

Thursday Evening, May 23, 2024, at 6:00

The Juilliard School

presents

Commencement Concert

Juilliard Orchestra

Marin Alsop, *Conductor*

HILARY PURRINGTON (b. 1990) **Sercy** (2024) (World premiere, commissioned by Juilliard)

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949) **Don Juan, Op. 20** (1889)

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945) **Concerto for Orchestra, BB. 123** (1943)

Introduzione: Andante non troppo—Allegro vivace

Giuoco delle coppie: Allegretto scherzando

Elegia: Andante non troppo

Intermezzo interrotto: Allegretto

Finale: Pesante—Presto

Performance time: approximately one hour, without an intermission

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About the Program

By Carys Sutherland

Sercy

HILARY PURRINGTON

Born: December 9, 1990, in western Massachusetts

In the southern U.S., “sercy” refers to a small, unexpected gift. And what lovelier present is there to receive, or to give, than music? Wagner wrote *Siegfried Idyll* as a “push present” for his wife after the birth of their son; Fanny Mendelssohn composed *Das Jahr*, a piano suite based on the months of the year, as a Christmas gift for her husband. How romantic to be immortalized as a muse. One thing that makes music history so compelling is the realization that our repertoire exists not simply as creative obsessions or pursuits of fame and fortune but as expressions of love made immune to the ravages of time.

Something fundamental about the nature of gifts, as composer Hilary Purrington (MM '15, composition) points out, is reciprocity, the mutual benefit to giver and recipient. Joy propagates joy. For Purrington, the commissioning of this piece was a gift as well as a way to give back to Juilliard, her alma mater. “My time at Juilliard was an immense gift, so composing this work really does come from a place of gratitude,” she says. Since studying at Juilliard, Purrington has made a successful career as both a composer and a vocalist, and her works have been performed by the Atlanta, Minnesota, and Phoenix symphony orchestras, among many others.

A prominent subset of Purrington’s career is her compositions for dance, and this is evident in the ethereal opening to *Sercy*, which feels like descending down stairs into a candlelit ballroom. Woodwinds and trumpets swirl atop a plush bed of strings. The score gives us all the language to immerse our-

selves in the atmosphere—“bright,” “sparkling,” “effervescent,” “buoyant”—and the triplets dance across the page. The overall effect of the piece is one of all-encompassing wonder and intoxicating beauty in a world where that can be sometimes hard to find.

Another gift *Sercy* gives is the unique opportunity it presents as a premiere, allowing this incarnation of the Juilliard Orchestra to interpret a piece for the first time without preconceived notions. The majority of a young musician’s time is spent emulating legendary recordings of legendary players: It’s not every day you get to set the example yourself.

Sercy’s gift to the world, then, is kaleidoscopic—to the audience, the performers, the school, and the composer herself.

Don Juan

RICHARD STRAUSS

*Born: June 11, 1864, in Munich
Died: September 8, 1949, in
Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany*

We’ve all heard to keep our friends close and our enemies closer. There have perhaps been no closer enemies in music history than Richard Wagner and Franz Strauss, two begrudging collaborators in whose crossfire Richard Strauss was caught for much of his life.

Richard Strauss was the son of horn player and composer Franz Strauss, who was principal horn for many of Wagner’s operatic premieres despite his disgust for Wagner’s eccentric tonality. The feeling was mutual: Wagner was quoted as saying, “Strauss is a detestable fellow, but when he blows his horn one cannot sulk with him.” They were the ultimate office nemeses. When his son began to display musical talent, Papa Franz taught him to emulate the classic German school of Mendelssohn and Brahms, which

he held in the highest regard, and the young Strauss' two horn concertos, written for his father, certainly exemplify this early style. But in his early 20s, son Richard gained a rebellious streak and was swayed by friends and peers to embrace Wagnerian grandeur as the music of the future, much to his father's dismay. Strauss' tone poems, for which he is best known, are as close to Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as an orchestra can get without a wardrobe or props department, and *Don Juan*, with its startling eroticism and blasphemous morals, was among his very first.

Don Juan is based on the legendary Spanish figure of the same name, who devotes his life to seduction, gambling, and murdering, before dying and either repenting or going to Hell, depending on whom you ask. This would have been shocking subject matter for the conservative German school of the time, which upheld Beethovenian classicism above all else (never mind that Mozart wrote about the same character a century earlier, in *Don Giovanni*). One can easily imagine Franz Strauss shaking his fist at Wagner for so corrupting his son. Wagner's wife, Cosima, with whom Strauss had a platonically blurry relationship, was herself scandalized by the subject matter, considering it a depraved counterpart to her husband's high philosophy. Nevertheless, the music world received the 1889 premiere with great acclaim, launching Strauss' career. Strauss was beginning to hone his new style, rife with vivid imagery, vigor, and virtuosity, and *Don Juan* marked a new era of programmatic Romantic music.

This virtuosity is heard right out of the gate, as Strauss writes one of the most notorious violin excerpts in the repertoire at the very beginning of the piece. The introductory theme feels like a riotous romp through the countryside: Don Juan's libertine bravado practically jumps off the page. Despite *Don Juan's* position as the shortest in length of

Strauss' orchestral tone poems, he manages to include excerpt-worthy material for almost every instrument (rumor has it that the premiering orchestra's members were annoyed at how difficult the piece was). Perhaps the most iconic of these is the heroic horn call, which has become synonymous with the piece itself. Strauss's love for the horn, no doubt owing to his father's influence, can be heard in all of his orchestral works.

Strauss uses various themes to represent love and violence in equal measure, with the solo violin and oboe portraying the more romantic side of the story. Strauss chooses to depict the more audience-friendly conclusion; Don Juan is killed in a duel by the father of his lover and resigns himself peacefully to death. Fittingly, the piece fades away, depicting Don Juan's final breaths.

Concerto for Orchestra

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born: March 25, 1881, in Sânnicolau Mare, Romania

Died: September 26, 1945, in New York City

If you wander south a few short blocks to 57th and 8th, you'll find a peculiar bust built into the side of an apartment building, nestled between a doorway and a lamp. Reading the inscription amid the hustle and bustle of Manhattan might inspire a double-take—a tribute to Béla Bartók across the street from a Sur La Table?

Bartók, one of Hungary's great composers and the father of ethnomusicology, was forced to flee his country in the outbreak of World War II due to his strong anti-Nazi beliefs. When he and his family arrived in that New York apartment building in 1940, Bartók's spirit was hit heavily by his exile from his homeland; he began to experience the first of his fatal health issues and found it difficult to compose. If it had not been for his friend Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of

the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the idea for the iconic Concerto for Orchestra may not have ever been conceived.

After the passing of his wife, in 1943, Koussevitzky visited Bartók and asked him to write a piece in her honor. Bartók was in the hospital suffering from undiagnosed leukemia and composer's block and might have never put pen to paper again without the emotional and monetary support of his friend. For the first time in years Bartók was inspired, and he wrote feverishly, finishing the work in only two months and imbuing the music with an ironic vitality and vigor he had all but lost. Sadly, he passed away soon after completing a revised finale, and would never see the full success of his most grand yet accessible composition. The Concerto for Orchestra is the culmination of Bartók's extraordinary talents and the final masterpiece of a singular musical mind.

The title "Concerto" may seem odd in the absence of a soloist at the front of the stage, but in this piece the entire orchestra serves as a single virtuosic entity, with each instrument's writing demonstrating the heights of each instrumentalist's unique skills. The piece is structured in five movements, with some following traditional sonata-allegro form, yet within them Bartók combines his classical training and extensive study of Hungarian folk music to create an entirely new sonic language, neither atonal nor harmonious.

The first movement is almost Beethovenian in its slow, melancholy introduction of

strings, presenting the intervallic fourths that make up the theme before swirling ominously into an allegro full of fugues and folkish melodies, especially in the oboe. The second movement, "Game of Pairs," is arguably the most fun for the audience to hear and most imbued with Bartók's mature wit, as he divides the winds into pairs and gives them lively melodies to play in dissonant intervals. The trumpets in particular demonstrate an almost medieval sense of whimsy, like a fairy fanfare. The elegiac third movement exemplifies Bartók's "night music" style, evoking imagery of a forest bathed in moonlight.

Shostakovich enthusiasts will recognize the invasion march theme from his "Leningrad" symphony in the fourth movement (which itself is a quote taken from Hungarian Franz Lehár). This Intermezzo is the most direct link to Shostakovich's music, with a clear resemblance in the waltz-like lilt and prominent brass writing; the two contemporaneous composers draw comparison nowadays for the political strife in their respective homelands and exile to America. The motive behind this quotation, be it respect or parody, will never truly be known. The finale whirls and rages, throwing virtuosity from all corners of the orchestra almost too quickly for the audience to appreciate. For a commencement concert celebrating the young, talented graduates of Juilliard, there is no better conclusion.

French horn player Carys Sutherland is in the final year of her bachelor's studies at Juilliard.

Meet the Artists



Marin Alsop

One of the foremost conductors of our time, Marin Alsop (Pre-College '72; BM '77, MM '78, violin) represents a powerful and inspiring voice. The first woman to serve as the head of a major orchestra in the U.S., South America, Austria, and Britain, she is now in her fifth season as chief conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra and recently extended her contract as chief conductor of Chicago's Ravinia Festival, where she curates and conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's summer residencies. The 2023-24 season also marks Alsop's first as artistic director and chief conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony as well as principal guest conductor of London's Philharmonia Orchestra. She begins as principal guest conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra in the 2024-25 season. She also serves as conductor of honor of Brazil's São Paulo Symphony (OESP), the first music director of the University of Maryland's National Orchestral Institute + Festival (NOI+F), and music director laureate and OrchKids founder of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, which she continues to conduct for three weeks each season after an outstanding 14-year tenure as its music director. The first and only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship, she also made history as both the first female conductor of the BBC's Last Night of the Proms as well as the first female and first American to conduct the Last Night three times. In 2019, Alsop was honored with the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award. To promote and nurture the careers of her fellow female conductors, in 2002 she founded the program now named the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship.



Hilary Purrington

The music of Hilary Purrington (MM '15, composition) tells compelling stories through expressive lyricism and vibrant orchestration. Her orchestral and chamber works have been performed by many distinguished ensembles including the Minnesota Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, American Modern Ensemble, and Albany Symphony. Recent commissions include new works for the American Composers Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and River Oaks Chamber Orchestra. Also an accomplished vocalist, Purrington has developed a reputation as a skilled composer of solo and choral music, and recent vocal commissions include new works for the Thirteen, the Yale Glee Club, the Choral Composer/Conductor Collective, and mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke. In 2023, New Camerata Opera produced *One Train*, a new opera cartoon with music by Purrington, a libretto by Hannah McDermott, and animation by Catarata. Purrington, who resides in New Orleans, holds degrees from the Yale School of Music, Juilliard, and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University.

Juilliard Orchestra

Juilliard's largest and most visible student performing ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra is known for delivering polished and passionate performances of works spanning the repertoire. Comprising more than 375 students in the bachelor's and master's degree programs, the orchestra appears throughout the season in concerts on the stages of Juilliard's Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall. The orchestra is a strong partner to Juilliard's other divisions, appearing in opera, dance, and drama productions as well as presenting an annual concert of world premieres by Juilliard student composers. This season, an impressive roster of world-renowned conductors leads the Juilliard Orchestra, including Joseph Colaneri, JoAnn Falletta, Ken-David Masur, Tito Muñoz, Nimrod David Pfeffer, Donald Runnicles, Jörg Widmann, and Thomas Wilkins as well as faculty conductors David Robertson, the director of conducting studies and distinguished visiting faculty, and Jeffrey Milarsky. Among the virtual projects students from the orchestra participated in during the 2020 lockdown was *Bolero Juilliard*, which became a viral sensation. The Juilliard Orchestra has toured across the U.S. and throughout Europe, South America, and Asia, where it was the first Western conservatory ensemble allowed to visit and perform following the opening of the People's Republic of China in 1987, returning two decades later, in 2008. In 2019, the orchestra traveled to London, performing alongside the Royal Academy of Music in Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. Other ensembles under the Juilliard Orchestra umbrella include the conductorless Juilliard Chamber Orchestra, Wind Orchestra, Lab Orchestra, and contemporary music group AXIOM.

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