

NORTH CAROLINA **SYMPHONY**

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto

THU, APR 25, 2024 | 7:30PM

WILSON CENTER, WILMINGTON

North Carolina Symphony
Kazem Abdullah, conductor
Sirena Huang, violin

PROGRAM

Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921)

Prelude to *Hansel and Gretel*

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

- I. Allegro molto appassionato
 - II. Andante
 - III. Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace
- Sirena Huang, *violin*

INTERMISSION

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Symphony No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 82

- I. Tempo molto moderato – Allegro moderato – Presto
- II. Andante mosso, quasi allegretto
- III. Allegro molto – Misterioso

About the Artists



Kazem Abdullah, *conductor*

These concerts are the North Carolina Symphony debut for Kazem Abdullah.

Kazem Abdullah opened the 2023/24 season leading a new production of Anthony Davis' *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* at the Metropolitan Opera, a production *The New York Times* called "an American classic." The season also includes debuts with the Naples Philharmonic and Kansas City Symphony and return engagements with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and Seattle Opera.

Among his orchestral credits are the Indianapolis, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Cincinnati symphony orchestras, Oregon Symphony, and Seattle Symphony. In addition to his symphony engagements, he has conducted the American premiere of Charles Wuorinen's opera *Brokeback Mountain*, Puccini's *Tosca* for Seattle Opera, and Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* for Cape Town Opera. Committed to expanding the American repertoire, he has led the premieres of American operatic works including *Omar*, by Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels.

Born in Indianapolis and raised in Dayton, Ohio, Abdullah currently lives in Nürnberg, Germany, and served as Generalmusikdirektor in Aachen, Germany, from 2012 to 2017. He conducted over 25 operas and collaborated with musicians such as Johannes Moser and Augustin Hadelich. He has also served as Assistant Conductor at the Metropolitan Opera, where he made his debut in 2009 conducting Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*.

Trained as a clarinetist, Abdullah has performed extensively as an orchestral musician, chamber musician, and soloist. He spent two seasons as a member of the New World Symphony and performed as a soloist with orchestras such as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra, as well as the chamber ensembles Trio Wanderer and the Auryn Quartet.

Abdullah has worked with student orchestras at the Interlochen Center for the Arts, The Juilliard School, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, among others. He was awarded the Outstanding Young Alumnus Award by his alma mater, the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.



Sirena Huang, *violin*

These concerts are the North Carolina Symphony debut for Sirena Huang.

Praised by *The Baltimore Sun* for her “impeccable technique...deeply expressive phrasing...and poetic weight,” Sirena Huang has been the recipient of numerous accolades and awards. She is the Gold Medalist of the 11th Quadrennial International Violin Competition of Indianapolis and was also awarded eight of the eleven special prizes. In 2017, she was awarded first prize at the Elmar Oliveira International Violin Competition and won the New York Concert Artist Worldwide Debut Audition. Other honors include first prize of the 6th International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians, first prize and the Audience Award at the Cooper International Competition, the Hahnloser Prize for Violin at the Verbier Music Festival in Switzerland, and top prizes at the Singapore International Violin Competition and the Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition.

Huang made her solo debut with the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra in 2004 at the age of nine. She has been featured as a soloist with more than 50 ensembles including the New York Philharmonic; The Cleveland Orchestra; the symphony orchestras of Indianapolis, Baltimore, Shanghai, and Singapore; and the Staatskapelle Weimar in Germany. She has appeared as a guest artist at the Verbier Festival, Marlboro Music Festival, Ravinia Festival, Aspen Music Festival and School, Newport Classical, Music in the Mountains, Eastern Music Festival, Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota, and many others.

In addition to her TED Talk “An 11-year-old’s magical violin” in 2006, Huang has been featured on numerous radio and television broadcasts including WQXR’s *Young Artists Showcase* and NPR’s *From the Top*.

About the Music



Prelude to *Hansel and Gretel*

ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK (1854-1921)

THE STORY

In the wake of Wagner's monumental influence on late 19th-century opera and amid the sustained power of Italian operas, one German composer managed to occupy a small corner of the terrain: Engelbert Humperdinck. The Siegburg-born composer had worked closely with Wagner at Bayreuth—as an ardent admirer, copyist, and tutor for the composer's son Siegfried—before turning to his most famous composition, *Hänsel und Gretel*. The choice of a homey children's tale from the Brothers Grimm, initially requested by Humperdinck's sister for her new infant, was a far cry from lofty mythological romances—yet the humble and familiar *Märchenoper* (fairy-tale opera) enchanted German audiences, critics, and composers alike.

Sending the composer a tantalizing gingerbread house on Christmas Eve, Cosima Wagner (the wife of Richard) added a note that “in an era when the Germans follow [the Italians] Mascagni and Leoncavallo... you offer them this delicious and delicate score.” Richard Strauss, who conducted the premiere in Weimar in 1893, raved: “What refreshing humor, what deliciously innocent melody, what skill and creativity in the treatment of the orchestra, what perfection in the arrangement of the whole, what fertile invention, what splendid polyphony—and all so original, new, and authentically German!” Brahms personally paid a visit to the composer after hearing the Viennese premiere: “*Hänsel und Gretel* was quite beautifully done and unbelievably well received. ... I certainly had not expected such a satisfying evening.”

LISTEN FOR

- The warm, inviting tones of the opening horns
- A lively section with chromatic scales tip-toeing in staccato that gradually build toward the climax
- A celebratory melody firmly arriving in C major that quietly recedes for the opening act of the opera

INSTRUMENTATION

Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings



Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

THE STORY

Many works in the history of classical music have arisen from close partnerships between composers and performers. At the height of his career, 29-year-old Felix Mendelssohn wrote in the summer of 1838 to the virtuoso violinist Ferdinand David, a close friend and the brilliant young concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra: "I should like to write a violin concerto for you next winter. One in E minor runs through my head, the beginning of which gives me no peace." Seven years would elapse before the work premiered in Leipzig with David, the dedicatee, as soloist.

Declared "the heart's jewel" among the four greats of German violin concertos (Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Brahms, and Bruch), Mendelssohn's concerto both delights the ear with hauntingly beautiful melodies and thwarts convention. A concerto's opening bars were typically reserved for the orchestra to introduce the work's main themes; here, Mendelssohn breaks tradition by allowing the soloist to have the first word against muted strings. Concertos also usually featured pauses between movements—but Mendelssohn weaves them together, seamlessly moving from one to the next.

Collaboration with David is preeminent in the cadenza, the precise location where the soloist typically dazzles audiences with a virtuosic improvisation. Here, Mendelssohn writes out the cadenza (with David's suggestions) and positions the solo interlude before the recapitulation rather than after. The change allowed audiences to marvel at the brilliance of the soloist before once again returning to the familiar lyricism of the main theme.

LISTEN FOR

- Intense lyricism in the opening solo
- The sustained voice of the bassoon that links the first movement with the second, leading to the soloist's beautiful song without words
- A sprightly Intermezzo before the finale that recalls the composer's earlier music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

INSTRUMENTATION

Solo violin; two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings



Symphony No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 82

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

THE STORY

Sibelius' Symphony No. 5 was commissioned by the Finnish government in 1914 to celebrate the composer at a special concert of his music the following year. His 50th birthday was declared a national holiday to honor "one of the richest spirits that were ever born in this country and the greatest creative power now living among us."

Sibelius could claim a long string of successes, including symphonic poems, four symphonies, and his violin concerto—but health concerns plagued the composer. He had undergone 14 throat operations to remove a tumor and chafed under a medically imposed denial of his beloved cigars and wine. He made a successful visit to America, where he received an honorary doctorate from Yale University, but the outbreak of the First World War cut off his royalties from his publisher in Germany.

Originally a four-movement work at its premiere in December 1915, the symphony was revised twice over the next four years—during which time it was pared down to three movements. Sibelius wrote in his diary regarding the revisions: "I wished to give my symphony another—more human—form. More down-to-earth, more vivid."

LISTEN FOR

- Two horns decorating an idyllic landscape of tone colors painted by flutes, oboes, and clarinets in the opening
- Variations that make up the slow Andante, characterized by sustained tones in the background and light movement in the foreground
- Tremolo figurations in the opening of the finale, with a horn motif described by musicologist Sir Donald Tovey as "Thor swinging his hammer"
- The final movement, inspired by the sight of 16 swans taking flight at once over his country home, which ends with six staggered chords—making it one of the most unusual endings in the symphonic repertoire

INSTRUMENTATION

Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, strings

Notes on the music by Joanna Chang

The Musicians of the North Carolina Symphony

Carlos Miguel Prieto,
Music Director
*The Maxine and
Benjamin Swalin
Chair*

Grant Llewellyn,
Music Director Laureate

Michelle Di Russo,
Associate Conductor
The Lucy Moore Ruffin Chair

Violin I

Brian Reagin, Concertmaster
*The Annabelle Lundy Fetterman
Chair*

Jessica Hung,
Associate Concertmaster
*The Assad Meymandi and Family
Chair*

Anna Black,
Assistant Concertmaster
The Anne Heartt Gregory Chair

Karen Strittmatter Galvin,
Assistant Concertmaster

Carol Chung*

Emily Rist Glover
The Jessie Wyatt Ethridge Chair

Paul Goldsberry
The Richard and Joy Cook Chair

So Yun Kim**
*The Governor James B. Hunt, Jr.
Chair*

Maria Meyer
*The Tom and Mary Mac
Bradshaw Chair*

Pablo Sánchez Pazos
*The Phyllis ("Pat") Conrad Wells
Chair*

Jessica Ryou
*The James C. Byrd and Family
Chair*

Lin-Ti Wang*

Eileen Wynne
The Harvey At-Large Chair

Erin Zehngut
The J. Felix Arnold Chair

Violin II

Jacqueline Saed Wolborsky,
Principal
The Nancy Finch Wallace Chair

Tiffany Kang,
Associate Principal
The Blanche Martin Shaw Chair

David Kilbride, Assistant
Principal

Qi Cao
Janet Gayer Hall

Chris Jusell*
Leah Latorraca*
Oskar Ozolinch
Jeanine Wynton

Viola

Samuel Gold, Principal
*The Florence Spinks and Charles
Jacob Cate and Alma Yondorf
and Sylvan Hirschberg Chair*

Kurt Tseng,
Associate Principal
The Betty Ellen Madry Chair

Brian Sherwood,
Assistant Principal

Petra Berényi

Paul Malcolm

Amy Mason
The J. Sidney Kirk Chair

Daniel Moore

Sandra Schwarcz
*The Samuel H. and Anne Latham
Johnson Chair*

Cello

Bonnie Thron, Principal
The June and Tom Roberg Chair

Elizabeth Beilman,
Associate Principal
*The Sarah Carlyle Herbert Dorroh
Chair*

Peng Li, Assistant Principal,
Anonymously Endowed

Yewon Ahn
Anonymously Endowed

David Meyer
The Nell Hirschberg Chair

Marc Moskowitz*
*The William Charles Rankin
Chair*

Lisa Howard Shaughnessy
The Sara Wilson Hodgkins Chair

Nathaniel Yaffe
*The Secretary of Cultural
Resources Betty Ray McCain
Chair*

Double Bass

Leonid Finkelshteyn, Principal
*The Martha and Peyton
Woodson Chair*

Bruce Ridge*,
Associate Principal
*The John C. and Margaret P.
Parker Chair*

Craig Brown
*The Mark W. McClure Foundation
Chair*

Erik Dyke
*The Harlee H. and Pauline G.
Jobe Chair*

John Spuller*
*The Dr. and Mrs. Preston H. Gada
Chair*

Flute

Anne Whaley Laney, Principal
*The Mr. and Mrs. George M.
Stephens Chair*

Mary E. Boone,
Assistant Principal
*The Dr. and Mrs. Shaler Stidham,
Jr. Chair*

Vaynu Kadiyali*
The Jack and Sing Boddie Chair

Piccolo

Vaynu Kadiyali*
The Jean Dunn Williams Chair

Oboe

Melanie Wilsden, Principal
The Hardison and Stoltze Chair

Joseph Peters,
Associate Principal,
The Lizette T. Dunham Chair

Rachel Ahn*
*The Clarence and Alice Aycock
Poe Chair*

English Horn

Joseph Peters
The Bruce and Margaret King Chair

Clarinet

Samuel Almaguer, Principal
The Mr. and Mrs. J. Christopher Walker, II Chair

Sammy Lesnick,
Assistant Principal
The Kathryn Powell and Green Flavia Cooper Chair

Bassoon

Aaron Apaza, Principal
The Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald S. Hudson Chair

Wenmin Zhang,
Assistant Principal,
The Beethoven Chair

French Horn

Rebekah Daley, Principal
The Mary T. McCurdy Chair

Kimberly Van Pelt,
Associate Principal
The Paul R. Villard and Gabriel Wolf Chair

Corbin Castro*
The Roger Colson and Bobbi Lyon Hackett Chair

Gabriel Mairson*
The James Marion Poyner Chair

To Be Filled
The Mary Susan Kirk Fulghum Chair

Trumpet

Paul Randall, Principal
The George Smedes Poyner Chair

Clinton McLendon,
Associate Principal
The Henry and Martha Zaytoun and Family Chair

Trombone

John Ilika, Principal
The Thomas Warwick Steed, Jr. Family Chair

Steven Osborne*, Assistant Principal

Jonathan Randazzo**, Assistant Principal
The Frances Armour Bryant Chair

Bass Trombone

Matthew Neff
Anonymously Endowed

Tuba

Seth Horner, Principal
The Governor and Mrs. James G. Martin, Jr. Chair

Harp

Anita Burroughs-Price
Vonda Darr

Timpani

Colin Hartnett, Principal
The Patricia R., Steven T. and George F. Hackney III Chair

Percussion

Richard Motylinski, Principal
The Margery and Earl Johnson, Jr. Chair

Rajesh Prasad,
Assistant Principal
The Abram and Frances Pascher Kanof Chair

Organ

To Be Filled
The Albert and Susan Jenkins and Family Organ Chair

Library

Stephanie Wilson, Principal
Orchestra Librarian
The Mary Colvert and Banks C. Talley Chair

Taylor Troyer,
Assistant Orchestra Librarian

*Acting position

**Leave of absence

Named musician chairs are made possible through very meaningful gifts to the Symphony's endowment. As such, these donor families are also members of the Lamar Stringfield Society.

All string players rotate stands on a periodic basis in each section with the exception of titled players: Principals, Associate Principals, and Assistant Principals.

The North Carolina Symphony is a member of the League of American Orchestras and the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians.

The North Carolina Master Chorale is the Resident Chorus of the North Carolina Symphony.

The North Carolina Symphony Foundation gratefully acknowledges the generous gift of the Lupot violin from Arnold and Zena† Lerman.

†deceased

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