Program 1

Thursday, September 24, 2026
7:30pm

Saturday, September 26, 2026
7:30pm

Sunday, September 27, 2026
3:00pm

Yuja Wang Plays Prokofiev

Gustavo Gimeno, conductor
Yuja Wang, piano

Linda Catlin Smith
The Horizon
(World Première/TSO Commission)

Claude Debussy
La mer
I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From Dawn to Noon on the Sea)
II. Jeux des vagues (Play of the Waves)
III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea)

Intermission

Sergei Prokofiev
Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major, Op. 26
I. Andante – Allegro
II. Tema con variazioni
III. Allegro, ma non troppo

Yuja Wang's performances are made possible through the generous support of John and Claudine Bailey.

Linda Catlin Smith (b. 1957)

The Horizon

World Première/TSO Commission
Composed 2026

15 min

FROM THE COMPOSER:

I've always loved the slow movements of orchestral repertoire; they've been a really important part of my listening life. My compositions are often slow and quiet in nature; they explore colour, harmony, and texture, as well as something I might call mood, or atmosphere. Intended to be subtle, my pieces focus on small changes or transformations rather than large, dramatic statements. They do, however, have their own sense of an unfolding narrative, and are not without drama, though it is a drama of a more interior kind.

Looking at the horizon, like listening to music, can draw me into a state of reverie. As I was finishing this work, I started to see the beginning as a distant horizon, the faint line at the far edge of a vista. The "horizon" is not a real place, it's an idea; hovering, mutating, elusive. (Music, too, is elusive, always vanishing....) Sometimes the horizon line has a clear edge, sometimes it's obscured by fog or clouds, sometimes it merges seamlessly with the sky. These images are metaphors that I feel resonate with the piece. Perhaps the idea of "the horizon" can be thought of as a thread of musical thought that weaves through the music, like the long, sustained tones that hover in the background throughout. The inspiration for the work is the orchestra itself, the sounds I'm drawn to as I explore the orchestral terrain. The horizon is what lies ahead, but is never reached, a symbol for the "unattainable." A good place to rest the eyes, and to focus the mind, it opens like a hope, or dream.

The Horizon was commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and is dedicated to Gustavo Gimeno.



COMPOSER BIO:

Linda Catlin Smith grew up in New York and lives in Toronto. She began her composition studies in high school in New York with Allen Shawn, and continued her schooling at SUNY Stony Brook, studying piano with Nurit Tilles and Gilbert Kalish, and then the University of Victoria, under Rudolf Komorous, John Celona, and Jō Kondō, and harpsichord under Erich Schwandt.

Her music has been commissioned and performed by many soloists and ensembles worldwide including the Tectonics festival; Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival; Vancouver, Edmonton, and Victoria Symphonies; Tafelmusik; Tapestry Opera; Bozzini Quartet; Arraymusic; Continuum Contemporary Music; Thin Edge New Music Collective (TENMC); Chamber Choir Ireland; pianists Eve Egoyan, Philip Thomas, Satoko Inoue, and Cheryl Duvall; harpsichordists Colin Tilney and Wesley Shen; cellist Elinor Frey; violinists Milan Pala and Maya Bennardo; and many others. In 2019, her orchestral work *Nuages* (commissioned by the BBC Proms) was premièred by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra at Royal Albert Hall.

Her recordings include *The Plains* with Cheryl Duvall (nominated for a 2026 JUNO), *Dark Flower* with TENMC, *Thought and Desire* with Eve Egoyan, and six albums on the Another Timbre label.

Many of her compositions were supported by commissions through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, and the Laidlaw Foundation. In addition to composing, she has taught composition privately and at Wilfrid Laurier University. She was recently awarded honorary membership to the International Society for Contemporary Music, and she received an Honorary Doctorate in Music from the University of Victoria in 2023.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

La mer

Composed 1903–1905

23 min

In childhood, Debussy had considered becoming a sailor, as his father once had been. Begun in the summer of 1903 and completed in March of 1905, *La mer* was the principal product of a period in which Debussy's creative life was as fertile as his private life was tumultuous. In 1904, he left his wife, Lilly, for Emma Bardac, an amateur singer whom he had met the year before, and when Lilly's despair drove her to attempt suicide, Debussy found himself at the centre of a scandal that, he was convinced, was the source of much of the widespread hostility that greeted *La mer* at its première in Paris on October 15, 1905.

At the time *La mer* was composed, the relationship between painting and music was still a hot topic of conversation among French aesthetes, even though the term "Impressionism" had been applied (not always flatteringly) to music as early as the 1880s. By 1905, it was commonplace to use it in comparing Debussy with contemporary painters like Monet, but it is still particularly apt in the case of *La mer*. Debussy himself spoke in explicitly Impressionist terms of his quest to convey "light and colour" in the work, and Edward Lockspeiser, in his seminal book *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, calls it the first and greatest example of an Impressionist orchestral work.

Labels aside, in *La mer*, Debussy cultivated a radical musical style. He sought musical images that were intentionally blurred, vaporous, diffuse, and dreamy, in order to depict fleeting, remembered impressions of the sea. Melodically, the music is tentative and fragmented: motifs emerge and recede as though shrouded in fog. Harmonically, the music does not drive toward clear cadential goals, but instead seems to "float," fluid but directionless; keys are suggested rather than asserted. In terms of rhythm and texture, the music seems vague, ambiguous, and unarticulated. Like the sea itself, it undulates constantly, yet seems curiously static. It is a perfect union of subject, form, and style.

Debussy's orchestration is crucial to the work's effect, though, remarkably, he achieved his countless novel effects of tone-colour using an orchestra that was small by late Romantic standards, albeit with a few special colours added—English horn, glockenspiel (or celeste), and two voluptuous-sounding harps. Yet for the most part, he draws radical and evocative sonorities from largely conventional forces. The orchestration, as he once put it, is "as stormy and varied as the sea."

La mer has been described as the greatest symphony ever written in France, a country that had no thriving symphonic tradition, and despite Debussy's modest subtitle, "Three Symphonic Sketches", the work has the scale, depth, and drama of a symphony. Despite its movements' descriptive titles, it has no real programmatic narrative. Even the first movement tells no story, once past its lovely evocation of sunrise. The restless second movement, the scherzo of this "symphony," captures the play of waves brilliantly, though, ironically, this is the one movement in which there is any real development in the Classical sense. The finale, "Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea", the most conventional "tone poem" among the three movements, adds a cyclical element to the structure by recalling motifs from the first movement, a stirring reminder that Debussy's early familial experiences of the sea were sometimes dangerous and terrifying, and that his regard for the sea combines passion, wonder, and awe—and maybe just a little fear.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major, Op. 26

Composed 1917–1921

28 min

Sergei Prokofiev possessed a tremendous gift for melodic invention, and had no problem coming up with material—for him, the challenge lay in the selection and arrangement of that material. Such would be the case when it came to the Third Piano Concerto, which was cobbled together from jottings in his numerous sketchbooks, some of them dating from as far back as his student days at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In the summer of 1921, Prokofiev rented a cottage on the Brittany coast where he could work in peace. He wrote:

"As far back as 1911 while working on the First Piano Concerto, I had planned a large-scale virtuoso concerto. I made very little progress with it however, and preserved only a passage of rising parallel triads. This I now inserted at the end of the first movement of the Third Concerto. In 1913, I had composed a theme for variations which I kept for a long time for subsequent use. In 1916–17, I had tried several times to return to the Third Concerto; I wrote a beginning for it and two variations on the theme of the slow movement. Two other themes from an unfinished string quartet went into the finale. Thus, when I began work on the Third Concerto, I already had all the thematic material, with the exception of the subsidiary theme of the first movement and the third theme of the finale."

Despite the intensive labour behind its composition, the Third Piano Concerto, with its high spirits and uninhibited tunefulness, has become one of Prokofiev's most popular—at its première in October 1921, with Prokofiev as the soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, it immediately took a place alongside Tchaikovsky's First and Rachmaninoff's Second as one of the "warhorses" of the genre.

The C-major concerto is the only one of the five set in traditional three-movement form. The first movement's brief "Andante" introduction begins with a Russian-flavoured tune played by one, then two, clarinets. Four energetic themes are presented in the following "Allegro": the first is brilliant, the next powerful and chordal, the third jaunty and humorous, and the fourth a fantastical whirlwind.

A theme with five variations forms the central movement. The gavotte-like melody of the theme is introduced initially by the flute and clarinet, then picked up by the other woodwinds. In the first variation ("Andantino"), the piano, and later the orchestra, elaborates on the theme. In the second, marked "Allegro", a trumpeter plays solo while the pianist weaves filigree with scale passages. Triplets are the mainstay of the third variation, while the atmospheric fourth, with its gentle feel and air of mystery, is reminiscent of a Chopin nocturne, with the piano in the spotlight, and the orchestra as subtle accompanist. The assertive final variation leads into an embellished recapitulation of the theme.

The jogging main theme of the rondo finale is first played by two bassoons in unison. Its companion is a more vigorous, caution-to-the-wind melody presented by the piano and orchestra. A central episode of large proportions and heavenly lengths sets out a new lyrical theme introduced by the clarinet and oboe, followed by another piano motif, an ostinato with repeated notes and an upward fling. A strident, rhythmic coda makes for an exhilarating conclusion.

—Program note by Walter T. Lemiski

For a biography of Gustavo Gimeno, please turn to page 8.



Yuja Wang, piano

Yuja Wang made her TSO début in June 2011.

Pianist Yuja Wang is celebrated for her charismatic artistry, emotional honesty, and captivating stage presence. She has performed with the world's most venerated conductors, musicians, and ensembles, and is renowned not only for her virtuosity but also her spontaneous and lively performances, famously telling *The New York Times*, "I firmly believe every program should have its own life, and be a representation of how I feel at the moment."

Wang was born into a musical family and began studying the piano at the age of 6. She received advanced training in Canada and at the Curtis Institute of Music under Gary Graffman. Her international breakthrough came in 2007, when she replaced Martha Argerich as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Two years later, she signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon and has since established her place among the world's leading artists, with a succession of critically acclaimed performances and albums. Her recordings have garnered multiple awards, including five GRAMMY® nominations and her first GRAMMY® win for Best Classical Instrumental Solo with her 2023 release of *The American Project*. For this she also won an Opus Klassik Award in the Concerto category.

Recent projects include a collaboration with David Hockney at London's Lightroom, play-direct tours with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra to Europe and South America, an international duo recital tour with pianist Víkingur Ólafsson, and a residency with the New York Philharmonic.

In 2025/26, Wang opened the seasons of many major US orchestras, including the San Francisco Symphony and The Philadelphia Orchestra, and Carnegie Hall, where she play-directed Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1. Among her orchestral performances, she took part in a major European tour with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Other orchestral appearances last season included performances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, The Cleveland Orchestra, and the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. Her play-directing continued with tours to Spain and the US with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, and she gave a recital tour throughout Asia. In November 2025, *Playing with Fire: An Immersive Odyssey with Yuja Wang* opened at the Philharmonie de Paris. This groundbreaking, multi-sensory installation took visitors behind the scenes and offered a rare perspective on the emotion and artistry behind Wang's performances.