

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

Jonathan Crow Plays Mendelssohn

Peter Oundjian, conductor

Jonathan Crow, violin

Joan Tower

Suite from Concerto for Orchestra

(Canadian Première)

Felix Mendelssohn

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

I. Allegro molto appassionato –

II. Andante –

III. Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace

Intermission

Edward Elgar

**Variations on an Original Theme “Enigma”,
Op. 36**

Theme: Andante “Enigma”

Variation I. L'istesso tempo “C.A.E.”

Variation II. Allegro “H.D.S.-P.”

Variation III. Allegretto “R.B.T.”

Variation IV. Allegro di molto “W.M.B.”

Variation V. Moderato “R.P.A.”

Variation VI. Andantino “Ysobel”

Variation VII. Presto “Troyte”

Variation VIII. Allegretto “W.N.”

Variation IX. Adagio “Nimrod”

Variation X. Intermezzo: Allegretto “Dorabella”

Variation XI. Allegro di molto “G.R.S.”

Variation XII. Andante “B.G.N.”

Variation XIII. Romanza: Moderato “* * *”

Variation XIV. Finale: Allegro “E.D.U.”

Program 3

Thursday,
October 2, 2025

7:30pm

Friday,
October 3, 2025

7:30pm

Saturday,
October 4, 2025

7:30pm

*The performances of
Jonathan Crow Plays
Mendelssohn are collectively
supported by our generous
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Joan Tower (b. 1938)

Suite from Concerto for Orchestra

Canadian Première

Composed 2024

12 min

The core of the original 30-minute Concerto for Orchestra features three momentous waves, each of which builds gradually and, with extraordinary rhythmic drive, leads to a breathtaking climax. Between these formidable passages are several wonderful episodes that feature virtually every orchestral instrument in its soloistic or chamber element.

The idea for a condensed version came to me after conducting the original piece many times; the excellent orchestral writing could lend itself to an innovative sampling of this masterpiece, shrinking the duration to around 12 minutes and rendering it more flexible to program.

The concept of a suite is by no means new; think Stravinsky's reduction of *The Firebird* or Prokofiev's distillation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Thinking carefully about the eruptive power of the grander orchestral sequences, I went to work on a version that can be played as a concert opener. This is not to suggest that the full Concerto for Orchestra is obsolete; it is one of the most dramatic, original, and beautiful works of the last 50 years. I do believe, however, that this newly shaped version is extremely compelling and stimulating, and I am honoured that such a great composer has allowed me to create this new reduction.

—Program note by Peter Oundjian

COMPOSER BIO: Joan Tower is widely regarded as one of the most important American composers living today. During a career spanning more

than 60 years, she has made lasting contributions to musical life in the US as a composer, performer, conductor, and educator. Her works have been commissioned by major ensembles, soloists, and orchestras, including the Emerson, Tokyo, and Muir String Quartets; soloists Evelyn Glennie, Carol Wincenc, David Shifrin, Paul Neubauer, and John Browning; and the orchestras of Chicago, New York, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Nashville, Albany, and Washington, DC, among others.

From 1969 to 1984, she was pianist and founding member of the Naumburg Award-winning Da Capo Chamber Players, which commissioned and premièred many of her most popular works. Her first orchestral work, *Sequoia*, quickly entered the repertory. Tower's tremendously popular six *Fanfares for the Uncommon Woman* have been played by over 600 different ensembles. She is Asher B. Edelman Professor in the Arts at Bard College, where she has taught since 1972.

Her composer residencies with orchestras and festivals include a decade with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Composer of the Year for their 2010/11 season, and the St. Louis Symphony, Deer Valley Music Festival, and Yale/Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. She was in residence as the Albany Symphony's Mentor Composer partner in the 2013/14 season. She has received honorary doctorates from Smith College, New England Conservatory, and Illinois State University.



Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

Composed 1838–1844

27 min

MENDELSSOHN WROTE TWO VIOLIN CONCERTOS.

One was his very first concerto, a Mozartian work for violin and strings composed when he was 13. The other, this one, was his very last orchestral work, completed in the summer of 1844, when he was on holiday near Frankfurt. The première, on March 13, 1845, in Leipzig, featured the violinist Ferdinand David, to whom the work was dedicated.

Though often regarded as a “conservative” Romantic, Mendelssohn wrote innovative concertos that influenced many later composers. In his two piano concertos from the 1830s, he dispensed with the Classical separation of solo and orchestra; instead, he had the two forces co-operate from the start in presenting and developing ideas. And he asked that all three movements be played without breaks, sometimes with connecting transitions. By the mid-1840s, this model of concerto form was second nature for Mendelssohn, and, in the Violin Concerto, he handled it with new ease and imagination. He even incorporated a cyclical element: the searching “Allegretto non troppo” that introduces the finale unmistakably recalls the mood of the first movement, and even its first theme.

The first movement’s soaring, passionate main theme follows a mere three beats of quiet, throbbing vamp in the orchestra, and is then developed at length. The poignant second theme, in a major key, is strikingly scored: a clarinet (above the flutes) takes the melody while the violin provides the bass, a sustained tone on its lowest open string, G. The violin then takes the theme and spins it out with increasing ardour.

The concise development section, both turbulent and mournful, leads directly into the solo cadenza, which Mendelssohn, unconventionally, puts just *before* the recapitulation. The recapitulation is shortened but intensified, the coda stormy.

The slow movement is simple in form but profoundly expressive. The principal theme is noble and (in the best sense) sentimental, with the directness of popular song. The violin develops this theme, through the whole range of the instrument, in several minutes of unbroken melody. The middle of the movement, with its own new theme, is darker, more agitated and dissonant, and even more intensely expressive (note the impassioned double-stopping in the violin part). The opening theme returns as a balm, more briefly now but in a richer setting, with a gentle wisp of a coda.

The scherzo-like finale, in E major, is pure fairy music—the Mendelssohn of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The form is perfectly judged, the scoring enchanting, and the two fetching main themes are ingeniously developed in an atmosphere of unrelenting high spirits. The first theme scampers and flutters, and its scoring is shiny and delicate, with the violin joined by bright flutes and clarinets, and anchored by *pizzicato* strings. The second theme is all tongue-in-cheek pomp, like a fairy’s wedding march. When the first theme is reprised in the development section and recapitulation, it sports a dignified new counterpoint (like his fellow prodigy Mozart, Mendelssohn had a facility for this sort of thing), and in the bustling coda, the music, though it never stops dancing, attains a real nobility. Is there another movement anywhere in the repertory that is so familiar, and yet still sounds so fresh, clever, and spontaneous?

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

Variations on an Original Theme “Enigma”, Op. 36

Composed 1898–1899

29 min

ON OCTOBER 21, 1898, Elgar relaxed after dinner by improvising at the piano. “Edward, that’s a good tune,” said his wife of one particular idea. “Tune? What tune?” the composer replied (for the “tune” sounded less like a lyrical melody than an accompaniment to one). But Alice was right, and as Elgar developed the tune, his thoughts turned to musical memories and to his friends. His sketching soon coalesced around a “quaint idea” for an ingenious and unprecedented orchestral work: a set of variations depicting persons within the composer’s circle—musical portraits, drawn from life. In the score he even labelled each variation with initials to identify the subject being portrayed, and over the years he explained his pictorial intentions in considerable detail.

The work was a resounding success at its première in London on June 9, 1899. It is Elgar’s most celebrated work, and for all its tone-painting and inside jokes, it withstands comparison with the best “abstract” sets of variations in the repertory; the work, Elgar recalled, was “commenced in a spirit of humour and continued in deep seriousness.” The form is fresh and inspired, the theme developed with fertile imagination in 14 highly individual variations, intelligently organized and scored with great originality. Elgar drew on the musical experiences of his circle. The gorgeous cello writing in Variation XII, for instance, depicts a “serious and devoted friend” who was an amateur cellist. And in the dignified “Nimrod”, Elgar recalls a long summer evening spent talking about Beethoven’s slow movements with one of his closest friends; he alludes, in the opening bars, to the popular “Adagio cantabile” of the “Pathétique” Sonata. Some of the variations

are good-natured parodies; Variation VI, for instance, with its leaping, wide-ranging melody in the violas, depicts an amateur violist who had difficulty crossing strings, and in Variation VII, Elgar noted the “uncouth rhythm of the drums and lower strings,” and satirizes a brusque and outspoken architect who made “maladroit essays to play the pianoforte.”

Elgar’s portraits can be remarkably specific—in Variation IV, he depicts a “country squire” hustling out of a room with an inadvertent slam of the door—and also remarkably personal; Variation V depicts a friend whose conversation was “continually broken up by whimsical and witty remarks,” and Elgar mimics his friend’s characteristic laugh (“Ha-ha-ha, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha”) with staccato woodwinds and horns. Variation X depicts the “dance-like lightness” of a young girl, who also possessed a youthful stammer (she was charmed, not offended, by the result, incidentally). Some of the variations do not depict the person identified by the initials. The elegant Variation VIII, for instance, depicts an 18th-century house owned by two sisters of Elgar’s acquaintance. Even when he’s poking fun, Elgar’s love for his friends is always apparent.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Behind the nicknames and acronyms:

C.A.E.	Caroline Alice Elgar, Elgar’s wife
H.D.S.-P.	Hew David Steuart-Powell
R.B.T.	Richard Baxter Townshend
W.M.B.	William Meath Baker
R.P.A.	Richard Penrose Arnold
Ysobel	Isabel Fitton
Troyte	Arthur Troyte Griffith
W.N.	Winifred Norbury
Nimrod	August Johannes Jaeger
Dorabella	Dora Penny
G.R.S.	George Robertson Sinclair
B.G.N.	Basil George Nevinson
***	likely Lady Mary Lygon
E.D.U.	“Edoo”, Caroline Elgar’s nickname for Elgar himself



Now Conductor Emeritus, Peter Oundjian made his TSO début as a guest conductor on October 24, 1998.

His début as Music Director Designate was on May 28, 2003, in a Mozart-rich program (including Itzhak Perlman playing the Violin Concerto No. 3, the overture to *Don Giovanni*, and Symphony No. 35 “Haffner”).

His first concert as Music Director was on September 22 of the same year, opening the new season with Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7 and Rachmaninoff’s *Symphonic Dances*.

Peter Oundjian, conductor

Peter Oundjian is a dynamic presence in the conducting world with an international career leading pre-eminent orchestras in many of the world’s major musical centres, from New York and Seattle to Amsterdam and Berlin.

In his début season as Music Director of the Colorado Symphony, where he served previously as Principal Conductor, Oundjian conducts six programs including a one-night-only performance featuring Lang Lang, Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 “Resurrection”, and a world première by Christopher Theofanidis. He also brings the orchestra to Carnegie Hall for the New York première of John Adams’s *Frenzy*. He is also Music Director of the Colorado Music Festival, where he has continued to program and conduct concerts that delight audiences with beloved masterpieces alongside music written by living composers.

Elsewhere in 2025/26, Oundjian leads the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Sarasota Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (where he is Conductor Emeritus), and Kansas City Symphony, and makes international visits to the KBS Symphony Orchestra (Seoul, South Korea) and the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra (Yerevan, Armenia).

Over the course of his 14-year tenure as Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, which concluded in 2018, he reinvigorated the orchestra with acclaimed innovative programming, artistic collaborations, extensive audience growth, national and international tours, and several outstanding recordings, including *Vaughan Williams—Orchestral Works*, which garnered a GRAMMY® nomination and a JUNO Award. Under his leadership, the orchestra underwent a transformation that significantly strengthened its presence in the world. He currently serves as TSO Conductor Emeritus.

From 2012 to 2018, Oundjian served as Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, which he led on several international tours, including North America, China, and a European festival tour with performances at the Bregenz Festival, the Dresden Music Festival as well as in Innsbruck, Bergamo, Ljubljana, and other cities. His final appearance with the orchestra as their Music Director was at the 2018 BBC Proms, where he conducted Britten’s epic *War Requiem*.

Oundjian was Principal Guest Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 2005 to 2008, and Artistic Director of the Caramoor International Music Festival in New York from 1997 to 2007. He was also the Music Director of the Amsterdam Sinfonietta from 1998 to 2002.

Oundjian has been a visiting professor at the Yale School of Music since 1981, and has received honorary doctorates from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and The Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto.



Jonathan Crow, violin

Jonathan Crow made his TSO soloist début in September 2011.

Jonathan Crow has been Concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra since 2011. A native of Prince George, BC, Crow earned his Bachelor of Music degree in honours performance from McGill University in 1998, at which time he joined the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal (OSM) as Associate Principal Second Violin. Between 2002 and 2006, Crow was the Concertmaster of the OSM; during this time, he was the youngest concertmaster of any major North American orchestra.

Crow continues to perform as a guest concertmaster with orchestras around the world, including the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NAC Orchestra), Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Sinfonia de Lanaudière, and Pernambuco Festival Orchestra (Brazil). Crow has also performed as a soloist with most major Canadian orchestras, including the Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver Symphony Orchestras; the National Arts Centre and Calgary Philharmonic Orchestras; the Victoria, Nova Scotia, and Kingston Symphonies; and Orchestra London, under the baton of such conductors as Charles Dutoit, Sir Yehudi Menuhin, Sir Andrew Davis, Peter Oundjian, Kent Nagano, Mario Bernardi, João Carlos Martins, and Gustavo Gimeno.

Crow joined the Schulich School of Music at McGill University as an Assistant Professor of Violin and was appointed Associate Professor of Violin in 2010. His current and former students have received prizes at competitions around the world, including the Yehudi Menuhin International Competition for Young Violinists, the OSM Competition, the Shean Strings Competition, CBC Radio's NEXT! competition, the Eckhardt-Gramatté National Competition, the Canadian Music Competition, and the Stulberg International String Competition. They also work regularly with orchestras such as the NAC Orchestra, TSO, OSM, Camerata Salzburg, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra, Vienna Kammerphilharmonie, and Vienna Symphony. Crow is currently Associate Professor of Violin at the University of Toronto.

An avid chamber musician, he has performed at chamber music festivals throughout North America, South America, and Europe, including the Banff, Ravinia, Orford, Domaine Forget, Seattle, Montreal, Ottawa, Incontri in Terra di Sienna, Alpenglow, Pernambuco (Brazil), Giverny (France), and Strings in the Mountains Festivals, and Festival Vancouver. He is a founding member of the JUNO Award-winning New Orford String Quartet, a project-based ensemble dedicated to the promotion of standard and Canadian string quartet repertoire throughout North America. As an advocate of contemporary music, he has premiered works by Canadian composers Michael Conway Baker, Eldon Rathburn, Barrie Cabena, Gary Kulesha, Tim Brady, François Dompierre, Vivian Fung, Ana Sokolovic, Marjan Mozetich, Christos Hatzis, Ernest MacMillan, and Healey Willan. He also includes in his repertoire major concerti by such modern composers as Ligeti, Schnittke, Bernstein, Brian Cherney, Rodney Sharman, and Cameron Wilson.

Crow has recorded for the ATMA, Bridge, CBC, Oxingale, Skylark, and XXI-21 labels, and is heard frequently on Radio-Canada's Chaîne culturelle, CBC Music, and National Public Radio, along with Radio France, Deutsche Welle, Hessischer Rundfunk, and RAI in Europe.