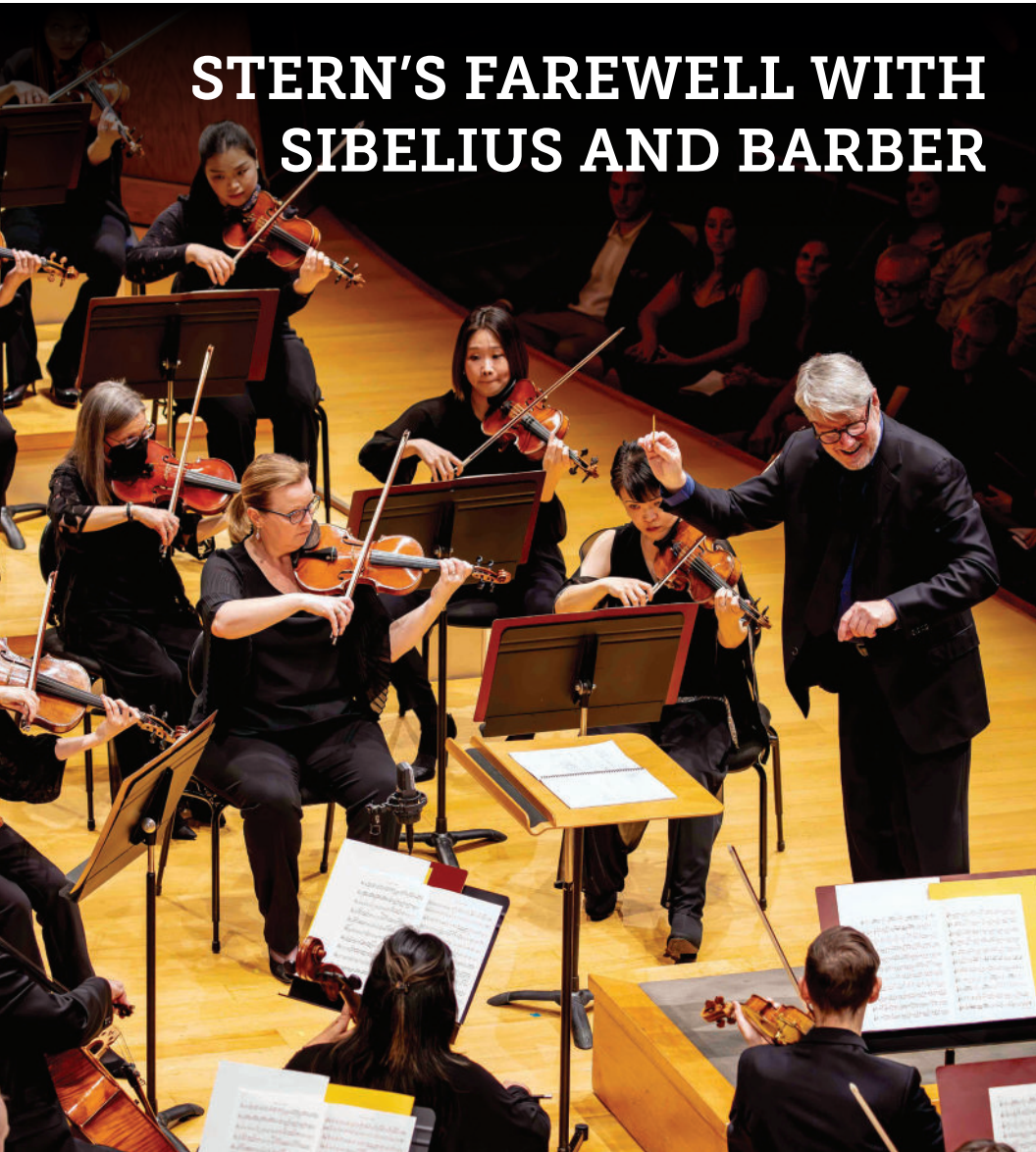




# KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

## STERN'S FAREWELL WITH SIBELIUS AND BARBER



**JUNE 21-23, 2024**

HELZBERG HALL, KAUFFMAN CENTER  
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

**MICHAEL STERN, MUSIC DIRECTOR  
AND CONDUCTOR**

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# PROGRAM

## STERN'S FAREWELL WITH SIBELIUS AND BARBER

Friday and Saturday, June 21-22, 2024 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, June 23, 2024 at 2 p.m.

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

**MICHAEL STERN, CONDUCTOR**

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**FELIX MENDELSSOHN** Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, op. 21

**SAMUEL BARBER** Symphony No. 1 in One Movement, op. 9

### INTERMISSION

**JEAN SIBELIUS** Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 43

I. Allegretto

II. Andante, ma rubato

III. Vivacissimo

IV. Finale: Allegro moderato

# ABOUT MICHAEL STERN



## MICHAEL STERN, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Michael Stern's celebrated 19-year tenure as music director of the Kansas City Symphony is remarkable for the orchestra's artistic ascent, organizational development and stability, and the extraordinary growth of its varied audiences. With a determined focus on impeccable musicianship and creative programming, Stern and the orchestra have partnered with Grammy® Award-winning Reference Recordings for an ongoing series of highly praised CDs.

Stern is also music director of the National Repertory Orchestra, a summer music festival in Breckenridge, Colorado, as well as the newly rebranded Orchestra Lumos, formerly the Stamford (CT) Symphony. He was recently named artistic advisor of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, one of Canada's foremost orchestral ensembles, and following a 22-year tenure as founding artistic director of Iris Orchestra in Germantown, Tennessee, he now serves the newly reimagined Iris Collective as artistic advisor.

Stern has led orchestras throughout Europe and Asia, including the Budapest and Vienna radio symphonies, the Helsinki, Israel, London, Moscow and Royal Stockholm philharmonics, London Symphony, National Symphony of Taiwan, Orchestre de Paris and Tokyo's NHK Symphony, among many others.

In North America, Stern has conducted the Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Houston, Indianapolis, National (Washington, D.C.), Montreal, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Seattle and Toronto symphonies, the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras and the New York Philharmonic. He has been a regular guest at the Aspen Music Festival and School, where he also worked with students in the American Academy of Conducting at Aspen.

Stern has also held conducting positions with Germany's Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra as well as France's Orchestre National de Lyon and Orchestre National de Lille.

Stern received his music degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where his major teacher was the noted conductor and scholar Max Rudolf. Stern co-edited the third edition of Rudolf's famous textbook, "The Grammar of Conducting," and also edited a new volume of Rudolf's collected writings and correspondence. He is a 1981 graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a degree in American history.



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# THANK YOU, MICHAEL STERN



Across the two decades of Michael Stern's leadership, we have been moved by brilliant performances, eloquent insights, great masterworks, world premieres and imaginative programs of tremendous emotional depth.

At this year's Bank of America Celebration at the Station on Memorial Day weekend, Mayor Quinton Lucas proclaimed "Michael Stern Day" in Kansas City, Missouri. People throughout the region join in this salute to Michael's artistic excellence, devotion to the community and steadfast belief that music matters.

**Thank You, Michael!**



## PROCLAMATION

### Recognizing May 26, 2024, as Michael Stern Day in Kansas City

**WHEREAS**, Michael Stern has served as Music Director of the Kansas City Symphony for 19 years, from 2005 to 2024; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern has had an illustrious career as a conductor, teacher and mentor, leading orchestras over the world and bringing renown to Kansas City; and

**WHEREAS**, through Mr. Stern's unwavering commitment to excellence, the Symphony's artistic momentum continues to build, making the case for music in the lives of everyone throughout our community; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern has tirelessly shared his transformative vision with musicians, board members, staff and audiences, focusing attention on the Kansas City Symphony's bright future and inspiring changes to lead it forward as the premier performing arts organization in our community; and

**WHEREAS**, during Mr. Stern's tenure, audiences for Kansas City Symphony performances have come from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and 31 foreign countries; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern is devoted to music of our time, and during his tenure as Music Director, the Kansas City Symphony gave 43 world premieres and six United States premieres, including 42 works commissioned or co-commissioned by the Symphony; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern and the Kansas City Symphony have released 11 recordings to widespread accolades and critical acclaim, with two more recordings still in production; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern helped lead the Kansas City Symphony's transition to the world-class acoustics of its new performance home, Helzberg Hall in the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern has shared his civic enthusiasm by conducting the Symphony playing our national anthem at season-opening games for the Kansas City Royals and Kansas City Chiefs; and

**WHEREAS**, Mr. Stern will be named Music Director Laureate, recognizing his remarkable accomplishments with the Kansas City Symphony; and

**WHEREAS**, everyone associated with the Kansas City Symphony and people throughout our community wish Mr. Stern well in his future endeavors.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, as Mayor of the City of Kansas City, I, Quinton D. Lucas, on behalf of the residents of this great city, do hereby proclaim May 26, 2024, as Michael Stern Day in Kansas City, Missouri.



Quinton D. Lucas

Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri

# PROGRAM NOTES



## FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, op. 21 (1826)

11 minutes

*2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, ophicleide (tuba), timpani and strings.*

In the case of Felix Mendelssohn, the answer to the nature vs. nurture debate is ... both. He was an exceptionally precocious child who displayed talent early on in painting, poetry, athletics and linguistics as well as in music. He also grew up in Berlin in a wealthy family that prized a highly intellectual environment, frequently entertaining some of the leading artists, philosophers, musicians and scientists of the era. By the age of 10, Felix was studying piano, violin, organ, music theory, counterpoint and composition. Of course, sibling rivalry can't be discounted as

at the same time, his 13-year-old sister Fanny performed from memory 24 preludes from J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The Mendelssohn children also studied a wide array of academic subjects and were tutored in English, French and German. A favorite activity was reading Shakespeare plays aloud, acting out various scenes. Felix's compositional skill advanced rapidly and he frequently had his works performed by an orchestra at private soirees in the Mendelssohn home.

In 1826, the Mendelssohns obtained a new German translation of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and its fantastical plot stirred Felix's imagination. Fairies, magic spells, nobles, mistaken identities and complicated love interests offered fertile ground for musical depictions. Fanny Mendelssohn later noted:

We were entwined with "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and Felix particularly made it his own. He identified with all of the characters. He recreated them, so to speak, every one of them whom Shakespeare produced in the immensity of his genius.

Fresh from the success of his remarkable Octet, 17-year-old Felix launched into the project of writing a concert overture (an orchestral work in the style of an overture but not intended to precede a play, opera or ballet) for "A Midsummer Night's Dream." He wrote to Fanny, who was traveling: "I've gotten into the habit of composing in our garden ... Today or tomorrow I shall go there to dream 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'" He composed quickly and finished the work — for two pianos — on August 6, 1826, for Fanny and him to perform. The orchestration soon followed and the overture was premiered at a concert in Stettin (then in Prussia; now Szczecin, Poland) on February 20, 1827, shortly after Felix's 18th birthday.

Mendelssohn scored the overture for fairly modest and unremarkable orchestral forces — pairs of woodwinds, horns and trumpets along with strings and timpani — with one exception: the English bass horn or corno inglese di basso, an instrument he encountered in 1824 while on holiday in



# PROGRAM NOTES

Northern Germany. It was an era that saw the advent of many new instruments and technological improvements in existing instruments, so it shouldn't be surprising that Mendelssohn would avail himself of those sounds. He soon substituted yet another new instrument for the English bass horn: the ophicleide, a bass brass instrument invented to replace the difficult-to-play serpent. The ophicleide enjoyed brief popularity before the tuba rose to prominence in the 1830s.

In 1833, Mendelssohn responded to his publisher's inquiry about the work's programmatic outline:

I believe it will suffice to remember how the rulers of the fairies, Oberon and Titania, constantly appear throughout the play with all their train, now here and now there; then comes Prince Theseus of Athens who joins a hunting party in the forest ... then the two pairs of tender lovers, who lose and find themselves; finally the troop of clumsy, coarse tradesmen, who ply their ponderous amusements; then again the fairies, who entice all — and on this the piece is constructed. When at the end all is happily resolved ... the fairies return and bless the house, and disappear as morning arrives. So ends the play, and also my overture.

He would return to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" 16 years later at the behest of King Frederick William IV of Prussia, composing several new pieces to serve as incidental music for a production of the play at Potsdam in 1843. From overture to finale, the dazzling genius of Mendelssohn's music is a perfect complement to Shakespeare's brilliance.

— *Eric T. Williams*

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# PROGRAM NOTES



## SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981)

Symphony No. 1 in One Movement, op. 9 (1936)

21 minutes

*Piccolo, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, harp and strings.*

### THE STORY

The American composer Samuel Barber was only 25 years old when he completed his First Symphony, which was his first orchestral work to gain widespread attention. Shortly after graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia (Michael Stern's alma mater), Barber was awarded the Rome Prize and spent three years studying there. During this period he composed the symphony. It was premiered in Rome by the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in December 1936; a month later it received its American premiere from the Cleveland Orchestra; and a month after that it was performed in Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic with Artur Rodziński conducting. Rodziński championed Barber's music and conducted the symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival in July of the same year, where the piece became the first symphonic work by an American composer to be performed there.

### THE MUSIC

The title of the piece on the printed score is "First Symphony (in One Movement)," but within the one movement Barber traverses all the ground of a traditional four-movement symphony.

The first "movement" contains three themes — the main theme at the beginning (in the strings), a lyrical second theme (introduced by the English horn), and a closing theme (played by the strings and woodwinds). These three themes form the basis of the entire piece. After the entire orchestra plays the same rhythm in unison twice, followed by an echo in the timpani alone, trills and fast scales (followed by a timpani roll) end the section.

The second "movement" is a scherzo, with lots of fast staccato (short) notes, based on a faster version of the main theme. After a flurry of upward scales, a solo bassoon and two clarinets play the staccato theme quietly before muted strings and a solo oboe usher in the third "movement," the expressive heart of the symphony. The oboe's melody is based on an elongated version of the lyrical second theme. An intense crescendo with a cymbal swell leads to the final "movement," which starts with a bass line in cellos and double basses drawn from the main theme. Over this repeating bass line, fragments from other themes are played, including the closing theme, bringing the symphony full circle.

— *AJ Harbison*

# PROGRAM NOTES

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Kansas City Symphony and Michael Stern recorded Barber's Symphony No. 1 on a recording entitled "One Movement Symphonies," also featuring Jean Sibelius' Symphony No. 7 and Alexander Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*.

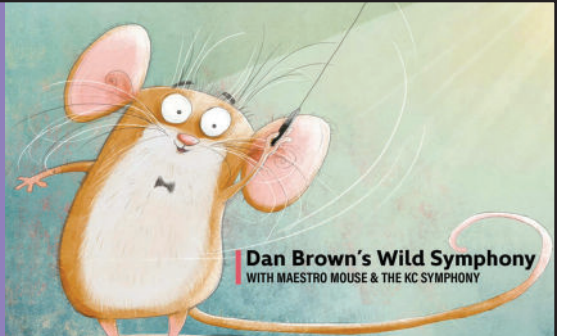
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 KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

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# PROGRAM NOTES



## JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 43 (1901-1902)

44 minutes

*2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.*

### THE STORY

Finland had long been subject to Swedish rule before being ceded to Russia in the 19th century. Thus, it should not be surprising that Jean Sibelius grew up in a Swedish-speaking family and didn't learn Finnish until his later school years. It was at that point he discovered the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, which would provide him with tremendous compositional inspiration over the years. At the age of 14, he began studying violin with a local bandmaster but subsequently entered the University of Helsinki to study law. Following a long tradition of composers abandoning legal studies in favor of music, Sibelius launched headlong into serious violin studies, spending two years in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Berlin and Vienna. Influenced greatly by the music of Beethoven, Wagner, Richard Strauss and Bruckner, he returned to Finland in 1891 and began to enjoy success with early compositions.

Teaching duties at the Helsinki Music Institute (now the Sibelius Academy) limited his time for composing so he welcomed a grant in 1898 that allowed him to focus on composition. His First Symphony premiered in 1899, its overt patriotic spirit stoking nationalist sentiment and making Sibelius a Finnish hero in the midst of Russian subjugation. This was the backdrop for his Second Symphony.

In February 1900, Sibelius' youngest daughter died, the victim of a typhus outbreak. Despite this dreadful blow, Sibelius embarked on a European concert tour, leaving his wife behind. He muddled on between work and alcoholic binges, leaving his home life in very strained circumstances. An anonymous letter arrived in June 1900, stating: "It is high time for you to travel. You will spend the late autumn and the winter in Italy, a country where one learns cantabile, balance and harmony, plasticity and symmetry of lines, a country where everything is beautiful — even the ugly. You remember what Italy meant for Tchaikovsky's development and for Richard Strauss."

The letter's author was revealed as Baron Axel Carpelan, an impecunious but very persuasive patron of the arts. From his many connections, he secured funds that allowed the Sibeliuses to go to Italy. They left Finland in October 1900, stopping in Berlin for two months before arriving in Italy and securing a villa in Rapallo, near Genoa.

Sibelius thought about various projects — first, a tone poem based on the legend of Don Juan, and then a set of four tone poems built on characters from Dante's "Divine Comedy." He noted in his diary late night musings on the Don Juan concept: "I was sitting in the dark in my castle when a stranger entered. I asked who he could be again and again — but there was no answer. I tried to make him laugh but he remained silent. At last the stranger began to sing — then Don Juan knew who it was. It was death." He then added what would become the main theme of the second movement of the Second Symphony.

# PROGRAM NOTES

Not long thereafter, the couple's 6-year-old daughter contracted typhus and Sibelius fled to Rome, unable to cope, leaving his wife Aino to nurse the child. The crisis passed and the family journeyed back to Finland, stopping in Florence, Vienna and Prague along the way.

The music did not come easily, as Sibelius noted in a letter to Baron Carpelan: "I have been in the throes of a bitter struggle with this symphony. Now the picture is clearer, and I am proceeding under full sail. Soon I hope to have something to dedicate to you. That is if you are pleased with the work."

Although the symphony was substantially finished in November 1901, Sibelius continued to revise the work, necessitating a delay in its premiere until March 8, 1902 with Sibelius conducting. The audience was ecstatic about the work and three additional sold-out performances took place over the next week. While Sibelius emphatically rejected any programmatic script for the symphony, Finnish audiences derived hope and national pride from its sound. Finland's independence was still 15 years hence, but the Second Symphony became an immediate source of inspiration for the country's people and has remained the most popular of his seven symphonies.

## THE MUSIC

At the symphony's outset, velvety pulsebeats in the strings propel the music forward and woodwinds serve up a chirpy melody answered elegantly by the horns. This dialogue continues until the violins, in unison, seize the moment. Despite frequent pauses, as if to collect one's thoughts, the music flows freely and Sibelius melds the various fragments into a coherent statement. He later wrote, "It is as if the Almighty had thrown down the pieces of a mosaic for heaven's floor and asked me to put them together." Although he eschewed programmatic interpretations of the symphony, it is difficult not to think of a Nordic landscape — across all seasons — as the picture for this heavenly floor.

The second movement begins with a solemn timpani roll followed by soft and deliberate plucked notes in the basses and cellos, making their inexorable way forward. Bassoons intone a mournful chant — the Don Juan death theme — softly emphasized by the timpani. Woodwinds and horns join the march followed by the upper strings, ever more ardent. Full-throated outcries yield to silence and the strings shyly emerge. It doesn't take long before the flames are rekindled, with the balance of the movement following this arc repeatedly.

Marked *vivacissimo*, or very lively, the third movement is launched by strings scurrying about wildly. The frenzy abates for a sweet melody in the oboe answered by clarinets and flute, soon taken up by the strings. This idyll is brief and the initial hectic pace resumes. The calm melody interrupts again but passion will not be denied and the music builds, leading seamlessly into the final movement with its triumphant theme. Unfolding continuously across a vast expanse, the glorious sound of the major key gradually subsides and minor emerges, threatening to overwhelm with its enveloping gloom. Piercing the darkness, the major key returns, victoriously concluding this grand symphony. It is easy to understand how this dramatic ending could be seen as symbolic of Finland's struggle for independence, despite Sibelius' objection to such a programmatic interpretation. Regardless, this is music that stirs the soul.

— *Eric T. Williams*

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Founded in 1982 by R. Crosby Kemper Jr. and a group of passionate music lovers, the Kansas City Symphony has rocketed to become one of the top 25 orchestras in the United States. During our 42-week season, we perform a huge range of orchestral and chamber music in our performance home, Helzberg Hall, at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. The musicians of the Symphony also perform throughout the Kansas City metro region on our portable stage, the Mobile Music Box, and we serve as the orchestra for the Kansas City Ballet and Lyric Opera of Kansas City. Michael Stern, the Symphony's music director, is finishing a 19-year tenure marked by artistic ascent, critical acclaim, and national recognition for the orchestra. Starting in July 2024, we will welcome conductor and composer Matthias Pintscher as his successor. Matthias regularly conducts many of the world's best orchestras and opera companies and ranks as one of the world's foremost composers of orchestral music.

Your Symphony includes 80 full-time musicians from around the world who call Kansas City home. Frequently joining them onstage is the 160-voice Symphony Chorus led by Charles Bruffy. Every season, dozens of soloists perform with us — instrumentalists, singer/songwriters, tribute rock bands, even aerial artists. We also accompany your favorite films, playing the soundtrack live as the movie is projected on Helzberg Hall's giant screen.

Between our concerts at the Kauffman Center, performances on the Mobile Music Box, and community events like Celebration at the Station, the Symphony aspires to serve all Kansas City through music. We belong to you, and to your neighbors, and to all the people you see throughout the community.

Music connects us: it has the unique ability to draw us closer to our inner selves and also closer to one another, transcending our differences. Every Symphony concert will take you on an emotional journey — a journey that's deeply personal but also a journey that we all experience together as one.

We're happy you are here. We are *your* Kansas City Symphony.

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## **2024/25 SEASON HIGHLIGHTS**

### **THE MUSIC**

- Igor Stravinsky's *The Firebird*
- Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto played by Gil Shaham
- Kansas City Symphony Chorus performs Mozart's Requiem
- Richard Strauss' monumental *Alpine Symphony*
- Saint-Saëns' "Organ Symphony"
- Beethoven's triumphant Symphony No. 7

### **THE ARTISTRY**

- Guest conductors Bernard Labadie and Gemma New
- Cellist Alisa Weilerstein performs Dvořák
- Pianist Conrad Tao plays Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1
- Kristina Fulton performs the Oboe Concerto of Bohuslav Martinů
- Pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet plays Saint-Saëns' "Egyptian" Concerto

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