

**TORONTO SYMPHONY YOUTH ORCHESTRA**

Nicholas Sharma, RBC Resident Conductor &  
TSYO Conductor

# Death & Transfiguration

**Nicholas Sharma**, conductor

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**Jean Coulthard**  
*Endymion*

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**Maurice Ravel**  
*Le tombeau de Couperin (The Tomb of  
Couperin)*

I. Prélude: Vif

II. Forlane: Allegretto

III. Menuet: Allegro moderato

IV. Rigaudon: Assez vif

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## Intermission

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**Richard Strauss**  
*Tod und Verklärung (Death and  
Transfiguration)*, Op. 24

*Program 4*

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**Saturday,**  
**February 21, 2026**  
3:00pm

George Weston Recital Hall

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*The TSO's Education and  
Community Engagement  
programs are generously  
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*RBC Resident Conductor  
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Jean Coulthard (1908–2000)

## **Endymion**

Composed 1964

14 min

**WHILE JEAN COULTHARD STILL CAN'T EXACTLY BE CALLED A HOUSEHOLD NAME** even in her native Canada, the Vancouver composer's profile has steadily risen in the quarter-century since her death at age 92. In 2016, for example, BBC Radio 3 made her its first-ever Canadian composer of the week, featuring her music in five hour-long programs. Her earliest music training came from her mother, a singer and music teacher, and her later studies included a stint in 1928–1929 at the Royal College of Music in London with Ralph Vaughan Williams as one of her principal instructors. Besides writing 350 works in virtually every form, including four symphonies, two concertos, and a full-length opera, Coulthard was an influential pedagogue, teaching music theory and composition at the University of British Columbia from 1947 through 1973.

Never part of the 20th-century avant-garde, Coulthard wrote unabashedly tonal music with traditional elements of neo-Romanticism and Impressionism. "When I write music, I am releasing my inner self," she once said. "I'd hate to waste a lifetime

obsessed with fashionable styles of music-writing of the moment." In 1964, she composed *Endymion*, a symphonic poem inspired by the Greek mythological figure of the same name. There are multiple versions of the story, but the composer summed up her take on the second page of the score: "Selene, Goddess of the Moon, became enamoured of Endymion, a beautiful youth of Elis. Descending from Olympus in her chariot, she kept him asleep forever, fearful that he might escape from her embraces if he awakened." The tale obviously captivated Coulthard, because she also wrote a song titled "Before the Statue of Endymion" as part of her *Three Ancient Memories of Greece* (1983).

The one-movement piece, which runs about 14 minutes, is an intoxicating, atmospheric work that can very much be described as neo-Romantic, with its cascading harp runs, floating flutes, enveloping strings, and celesta accents. Although there are moments of heightened intensity and emphatic brass, it opens with a section descriptively marked "Lento Misterioso (Enchanted Sleep)" and ends similarly, with a pervasive feeling of transporting beauty and placidity throughout.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

## **Le tombeau de Couperin (The Tomb of Couperin)**

Composed 1914–1917; orchestrated 1919

18 min

**THIS DELECTABLE SUITE** is Ravel's most direct homage to his beloved Baroque era. The very name reflects Baroque practice: numerous 18th-century composers created

such tombeaux or memorial tributes to fellow artists. In the title, Ravel chose to honour the celebrated composer and virtuoso harpsichordist François Couperin (1668–1733). He stated, however, that he conceived the suite as more of a salute to the entire period than to any specific composer.

While he was producing the initial sketches, the prospect of continent-wide war was looming closely. When the conflict finally broke out, he put the music aside to focus on serving his country. Too old, too short, and medically unfit for active duty, he found a place driving truckloads of soldiers to the front. His health, mental as well as physical, suffered grievously during the war years. In June 1917, following an attack of dysentery and the death of his beloved mother, he received a provisional medical discharge.

Suffering from depression and insomnia, he accepted an invitation from a friend to rest and recuperate at her country estate. There he completed *Le tombeau de Couperin*, his final work for piano solo. Perhaps the retreat to a calmer, saner world that it represents served as a tonic for his battered mind and body. The suite contains a further, contemporary element of tribute: each movement bears a dedication to a friend who died in combat.

When he transcribed the music for orchestra, he deleted two sections, “Fugue” and “Toccata”, and rearranged the sequence

of the remaining movements. The “Prélude” (dedicated to Lt. Jacques Charlot) offers a swift, sparkling introduction. The “Forlane” (dedicated to Lt. Gabriel Deluc) is the oldest dance form in the suite. This lilting step, dating back to the Italian Renaissance, is said to have been a favourite of Venetian gondoliers. This example is a deft modernist reinterpretation, wistful and bittersweet.

These emotions intensify in the “Menuet” (dedicated to Jean Dreyfus, son of the friend at whose home Ravel completed the suite). In the central section of this movement, one of the most exquisitely melancholy pages in his entire output, he momentarily opens a crack in the curtain behind which he carefully concealed his emotions, and permits a shaft of poignant inner light to shine forth. The rambunctious concluding “Rigaudon” (dedicated to Pierre and Pascal Gaudin) derives from a rustic dance originating in the French region of Provence. A pastoral middle section, complete with drone bass, provides gentle contrast to the high-spirited outer panels.

—Program note by Don Anderson

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Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

## *Tod und Verklärung* (*Death and Transfiguration*), Op. 24

Composed 1888–1889

24 min

**SHORTLY AFTER STRAUSS COMPLETED DON JUAN**, his second tone poem and the first to win success, he set to work on a third such piece, *Death and Transfiguration*. He conducted the première in Eisenach, Germany, on June 21, 1890.

Five years later, he revealed his inspiration for this initially terrifying yet ultimately uplifting piece in a letter to a friend

(the four sections of the piece have been added to Strauss's description): “The idea came to me to write a tone poem describing the last hours of a man who has striven for the highest ideals, presumably an artist.

**[I. Largo]** The sick man lies in bed breathing heavily and irregularly in his sleep. Friendly dreams bring a smile to the face of the sufferer; his sleep grows lighter; he awakens.

**[II. Allegro]** Fearful pains begin once more to torture him, fever shakes his body. **[III. Meno mosso, ma sempre alla breve]** When the

attack is over and the pain recedes, he recalls his past life; his childhood passes before his eyes; his youth with its striving and passions and then, while the pains return, there appears to him the goal of his life's journey, the ideal, the ideal which he attempts to embody in his art, but which he was unable to perfect because such perfection can be achieved by no man. The fatal hour arrives. **[IV. Moderato]** The soul leaves the body, to discover in the eternal cosmos the magnificent realization of the ideal which could not be fulfilled here below."

*Death and Transfiguration* is a purely imaginary work, since the 25-year-old composer had not undergone any life-threatening experiences by that point in his life. It is worth noting, however, that when he started the composition, he was deeply in thrall with Richard Wagner's groundbreaking opera *Tristan und Isolde*—in 1888, he was hired to work as the repetiteur (or vocal

coach) for a production at the Bayreuth Festival. *Death and Transfiguration* owes much to Wagner's opera, both in concept (the opera's plot features a "Liebestod", or "Love-Death", and ultimately culminates with Isolde's transfiguration) and in sound. It displayed remarkable maturity for one so young, in terms of creative confidence, philosophical ambition, and the skillful handling of the large, post-Romantic orchestra. In it, Strauss leads listeners on a harrowing but ultimately heartening, Beethoven-like journey from darkness to light.

Sixty years later, he quoted the noble, symbolically rising "transfiguration" theme in the concluding section of the *Four Last Songs*, after the soloist has sung the words, "Can this perhaps be death?" As Strauss lay on his deathbed, he whispered to his daughter-in-law, Alice, "Dying is just as I composed it in *Death and Transfiguration*."

—Program note by Don Anderson



### **Nicholas Sharma, RBC Resident Conductor & TSYO Conductor**

In the 2025/26 season, Nicholas Sharma joins the Toronto Symphony Orchestra as RBC Resident Conductor and Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra Conductor. He has led performances with orchestras across North America, earning recognition for his versatility and musical artistry.

Recent conducting highlights include début performances with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Eugene Symphony, as well as serving as Assistant Conductor of the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the South Dakota

Symphony Youth Orchestra for the 2024/25 season.

He has participated in master classes and summer festivals with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the New World Symphony, the National Academy Orchestra of Canada, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Colorado College Summer Music Festival, working with such distinguished conductors as Michael Tilson Thomas, Stéphane Denève, Neeme Järvi, Robert Spano, Nicholas McGegan, Mark Stringer, and Boris Brott.

A native of the Toronto area, Sharma began his musical studies as a violinist. He holds a degree in violin performance from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Oleh Krysa, and a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Oregon under David Jacobs. In 2024, he completed a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree in orchestral conducting at Eastman, studying with Neil Varon. His return to Toronto marks both a personal and professional homecoming as he takes on these new artistic leadership roles.

## Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra

Nicholas Sharma, conductor

**FOR 52 SEASONS**, since its founding under the direction of Victor Feldbrill in 1974, the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra (TSYO) has been dedicated to providing a high-level orchestral experience for talented young musicians aged 22 and under. The tuition-free TSYO program delivers a unique, powerful, and life-enriching opportunity that encourages significant achievement, regardless of participants' chosen career paths. The TSYO is closely affiliated with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra: TSO musicians serve as coaches through the season, TSO guest artists lead TSYO master classes, and the TSYO performs annually with the TSO in a side-by-side concert.

### VIOLINS

Aida Chegini  
Anamaria Khingava  
Annika Kho  
Ariel Loboda  
Chelsea Gu  
Chelsea Wan  
Chloe Ng  
Edward Wu  
Emily Wang  
Hannah Kwan  
Joy Cha-Kang  
Lucas Ju  
Marion Cha-Kang  
Oliver (Zihuan) Xu  
Richard Xiong  
Roland Ding  
Salma Khakimov  
Sophie Cheung  
Tina Sievers  
Victoria Gilerovitch  
Xinru Lai  
Yusuf Tajbakhsh  
Zhuoyi Yang  
Zoe Lai-Yi Clarke

### VIOLAS

Celine Aricibasi  
Emily Liao  
Gabriella Liu  
Isla Ertl  
Larry Zheng  
Lauren Liang  
Nathan Wu  
Noah Haro Jang  
Peggy Zhu  
Sam Talebi  
Solomon Cheung

### CELLOS

Austin Dong  
Claire Wang

Unice Choe  
George Gernega  
Maggie Marshman  
Matthew Ng  
Rebecca Lima  
Ruichen Wang  
Ryan Yin  
Stella Chang  
Yuheng (Hassel) Chen

### DOUBLE BASSES

Alice Quach  
Danylo Tkaczyk  
Emma Chen  
Jikai (Nick) Zhang  
Julia Li  
Richard Nemeth  
Wang Hin (Marcus) Chan  
Xiaoyi (Ashley) Ruan

### FLUTES

Clara Wang  
Eleanor Song  
Karri Li  
Rowan Froh

### OBOES

Clara Aristanto  
Hingyi Cui  
Jason Fan

### CLARINETS

Farimah Khorrami  
Marco Ding  
Michelle Jin

### BASSOONS

Kendal Morrison  
Spencer Mendez  
Taran Massey-Singh

### HORNS

Avery Hubert  
Ethan Chialtas  
Jingyao (Victor) Hu

Sophia Choi  
Qiwei Liu

### TRUMPETS

Andre Zi-an Jin  
Kevin Zhao  
Tamsin Spiller  
Teresa Osko

### TROMBONES

Abellia Chan  
Alina Dai  
Amy Jordaán

### TUBA

Jack Shiels

### PERCUSSION

Bowen Wang  
Elyssa Arde  
Jack Wong  
Jon Bilek

### HARP

Luc Hung  
Weiqi (Vicky) Chen

### PIANO

Jonathan Alter

### STAFF

**Matthew Robertson+**  
TSYO Manager &  
Community Assistant

**Jennifer Mak**  
Interim TSYO Manager

**Nicole Balm**  
Senior Director of  
Education & Community  
Engagement

**Pierre Rivard**  
Family & School  
Programs Manager

### Angela Maria Sanchez

Education & Community  
Engagement Coordinator

### FACULTY

#### Nicholas Sharma

RBC Resident Conductor  
& TSYO Conductor  
*generously supported by  
the Toronto Symphony  
Volunteer Committee*

#### Ilan Mendel

TSYO Assistant Conductor

#### Shane Kim

Violin Coach  
TSO Violin

#### Peter Seminovs

Violin Coach  
TSO Violin

#### Ivan Ivanovich

Viola Coach  
TSO Viola

#### Emmanuel Beaulieu

**Bergeron**  
Cello Coach  
TSO Associate Principal  
Cello

#### Christopher Laven

Double Bass Coach  
TSO Double Bass

#### Miles Haskins

Woodwind Coach  
TSO Clarinet & Bass  
Clarinet

#### Renata Cardoso

Brass Coach  
TSO Trumpet

#### Joseph Kelly

Percussion Coach  
TSO Percussion/Assistant  
Principal Timpani

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+On leave