

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

James Ehnes Plays Barber

Gustavo Gimeno, conductor

James Ehnes, violin (2023/24 TSO Spotlight Artist)

Samuel Barber

Adagio for Strings

Samuel Barber

Violin Concerto, Op. 14

I. Allegro

II. Andante

III. Presto in moto perpetuo

José Silvestre White Lafitte

Violin Concerto in F-sharp Minor

III. Allegro moderato

Intermission

Karen Sunabacka

The Prairies

Silvestre Revueltas

Sensemaya

Leonard Bernstein

Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

I. Prologue

II. "Somewhere"

III. Scherzo

IV. Mambo

V. Cha-Cha

VI. Meeting Scene

VII. "Cool" Fugue

VIII. Rumble

IX. Finale

Program 2

Wednesday,
October 18, 2023

8:00pm

Thursday,
October 19, 2023

8:00pm

Saturday,
October 21, 2023

8:00pm

The TSO Chamber Soloists

Saturday, October 21, 2023
6:45pm

Camille Watts, flute

Sarah Jeffrey, oboe

Samuel Banks, bassoon

Nicholas Hartman, horn

Megan Hodge, trombone

Amanda Goodburn, violin

Ivan Ivanovich, viola

Emmanuelle Beaulieu Bergeron, cello

Ian Cusson (b. 1981)

The Cure of Madness

*To Live**

**Created in partnership with
the Centre for Addiction and
Mental Health (CAMH).*

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

*The October 21 performance is
dedicated to the memory of
Susan Brenninkmeyer.*

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

Adagio for Strings

Composed 1935

8 min

SAMUEL BARBER COMPOSED his one and only string quartet in 1935. In 1937, he transcribed the second movement for string orchestra and retitled it *Adagio for Strings*. In that year, renowned maestro Arturo Toscanini was planning programs for the début season of the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Wishing to include a short American work, he consulted conductor Artur Rodziński, who had recruited and rehearsed the new ensemble. Rodziński had just conducted Barber's Symphony No. 1 at the Salzburg Festival to great acclaim, so he recommended Barber who responded with two pieces: the brand-new *Essay for Orchestra* and the *Adagio for Strings*. He dispatched them to Toscanini, but, a short time later, they were returned without comment.

When Barber's friend Gian Carlo Menotti visited Toscanini in the summer of 1938, Barber refused to accompany him. Toscanini told Menotti, "He's just angry with me, but he has no reason to be—I'm going to do both of his pieces." Toscanini made good on his promise. Barber's works were broadcast nationwide, bringing his name to an expansive audience in the most prestigious way imaginable.

The eloquent simplicity and grave beauty of the *Adagio for Strings* have led to its becoming not only an international

concert favourite, but also an appropriate element of solemn public ceremonies, beginning with the funeral of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1945, and coming to include Barber's own memorial service and the funeral of Princess Grace of Monaco. The *Adagio* has also been used to poignant effect on the soundtracks of several films, including *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Platoon* (1986), *Lorenzo's Oil* (1992), and *Amélie* (2001). In 1967, Barber recast it once again as a choral work, using the "Agnus Dei" ("Lamb of God") text from the Latin Mass.

—Program note by Don Anderson



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Scene from *The Elephant Man* (1980). Director David Lynch's omission of measures 36–56 of the *Adagio*, best described as "a robust charge to exultation," likely contributed to the work being voted the "saddest classical work ever" in a 2004 BBC poll.

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He's just angry with me, but he has no reason to be—I'm going to do both of his pieces.

—ARTURO TOSCANINI

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

Violin Concerto, Op. 14

Composed 1939

25 min

BARBER COMPOSED this concerto in 1939. It was his first concerto, and it remains the most frequently performed of the three he wrote. The others feature cello (1945) and piano (1962). It was commissioned by Samuel Fels, a wealthy industrialist and philanthropist from Philadelphia, as a vehicle for Iso Briselli, a gifted young violinist who was Fels's ward and protege.

Barber sketched the first two movements in Switzerland during the summer of 1939, then, due to the increasing threat of war, returned to the US in September. He completed the two movements in mid-October and dispatched them to Briselli. Briselli was pleased with them, but his approval did not extend to the finale that Barber sent him in November, considering it insufficiently substantial to balance the first two movements. He suggested that Barber rewrite the finale, the composer declined to do so, and Briselli returned the music to Barber. (Apparently, they remained friends despite the dissolution of their intended musical collaboration.)

It fell to the distinguished American soloist Albert Spalding to give the concerto's première on February 4, 1941. Eugene Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra. The concerto quickly entered the international repertoire, and it remains one of the most frequently performed concertos of the last century.

Dispensing with preliminary gestures, Barber launches the concerto with a lyrical, gracious opening theme on solo violin. Throughout the first movement, humour and drama make themselves felt, but the overall mood is sweet and restrained. This atmosphere continues in the slow

second section, with an added overlay of melancholy. Barber prefaces the violin's first entry with lovely solos for wind instruments. Tension later builds gradually to an orchestral climax of darkened fervour. The "perpetual motion" finale brings a strong change in tone and a greatly heightened energy level. Brief, concentrated, and Barber's most "modern" creation, it offers plenty of rhythmic thrust and virtuoso fireworks, for soloist and orchestra alike.

After undergoing a period of relative neglect following Barber's death, his reputation has ridden the neo-Romantic wave and returned to the high level it enjoyed during the peak of his career. His music reveals the emotional warmth and spirit of communication found in 19th-century Romanticism, spiced with those techniques of contemporary practice that suited him.

—Program note by Don Anderson

A WELCOME VISITOR

It took the Barber Violin Concerto 47 years following its 1941 Philadelphia première to arrive at the TSO, but since then it has been a regular visitor. Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg was the first to perform it, in May 1988, with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting, and returned in 2003, with Marin Alsop on the podium. Tonight's soloist, James Ehnes, previously performed it in January 2011, with Peter Oundjian conducting, on a TSO tour of Florida.

Joshua Bell (1995), Cho-liang Lin (2007), and Gil Shaham (2010) have also performed it with the TSO, but perhaps the most interesting footnote is not a TSO performance at all. In 1997, Benjamin Bowman, as a member of the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra, performed it under the direction of clarinetist Joaquin Valdepeñas. Bowman is now concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera.

José Silvestre White Lafitte (1835–1918)

Violin Concerto in F-sharp Minor

III. Allegro moderato

Composed 1864

5 min

ALTHOUGH LARGELY FORGOTTEN in the decades after his death in 1918, José Silvestre White Lafitte (also known as Joseph White) enjoyed an illustrious career as a violinist and composer that was centred on Paris but also included a performing tour of the Americas in 1875–1877. He was born in Matanzas, Cuba, in 1835 (or 1836—sources conflict on the exact date), to an Afro-Cuban mother and Spanish father, an amateur violinist who served as the musically precocious boy's first teacher. The young violinist gave his first recital in 1854 with none other than famed composer and pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk as his accompanist. The visiting luminary encouraged White and raised money for him to study in Paris.

He went on to win the First Grand Prize at the Paris Conservatory and establish himself in France's musical centre, becoming a French citizen in 1870. Among his admirers was Italian composer Gioachino Rossini, who attended one of the violinist's concerts in 1858 and sent him a letter offering blessings and praising his "warm execution, feeling, [and] elegance." White later served as director of the Imperial Conservatory in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1877–1889, returning afterward to Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life.

White wrote some 30 works, and, not surprising given his prowess on the instrument, most are for violin. Perhaps the most famous is *La bella Cubana*, a habanera (a Cuban dance in duple time) for two violins and orchestra. Another standout is his Violin Concerto in F-sharp Minor (1864), which has gained increasing attention in recent years. Although

its unexpected key is found in smaller-scale works like Chopin's Polonaise in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44, it is rarely used for symphonies and concertos. Notable exceptions include Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony and Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 1.

The approximately 22-minute Violin Concerto is written in a pleasing, full-bodied Romantic style, with a sunny opening movement that provides a few nice solos in the orchestra, followed by a lyrical slow movement. Heard on this program will be the final movement only, *Allegro moderato*, which lasts about five minutes, with a bouncy, syncopated violin line that gives way at times to some showy passagework with twisty triplets and even some sextuplets. But while this movement dishes up its share of virtuosic displays, White keeps such fireworks in moderation, as the tempo marking suggests, and makes sure everything stays within the overall genial feel of this work.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan



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Print of José White Lafitte when he won First Prize at the Paris Conservatory in 1856. Wikimedia Commons

Karen Sunabacka (b. 1978)

The Prairies

Composed 2017

5 min

THE PRAIRIES WAS COMMISSIONED and premiered by the Orchestre Métropolitain (Montreal) in February 2017. This five-minute piece is part of a collaborative composition, titled *De Natura Sonorum: A Canadian Pastoral Symphony*, about the geographical areas of Canada, for which five composers each wrote a movement depicting a different part of the country. Created in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Confederation, *De Natura Sonorum* was nominated in Quebec's 21st Prix Opus in the Création de l'année (Composition of the Year) category.

As a prairie composer whose works are often inspired by the natural world, Sunabacka was selected to contribute the fourth movement for this project. To compose the piece, Sunabacka first took to social media, asking what the "sounds of the prairies" are. Once the responses came in, she organized them into the four seasons, and then composed the piece to follow the sounds of the prairie seasons, beginning and ending in summer.

Starting with the delicate sounds of crickets and sparrows, the music then shifts to the honking of migrating Canadian geese and the chilly breath of the autumn wind (evoked by the brass blowing through their instruments and strings sliding on harmonic glissandos). Strings later recreate the sound of crunchy snow as glissandos continue, suggesting the whiz of sleds and the whoosh of ice skates. As spring emerges, a thunderstorm brews and reaches a climactic roar, after which it dies down to the gentle sounds of rustling grass and bird calls—the return of summer calm in the Prairies.

COMPOSER BIO: Composer Karen Sunabacka often finds inspiration in puzzles, stories, and her Métis and mixed-European heritage. She has deep roots in the Red River Settlement (what is now known as Manitoba) and feels a strong connection to the Métis, Scottish, Swedish, and Finnish cultures. This mix of cultural connections sometimes creates conflicts and new perspectives that she finds both interesting and challenging. Her music reflects this cultural mix through the exploration of the sounds and stories of the Canadian Prairies.

She often collaborates with her Métis mother, Joyce Clouston, who is a writer, Indigenous Cultural Carrier, and social worker. Together they have completed numerous works that explore family stories and the intersections of Indigenous-settler relations and philosophies. In September 2022, she released her first album, titled *Curlicue* (on Ravello Records), with pianist Darryl Friesen, which includes all her solo-piano music to date.

In demand as a composer, Sunabacka enjoys the challenge of finding a balance between teaching, composing, performing, and keeping up with her favourite science fiction and fantasy series.

Sunabacka is an Associate Professor of Music at Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo.



—Compiled and written by Hannah Chan-Hartley, PhD

Silvestre Revueltas (1899–1940)

Sensemayá

Composed 1937 & 1938

7 min

ALTHOUGH SILVESTRE REVUELTAS ONLY LIVED TO BE 40, the Mexican violinist, conductor, and composer packed a great deal into his short life. After completing his musical studies at two schools in the United States, including the Chicago Musical College, he was invited in 1929 to become assistant conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico but left six years later, after a falling-out with its founder, Carlos Chávez. In 1937, he travelled under the auspices of a leftist group to Spain during that country's infamous civil war, returning disillusioned to Mexico after Franco's victory. He fell into depression and died of complications related to alcoholism in 1940.

Mostly in the last ten years of his life, he composed some 60 works, including eight film scores and four string quartets. The two best known of these creations are a concert arrangement of his 1939 score for the movie *La noche de los mayas* (*The Night of the Mayans*) and *Sensemayá*. The latter was inspired by a poem of the same title by Nicolás Guillén, who served for 30 years as president of The National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba and was known as the national poet of Cuba. Guillén drew on his African and Spanish ancestry and incorporated Afro-Cuban legends and songs into his poetry. This poem from which Revueltas drew carries the subtitle "Chant to Kill a Snake", and the text deals with that unusual subject matter.

Revueltas wrote his first version of *Sensemayá* for small orchestra in 1937 and then expanded it for full symphonic orchestra a year later, with a substantial array of percussion including xylophone, claves, maracas, raspador, and two tom-toms. The

viscerally appealing work runs about seven minutes and shares certain similarities with the iteration and rhythmic insistence of Maurice Ravel's *Boléro*, which was written nine years earlier and was likely known to Revueltas.

After a stroke to the gong, *Sensemayá* opens quietly and mysteriously, with ostinato lines for the bass clarinet and bassoon, and, after several bars, the tuba enters with a questioning melodic passage. The work builds in intensity to the first of several climaxes, but the ostinato undertow continues almost non-stop, sometimes switching to other instruments. Midway through, the music becomes more strident with crashing cymbals, brass blasts, and woodwind screams, and then quickly quiets again. In the last minute or so, the work pushes to its powerful, fervid, and thrilling conclusion.

—Program note by Kyle MacMillan



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Silvestre Revueltas and his source:

Sensemayá, with his mouth, *sensemayá*. The dead snake cannot eat; the dead snake cannot hiss; he cannot move, he cannot run! The dead snake cannot look; the dead snake cannot drink; he cannot breathe, he cannot bite. ¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!

"*Sensemayá canto para matar una culebra*"
by Nicolás Guillén

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*

Composed 1957–1961

22 min

LEONARD BERNSTEIN COMPOSED the stage musical *West Side Story* in 1957. This orchestral suite, *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*, appeared in the wake of the 1961 film version, which won ten Academy Awards including Best Picture and Music (best score for a motion picture), awarded to Saul Chaplin, Johnny Green, Sid Ramin, and Irwin Kostal. The suite was premièred by conductor Lukas Foss and the New York Philharmonic on February 13, 1961, using the original Broadway orchestrations by Ramin and Kostal, expanded under Bernstein's supervision to full symphony orchestra.

The virtually operatic *West Side Story* is Bernstein's masterpiece of musical theatre, and marked the arrival on the music-theatre scene of Stephen Sondheim, then 27 years old, as librettist. It updates the spirit of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into contemporary times, placing the star-crossed lovers, Tony and Maria, on opposite sides of a battle, in 1957, between the Jets, a gang of white youths, and the Puerto Rican Sharks, for control of San Juan Hill on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

In the musical's opening scene, Officer Krupke and Lieutenant Schrank break up a brief skirmish, telling the gangs that their conflict is pointless since the neighbourhood will be imminently demolished to make way for the Lincoln Center (which, ironically enough, opened in September 1962 with a performance by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra).

Dance—dramatic, even violent, in nature—plays a prominent role in the show, providing plentiful material for the suite's symphonic synthesis, which links many of the musical's

most familiar themes in a sequence that follows the plot. Even if you aren't familiar with the storyline, it provides grand entertainment and a banquet of memorable melodies.

Here is the synopsis that appeared in the published score:

Prologue: The growing rivalry between the teenage street gangs, the Sharks and the Jets.

Somewhere: In a visionary dance sequence, the two gangs are united in friendship.

Scherzo: In the same dream, they break through the city walls and suddenly find themselves in a world of space, air and sun.

Mambo: Reality again; competitive dance between the gangs.

Cha-cha: The star-crossed lovers see each other for the first time and dance together.

Meeting Scene: Music accompanies their first spoken words.

"Cool" Fugue: An elaborate dance sequence in which the Jets practice controlling their hostility.

Rumble: Climactic gang battle during which the two gang leaders are killed.

Finale: Love music developing into a procession, which recalls, in tragic reality, the vision of Somewhere.

—Program note by Don Anderson



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West 63rd Street, San Juan Hill, 1956. Site of the proposed Lincoln Center. Source: Committee on Slum Clearance, Lincoln Square

For a biography of Gustavo Gimeno, please turn to page 10.



James Ehnes, violin

James Ehnes made his TSO début in February 1994.

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after musicians on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism, and an unfaltering musicality, Ehnes is a favourite guest at the world's most celebrated concert halls.

Recent orchestral highlights include the Met Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, San Francisco Symphony, London Symphony, NHK Symphony, and Munich Philharmonic. Throughout the 2023/24 season, Ehnes continues as Artist in Residence with the National Arts Centre of Canada and as Artistic Partner with Artis—Naples. During this season, he will make débuts with Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, and Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

Alongside his concerto work, Ehnes maintains a busy recital schedule. He performs regularly at the Wigmore Hall (including the complete cycle of Beethoven sonatas in 2019/20, and the complete violin/viola works of Brahms and Schumann in 2021/22), Carnegie Hall, Chicago Symphony Center, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Ravinia, Montreux, Verbier Festival, Dresden Music Festival, and Festival de Pâques in Aix-en-Provence. A devoted chamber musician, he is the leader of the Ehnes Quartet and the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society.

Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including two GRAMMY® Awards, three Gramophone Awards, and 11 JUNO Awards. In 2021, Ehnes was announced as the recipient of the coveted Artist of the Year title in the 2021 Gramophone Awards, which celebrated his recent contributions to the recording industry, including the launch of a new online recital series entitled *Recitals from Home*, which was released in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of concert halls. Ehnes recorded the six Bach sonatas and partitas and six sonatas of Ysaÿe from his home with state-of-the-art recording equipment, and released six episodes over the period of two months. These recordings have been met with great critical acclaim by audiences worldwide and Ehnes was described by *Le Devoir* as being "at the absolute forefront of the streaming evolution."

Ehnes began violin studies at the age of 5, became a protege of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin at age 9, and made his orchestra début with l'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal at age 13. He continued his studies with Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music and The Juilliard School, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music upon his graduation in 1997. He is a Member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is a Visiting Professor.

Ehnes plays the "Marsick" Stradivarius of 1715.