

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

Joshua Bell Plays Bruch + Beethoven

Joshua Bell, conductor & violin
(2025/26 TSO Spotlight Artist)

Ludwig van Beethoven
Overture to *Egmont*, Op. 84

Max Bruch
Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26
I. Prelude: Allegro moderato
II. Adagio
III. Finale: Allegro energico

Intermission

Florence Price/arr. Jim Gray
Adoration

Ludwig van Beethoven
Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92
I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace
II. Allegretto
III. Presto
IV. Allegro con brio

Program 4

Thursday,
March 26, 2026
7:30pm

Saturday,
March 28, 2026
7:30pm

Sunday,
March 29, 2026
3:00pm

*The TSO Spotlight Artists
are generously supported
by Zenovia Zmiyivsky.*

*The March 28 performance
is generously supported
by Paul Straatman & Shane
Toland.*

*The March 29 performance
is generously supported by
the Estate of Ingrid Foldes.*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Overture to *Egmont*, Op. 84

Composed 1809

8 min

BEETHOVEN RECEIVED SEVERAL COMMISSIONS

for music to accompany theatrical presentations. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the celebrated author of *Faust*, completed his play *Egmont* in 1778. He specified that it be accompanied by music, and even indicated precisely where he wished it to be heard. Several composers took up the challenge prior to Beethoven, but none succeeded.

In 1809, the directors of Vienna's Burgtheater shrewdly approached Beethoven, whose catalogue of works by that time included six symphonies and the opera *Fidelio*, to provide music for a revival of *Egmont*. He accepted the offer eagerly, Goethe being one of his favourite writers.

His score included nine pieces: entr'actes, songs, melodramas (music heard under speech), and an overture. The introductory music was the last to be finished—too late, in fact, for the revival's first

performance. Uncharacteristically, he refused payment, presumably out of reverence for Goethe. The author experienced the play with Beethoven's music for the first time in 1814. He expressed enthusiastic approval, especially for the final scene. "Beethoven has followed my intentions with admirable genius," he said.

The play is set in Brussels during the 16th century, when the Netherlands lay under Spanish occupation. The local resistance leader, Count Egmont, is imprisoned and condemned to death. His grief-stricken wife takes her own life. The night before Egmont's execution, she appears to him in a dream, transformed into the goddess of freedom. She foretells that his death will inspire his countrymen, first to rebellion, then to the re-establishment of their liberty. Heartened by this vision, Egmont is able to face his execution with dignity. Beethoven's overture to *Egmont* transcends its specific inspiration to make a stirring, uplifting statement on human affairs.

—Program note by Don Anderson

Max Bruch (1838–1920)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26

Composed 1864–1866

24 min

NO ONE COULD ACCUSE BRUCH OF LAZINESS. In addition to composing three operas, three symphonies, several oratorios, more than 40 additional pieces for chorus, and numerous works in other forms, he worked extensively as a teacher and conductor. He held major posts in Liverpool, Breslau, and Berlin, and

undertook guest conducting engagements that brought him as far afield as North America.

Regarding long-term achievement, not one of the above-mentioned pieces has gained a foothold in the standard repertoire. The sifting process of time has left just a trio of Bruch's works to warm themselves in the sun: two of his nine works for violin and orchestra—the Concerto No. 1 and *Scottish Fantasy*—plus his *Kol Nidrei* for cello.

The reasons for the concerto's esteem are crystal clear. It is a compact work that combines the dramatic, the lyrical, and the virtuosic in perfect balance. It also demonstrates Bruch's deep understanding of the violin. He once stated that the instrument "can sing a melody better than a piano, and melody is the soul of music."

Although this concerto—his most enduringly popular composition—sounds smooth and effortless, it followed a difficult course to its final form. It won a favourable reception at its first public performance, but it still left Bruch unsatisfied. Seeking advice on how to improve it, he consulted with the widely respected Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim who gave him a long, detailed evaluation. Relieved by this expert counsel, Bruch dedicated the concerto to Joachim. The première of the revised edition drew a warm response from audience and composer alike.

Bruch titled the concerto's opening section "Prelude", suggesting that it serves primarily as an introduction to the more

important second movement, the "Adagio". The "Prelude" opens in an air of quiet, brooding melancholy before breaking out into a full-blown and impassioned allegro. It builds up to two major climaxes before dying away in emotional exhaustion. Bruch then segues without pause into the heartfelt central "Adagio", which begins in a prayer-like atmosphere, then gradually gains both in activity and expressiveness. It features some of the most beautiful writing in the entire literature for violin.

Bruch concludes the concerto with a propulsive, Romani-style finale, anticipating the last movement of the concerto that Johannes Brahms wrote ten years later—a work also dedicated to, and premièred by, Joseph Joachim. The second theme has a noble contour, more elevated than heroic. It's definitely a dance but, in keeping with the concerto's overall character, it's still a rather serious one until a final *accelerando* hurtles the concerto across the finish line.

—Program note by Don Anderson

Florence Price (1887–1953)/

arr. Jim Gray (b. 1964)

Adoration

Composed 1951; arranged 2022

4 min

NO 20TH-CENTURY COMPOSER has enjoyed a faster or more dramatic posthumous renaissance than Florence Price. Despite considerable success during her lifetime, including becoming the first Black woman to have a work played by a major American orchestra, the Chicago composer fell into obscurity following her death in 1953 in large part due to prejudice around her race and sex—certainly not because of any lack of quality in her music.

Significantly aiding her revival in the last couple of decades was the 2009 discovery of a cache of her manuscripts in her former

summer home near St. Anne, Illinois, and the publication of the first biography of Price in 2020. It has also helped that contemporary classical listeners are more open to music tinged with cross-genre influences like the African-American folk music, including elements of juba dances and spirituals, that often infuses her work.

Price's more than 420 compositions—a number that keeps growing as additional manuscripts are rediscovered and published—can now be heard regularly on the programs of ensembles large and small across North America. Among them is this church work, which Price composed for organ (one of the two instruments she regularly played) two years before her death. This version, arranged for solo violin and

strings by Jim Gray, a multi-genre, Tennessee-based composer and arranger, got a big boost in 2023 when Decca included it on a recording featuring the violinist Randall Goosby and The Philadelphia Orchestra.

This spellbinding devotional work, which runs a little under four minutes, opens with an airy, gently compelling melody for the solo violin and retains the same reflective

mood throughout. The main focus stays almost exclusively on the violin, with the plush strings providing softly enveloping support. The work swells to a measuredly impassioned climax a little before the end and then settles back into a calm, quiet conclusion. Expect this work to become a concert staple, especially as an ideal encore.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92

Composed 1811–1812

36 min

BEETHOVEN BEGAN HIS SEVENTH SYMPHONY

around the summer of 1811, and completed it the following spring. It had its première in December 1813. One of the last specimens of his “heroic” style, it proved to be one of his most popular works, though it was also widely considered difficult and eccentric. A reviewer in 1827 wrote, “The whole thing lasts at least three-quarters of an hour, and is a true mixture of tragic, comic, serious, and trivial ideas, which spring from one level to another without any connection, repeat themselves to excess, and are almost wrecked by the immoderate noise of the timpani.” By one account, Carl Maria von Weber, on the basis of this work, pronounced Beethoven “ripe for the madhouse.” There are dark, strange, and disturbing passages in this symphony, but ultimately it is a celebration—joyous, liberated, and festive. Wagner famously dubbed it “the apotheosis of the dance,” and a powerful rhythmic momentum does drive every movement—even the “Allegretto”, which unfolds like a procession.

A long, weighty slow introduction establishes the high rhetorical tone of the

symphony, and a striking transition prods the music by degrees toward the boisterous jig-like rhythm of the main part of the first movement. The main theme, when we first hear it (on solo flute), is quiet and light-hearted, but by the time the music has driven to its raucous coda, the accumulated rhythmic energy is thrilling. The “Allegretto” introduces a note of tragedy: The sober main theme, set out in the lower strings, is subjected to variations—now brooding, now terrifying, now delicate. Twice there is relief—brief, tender idylls—but the movement finally peters out as though in despair, and ends as it began, with mournful horn-and-woodwind chords. The propulsive “Presto” is unusually long; *twice* the scherzo is interrupted by a slower, more majestic trio. (According to an acquaintance, Beethoven borrowed the theme of the trio from an Austrian pilgrimage hymn, and the solemn scoring of it lends credence to the story.) The galloping finale is even more rhythmically furious than the first movement, and its main theme is developed almost obsessively. Near the end, at a busy, explosive climax, Beethoven wrote one of his very rare triple-forte dynamic markings. It was warranted: music had never known such Dionysian drive and power before.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana



Joshua Bell, conductor & violin (2025/26 TSO Spotlight Artist)

Joshua Bell made his TSO début in May 1988.

With a career spanning almost four decades, GRAMMY® Award-winning violinist Joshua Bell is one of the most celebrated artists of our time. He has performed with virtually every major orchestra in the world, and regularly appears as a soloist, recitalist, chamber musician, and conductor, and as the Music Director of London's Academy of St Martin in the Fields (ASMF).

Bell continues to champion the rediscovered Violin Concerto by Thomas de Hartmann in the 2025/26 season, following his world-première recording of the work. He gives its UK première at London's BBC Proms, its North American première with the New York Philharmonic, and its Canadian première during his season-long tenure as a Toronto Symphony Orchestra Spotlight Artist. With ASMF, he leads extensive tours, including returns to the Vienna Konzerthaus and Carnegie Hall. Other highlights include his first appearances as Principal Guest Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony, an Asian tour with Hamburg's NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, trio programs with Steven Isserlis and Evgeny Kissin in the US and Europe, and duo recitals with Jeremy Denk at Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Ravinia Festival.

In 2011, Bell succeeded founder Sir Neville Marriner as Music Director of ASMF. He is also the Founder and Music Director of Chamber Orchestra of America (COA), which aims to empower the next generation of artists.

Bell has commissioned and premiered works by John Corigliano, Edgar Meyer, and Nicholas Maw. His recording of Maw's Violin Concerto won a GRAMMY® Award, and his work on the film soundtrack for *The Red Violin* helped secure Corigliano's Academy Award.

Bell's collaborators include Emanuel Ax, Chris Botti, Chick Corea, Renée Fleming, Josh Groban, Lang Lang, Dave Matthews, Anoushka Shankar, Regina Spektor, Sting, and Daniil Trifonov. He made three guest-star appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and numerous appearances on the Amazon series *Mozart in the Jungle*. His extensive discography has been recognized with GRAMMY®, Mercury, Gramophone, and OPUS KLASSIK Awards.

Born in Bloomington, Indiana, Bell began playing the violin at age 4, starting studies with his mentor, Josef Gingold, eight years later. At 14, Bell debuted with Riccardo Muti and The Philadelphia Orchestra, and at 17 he made his Carnegie Hall début with the St. Louis Symphony. He signed with his first label, London Decca, at 18, when he also received the Avery Fisher Career Grant. Since then, Bell has been nominated for six GRAMMY® Awards, named Instrumentalist of the Year by *Musical America*, selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum, and recognized with the Avery Fisher Prize. He received the 2003 Indiana Governor's Arts Award, and in 2000 was honoured as an Indiana "Living Legend". Bell has performed for three American presidents and the justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. After participating in former President Barack Obama's Committee on the Arts and Humanities' first cultural mission to Cuba, he headlined the subsequent Emmy-nominated PBS *Live from Lincoln Center* special. Bell performs on the 1713 Huberman Stradivarius violin.