

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

**Copland's Clarinet +
Enigma Variations**

Trevor Wilson, conductor
Eric Abramovitz, clarinet

Dinuk Wijeratne
Polyphonic Lively

Ralph Vaughan Williams
Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus

Introduction and Theme: Adagio

Variant I: quarter note = quarter note

Variant II: Allegro moderato

Variant III: quarter note = 150

Variant IV: L'istesso tempo

Variant V: Adagio

Aaron Copland
Clarinet Concerto

Slowly and expressively – Cadenza – Rather fast

Intermission

Edward Elgar
Variations on an Original Theme
"Enigma", Op. 36

Theme ("Enigma"): Andante

Variations:

I. "C.A.E.": L'istesso tempo

II. "H.D.S.-P.": Allegro

III. "R.B.T.": Allegretto

IV. "W.M.B.": Allegro di molto

V. "R.P.A.": Moderato

VI. "Ysobel": Andantino

VII. "Troyte": Presto

VIII. "W.N.": Allegretto

IX. "Nimrod": Adagio

X. Intermezzo "Dorabella": Allegretto

XI. "G.R.S.": Allegro di molto

XII. "B.G.N.": Andante

XIII. Romanza "****": Moderato

XIV. Finale "E.D.U.": Allegro

Program 1

**Saturday,
October 14, 2023**

8:00pm

**Sunday,
October 15, 2023**

3:00pm

*Resident Conductor position
generously supported by the
RBC Emerging Artists Program.*

Dinuk Wijeratne (b. 1978)

Polyphonic Lively

Composed 2016

12 min

THE COMPOSER DESCRIBES HIS PIECE AS FOLLOWS:

Poly-phon-ic (adj.)—many-voiced, [music] composed of relatively independent melodic lines or parts; *Live-ly* (adj.)—full of life or vigour.

While browsing through a library book of very vibrant artwork by Paul Klee, the 20th-century Swiss-German master, I was struck by the title of one of the paintings: *Polyphonic Lively*. Though the two adjectives back-to-back suggest that something may have been lost in translation, I felt compelled to turn these very vivid and evocative words into music. They immediately conjured up high-vibration, high-intensity “chatter” nicely suited to an orchestra’s season opener.

Music, as a communicative medium, offers unique and wonderful opportunities for stacking contrasting ideas—for “polyphony”. As a composer I like to explore the possibility that musical voices, each conveying an idea that is either supportive or subversive, can be allowed to coexist in a way that often eludes us in today’s world. The nature of *Polyphonic Lively* is character-driven and, through sharp turns and decisive action, its “journey” is simply what the characters make of it. Its musical fabric is a multiplicity of voices, lines, and themes that decide—on a whim—when to coalesce and coexist.



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Paul Klee: *Polyphony* (1932), one of many with “polyphony” in the title. Kustmuseum Basel

COMPOSER BIO: Sri Lankan-born Canadian Dinuk Wijeratne is a JUNO- and multi-award-winning composer, conductor, and pianist who has been described by *The New York Times* as “exuberantly creative,” and by the *Toronto Star* as “an artist who reflects a positive vision of our cultural future.” His boundary-crossing work sees him equally at home in collaborations with symphony orchestras and string quartets, tabla players and DJs, and takes him to international venues as varied as the Berliner Philharmonie and the North Sea Jazz Festival.

Wijeratne describes his music as an intersection of cultures, influenced by those of his upbringing—Sri Lanka, India, and the Middle East—and expressed through the genres, compositional techniques, and mediums of Western classical music. “I’m using music to find a cultural balance that one wants to live, and to explore identity that way,” he noted in a recent profile for Ottawa Chamberfest.

His piece *Polyphonic Lively* was commissioned by Symphony Nova Scotia in 2016, when he was the orchestra’s RBC Composer in Residence, and was premièred by the ensemble conducted by Bernhard Gueller on October 13, 2016.

In 2017, the piece won the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia Masterworks Arts Award, the province’s largest annual award for a work of art.



—Compiled and edited by Hannah Chan-Hartley, PhD

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) ***Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus***

Composed 1939

13 min

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS'S FIRST COMPOSED WORK was the four-bar piano piece *The Robin's Egg*, written at age 5, soon after he began piano lessons. He went on to gain considerable renown; in 2022, the classical world celebrated the 150th anniversary of his birth with a wide range of performances, recordings, and associated projects.

Best known for his nine symphonies, and orchestral works like the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910) and *The Lark Ascending* (1914), he contributed copiously to nearly every musical form. In addition to being markedly interested in Tudor and Elizabethan music, this ardently English composer was also strongly influenced by his country's folk songs and their modal harmonies. Much as Béla Bartók famously did in Hungary at around the same time, Vaughan Williams ventured into the English countryside, starting in 1903, and transcribed more than 800 songs that he heard. One outcome of those efforts is *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus*—a work for harp and string orchestra, based on a tune that he also quotes in his popular *English Folk Song Suite* (1923), from a 16-stanza folk song dating back to the 1570s.

Five Variants was a British Council commission for the 1939 World's Fair in New York City. Famed English conductor Adrian Boult led the first performance in June of that year in Carnegie Hall, alongside world premières of works by two of the composer's fellow countrymen, Arthur Bliss and Arnold Bax. Reflecting Vaughan Williams's lifelong affection for the work, his funeral service in 1958 opened with the *Five Variants*, again conducted by Boult.

The 13-minute work is divided into six sections: an *Introduction and Theme* is followed by five variants that proceed without interruption. It opens like a gentle breeze in B modal minor, and a sense of tranquility pervades the whole, with soft, pleasing harmonies and nary a dissonance to be heard. Frequently appearing in the score is the marking "cantabile," meaning the composer wants that passage to be performed with a smooth singing style. The pace accelerates in the fourth variant and the music becomes a bit more intense before slowing and giving way in the adagio fifth variant to an introspective cello solo with a bit of violin support. Finally, all the instruments return, and the work settles into a slow, sustained, and peaceful resolution.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan



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Serpents have knees?: "Dives" is Latin for "rich man." Lazarus is from "lazar" (leper/beggar) but with biblical resonances of Lazarus who rose from the dead. In the song that was Vaughan Williams's source, Dives repeatedly spurns the beggar's entreaties, even "[sending] out his hungry dogs to bite him where he lay." (They lick his sores instead.) Lazarus dies and ascends to heaven. When Dives dies, two serpents arise out of hell to guide him there. "There's a place in Hell prepared for thee," they say, "to sit upon a Serpent's knee."

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Clarinet Concerto

Composed 1948 & 1949

16 min

WIDELY REGARDED AS “THE DEAN OF AMERICAN COMPOSERS,” Copland wrote music displaying a variety of styles, including the moderately avant-garde. He won his greatest successes through his joyful compositions that celebrate (and often directly quote from) the folk culture of America, such as the ballets *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942), and *Appalachian Spring* (1944).

His interest in American music extended beyond folk tunes and cowboy songs. Jazz, the snappy, free-wheeling, and distinctively American musical style born in New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century, won his heart and drew his creative attention, too. Early signs of its influence crop up in an orchestral suite, *Music for the Theatre* (1925), and in the Piano Concerto (1926).

His interest in jazz lay dormant for 20 years until the celebrated swing clarinetist Benny Goodman (who also played straight classical music from time to time) commissioned this concerto from him in 1947. Its technical demands made Goodman nervous, to the point where he put off playing it for nearly two years (virtually to the

end of the exclusivity clause in his contract with Copland). Copland’s plan to have it premiered by another soloist finally pushed Goodman to take up the challenge.

The concerto consists of one continuous movement, with an unaccompanied solo cadenza linking the two main sections. The opening portion is slow and lyrical, almost like a lullaby. This feeling is emphasized by Copland’s skillful use of his accompanying orchestra, which is made up of strings and harp. The cadenza begins in the same mood, but gradually the rhythms of jazz and South American dances make their way into the music, ushering in the bouncy, virtuosic second half. In that section, Copland expanded the orchestra’s range of colours by adding a piano.

—Program note by Don Anderson

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So long as the human spirit thrives on this planet, music in some living form will accompany and sustain it and give it expressive meaning.

—AARON COPLAND



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Aaron Copland conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with Benny Goodman. (Photo: Library of Congress). At the TSO, the composer conducted James Campbell, clarinet, and the TSO in an all-Copland program, August 10, 1979.

Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

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

Composed 1898 & 1899

29 min

IN THE FALL OF 1898, as he developed an orchestral theme, Elgar hit upon a “quaint idea,” as he described it in a letter to his friend August Jaeger: a set of variations, each labelled with initials, depicting various persons within his circle. “The Variations have amused me because I’ve labelled ‘em with the nicknames of my particular friends—you [Jaeger] are Nimrod,” Elgar wrote. The work was a resounding success at its June 19, 1899 première in London, and it marked a turning point for Elgar, creatively, professionally, and financially.

The theme is titled “Enigma”, and Elgar claimed that it fit snugly in counterpoint with a certain well-known tune—but would not say *which* tune. Over the years, musicians and scholars have proposed countless solutions to the puzzle, ranging from “Rule, Britannia!” and “God Save the Queen” to the “Dies Irae”, “Auld Lang Syne”, and even “Pop Goes the Weasel”, but Elgar took his secret with him to the grave. In any event, the work can stand alongside the best variation sets in the repertory. The form is fresh, inspired, and intelligently organized, the theme developed in 14 imaginative and highly individual variations, all scored with great originality. There is poetry and fantasy in this music but also technical ingenuity and control; there is Elgar the exalted symphonist but also Elgar the miniaturist, the salon composer, and the man of the theatre.

The variations run the gamut from light and airy to emotionally and spiritually profound, but, even where he pokes fun, Elgar’s love for his friends is apparent: the music can be deeply expressive and achingly beautiful. Among the more serious portraits

is the slow, dignified *Nimrod* (IX)—the heart of the piece; it evokes a summer evening Elgar spent talking about Beethoven’s slow movements with Jaeger. There is some witty tone-painting, too—a “country squire” hustling out of a room with a slam of the door (IV), a charming young girl with an unfortunate stammer (X), and some good-natured parodies of amateur performers (VI and VII). Some variations do not portray the friends themselves: the minuet-like VIII depicts an 18th-century house, XI documents Elgar’s amusement over a friend’s bulldog, and XIII evokes a sea voyage. Especially moving are Elgar’s portraits of his wife (I) and, in the long, noble *Finale* (XIV), of himself.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzano



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Behind the nicknames and acronyms:

C.A.E. Caroline Alice Elgar, Elgar’s wife; **H.D.S.-P.** Hew David Stuart-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



Trevor Wilson, conductor

Trevor Wilson made his TSO début in December 2022.

Trevor Wilson is an Ottawa-born conductor and composer who in 2022 began his position as RBC Resident Conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. In this role, he works closely with Music Director Gustavo Gimeno and conducts performances with the TSO and Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra throughout the season. Wilson has also appeared as a guest conductor with orchestras across Canada, including the NAC Orchestra, and upcoming engagements include performances with Symphony Nova Scotia in spring 2024. Under the mentorship of Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Wilson was among the inaugural cohort of the Orchestre Métropolitain's Orchestral Conducting Academy where he covered rehearsals, participated in community-outreach programs, and assisted in concerts between the 2021 and 2023 seasons.

Wilson has been active in the Ottawa musical community, having conducted performances with the University of Ottawa Orchestra and other local ensembles. In 2017, Wilson co-founded the Ottawa Pops Orchestra, serving as its Music Director until 2019. He also served as Assistant Conductor of the National Academy Orchestra of Canada under the late Maestro Boris Brott in summer 2019. Having attended numerous master classes and festivals, Wilson has had the opportunity to study under internationally renowned conductors such as Alexander Shelley, David Zinman, Gerard Schwarz, and Neil Varon. Wilson completed his graduate studies in orchestral conducting under Marin Alsop at the Peabody Conservatory, where he also served as Assistant Conductor of the Peabody Choruses.



Eric Abramovitz, clarinet

Eric Abramovitz made his TSO solo début in November 2022.

Eric Abramovitz joined the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 2018 as Associate Principal and E-flat Clarinet, and was appointed Principal Clarinet in 2021. Prior to joining the TSO, he held positions with the Nashville Symphony and the Santa Barbara Symphony. Recently featured on CBC's "30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30" list, Abramovitz won first prize at the Vandoren Emerging Artist Competition in 2017. Also a first-prize winner at the OSM Standard Life Competition in 2011, he has been featured as a soloist with numerous orchestras including the McGill and USC Symphonies, l'Orchestre symphonique de Québec, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. A versatile musician, Abramovitz enjoys playing klezmer and jazz music whenever he can, and, just last season, he made his solo début with the TSO, not only on clarinet, but also on saxophone.

Abramovitz was a Sylva Gelber Career Grant recipient in 2016, and has toured throughout Japan and South Korea with the New York Symphonic Ensemble and l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, respectively. A Montreal native, Abramovitz obtained his bachelor's degree at McGill University's Schulich School of Music, and pursued graduate studies at the University of Southern California. Abramovitz's teachers include Zaven Zakarian, Alain Desgagné, Robert Crowley, Simon Aldrich, Jean-François Normand, Kimball Sykes, and Yehuda Gilad.