is a tribute to Sibelius' writing that different listeners can sense so many different things here before the music fades into a mysterious silence fully worthy of the vast woodlands whose spirit it set out to evoke.

*Tapiola* was commissioned by the American conductor Walter Damrosch, who led the premiere with the New York Philharmonic Society on December 26, 1926. It was one of the few premieres of his music that Sibelius did not hear or conduct himself. When he wrote *Tapiola*, Sibelius had no idea that it would be his final major work. He was not ready to give up composing, and he did go on to write a few small pieces. He apparently made some progress on what would have been his Eighth Symphony, though that work—if it ever existed—vanished completely. But following these efforts, Sibelius lapsed into the silence that would span 30 years, until his death at almost 92 in 1957. But in its beauty, concentration, and evocative power, *Tapiola* makes a fitting and magnificent conclusion to his career as a composer.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger**.

coda

The Minnesota Orchestra first performed music from **Beethoven's *The Creatures of Prometheus***—a suite of selections from the complete ballet—on March 13, 1908, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, under the direction of founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer. The ballet's overture was first played by the Orchestra as a standalone work during its November 1936 tour to Winnipeg and Moorhead.

Although this week's concerts mark the Orchestra's first-ever public performance of music by **Geoffrey Gordon**, his music was played by the Orchestra at a “Perfect Pitch” reading session of new music at Orchestra Hall on October 19, 1999, when his first major orchestral work, *Mis en scène*, was conducted by Giancarlo Guerrero. The music of **Haukur Tómasson**, however, has not previously been heard here.

The Orchestra added **Sibelius' *Tapiola*** to its repertoire relatively recently—on September 16, 2004, at Orchestra Hall, under Osmo Vänskä's direction. It was the season-opening work of Vänskä's second year as music director.