

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

Trifonov Plays Brahms

Gustavo Gimeno, conductor
Daniil Trifonov, piano

George Walker
Sinfonia No. 2

I. ♩ = 76

II. Lamentoso e quasi senza misura. ♩ = 63

III. ♩ = 116

Witold Lutosławski
Concerto for Orchestra

I. Intrada

II. Capriccio notturno e arioso

III. Passacaglia, toccata e corale

Intermission

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

I. Maestoso

II. Adagio

III. Rondo: Allegro non troppo

Program 1

Wednesday,
January 10, 2024

8:00pm

Thursday,
January 11, 2024

8:00pm

Saturday,
January 13, 2024

8:00pm

*The January 13
performance is generously
supported by Bettie Moore
in memory of Donald Moore*

*Gustavo Gimeno's
appearances are generously
supported by Susan
Brenninkmeyer in memory
of Hans Brenninkmeyer*

George Walker (1922–2018)

Sinfonia No. 2

Composed 1992

16 min

BORN IN WASHINGTON, DC, George Walker was a Pulitzer Prize–winning composer, pianist, and academic. Throughout his career, Walker contended with barriers of systemic racism to become the first Black graduate of Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied piano and composition; the first Black instrumentalist to appear as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra; and the first Black composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize in Music (for *Lilacs* for Voice and Orchestra in 1996). His nearly 100 compositions range from solo piano pieces and art songs to concertos and symphonic works, the latter of which have been performed by virtually every major American orchestra, in England, and elsewhere. In his autobiography, *Reminiscences of an American Composer and Pianist* (Scarecrow Press, 2009), Walker wrote the following description of his *Sinfonia No. 2* for orchestra:

“The first movement begins with a four-note motive for full orchestra. An ascending melodic line in the violins continues in the woodwinds. Repeated notes in the brass terminate that section. In the next section, an extended melodic line, beginning in the cellos and double basses and moving to violins, woodwinds, and horns, leads to a contrasting four-note

motive stated by an oboe. This becomes the genesis of a new section that climaxes with a restatement of the four-note motive from the opening of the movement.

Rhythmic similarities to this material appear with intervallic alterations. A flurry of notes in the strings and woodwinds subsides quickly to a sustained ‘D’ in the violins that is punctuated by *pizzicati* [plucking] in the lower strings. An ascending melodic line culminates in repeated notes. A brief coda closes the movement quietly.

The second movement, marked ‘Lamentoso e quasi senza misura,’ begins as a flute solo before a chord played by four cellos and a guitar support the florid figuration in the flute part. With the return of the initial segment of the flute solo, three more cellos and a double bass are added to the orchestration. The rhythmic impulse of five notes played initially by the English horn and bass

clarinet are the core elements that can be identified in the third movement. The subtle emergence of an eighth-note pattern with a steady pulse provides the basis for the imposition of rhythmic fragments above it. Interposed between these sections are brief sustained moments that interrupt the foot-tapping insistence of the bass line of eighth notes. The brilliant conclusion of the work incorporates the five notes heard at the beginning of the movement.”

—Written and compiled by Hannah Chan-Hartley, PhD



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George Walker—by Dane Thibeault

Witold Lutosławski (1913–1994)

Concerto for Orchestra

Composed 1950–1954

26 min

WITOLD LUTOSŁAWSKI WAS ONE OF THE MOST highly respected and widely performed composers of the 20th century. A careful craftsman with lofty creative standards, he produced a relatively small body of work—some 50 pieces. He also earned deep respect as a teacher, serving as visiting professor of composition at prestigious institutions in the United States, Scandinavia, and Germany. Between 1925 and 1943, Paul Hindemith, Walter Piston, Zoltán Kodály, and Béla Bartók had composed concertos for orchestra. These pieces share a common goal: to showcase and celebrate the full range of the modern orchestra's colours. Lutosławski's concerto also offers a dazzling synthesis of Baroque-era forms (passacaglia and fugue) with 20th-century scoring. It was the first concerto for orchestra to appear in the wake of Bartók's celebrated work. Many of its building blocks are traditional Polish folk songs and dances, collected during the 19th century in the Mazovia region, near Warsaw.

The opening *Intrada* has two sections. The first is brisk, bold, and exhilarating. The slower, quieter, and delicately scored second bears a distinctly folk-like flavour. The next movement opens and closes with a fleet, scherzo-like *Capriccio notturno* (*Nocturnal Caprice*). Lutosławski here provides a

modern descendant of the Shakespeare-inspired fairy-tale music of Mendelssohn and Berlioz. Marked to be performed "in murmuring fashion," it is studded with darting percussion flourishes. In between comes an interlude that is more aggressive and dramatic than a traditional interpretation of its title, *Arioso* (in singing style), would imply.

The finale runs longer than the two preceding movements combined. Lutosławski would continue and intensify this trend throughout his career. This finale's

purposes are to sum up what has come before and resolve the concerto's dramatic tensions. The opening half is a *Passacaglia*, a set of variations above an unchanging bass line. The theme appears quietly in the double basses and harps. The concise, virtuosic variations move upward in terms of pitch through every section of the orchestra. They are characterized by dynamic rhythms, powerful expressiveness, and kaleidoscopic colouring. Following a

brief pause, a surging *Toccata* restores and maintains the forward momentum. After a period of furious activity, woodwinds softly introduce the theme of the *Corale* (whose resemblance to the central trio of the second movement of the Bartók concerto has been noted). Lutosławski develops his materials in exhilarating and brilliant fashion. He intertwines the *Toccata* and *Corale*, for example, en route to the concerto's celebratory conclusion.

—Program note by Don Anderson



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Witold Lutosławski—by Dane Thibeault

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

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

Composed 1854–1859

42 min

IN MARCH 1854, Brahms embarked on a Sonata in D Minor for two pianos, but soon his musical ideas were outgrowing his medium, so he reconceived the work (with help from colleagues like the violinist Joseph Joachim) as a four-movement symphony. Pianistic ideas kept compromising his symphonic designs, however; in February 1855, he even had a dream in which he played a concerto based on his “hapless symphony.” And so a concerto it became—his very first orchestral work. He completed the revised first movement in April 1856, but discarded his other symphonic ideas and wrote a new slow movement and finale. He tried out a preliminary version of the concerto in Hanover in March 1858, and gave the public première there on January 22, 1859, under Joachim’s baton. The audience was polite but puzzled, and a few days later, in Leipzig, the concerto was hissed at.

Perhaps that was to be expected: though the music was outwardly Classical in form, its monumental scale and powerful, elevated rhetoric were unprecedented in a concerto. But then, the two-piano version had been conceived in the immediate aftermath of the attempted suicide of

Brahms’s mentor Robert Schumann, who was plagued by mental illness, and the concerto version was developed in the wake of Schumann’s death. In Brahms’s mind, the work was a memorial to the tragic fate of his beloved friend.

The note of tragedy is strongest in the first movement, with its portentous orchestral introduction, ample proportions, and bravura piano writing (the virtuosity here is more massive than dazzling); emotionally, the movement is mostly dark, troubled, and at

times even desperate.

The “Adagio”, no less spacious, is a tender, song-like idyll. Brahms called it a “gentle portrait” of Schumann’s wife, Clara, to whom he had his own romantic attachment, and below the opening melody, in his manuscript, he wrote (in Latin), “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The brilliant, robust “Rondo” has some of the blustery rhetoric of the first movement, though it ends triumphantly. The hint of Hungarian style

(typical of Brahms’s concerto finales) may reflect the influence of Joachim, who was born in Hungary and who was composing his own concerto “In the Hungarian Style” for violin—also in D minor—at precisely the time that Brahms was turning his first symphony into his first concerto.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana



↑ Johannes Brahms—by Dane Thibeault

For a biography of Gustavo Gimeno, please turn to page 8.



Daniil Trifonov, piano

Daniil Trifonov made his TSO début in September 2014.

GRAMMY® Award–winning pianist Daniil Trifonov (dan-EEL TREE-fon-ov) has made a spectacular ascent of the classical music world as a solo artist, champion of the concerto repertoire, chamber and vocal collaborator, and composer. Combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth, his performances are a perpetual source of awe. Trifonov undertakes major engagements on three continents in the 2023/24 season. In concert, he performs Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with The Cleveland Orchestra and Toronto Symphony Orchestra; Brahms’s Second Piano Concerto with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony, and Israel Philharmonic; Schumann’s Piano Concerto with the New York Philharmonic; Mozart’s “Jeunehomme” Piano Concerto at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and other US venues with the Rotterdam Philharmonic; Chopin’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Orchestre de Paris; Mason Bates’s Piano Concerto, a work composed for the pianist during the pandemic, with the Chicago Symphony, Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, and Deutsches Symphonie–Orchester Berlin; and both Gershwin and Rachmaninoff concertos with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which he joins at home and on a European tour.

In October 2021, Deutsche Grammophon released *Bach: The Art of Life*, featuring Bach’s masterpiece *The Art of Fugue*, as completed by Trifonov himself. Also including selections from the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*, music by four of the composer’s sons, and two pieces known to have been Bach family favourites, *Bach: The Art of Life* scored the pianist his sixth GRAMMY® nomination, while an accompanying music video, on which he performs his own completion of *The Art of Fugue*’s final Contrapunctus, was recognized with the 2022 Opus Klassik Public Award. Trifonov also received Opus Klassik’s 2021 Instrumentalist of the Year/Piano award for *Silver Age*, his album of Russian solo and orchestral piano music by Scriabin, Prokofiev, and Stravinsky. Released in fall 2020, this followed 2019’s *Destination Rachmaninov: Arrival*, for which the pianist received a 2021 GRAMMY® nomination. Presenting the composer’s first and third concertos, *Arrival* represents the third volume of the DG series Trifonov recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, following *Destination Rachmaninov: Departure*, named BBC Music’s 2019 Concerto Recording of the Year, and *Rachmaninov: Variations*, a 2015 GRAMMY® nominee. DG has also issued *Chopin Evocations*, which pairs the composer’s works with those by the 20th-century composers he influenced, and *Trifonov: The Carnegie Recital*, the pianist’s first recording as an exclusive DG artist, which captured his sold-out 2013 Carnegie Hall recital début live and secured him his first GRAMMY® nomination.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, Trifonov began his musical training at the age of 5 and went on to attend Moscow’s Gnessin School of Music as a student of Tatiana Zelikman before pursuing his piano studies with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has also studied composition and continues to write for piano, chamber ensemble, and orchestra. When he premièred his own Piano Concerto, Cleveland’s *The Plain Dealer* marvelled: “Even having seen it, one cannot quite believe it. Such is the artistry of pianist-composer Daniil Trifonov.”