

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

Gimeno Conducts the Best of Brahms

Gustavo Gimeno, conductor
Víkingur Ólafsson, piano

Amy Brandon
qililliil (June 12)
World Première/TSO NextGen Commission

Andrew James Clark
ROY (June 14)
World Première/TSO NextGen Commission

Sonny-Ray Day Rider
Celestiaga, Daughter of the Cosmos (June 15)
World Première/TSO NextGen Commission

Johannes Brahms
Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15
I. Maestoso
II. Adagio
III. Rondo: Allegro non troppo

Intermission

Johannes Brahms
Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98
I. Allegro non troppo
II. Andante moderato
III. Allegro giocoso
IV. Allegro energico e passionato

Program 1a

Thursday,
June 12, 2025
8:00pm

Saturday,
June 14, 2025
8:00pm

Sunday,
June 15, 2025
3:00pm

For details on
the *Brahms & Beyond*
Relaxed Performance on
June 14, 2025, at 11:00am,
please see page 14.

*Gustavo Gimeno's
appearances are generously
supported in memory
of Hans and Susan
Brenninkmeyer.*

*Víkingur Ólafsson's
appearance is generously
made possible by Blake and
Belinda Goldring.*

*The June 12 performance
is collectively supported
by the TSO's Honorary
Governors' Circle.*

*The June 15 performance
is generously supported by
Bettie Moore.*

*The World Premières of
qililliil, ROY, and Celestiaga,
Daughter of the Cosmos are
generously supported by
Margie and Peter Kelk.*

Amy Brandon (b. 1980)

qilillil

World Première/TSO NextGen Commission
June 12

Composed 2025

5 min

FROM THE COMPOSER: *qilillil* (hill-lill-lill) is a god of the underworld: she creates and inhabits black holes, parts of time and space where dimensions intersect, creating pockets of unreality. While writing this piece, I tried to think carefully about how I might create this impression, and I focused most of the piece on trying to manipulate the physical properties of sound (timbre) in order to express the substance of the piece (a god of black holes).

I'm very interested in the physical nature of music and sound. Often this is expressed through the harmonic series, which is kind of like a mathematical description of what sound is. Sound is a fluid, because it travels through air. It has a physical presence and behaves according to physical rules. Part of these physical rules are the intervals within the harmonic spectra—the strongest and most present being octave, perfect fifth, and major third.

If I had to boil down the language of the piece it all comes from these intervals, in particular the first, third, fifth, and 15th partials of the harmonic series, which forms a major seventh chord. Some of this language also overlaps with, and is drawn from, the symmetric enneatonic scale from Messiaen and Tchernin. This scale has interesting properties, as its harmonic components contain multiple major seventh chords, as well as augmented and bitonal triads (triads that are both major and minor).

These intervals and sonorities are used all over *qilillil*. The opening is made of semitone clusters that add up to a minor third. The background texture of the middle

segment (behind the solo cello line) consists of different perfect fifths being layered against each other, creating augmented sonorities and dissonances, while the melodic material of the ending is built out of different arrangements of major and minor thirds in sequence, as they are broken apart in time. As well, throughout the piece I use a number of timbral elements in the strings that are created by bowing very close to the bridge. In a way, this is an expression of the very high partials of the harmonic series, the parts of the “notes” that we don't often hear.

In this piece I tried to create an unstable world out of stable elements, using the properties of the harmonic series to create splintered timbres, harmonies, and melodies.

COMPOSER BIO: JUNO-nominated composer Amy Brandon's pieces have been described as “gut-wrenching and horrific” (*Critique*), “otherworldly, a clashing of bleakness with beauty” (*Minor 7th*), and “arresting, riveting music, highly original and individual” (Simon Cummings, 5:4). Her installations and acoustic works have been presented at the Gaudeamus Festival (Screen Dive), National Sawdust (New York City), Trinity College Dublin, and the Winnipeg New Music Festival. She has received Canadian and international composition awards including Grand Prize at the 2019 Leo Brouwer Guitar Composition Competition, and was a 2020 JACK Quartet Studio Artist. She teaches composition at Dalhousie University's Fountain School of Performing Arts in Halifax, Nova Scotia.



Andrew James Clark (b. 1994)

ROY

World Première/TSO NextGen Commission
June 14

Composed 2025

5 min

FROM THE COMPOSER: I have always felt that the most exciting use of the radio was not to listen to music, but rather to rapidly switch between different stations producing an uncanny interplay of clashing styles and genres. I have found that hearing so many different musical materials in such quick succession often produces its own musical syntax, and otherworldly rhythmic energy.

It was not always possible to use a radio in this manner however, particularly in most of Canada during the early 20th century. For example, during the Great Depression a 37-year-old Roy Thomson found himself working as a door-to-door radio salesman in North Bay, Ontario, and he was struggling to make sales due to the fact that there were no local radio stations for his potential customers to listen to. To remedy this, Roy Thomson established his own radio station in the area, the first step in what would become Roy Thomson's newspaper and media empire and the legacy of the Thomson family.

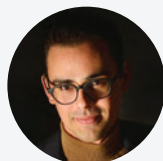
ROY is all at once a celebration of radio technology, Roy Thomson Hall, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In this piece, unexpected jolts of energy carry the music into far-flung and unfamiliar places, and frequent "re-tunings" of the radio lead to the emergence of new themes, sections, and attitudes. The work opens with a dramatic and off-kilter horn theme, which is interrupted by a sudden lament from the cellos and trombones. A new layer of pulsations emerges beneath the surface and a "re-tuning" of the radio begins, launching the ensemble into a new section of conflicting ideas. The chaos culminates when a small chamber group of strings performs an unfamiliar and highly

distorted version of the opening theme, initiating a celebratory return of the opening material leading into a recapitulation. As the music nears its end, thematic material from Brahms's Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2 emerges; however the radio quickly erases the quotation in a sudden cacophony of conflicting channels and signals, followed by a new and even more bombastic finale.

COMPOSER BIO: Andrew James Clark's music has been performed in Canada and abroad. His professional development includes a Composer Fellowship with the Hamilton Philharmonic, a Conducting Apprenticeship with Orchestra Toronto, and participation in the Amadeus Choir's Choral Creation Lab and Scarborough Philharmonic's New Generation Composers Program. His work has been published by Counterpoint Music Library Services and been included in the Alliance for Canadian New Music Project's Contemporary Showcase Syllabus.

Recent awards include second place in the Etobicoke Philharmonic's 2022 Young Composers Competition (for his *Symphonic Dance*) and being named a finalist in the 2020 New York City Contemporary Music Symposium (for the prelude to his *Rhythmic Suite*). His concert series *Classical Context* has been featured on Ludwig Van's Critic's Picks and has showcased a substantial number of early-career professionals from throughout Canada.

Clark holds two music degrees from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music, completed under the supervision of Gary Kulesha. He is an Associate Composer of the Canadian Music Centre.



Sonny-Ray Day Rider (b. 1987)

Celestiaga, Daughter of the Cosmos

World Première/TSO NextGen Commission

June 14 (11:00am) & 15

Composed 2025

5 min

FROM THE COMPOSER:

Celestiaga, Daughter of the Cosmos is a piece that was inspired by my awe and love for the stars and my ancestral Blackfoot stories about the cosmos and our origins as Niitsitapii (the real people).

Celestiaga is the personification of my ancestors and the cosmological stories that have been passed down to me.

May ***Celestiaga*** grant us all an audience.

My Ancestral nostalgic urgency

Secretly sings rituals to me

Pulsars and holy celestial beings drum beneath my love....

—*The Blood Song Winter Count: Closing Ritual (XVII)*—

Sonny-Ray Day Rider

COMPOSER BIO: Sonny-Ray Day Rider (BA, music) is a Blackfoot composer and pianist from the Kainai Blood Tribe. He has a broad musical palette working with many genres.

Day Rider is currently pursuing advanced studies (MMus) in music composition at the University of Lethbridge. He shows great promise in the field, having accumulated a large breadth of significant creative projects as an emerging Blood (Blackfoot) artist in an impressively short time span. He also currently has a seat on the Indigenous Advisory Circle to Library and Archives Canada, and was formerly a faculty member at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.



Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15

Composed 1854–1858

42 min

IN MARCH 1854, Brahms embarked on a sonata in D minor for two pianos, but soon his musical ideas were outgrowing his medium, so he reconceived the work (with help from

colleagues like the violinist Joseph Joachim) as a four-movement symphony. Pianistic ideas kept compromising his symphonic designs, however; in February 1855, he even had a dream in which he played a concerto based on his “hapless symphony.” And so a concerto it became—his very first orchestral work. He completed the revised first movement in

April 1856, but discarded his other symphonic ideas and wrote a new slow movement and finale. He tried out a preliminary version of the concerto in Hanover in March 1858, and gave the public première there on January 22, 1859, under Joachim's baton. The audience was polite but puzzled, and a few days later, in Leipzig, the concerto was hissed.

Perhaps that was to be expected: though the music was outwardly Classical in form, its monumental scale and powerful, elevated rhetoric were unprecedented in a concerto. But then, the two-piano version had been conceived in the immediate aftermath of the attempted suicide of Brahms's mentor Robert Schumann, who was plagued by mental illness, and the concerto version was developed in the wake of Schumann's death. In Brahms's mind, the work was a memorial to the tragic fate of his beloved friend.

The note of tragedy is strongest in the first movement, with its portentous

orchestral introduction, ample proportions, and bravura piano writing (the virtuosity here is more massive than dazzling). Emotionally, the movement is mostly dark, troubled, and at times even desperate. The "Adagio", no less spacious, is a tender, song-like idyll. Brahms called it a "gentle portrait" of Schumann's wife, Clara, to whom he had his own romantic attachment, and below the opening melody in his manuscript he wrote (in Latin), "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" The brilliant, robust "Rondo" has some of the blustery rhetoric of the first movement, though it ends triumphantly. The hint of Hungarian style (typical of Brahms's concerto finales) may reflect the influence of Joachim, who was born in Hungary and composing his own concerto "in the Hungarian Manner" for violin—also in D minor—at precisely the time Brahms was turning his first symphony into his First Concerto.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98

Composed 1884–1885

40 min

BRAHMS COMPLETED HIS FOURTH SYMPHONY in the summer of 1885, after a long gestation bred of insecurity. Though just 51 when he began it, he worried that his creative powers were declining, and feared he could not surpass his popular and acclaimed Third Symphony. He approached the performance and publication of the Fourth with dread, but the première, which he conducted in Meiningen on October 25, 1885, was a triumph, as were subsequent performances.

Though reputedly an "academic" composer, Brahms was a progressive musical thinker, and his ability to unify a composition through the perpetual metamorphosis of

germinal motifs anticipated much modern music of a formalist orientation. The music of the Fourth is highly concentrated and densely developed (often in counterpoint); even some of Brahms's supporters found it too abstract, too cerebral. Yet, it is searching and dramatic too, at once lofty and deeply personal, more austere than sensuous (the thick, heavy scoring seems exactly right). From its elegiac opening theme, the first movement is mostly sombre and melancholy, and occasionally darkly mysterious, though Brahms tames the music's passion by casting it in a rigorous, clearly articulated Classical sonata form.

The slow movement is a leisurely and moving pastorella with an antique flavour, though rent from time to time with clangorous eruptions from the orchestra.

The principal melodies are all deeply expressive and scored in rich, autumnal colours. The third movement is a bright, swift, noisy march with an often militaristic sound (note the piccolo, contrabassoon, and triangle) and a Dionysian energy that is rare in Brahms, though the secondary themes are quiet, gracious, dance-like—and (surely intentionally) a little banal.

The finale is set in one of the strictest and most archaic musical forms: the chaconne—a set of variations based not on a melody but on a repetitive bass line (or “ground bass”). Brahms borrowed his ground bass from Bach’s cantata *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (*For Thee, O Lord, I long*), BWV 150, a work to which Brahms

had been attracted for many years. The movement is an exhaustive catalogue of variation techniques, testimony to Brahms’s extraordinary craftsmanship and imagination, and the 30 variations fall into three large groups, with variations 12 to 16 forming a “slow movement” in the middle. “This movement is seared by shattering tragedy,” wrote the conductor Felix Weingartner, who called the closing pages “a veritable orgy of destruction.” Unlike most minor-key symphonies, the Fourth does not close in the major: Brahms rejects the beloved Romantic archetype of turmoil leading to triumph and, at the end, only intensifies the tone of tragedy with which he had begun.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

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



Víkingur Ólafsson, piano

Víkingur Ólafsson made his TSO début in March 2018.

Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson has captured public and critical imagination to become one of the most sought-after artists of today. His recordings have led to over one billion streams, and he has won numerous awards, including the 2025 GRAMMY® for Best Classical Instrumental Solo for his recording of Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, *BBC Music Magazine* Album of the Year, and *Opus Klassik* Solo Instrument Recording of the Year (twice). Other notable honours include the Rolf Schock Music Prize, *Gramophone*’s Artist of the

Year, *Musical America*’s Instrumentalist of the Year, the Order of the Falcon (Iceland’s order of chivalry), and the Icelandic Export Award, given by the president of Iceland.

In a landmark move, Ólafsson devoted his entire 2023/24 season to a world tour of a single work, J.S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, performing it 90 times to great critical acclaim. The 2024/25 season sees Ólafsson as Artist-in-Residence with Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, as well as Artist-in-Focus at Vienna Musikverein. He tours Europe with The Cleveland Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, performs with the Berliner Philharmoniker at the BBC Proms, and returns to the New York Philharmonic. He joined forces with Yuja Wang for a highly anticipated two-piano recital tour across Europe and North America and, in January 2025, gave the world premiere of John Adams’s *After the Fall*—a piano concerto written especially for him—with the San Francisco Symphony. In spring 2025, Ólafsson performs his new piano recital, an exploration of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109, on multiple dates across the US and Europe.