

TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

Oundjian Conducts Rachmaninoff

Peter Oundjian, conductor
Steven Banks, saxophone

Katerina Gimon*
Under City Lights, Forgotten Stars
World Première/TSO NextGen Commission

John Adams
Saxophone Concerto
Canadian Première
I. Animato – Moderato – Tranquillo, suave
II. Molto vivo (a hard driving pulse)

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninoff
Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 44
I. Lento – Allegro moderato
II. Adagio ma non troppo
III. Allegro

*TSO NextGen Composer

Program 2

Wednesday,
January 17, 2024
8:00pm

Saturday,
January 20, 2024
8:00pm

Sunday,
January 21, 2024*
3:00pm

*George Weston Recital Hall

*Peter Oundjian's
appearance is generously
supported by Robert
Corcoran, in memory of
Ann Corcoran*

*The TSO's George Weston
Recital Hall Series is
generously supported
by Jim Fleck and
Georgina Steinsky*

Katerina Gimon (b. 1993)

Under City Lights, Forgotten Stars

Composed 2023

World Première, TSO NextGen Commission

5 min

THE COMPOSER WRITES: For nearly all of human history, the sight of a star-filled night sky has been a unifying human experience—inspiring scientific advances, philosophy, art, and more. But today, our naturally starry skies are becoming rapidly unknown to recent generations. Our night skies have become so polluted with artificial light that in most cities—where over a half of the world’s population resides, including over 75% of Canadians—only a smattering of stars are ever visible to the unaided eye. Our view is getting drowned in light and it’s only getting worse, with recent estimates finding we’re now seeing nearly 10% fewer stars each year. But as our view of the cosmos disappears, what are we and future generations losing along with our connection to the stars?

In *Under City Lights, Forgotten Stars*, I’ve imagined a story of rediscovery where, for a time, we dim city lights and uncover the naturally starry skies hidden beneath. The music and story exist in three sections. In the first, you’ll hear bright and incessantly moving lines in the xylophone, marimba, and echoed-in other instruments, painting an illuminated city nightscape. In the second section, the city lights fade away to reveal a truly dark sky, depicted in a wandering low-string feature. Finally, our brilliantly starry skies are gradually revealed in all their magnificence, shimmering, and swirling above. The piece concludes with a fiery, bright brass feature depicting the awe-inspiring view of the Milky Way. To learn more about light pollution visit darksky.org.

COMPOSER BIO: Ontario-born and British Columbia–based composer Katerina Gimon’s uniquely dynamic, poignant, and eclectic compositional style has earned her a reputation as a distinctive voice in contemporary Canadian composition and beyond. Her works have been described as “sheer radiance” (*Campbell River Mirror*), “imbued with human emotion” (*San Diego Story*), and capable of taking listeners on a “fascinating journey of textural discovery” (*Ludwig Van*), earning her several honours including multiple SOCAN Awards (2022, 2021, 2016) and nominations for Western Canadian Music Awards for Classical Composer of the Year (2023, 2021). In her music, Gimon draws influence from a myriad of places—from the Ukrainian folk music of her heritage to indie rock, as well as from her roots as a songwriter and improviser. Her compositions are performed widely across Canada and internationally, with notable performances at Carnegie Hall, Berliner Philharmonie, and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.



—Compiled by Hannah Chan-Hartley

John Adams (b. 1947)

Saxophone Concerto

Composed 2013

Canadian Première

30 min

A YOUTHFUL INSTRUMENT by classical music standards, the saxophone enjoys a concert repertoire firmly rooted in the 20th and 21st centuries. In contrast to the vast depth of warhorse concertos for the piano or violin, the genre of saxophone concerto is still being defined, allowing composers the opportunity to tinker, innovate, and draw from the instrument's inescapable contributions to jazz and other forms of popular music. The father of American composer John Adams was an accomplished alto saxophonist in several swing bands, and Adams recalls hearing the sound of the saxophone nearly every day as a child, whether it was from his father or a healthy household collection of jazz records. Unsurprisingly, the saxophone makes routine appearances in Adams's own compositions, including the prominent orchestration for saxophones in his best known work, the 1987 opera *Nixon in China*.

Where *Nixon in China* brought the saxophone into the opera house, Adams's Saxophone Concerto brings the energy, technique, and styles of jazz saxophone performance to the symphonic stage. Adams was inspired to write the piece upon learning that Timothy McAllister—the work's dedicatee and first performer—was also a former champion stunt bicycle rider. Adams connected the notion of McAllister as a risk-taker with the fiendishly difficult and adventurous bebop stylings of players like Charlie Parker. From this font of inspiration, Adams challenges the soloist and orchestra to extraordinary classical virtuosity tinged with the freer, grittier technique of the jazz club.

This substantial *tour de force* dips and weaves between musical worlds, with undercurrents of jazz never far from hand.

Part one alternates capriciously between an animated mood characterized by angular accents and lyrical, meditative spells atop muted strings. The shorter part two, termed "a species of funk-rondo" in the composer's own program notes, articulates a winding and virtuosic solo line punctuated by restless interjections from the orchestra. A final burst of energy and tension propels the work to a provocative ending with wit and irreverence worthy of the bebop greats.

COMPOSER BIO: Composer, conductor, and creative thinker John Adams occupies a unique position in the world of classical music. Over the past 25 years, Adams's music has played a decisive role in turning the tide of contemporary musical aesthetics away from academic modernism and toward a more expressive language. Born and raised in New England, he began composing at age 10 and heard his first orchestral pieces performed while still a teenager. The intellectual and artistic traditions of New England, including his studies at Harvard University and attendance at Boston Symphony Orchestra concerts, helped shape him as an artist and thinker. After earning two degrees from Harvard, he moved to Northern California in 1971 and has since lived in the San Francisco Bay Area. Adams's works have received numerous awards, among them the 1994 Royal Philharmonic Society Award for his Chamber Symphony and the 1995 Grawemeyer Award for his Violin Concerto. In September 2003, Adams succeeded Pierre Boulez as Composer in Residence at Carnegie Hall.



—Program note by Arlan Vriens

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1973)

Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 44

Composed 1936

38 min

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF WAS BORN IN SEMYONOVO in the Novgorod Oblast (region) of northwest Russia and died in Beverly Hills, California, USA, having left Russia with his family in 1918. Symphony No. 3 was his second-last orchestral work and one of only six he wrote during his 25 years in the USA. The debut of the Third Symphony (on November 6, 1936) drew a disappointing, and likely disappointed, response from audiences and press alike. Some found it too much of an advance on his earlier works; others, not enough. Concert performances were initially rare, though like other previously neglected Rachmaninoff compositions, the reputation of this elegant, ingenious, and often surprising work has grown significantly over the last 30 years.

The entire work is bound together by a theme that recurs in various guises and transformations in each movement. This chant-like motto appears quietly at the very opening of the first movement. The first main theme is a questioning idea scored for oboes and bassoons. The cellos introduce the second subject, a meltingly nostalgic melody that extends Rachmaninoff's run of gorgeous, ultra-romantic themes; instead of fading away wistfully, as one might expect,

it gathers momentum and expands into an exultant, full-throated climax. In the *Allegro moderato* main body of the first movement, Rachmaninoff focuses solely on developing the first theme. He achieves this with impressive variety. In emotional terms, the treatment displays great bitterness and borders on violence, climaxing in a march-like episode bedecked with percussion. The main themes return, their wistful longing intensified, before the movement comes to rest, in delicately scored exhaustion.

The slow middle movement is in three panels. Once again it opens and closes with the motto, appearing initially on the horns, filigreed with harp accompaniment. Stirrings of restlessness insinuate themselves, eventually welling up to introduce the brisk central panel. An abbreviated version of the opening panel closes the movement, pizzicato motto and all. Optimism radiates from the bright, energetic opening of the episodic *Allegro* finale, only to be

shadowed soon afterward by the menacing return of the motto. Rachmaninoff then uses the first melody as the theme for an athletic fugue; the finale's opening theme returns in its original, vivacious form. After a meditative passage, the movement gradually banishes the shadows that have dogged it, and, regaining the fervour with which it began, powers forward to a resounding conclusion.

—Program note by Don Anderson



↑
Sergei Rachmaninoff—by Dane Thibeault



Peter Oundjian made his TSO début as a guest conductor on October 24, 1998.

His début as Music Director Designate was on May 28, 2003, in a Mozart-rich program (including Itzhak Perlman playing Violin Concerto No. 3, the overture to *Don Giovanni*, and Symphony No. 35 "Haffner").

His first concert as Music Director was on September 22 of the same year, opening the new season with Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, and Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* after intermission.

Peter Oundjian, conductor

A dynamic presence in the conducting world, Peter Oundjian is renowned for his vibrant collaborative spirit and engaging musicality. His musical career spans five decades, beginning as a solo violinist and first violinist of the Tokyo String Quartet, followed by an international conducting career leading preeminent orchestras in many of the world's major musical centers.

He is currently Principal Conductor of the Colorado Symphony and Music Director of the Colorado Music Festival (CMF), where he has continued to program and conduct concerts that delight audiences with beloved masterpieces alongside music written by living composers. Over the course of his 14-year tenure as Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, which concluded in 2018, he reinvigorated the orchestra with acclaimed innovative programming, artistic collaborations, extensive audience growth, national and international tours and several outstanding recordings, including Vaughan Williams' *Orchestral Works*, which garnered a Grammy nomination and a Juno award. Under his leadership, the Symphony underwent a transformation that significantly strengthened its presence in the world.

From 2012–2018, Oundjian served as Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, where he led the RSNO on several international tours, including North America, China, and a European festival tour with performances at the Bregenz Festival, the Dresden Festival as well as in Innsbruck, Bergamo, Ljubljana, and others. His final appearance with the orchestra as their Music Director was at the 2018 BBC Proms where he conducted Britten's epic *War Requiem*.

Oundjian was Principal Guest Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 2006 to 2010 and Artistic Director of the Caramoor International Music Festival in New York from 1997 to 2007. He was also the Music Director of the Amsterdam Sinfonietta from 1998–2002. Throughout his conducting career, Oundjian has appeared as guest conductor with the country's leading orchestras, including Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Atlanta and San Francisco Symphonies, among others.

After opening the 2023–2024 season in Denver, Oundjian will return to Seattle, Dallas, Toronto, and Sarasota. His season culminates with a Carnegie Hall concert in the spring with students from the Royal Conservatory in Toronto.

Oundjian has been a visiting professor at Yale University's School of Music since 1981.



Steven Banks, saxophone

These performances mark Steven Banks's TSO debut.

As a performer and composer, saxophonist Steven Banks (b. 1993) is striving to bring his instrument to the heart of the classical music world. He is driven to program and write music that directly addresses aspects of the human experience and is an active and intentional supporter of diverse voices in the future of concert music. Banks is establishing himself as a compelling and charismatic soloist, and in 2022, he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and was a chosen artist for WQXR's Artist Propulsion Lab. He was the first saxophonist to be awarded First Prize at the Young Concert Artists Susan Wadsworth International Auditions. Critics have consistently recognized Banks for his warm yet glowing tone, well-crafted and communicative musical expression, and deft technical abilities.

As a composer, Banks has been commissioned by such organizations as Young Concert Artists, WQXR's Artist Propulsion Lab, Latitude 49, Yale University's Project 14 initiative, and Northwestern University's Saxophone Ensemble. Jarrett Hoffman of *Cleveland Classical* has said that his music showcases "a unique and ambitious blend of feelings and sounds" and portrays "a deep intimacy" and "a sense of vulnerability." His work for alto saxophone and string quartet, *Cries, Sighs, and Dreams*, was premiered in May 2022 at Carnegie Hall with the Borromeo Quartet. His work for solo piano, *Fantasy on Recurring Daydreams*, was premiered by Zhu Wang in April 2023. Banks's works are published by Murphy Music Press.

An advocate for diversity and inclusion in music education and performance, Banks was part of the TEDxNorthwesternU 2017 conference presenting his dynamic approach to overcoming institutionalized prejudices against women and people of colour. In addition, he has written about and given lectures on the history of Black classical composers. In collaboration with Anthony Trionfo and Randall Goosby, the "Learning to Listen" round table was created to discuss the nuances of the Black experience in classical music and beyond. In partnership with the Sphinx Organization, they also created the "Illuminate!" series, which opened three essential conversations on the subject of music education, artist activism, and the LGBTQIA+ community in classical music.

Banks serves as a visiting faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He was previously Assistant Professor of Saxophone at both Ithaca College and the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory, and held the Jackie McLean Fellowship at the University of Hartford. His own primary saxophone teachers have been Taimur Sullivan, Otis Murphy Jr., and Galvin Crisp. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, as well as a Master of Music degree from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music. Banks is an endorsing artist for Conn Selmer instruments, D'Addario Woodwinds, lefreQue Sound Solutions, and Key Leaves.