Minnesota Orchestra
Karina Canellakis, conductor
Francesco Piemontesi, piano

Thursday, February 13, 2020, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, February 14, 2020, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, February 15, 2020, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Zosha di Castri
Lineage
cia. 11'

Maurice Ravel
Concerto in G major for Piano and Orchestra
c. 21'
Allegramente
Adagio assai
Presto

Francesco Piemontesi, piano

INTERMISSION
cia. 20'

Béla Bartók
Concerto for Orchestra
cia. 38'
Introduzione: Andante non troppo – Allegro vivace
Gioco delle coppie: Allegretto scherzando
Elegia: Andante non troppo
Intermezzo interrotto: Allegretto
Finale: Pesante – Presto

Concert Preview with Peter Mercer Taylor
Thursday, February 13, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, February 14, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine
Saturday, February 15, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium

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.
Di Castri: Lineage
Zosha di Castri pays homage to her late grandmother and explores the concepts of memories, identity and cultural heritage in a work built around a recurring chorale, as well as an ostinato that calls to mind the stories told by elders.

Ravel: Piano Concerto
This popular work opens with a jazz-spiced movement highlighted by a bravura cadenza and proceeds into a serene, sparsely accompanied Adagio. In the mischievous Presto with which it concludes, the piano chases the orchestra.

Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra
Bartók upends the concerto form by treating each section of instruments in a soloistic and virtuosic manner. The mood progresses from stern to spooky to life-affirming, with two witty scherzos scattered into the mix. Upon the work’s 1944 premiere, conductor Serge Koussevitzky called it “the best orchestral piece of the last 25 years.”
When Florida’s New World Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony co-commissioned young Canadian-born composer Zosha di Castri to write a piece for large orchestra in 2013, the opportunity came at a time of personal loss: the composer’s grandmother had recently passed away. Di Castri had grown up listening to her grandmother’s tales of life in the “old country.” Those stories—and importantly, di Castri’s reaction to them—became the inspiration for Lineage, her second work for large orchestra.

In a 2014 interview, di Castri stated: “I was thinking of doing a piece that was kind of a tribute to [my grandmother], but I was also reflecting on what it meant to be a third-generation Canadian and how we relate to our culture.” Di Castri wondered: as each of us re-engage with these passed-down “secondhand memories,” what changes—and what stays the same? Which memories do we return to, and why? What do those memories say about our own identities and lineages? And what might these ideas sound like when portrayed by an orchestra?

A rising talent

With this week’s performances of Lineage, Minnesota Orchestra audiences are being introduced to the music of a composer on the rise. This season Lineage is also being performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Montclair State University Symphony Orchestra. Di Castri reached her largest audience to date last July, when the BBC Symphony and BBC Singers premiered her Long Is the Journey, Short Is the Memory, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, at the opening concert of the 2019 BBC Proms. Her current projects include a commissioned work for the Grossman Ensemble at the University of Chicago, scheduled for premiere in June 2020, and her first album, Tachitipo, was released in November to immediate critical acclaim.

Born in 1985 in Edmonton in Canada’s Alberta province, di Castri earned her bachelor’s degree in piano performance and composition at McGill University in Montreal, then went on to complete her doctorate at Columbia University, where she is currently the Francis Goelet Assistant Professor of Music. Her compositional output includes concert music, projects with electronics, sound arts, and interdisciplinary collaborations with video and dance. To date she has written six works for orchestra.

A recurring landmark

One of di Castri’s goals in Lineage was to create a recurring structural landmark that listeners could grab hold of and return to as the work progressed. She chose to make that landmark a chorale (described as “distant” in the score). This chorale appears three times, much like a trio of columns supporting a porch: once at the beginning, once in the middle and once at the end. It loosely cycles through a particular pitch pattern: the notes sink down, haunting and dispirited, then leap up, seemingly intrigued, creating a cycling undulating shape that suggests rise and fall, departure and return, simultaneously.

Part of the chorale’s eerie atmosphere is due to di Castri’s use of microtones: notes that are either slightly too sharp or slightly too flat to be played on a piano. In the orchestral world, microtones are encountered most often in experimental 20th- and 21st-century works; however, microtones aren’t a modern invention, as they appear in some cultures’ folk music. In Lineage, the microtones serve as a recurring callback to di Castri’s cultural heritage. The composer is firm that she doesn’t mean to quote folk music directly or even authentically here, but rather wants to create a musical analogue to the “secondhand memories” she herself received from her grandmother by writing hints of imagined folk music.

Weaving its way in and out of the entire piece is a recurring ostinato: a rhythm or phrase that repeats itself again and again, much like a grandparent’s story. In Lineage this ostinato appears in different guises played by different instruments. Wherever it shows up, whether it’s in the haunted-sounding woodwinds or the muted trumpets or the frantic strings, the ostinato provides a sense of scurrying propulsion, always providing direction and pointing the way forward. By the end of the work, however, that propulsion has largely faded, finally replaced by a shaky set of otherworldly murmurs in the strings’ upper registers. (The score’s last instruction for the percussion players reads: “Fade out with the natural resonance of the gongs and tam tams.”) In the end, this mysterious world of music and memory seems to be without weight.

In a composer’s note that prefaces the score, di Castri writes that Lineage “is a combination of change and consistency, a re-imagining of places and traditions I’ve known only second-hand, the sound of a fictitious culture one dreams up to keep the memories of another generation alive.”

Zosha di Castri
Born: January 16, 1985, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; now living in New York

Lineage
Premiered: April 20, 2013
Ravel was 54 before he wrote any concertos, and then, in the fall of 1929, he set to work simultaneously on two. His Concerto for Piano Left Hand, dark and serious, was for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, and the other, the much lighter Piano Concerto in G major, was intended for the composer's own use. But by the fall of 1931, when the G-major Concerto was complete, failing health prevented the composer from performing this music himself. Instead, he conducted the premiere in Paris on January 14, 1932; the pianist was Marguerite Long, to whom Ravel dedicated the concerto, and who had also given the first performance of Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in 1919.

**brilliant, transparent and sultry**

Ravel described this work as “written in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns,” but listeners would hardly make those associations. What strikes audiences first are the concerto’s virtuoso writing for both piano and orchestra, the brilliance and transparency of the music, and the influence of American jazz. It is possible to make too much of the jazz influence, but Ravel had heard jazz during his tour of America in 1928 and found much to admire. When asked about its influence on this concerto, he said: “It includes some elements borrowed from jazz, but only in moderation.” Ravel was quite proud of this music and said that in it, he had expressed his thoughts just as he had wished.

**Program note by Emily Hogstad.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maurice Ravel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Born:</strong> March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Died:</strong> December 28, 1937, Paris, France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concerto in G major for Piano and Orchestra</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Premiered:</strong> January 14, 1932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lineage** received its world premiere performance on April 20, 2013, with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, Florida.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling E-flat clarinet and 1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, China cymbal, splash cymbal, 4 suspended cymbals, 3 almglocken, 6 nipple gongs, ocean drum, rain stick, 2 tamtams, 2 wood blocks, xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, harp, piano, celesta and strings

**Program note by Eric Bromberger.**

béla Bartók and his second wife Ditta fled to the United States in October 1940 to escape World War II and the Nazi domination of Hungary, but their hopes for a new life in America were quickly shattered. Wartime America had little interest in Bartók or his music, and the couple soon found themselves living in near poverty. Then came the catastrophe: in the spring of 1942 Bartók’s health failed. By the following spring
Music of strength and beauty

“The title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat the single orchestral instruments in a concertante or soloistic manner,” Bartók wrote. “The ‘virtuoso’ treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato section of the development of the first movement (brass instruments), or in the perpetuum-mobile-like passage of the principal theme of the last movement (strings), and especially in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages.”

This is music of strength, humanity, beauty and, not least, humor. Bartók’s own description may touch the secret of its emotional appeal: “The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death-song of the third, to the life-assertion of the last one.”

The five movements of the Concerto for Orchestra are in the beautifully symmetric arch form that Bartók sometimes employed. The outer movements, both in modified sonata form, anchor this arch, framing the two even-numbered movements, both of which have the character of scherzos (each is marked Allegretto). The central slow movement, which itself is in a symmetric ternary form, becomes the capstone to the arch.

introduzione. The music comes to life with a brooding introduction, and flutes and trumpets hint at theme-shapes that will return later. The movement takes wing at the Allegro vivace with a leaping subject (immediately inverted) for both violin sections, and further themes quickly follow: a second subject for solo trombone and a more intimate figure for solo oboe. As part of the development comes a resounding fugato for the concerto’s 11 brass players.

gioco delle coppie (game of pairs). This charming movement should be understood as a scherzo in the literal meaning of the word: a “joke”—music for fun. A side drum sets the rhythm, and then pairs of woodwinds enter in turn to play a variation on the good-natured opening tune, first heard in the bassoons. Bartók varies the sound by having each “couple” play in different intervals: the bassoons are a sixth apart, the oboes a third, the clarinets a seventh, the flutes a fifth and, finally, the trumpets are a second apart. A noble brass chorale interrupts the fun, after which the woodwinds pick up the opening theme and resume their game.

elegia. At the center of the concerto lies this dark Andante, which Bartók called a “lugubrious death-song” and which is based in part on material first heard during the introduction to the first movement. It opens with an inversion of the concerto’s very beginning, which gives way to one of the finest examples of Bartók’s “night-music,” with a keening oboe accompanied by spooky swirls of sound. A great outburst from the violins, also derived from the very beginning, leads to the violas’ parlando declarations. The music winds its way back to the eerie night-sounds of the opening before vanishing with only two instruments playing—piccolo and timpani.

intermezzo interrotto (interrupted intermezzo). A sharper sense of humor emerges here. Bartók begins with a woodwind tune whose shape and asymmetric meters suggest an Eastern European origin and continues with a glowing viola melody that must have had specific appeal for him: it is derived from an operetta tune by Zsigmond Vincze that originally set the words “You are lovely, you are beautiful, Hungary.” At the center of the movement comes the interruption.

During the war, Bartók had been dismayed by the attention paid to Shostakovich’s Leningrad Symphony, and he objected
particularly to the obsessive ostinato theme Shostakovich associated with the Nazi invaders (which he had taken from Lehár’s The Merry Widow). Bartók quotes that tune in the solo clarinet, then savages it: he makes the orchestra “laugh” at the theme, which he treats to a series of sneering variations and finally lampoons with rude smears of sound. This has long been considered Bartók’s attack on Shostakovich, but is it possible that Lehár’s tune functions in exactly the same way for both Shostakovich and Bartók? For each, it is a symbol of the hated Nazis, it invades their own music, and it is thrown aside in an act of defiant nationalism. Once it is gone, Bartók returns—in one of the most beautiful moments in the concerto—to his “Hungarian” tune, now sung hauntingly by muted violins.

**Finale.** The Finale begins with a fanfare for horns, and then the strings take off and fly: this is the perpetual motion Bartók mentioned in his note for the premiere. Beginning very quietly with the inside second violins, he soon invests this rush of energy with a slashing strength.

This movement is of a type Bartók had developed over the previous decade, the dance-finale, music of celebration driven by a wild energy. Yet it is a most disciplined energy, as much of the development is built on a series of fugues. Bartók is scrupulous in this score about giving every single section and player a moment of glory. Matters subside into a mysterious quiet, and from this misty murk the fugue theme suddenly blazes out in the brass. The Concerto for Orchestra ends with one of the most dazzling conclusions to any piece of music: the entire orchestra rips straight upward in a dizzying three-octave rush of sound.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, 2 harps and strings

*Program note by Eric Bromberger.*

This week’s performances of di Castri’s *Lineage* mark the first time the Minnesota Orchestra has performed music by Canadian-born composer Zosha di Castri. The Orchestra, however, has several ties to Canada: flute and piccolo player Roma Duncan is from Nova Scotia, while violinist Joanne Opgenorth is a native of Edmonton, violinst Céline Leathead is from Montreal, and the Orchestra’s creative partner for summer programming, Jon Kimura Parker, hails from Vancouver. In addition, cellist Arek Tesarczyk was principal cello of the Winnipeg Symphony for 11 years, while Principal Bass Kristen Bruya came to Minnesota from the Toronto Symphony.

The Orchestra’s initial performance of Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G major* came on February 17, 1938, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with then-music director Dimitri Mitropoulos serving as both conductor and piano soloist. This performance came just six years after the work’s world premiere. Only one other person has conducted this concerto with the Orchestra while also playing the solo part—Andrew Litton in both 2005 and 2014—while other soloists through the years have included Martha Argerich, Jean Casadesus, Lise de la Salle, Simone Dinnerstein, Alicia de Larrocha, Christopher O’Riley and Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

The Orchestra first performed Bartók’s *Concerto for Orchestra* on November 4, 1949, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with Antal Dorati on the conductor’s podium. This was also a fairly new work at the time the Orchestra added it to its repertoire—less than five years had elapsed since its premiere—and the concerto quickly became a calling card of the ensemble, as the Orchestra and Dorati performed it dozens of times on performance tours throughout the 1950s. More recently, the concerto was the centerpiece of an Inside the Classics concert in March 2017 hosted by Orchestra violist Sam Bergman and conducted by Sarah Hicks.