Minnesota Orchestra
Juraj Valčuha, conductor
Leila Josefowicz, violin

Friday, November 1, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, November 2, 2019, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Anton Webern
Im Sommerwind
ca. 13’

Igor Stravinsky
Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra
Toccata
Aria I
Aria II
Capriccio
Leila Josefowicz, violin
ca. 22’

INTERMISSION
ca. 20’

Richard Strauss
An Alpine Symphony, Opus 64
ca. 51’

Pre-Concert
Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Leila Josefowicz
Friday, November 1, 7 pm, Auditorium
Saturday, November 2, 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.


**Artists**

**Juraj Valčuha, conductor**

Juraj Valčuha, now welcomed for his fourth engagement with the Minnesota Orchestra, is music director of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples and first guest conductor of the Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin. From 2009 to 2016 he was chief conductor of Italy’s RAI National Symphony Orchestra, with which he toured to music centers including the Vienna Musikverein and Berlin’s Philharmonie. He has also conducted the Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Dresden Staatskapelle, Vienna Symphony, Munich Philharmonic, Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Orchestre de Paris and Philharmonia of London, as well as major American orchestras from coast to coast. Highlights of his recent engagements include a return to the New York Philharmonic; productions of Janáček’s *Katja Kabanova* and Wagner’s *Die Walküre* with Teatro San Carlo; Strauss’ *Salome* in Bologna; concerts with the BBC Symphony and the Montreal, Vienna, San Francisco, Pittsburgh and Dallas orchestras, and a tour of the Baltic countries with the Konzerthaus Orchester Berlin. More: jurajvalcuha.com.

**Leila Josefowicz, violin**

Leila Josefowicz has appeared numerous times with the Minnesota Orchestra, most recently in October 2016, when she played John Adams’ *Scheherazade.2*. Highlights of her 2019-20 schedule include opening the London Symphony Orchestra’s season with Sir Simon Rattle and returning to the San Francisco Symphony with its incoming music director Esa-Pekka Salonen to perform Salonen’s own Violin Concerto, as well as engagements with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra and Philadelphia Orchestra. In addition, she will perform the U.K. premiere of Helen Grime’s *Violin Concerto* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. She has received Grammy nominations for her recordings of *Scheherazade.2* with the St. Louis Symphony and Salonen’s Violin Concerto with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. She is a recipient of a 2018 Avery Fisher Prize and was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 2008. More: harrisonparrott.com, leilajosefowicz.com.

**one-minute notes**

**Webern: *Im Sommerwind***

This tone poem from Webern’s younger years—before his music took a more modernist turn under Schoenberg’s tutelage—evokes a warm summer day in the countryside, with music that begins softly and rises to two great climaxes that each subside quickly, leading to a peaceful close.

**Stravinsky: Violin Concerto***

Ingenuity abounds throughout this concerto, which opens with a widely-spaced violin chord the composer called the “passport” to the work. The sparkling first movement, buoyant and playful as circus music, gives way to two lyrical arias and a *Capriccio* full of double-stops, dashing octaves and other violin pyrotechnics.

**Strauss: An Alpine Symphony***

The *Alpine Symphony*—possibly the most remarkable description of nature in sound—paints a vivid musical picture of a climb through Strauss’ beloved Bavarian Alps, employing dazzling orchestral colors and demanding phenomenal feats of virtuosity from the musicians.
or several generations the Webern family had a summer estate, called Preglhof, in a mountain valley near Klagenfurt at the east end of the Wörthersee in southern Austria. Anton Webern spent his summers there as a child and delighted in climbing through the mountains that surrounded the estate. In the summer of 1904, after two years at the University of Vienna, the 20-year-old composer returned to Preglhof and set to work on an ambitious new piece. He had already written songs, piano pieces and chamber music, but that summer he composed a work for large orchestra, inspired by his pleasure in the sunny valleys and mountains of Carinthia and specifically modeled on the lengthy poem *Im Sommerwind* (In the Summer Wind) by Bruno Wille. Wille (1860-1928), a German social philosopher and poet, believed so deeply in the spiritual power of nature that he fled the city to make his home on an isolated lake outside Berlin. His *Im Sommerwind* tells of the experience of a summer day in the country, of bright sunlight and warm winds, and finally of the pleasure and peace the day brings.

Webern used Wille's poem as the framework for his orchestral work, a tone poem somewhat in the manner of Richard Strauss but more concerned with expressing states of feeling than depicting specific actions. Webern was precise in his subtitle "Idyll for Large Orchestra." An idyll is an ancient form of poetry that celebrates pastoral life, and Webern does indeed write for very large orchestra. *Im Sommerwind*, in fact, requires one of the largest orchestras Webern ever used, including six horns and two harps, though (curiously) it has no trombones or tubas, and it makes very delicate use of percussion.

**evoking the countryside**

*Im Sommerwind* is a terrific evocation of a warm summer day in the countryside. It begins very quietly (the marking is triple piano) as Webern slowly unfolds a great D-major chord from the muted strings. The music itself is built on a series of short motifs, usually just a few measures each, that evolve continuously across the 13-minute span of this music. Principal among these are the rising, surging figure first heard in the violins and a dancing idea for solo oboe that Webern marks *lustig* (gay, delighted).

Gradually the summer wind begins to blow and the music eases ahead and becomes more animated. Those who think of Webern as the supremely cerebral and detached manipulator of tone rows and complex canons should look at his performance markings in this score. The musicians are repeatedly instructed to make their playing "as tender as possible," "very soft and tender," "with tender expression," and "very peaceful and solemn."

Twice this music rises to great climaxes that subside quickly: Webern’s winds blow firmly but never tempestuously. He deploys his forces with precision. Sometimes he uses only a handful of solo instruments, but he is also willing to unleash the full resources of his "large orchestra" to create an opulent sonority that can sound very much like *Der Rosenkavalier* (still seven years in the future). *Im Sommerwind* concludes peacefully as Webern returns to the same D-major chord that opened this music and instructs the players to let their sound fade into inaudibility.

**a change in direction**

Webern finished the draft of this music early in August 1904 and had the orchestration complete six weeks later, on September 16. The young composer could not have known, as he completed this score, that seven days earlier and just a few miles to the west—at his sunny summer residence on the Worthersee—Gustav Mahler had completed the draft of his Sixth Symphony. That fall, Webern would return to Vienna and begin studying with Arnold Schoenberg, and his subsequent music would take quite a different direction. He remained proud of *Im Sommerwind*, however, and showed the manuscript to his own students as an example of his early work. But Webern never heard this music. The first performance did not take place until May 25, 1962, 17 years after the composer’s death, when it was performed by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra at the first International Webern Festival in Seattle.

**Instrumentation:** 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 4 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 6 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, cymbals, triangle, 2 harps and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.
Igor Stravinsky
Born: June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia
Died: April 6, 1971, New York City

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra
Premiered: October 23, 1931

Stravinsky had no interest in virtuosity for its own sake. Of his 100-plus compositions, only one is a concerto for solo instrument and full symphony orchestra, and he was at first reluctant even to write this one. In the fall of 1930, shortly after completing his Symphony of Psalms, Stravinsky visited his friend and publisher Willy Strecker in Wiesbaden. Strecker wanted Stravinsky to compose a concerto for the young violinist Samuel Dushkin, but Stravinsky was wary: “I hesitated because I am not a violinist and I was afraid that my slight knowledge of that instrument would not be sufficient to enable me to solve the many problems which would necessarily arise in the course of a major work especially composed for it.” But Stravinsky was so impressed by Dushkin’s skill and general culture that he took on the commission and consulted frequently with the violinist in the course of composition.

the “passport” chord
Some years later, Dushkin left a reminiscence of working with Stravinsky, and it included an account of a seminal moment in the composition of this concerto: “During the winter I saw Stravinsky in Paris quite often. One day when we were lunching in a restaurant, Stravinsky took out a piece of paper and wrote down [a] chord and asked me if it could be played. I had never seen a chord with such an enormous stretch, from the E to the top A, and I said ‘No.’ Stravinsky said sadly ‘Quel dommage’ (What a pity). After I got home, I tried it, and to my astonishment, I found that in that register, the stretch of the 11th was relatively easy to play, and the sound fascinated me. I telephoned Stravinsky at once to tell him that it could be done. When the Concerto was finished, more than six months later, I understood his disappointment when I first said ‘No.’ This chord, in a different dress, begins each of the four movements. Stravinsky himself calls it his ‘passport’ to that Concerto.”

Stravinsky wrote the first two movements during the spring of 1931 in Nice and completed the concerto that September at a summer estate in Isère. The first performance took place the following month, on October 23, 1931; Dushkin was soloist, and Stravinsky conducted the Berlin Radio Orchestra.

breathing the spirit of Bach
Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto has become virtually a locus classicus of his neo-classical style: its movement titles come right out of a Bach suite, and the spirit of that composer’s violin music hovers over much of this work. Stravinsky himself was aware of this, and 30 years after composing the concerto he offered this perspective: “The subtitles of my Concerto—Toccata, Aria, Capriccio—may suggest Bach, and so, in a superficial way, might the musical substance. I am very fond of the Bach Concerto for Two Violins, as the duet of the soloist with a violin from the orchestra in the last movement of my own Concerto may show. But my Concerto employs other duet combinations too, and the texture is almost always more characteristic of chamber music than of orchestral music.”

toccata. The title of the first movement, Toccata, originally denoted brilliant keyboard music (it means “touched” in Italian), and so its use with violin music may seem anomalous. Here it points to a brilliance in the writing for both violin and orchestra. The concerto opens with the “passport” chord, its bright, stinging sound forming a brisk call to order. A profusion of thematic ideas follows, and Stravinsky quickly combines several of these in some very impressive and graceful contrapuntal writing. An absolutely literal recapitulation leads to a brief coda and the firm close.

aria I, aria II. Both middle movements are titled Aria, though they are quite different in character. In the first, the “passport” chord leads to some subdued two-part writing for solo violin and the entire cello section; the central episode presses ahead energetically before the opening material returns and the movement evaporates in a wisp of sound. Aria II brings the concerto’s most “Bachian” moments: the “passport” chord introduces some writing for the violin that sounds as if it might have come almost verbatim from the opening movement of Bach’s sonatas for unaccompanied violin. This was clearly special music for Stravinsky, who takes care to remind the soloist repeatedly to play cantabile, even stressing at one point that the music should be dolce (an unusual marking from a composer who was characteristically reserved in his performance markings).

capriccio. The final movement bursts to life with the sound of the familiar chord, then races ahead on spirited writing for the soloist. This movement is episodic, almost mercurial in its quick leaps between moods and themes. Near the end come several remarkable passages. The first is the extended duet between soloist and concertmaster that Stravinsky felt had been inspired by Bach’s Double Concerto. A one-measure grand pause introduces the coda, whose surging, sputtering rhythms and rapid alternation of bowed and pizzicato notes look ahead 14 years to the first movement of Stravinsky’s Symphony in Three Movements. On this energy, the Violin Concerto powers its way to a sizzling close.
Richard Strauss' colossal *Alpine Symphony* is one of the most remarkable works ever created to depict nature in sound. The dates of composition (1911-15) indicate that it closely followed *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, but one looks in vain for the lightness of touch and chamber music qualities of these works. Reverting to the enormous resources required for compositions like *Symphonia domestica*, *Salome*, and *Elektra*, Strauss calls for an orchestra of more than 130 musicians.

Every aspect of the ascent and descent of an Alpine peak is portrayed, covering a time span of 24 hours. This richly descriptive piece of program music, nearly an hour in length, shows Strauss at the peak of his orchestrative powers. There was virtually nothing, either spiritual or physical, that he could not depict in sound. He once remarked casually that, if necessary, he could describe a knife and fork in music. To achieve his goals in the *Alpine Symphony*, instruments are combined in unprecedented variety and pushed to the extremes of their range. Utmost virtuosity and stamina are required from every player. In addition to the vast and varied forces required, Strauss additionally calls for a backstage contingent of six horns, two trumpets and two trombones used only in the Ascent episode near the beginning. All in all, not the sort of work that is likely to turn up frequently on concert programs. But its dazzling orchestral colors, phenomenal feats of virtuosity, and the sheer fun all this produces for audiences and musicians alike have ensured the *Alpine Symphony* a secure place in the orchestral repertory.

Though Strauss loved the Bavarian Alps and eventually built a villa in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, he was never much of a mountaineer. Nevertheless, at the age of 14, he once spent a day with some friends climbing a mountain, and later wrote of it to Ludwig Thuille, a friend who missed the expedition. He used terms that closely parallel the events described in the composition he would write more than 30 years later: departure in the wee hours of the morning, the long climb to the summit, getting lost, a violent thunderstorm that thoroughly drenched everyone, drying off in a farmhouse and, upon returning home, his attempts to give a musical recreation of the trip at the piano, “...full of Wagnerian tone-painting and monstrous nonsense.”

The idea for creating an orchestral rendering of this Alpine experience began to stir in the first years of the new century, but serious work began only in 1911, and the bulk of the writing took place during a 100-day stretch in 1914-15. Strauss completed the score on February 8, 1915, and conducted the premiere himself in Berlin on October 28 of that year. The orchestra was, appropriately enough, the Dresden Court Orchestra (today the Dresden Staatskapelle), which over the previous 14 years had given the premieres of four Strauss operas. The score is dedicated to this orchestra and to its general manager, Count Nikolaus Seebach.

Richard Strauss outside his villa in Garmisch-Partenkirchen; in the background is the landscape that inspired *An Alpine Symphony*.
the most sensational tone poem
Although nominally a symphony, this work is a symphonic poem in all but name. One perceives it not as a series of movements in the standard symphonic format (slow introduction and allegro first movement; slow second movement; scherzo third movement; finale and coda)—though attempts have been made to force it into this Procrustean bed—but rather as an extended fantasy built on the Lisztian principle of thematic transformation within the context of a story line or pictorial description. Naturally, the Alpine Symphony is something of an anomaly in Strauss' career. It appeared more than a decade after he had written his previous symphonic poem, Symphonia domestica, and when he was securely anchored in a career in the opera house, with six operas to his credit, three of them huge successes (Salome, Elektra and Der Rosenkavalier). In the Alpine Symphony, his valedictory effort in the world of symphonic poems, Strauss created his biggest, most extravagant and most sensational tone poem of all.

Much has been made of the frankly, even graphically, descriptive nature of this music, and this is a primary issue for its detractors. But Strauss himself saw things differently: "There is no such thing as abstract music; there is good music and bad music. If it is good, it means something; and then it is program music." The listener is of course free to listen to the Alpine Symphony as he or she chooses: as a succession of landscapes and weather conditions in sound, as the composer's artistic affirmation of Nature, as a metaphor of Life as a mountain which Man must climb, or in any other way one might like. Listeners will have little difficulty identifying the various scenes and events as they pass by. Nevertheless, a few remarks may be helpful.

The deep silence of Night is heard in thick, dark, B-flat minor chords; at times every note of the scale is being sustained. Against this opaque sound, low brass instruments present the first of many statements of a solemn chordal theme suggesting the massive, imposing mountain in all its stern majesty. Sunrise uses as its melodic material a bright, A-major derivation of the descending minor scale from the Night section.

When the climbers begin their ascent, another principal theme, strongly rhythmic, is heard at the allegro entrance of lower strings, climbs to successively higher levels, and is worked out in elaborate counterpoint. A hunting party is heard in the distance, represented by an off-stage brass ensemble. (Strauss surely got this idea from similar scenes in Wagner's Tannhäuser and Tristan and Isolde.)

As the climbers continue their journey, orchestral colors, textures and melodies depict thickening foliage, bird calls, yodels, waterfalls, the apparition of a water sprite, expansive flowery meadows, herds of cattle (the idea to use cowbells here is possibly derived from Mahler's Sixth Symphony), idyllic calm and beauty of the slopes, the slippery surface of a glacier (chromatic, “sliding” trumpet writing), the climbers transfixed by the awesome view from the summit, haze obscuring the sun, ominous stillness and calm before the storm, distant flashes of lightning, isolated raindrops (oboe), thunder, the fury of a blinding storm enhanced by a terrific explosion from the thunder sheet at the climax, the nostalgic glow of sunset, spiritual tranquility at the end of a fulfilling day, and finally, the gloom of night once more as the noble mass of the mountain recedes into darkness and memory, 24 hours after we first encountered it.

Instrumentation: 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), heckelphone, 3 clarinet (1 doubling bass clarinet), E-flat clarinet, 4 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 8 horns (4 doubling Wagner tubas), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, cowbell, tamtam, triangle, thunder sheet, wind machine, glockenspiel, celesta, 2 harps, organ, offstage brass ensemble (6 horns, 2 trumpets and 2 trombones) and strings

Program note by Robert Markow.

The Minnesota Orchestra first performed Webern's Im Sommerwind on April 11, 1974, at O'Shaughnessy Auditorium at the College of St. Catherine, with Stanislaw Skrowaczewski conducting. That concert came just six months before the Orchestra performed its inaugural concert at its new home, Orchestra Hall. It has performed the work twice at Carnegie Hall, in 1984 and 2000.

The Orchestra's initial performance of Stravinsky's Violin Concerto came on January 20, 1972, also at O'Shaughnessy Auditorium, with George Trautwein as conductor and the world-famous Itzhak Perlman as soloist. Perlman would go on to win a 1980 Grammy Award for recording this concerto with the Boston Symphony.

The Orchestra added Strauss’ An Alpine Symphony to its repertoire on December 29, 1916, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, under the direction of founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer. Sixty-four years passed before the ensemble mounted the work a second time, in November 1980.