

**TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

# The Firebird

**Eva Ollikainen**, conductor  
**Mao Fujita**, piano

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**Johannes Brahms**  
Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15

I. Maestoso

II. Adagio

III. Rondo: Allegro non troppo

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## Intermission

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**Arvo Pärt**  
Symphony No. 1, Op. 9 "Polyphonic"

I. Canons

II. Prelude and Fugue

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**Igor Stravinsky**  
Suite from *The Firebird*  
(1919 revision)

I. Introduction and Dance of the Firebird

II. Dance of the Princesses

III. Infernal Dance of King Kastchei

IV. Berceuse

V. Finale

*Program 2*

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Thursday,  
January 15, 2026  
7:30pm

Saturday,  
January 17, 2026  
7:30pm

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The TSO Chamber Soloists

Saturday, January 17, 2026  
6:15pm

Kelly Zimba Lukić, flute  
Heidi Elise Bearcroft, harp  
Clare Semes, violin  
Luri Lee, violin  
Ivan Ivanovich, viola  
Emmanuelle Beaulieu Bergeron,  
cello  
Jeffrey Beecher, double bass

Arvo Pärt

*Spiegel im Spiegel*  
(*Mirror(s) in the Mirror*)

Einojuhani Rautavaara  
Ballad for Harp and Strings

*The TSO Chamber Soloists  
performance is generously  
supported by the Estate of  
Joan Lillian Harris.*

*The January 17 performance  
is generously made possible  
by Bettie Moore.*

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

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

Composed 1854–1858

42 min

**CONSIDERABLE BIRTH PANGS** accompanied the creation of Johannes Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1. The composer originally sketched the work in 1854 as a sonata for two pianos, writing it in the same key as Beethoven's monumental Ninth Symphony, which he first heard that same year in Cologne. But ever wary of making a musical misstep, and of the awesome precedent set by Beethoven, Brahms reworked his own piece through a number of transformations. The slow movement of the original sonata became the funeral march of his *German Requiem*. The third movement reappeared as the finale of his Symphony No. 1. And his First Piano Concerto premièred—with a polite but lukewarm reception—in Hannover, on January 22, 1859, under the direction of his close friend Joseph Joachim.

The second performance, five days later, was held in Leipzig, a major musical centre. Incredible as it seems today, the concert was a fiasco, one of the most famous scandals of 19th-century music. Unfortunately for Brahms, the audiences and critics of the day had come to expect concertos that were no more than entertaining musical fluff. Eduard Bernsdorf, a critic of the *Signale*, called Brahms's concerto "a composition dragged to its grave. This work cannot give pleasure.... It has nothing to offer but hopeless desolation and aridity."

Brahms himself declared the concerto "a brilliant and decisive failure." The young composer, though philosophical about the matter, would not write another major orchestral work for the next 14 years.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 is a very personal work. Brahms, a very fine pianist,

wrote it for his own abundant technical skills (in fact, he was the soloist for the première). Although entitled a piano concerto, the piece may more aptly be called a concerto for piano and orchestra, since Brahms suppressed mere prodigious display to strive for equality of the two partners.

The first movement begins with an ominous drumroll. The full orchestra outlines a full-blown exposition with a wealth of thematic material. The principal theme is angry in character; perhaps the tragic fate of Robert Schumann was preying on Brahms's mind. (Schumann had attempted suicide in 1854 by throwing himself into the icy Rhine. He died of dementia two years later.) The soloist silently waits a considerable time before entering with a lyrical, though resigned, song theme.

The second movement, marked "Adagio", held deep meaning for Brahms. It is a sublime, hymn-like musical "portrait" of Clara Schumann, wife of his departed friend and musical equal. The intense second theme is a rich melody featuring clarinets and oboes in a minor mode.

The "Rondo" finale is vigorous yet mirthful, a movement that moves one's thoughts far from the intimate delicacy of the "Adagio" and the tragedy of the "Maestoso" first movement. The Hungarian spirit of the finale reminds one of Brahms's youthful forays into Romani and popular café music. Episodic sections are presented in a gentler manner, providing contrast to the high spirits of the opening theme. This movement contains a short cadenza—the only one in the concerto—marked "quasi Fantasia". A luscious Romantic subject emerges before the work is rounded off by a tempestuous final flurry.

—Program note by Walter Lemiski

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

## Symphony No. 1, Op. 9 “Polyphonic”

Composed 1963

16 min

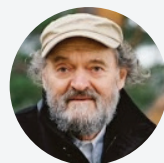
**ARVO PÄRT'S SYMPHONY NO. 1** was completed in 1963 after he graduated from the Tallinn Conservatory and is dedicated to Heino Eller, Pärt's composition professor. The symphony continues the direction of *Nekrolog* (1960), Pärt's first orchestral composition and the very first piece in Estonian music to use the dodecaphonic (12-tone) technique. The symphony also has common traits with the first sound mass work in Estonian music, *Perpetuum mobile*, which Pärt composed in the same year.

The title of the symphony, “Polyphonic”, as well as the titles of the two movements—“Canons” and “Prelude and Fugue”—refer to contrapuntal texture and the forms of classical polyphony. The constructive basis of the symphony is the dodecaphonic note row, which is strictly adhered to. Pärt has used the same note row in mirror form, also in *Perpetuum mobile*, but starting it a tritone higher. In the culminating passages of the symphony, he has used the means of a sound mass (e.g., clusters). The canons in the first movement run in waves, rising highest toward the end. A beautiful violin solo in the beginning of the prelude seems to play the role of a slow middle movement. The main culmination of the entire composition is formed in the fugue by a single energized dynamic ascent.

Symphony No. 1 premiered on February 7, 1964, performed by the Estonian Radio Symphony Orchestra (currently Estonian National Symphony Orchestra), conducted by Neeme Järvi.

—Program note by the Arvo Pärt Centre

**COMPOSER BIO:** Arvo Pärt is one of those composers in the world whose creative output has significantly changed the way we understand the nature of music. In 1976, he created a unique musical language called “tintinnabuli” (the impression of ringing bells) that has reached a vast audience of various listeners and defined his work right up to today. Pärt has now been composing in his tintinnabuli-style for over 40 years, and it has proven to be a rich and inexhaustible creative source. During the last decade, Pärt has rearranged approximately 30 of his earlier works and composed around ten new pieces. He has lived permanently in Estonia since 2010. The same year, on the initiative of Arvo and Nora Pärt, the Arvo Pärt Centre (APC) was established in Laulasmaa. In collaboration with Pärt and his family, the APC aims to create and maintain the personal archive of the composer.



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*Music is my friend. Ever-understanding, compassionate, forgiving. It's a comforter; the handkerchief for drying my tears of sadness, the source of my tears of joy, my liberation and flight. But also a painful thorn in my flesh and my soul; that which makes me sober, and teaches me humility.*

—ARVO PÄRT

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

## Suite from *The Firebird* (1919 revision)

Composed 1909–1910; revised 1919

19 min

**IGOR STRAVINSKY COMPOSED HIS BALLET** *The Firebird* between 1909 and 1910. This suite—the second of three that he drew from the full score—was premièred in Geneva, Switzerland, on April 12, 1919, with Ernest Ansermet conducting.

Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes took Parisian audiences by storm with its début season in 1909. For the next year's productions, Diaghilev envisioned a lavishly mounted new ballet, its plot adapted from Russian fairy tales. He entrusted the scenario and choreography to esteemed dance master Michel Fokine. When his first choice as composer, his former teacher Anatoly Lyadov, was judged too slow to complete the score on time, Diaghilev cast about for a replacement. Impressed with Stravinsky's original compositions *Scherzo fantastique* and *Fireworks*, and with his orchestration of two numbers in Diaghilev's 1909 production of the ballet *Les Sylphides*, the impresario offered the virtually unknown, 27-year-old composer a tentative commission for *The Firebird*.

"I had already begun to think about *The Firebird* when I returned to St. Petersburg from Ustilug in the autumn of 1909," Stravinsky wrote, "although I was not yet certain of the commission (which in fact did not come until December, more than a month after I had begun to compose; I remember the day Diaghilev telephoned me to say to go ahead, and my telling him I already had)."

Stravinsky worked on the score at a country home owned by the Rimsky-Korsakov family, then completed it in St. Petersburg in March. "I was flattered, of

course, at the promise of a performance of my music in Paris," he wrote, "and my excitement at arriving in that city, towards the end of May, could hardly have been greater." The première on June 25, 1910, achieved a glittering triumph, launching him into the front rank of contemporary composers.

With the help of a magic firebird, the ballet's hero, Prince Ivan, rescues a group of spellbound princesses from the clutches of an evil magician, Kastchei. The music quotes two Russian folk songs. One is the lyrical tune for the princesses, the other the majestic hymn that closes the score. The whirling, nightmarish "Infernal Dance" performed by Kastchei and his monstrous subjects is a tour de force of orchestral brilliance.

—Program note by Don Anderson



↑  
Tamara Karsavina as the Firebird and Michel Fokine as Prince Ivan in the 1910 Ballets Russes production of Stravinsky's *The Firebird*.



## Eva Ollikainen, conductor

These performances mark Eva Ollikainen's TSO début.

With her elegant, expressive body language, natural stage presence, and infectious musicality, Eva Ollikainen is one of the leading conductors of our time. Since 2020, she has been Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. Previously, she was Chief Conductor of the Nordic Chamber Orchestra.

The 2025/26 season sees Ollikainen début with the Münchner Philharmoniker, WDR Sinfonieorchester, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Oslo Philharmonic, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and NHK Symphony Orchestra at the NHK Music Festival, among others. She also returns to the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Belgian National Orchestra, and SWR Sinfonieorchester. In March, she leads the Iceland Symphony Orchestra on their European tour.

Highlights from recent seasons include débuts and appearances with the Orchestre National de France, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Wiener Symphoniker, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and BBC Philharmonic. In the opera house, Ollikainen has conducted at the Staatsoper Berlin, Semperoper Dresden, Royal Danish Opera, Stockholm's Kungliga Operan, Finnish National Opera, and Göteborg Opera.

Curious about contemporary music, Ollikainen has performed a wide range of repertoire with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and is well known for championing the music of Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, with whom Ollikainen has a close artistic partnership. In 2023, Ollikainen and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra released Thorvaldsdóttir's *ARCHORA / AIÓN* on Sono Luminus to critical acclaim; the album was selected as part of *The New York Times*' "Best Classical Music Albums of 2023" and *The Boston Globe*'s "10 Best Classical Albums of the Year". This release follows the world première of *ARCHORA*, which was given by Ollikainen at her BBC Proms début in 2022 with the BBC Philharmonic; the première was selected as one of *The Guardian*'s "Classical Highlights of 2022".

A former student of Leif Segerstam and Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy, Ollikainen won the Jorma Panula Conducting Competition at the age of 21. Today, the support of young musicians is close to her heart. She teaches regularly at the Sibelius Academy and leads master classes at the Fiskars Summer Festival, Nordisk Dirigentforum, and institutions such as the Peabody Institute and the Royal Danish Academy of Music. She founded the Iceland Symphony's Conducting Academy in 2021.

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*Throughout, Ollikainen effectively built up musical sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into chapters. She let the grand story of the symphony...unfold from its seemingly disconnected elements.* —THE ARTS DESK



## **Mao Fujita, piano**

These performances mark Mao Fujita's TSO debut.

With an innate musical sensitivity and naturalness to his artistry, 26-year-old pianist Mao Fujita has already impressed many leading musicians as one of those special talents that come along only rarely, with *The New York Times* writing, "As soon as his fingers touched the keys, waves of airy filigree, beautifully shaped and accomplished, emerged in almost continuous streams," on the occasion of his US debut at Carnegie Hall in January 2023.

Born in Tokyo, Fujita was still studying at the Tokyo College of Music in 2017 when he took First Prize at the prestigious Concours International de Piano Clara Haskil in Switzerland, along with the Audience Prize, Modern Times Prize, and the Coup de Coeur Prize, which first brought him to the attention of the international music community. He was also the Silver Medalist at the 2019 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow.

In the 2025/26 season, Fujita continues his run of impressive appearances at major festivals and venues across Europe, North America, and Asia, including the Salzburg Festival, Vienna, Paris, Rome, Luxembourg, Hamburg, Dortmund, Gstaad, Warsaw, Tenerife, Lisbon, Copenhagen, Lyon, and Aix-en-Provence, as well as a recital tour across North America with performances in New York, Cleveland, Boston, Minnesota, San Francisco, Vancouver, and San Diego. Season highlights also include tours in Asia and Europe with the Filarmonica della Scala, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In addition, he debuts with the Boston, Toronto, and KBS Symphony Orchestras, the Oslo Philharmonic, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, and the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, and returns to the Czech Philharmonic, Gewandhausorchester, Wiener Symphoniker, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse, and Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI.

Fujita has worked with many of the leading conductors of our time, including Semyon Bychkov, Riccardo Chailly, Elim Chan, Myung-Whun Chung, Christoph Eschenbach, Manfred Honeck, Jakub Hrůša, Andris Nelsons, Lahav Shani, and Kazuki Yamada. Previous orchestral debuts include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Lucerne Festival Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Münchner Philharmoniker, hr-Sinfonieorchester, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, and others. Fujita is also a sought-after chamber music partner and has worked with Renaud Capuçon, Leonidas Kavakos, Emanuel Ax, Kirill Gerstein, Antoine Tamestit, Kian Soltani, and the Hagen Quartett, among others.

Fujita is an exclusive Sony Classical International artist. In October 2022, his eagerly anticipated debut album on the Sony Classical label, a studio recording of Mozart's complete piano sonatas, was released to unanimous acclaim for its transparent sound worlds and vividly detailed interpretation. He has performed the full sonata cycle at the Verbier Festival and the Wigmore Hall, and across Japan's major concert halls. His second album on the label, a wide-ranging and ambitious set entitled *72 Preludes* that champions the 24 preludes of Chopin, Scriabin, and Yashiro, was released in the autumn of 2024.

Starting piano lessons at the age of 3, Fujita won his first international prize in 2010 at the World Classic in Taiwan, and became a laureate of numerous national and international competitions including the Rosario Marciano International Piano Competition in Vienna (2013), the Zhuhai International Mozart Competition for Young Musicians (2015), and the Gina Bachauer International Young Artists Piano Competition (2016).