



Celebrity Series of Boston

Tuesday | April 23, 2024 | 8pm
Symphony Hall

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Bamberg Symphony
Jakub Hrůša chief conductor
Lukáš Vondráček piano

Richard Wagner Prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin*, WWV 75

Johannes Brahms Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90
Allegro con brio
Andante
Poco allegretto
Allegro

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54
Allegro affettuoso
Intermezzo
Allegro vivace

Wagner Overture to *Tannhäuser*, WWV 70

This evening's program will run approximately two hours and fifteen minutes,
including intermission.

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin*, WWV 75

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Wagner composed *Lohengrin* in the late 1840s while serving as Kapellmeister of the Dresden royal court. Before the opera could be premiered, the Revolutions of 1848 began spreading across Europe; they eventually came to Dresden in what became known as the May Uprising. While others—including the Schumanns and their children—fled the destruction, Wagner joined the revolutionaries, making hand grenades and serving as a lookout. When the rebellion was crushed, Wagner fled to Switzerland, where he remained in exile even as Franz Liszt premiered *Lohengrin* in Weimar.

The opera tells of the titular heroic knight of the Holy Grail (Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*, was based on Lohengrin's father). Lohengrin, sent to rescue a damsel in distress, famously arrives and departs on a boat pulled by a swan (after missing the boat in a performance at the Metropolitan Opera, one stranded tenor yelled "When does the next swan leave?" from the wings).

The prelude depicts a vision of the Grail descending from heaven. Wagner wrote a vivid program note for the Act I prelude. Program notes were uncommon at the time, but Wagner, ever an advocate of merging music and text, fervently maintained a desire to communicate as much meaning to the audience as possible:

It is the representation of this episode in tones that he wishes to elucidate for the imagination by describing it as an object visible to the human eye.

—Our rapturous gaze toward the highest, divine yearning for love perceives the clear blue celestial vault; a wonderful, at first scarcely perceptible apparition begins to materialize, magically compelling our sight as it does so. The angelic host is depicted through infinitely delicate lines that gradually take on a more distinct contour; the host descends imperceptibly from the luminous heights, conveying in their midst the sacred vessel. ... When at last the sacred vessel itself is exposed in its wondrous, naked reality to the sight of the privileged beholder—at that point the onlooker's senses fail him altogether, and he sinks down overwhelmed, devoutly prostrate. ... And so the glorious host disappears back into the brightness of the celestial ether, from whence it had first appeared.

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

At the age of twenty, a then little-known Johannes Brahms called at the home of Robert and Clara Schumann. Robert's diary entry from the next day includes the line, "visit from Brahms—a genius." Brahms performed a number of compositions for them over the next two weeks, and soon after Robert publicly heralded the young composer as one "called to give expression to his times in ideal fashion: a musician who would reveal his mastery not in gradual stages but like Minerva would spring fully armed from Kronos' head." Brahms and the Schumanns formed a deep bond in the wake of these first meetings. When Robert was institutionalized Brahms would visit Robert in the asylum, serving as a go-between when Clara was not permitted entry. After Robert's death she and Brahms remained close companions until her own passing forty years later.

Brahms composed his Third Symphony shortly after his fiftieth birthday. Planted comfortably in a studio overlooking the Rhine Valley (the view, he wrote, was as luxurious "as if I were trying to imitate Wagner"), Brahms worked with relative ease; his First Symphony, by contrast, took more than two decades to complete.

In the so-called “War of the Romantics,” Brahms became a sometimes reluctant standard bearer of “absolute” music devoid of programmatic meanings. It may seem strange then that his Third Symphony abounds with extra-musical allusions. The symphony opens with the notes F–A–flat–F, a three-note “motto” figure that one of Brahms’ friends identified as a musical cipher for his personal motto, “Frei aber froh” (Free but happy). Brahms developed this motto after befriending Hungarian violinist and conductor Joseph Joachim, who had already adopted his own cipher: F–A–E, “Frei aber einsam” (Free but lonely). Here Brahms uses the minor-key version of his motto, perhaps to express a more mature and nuanced view of life.

Following the motto, the violins introduce a flowing theme based upon a melody in Robert Schumann’s own Third Symphony. Nicknamed “Rhenish” after the Rhineland sojourn that had inspired it, the symphony may have been to Brahms a fond reminder of his first meetings with the Schumanns and Joachim. But in this work Brahms pays tribute not only to friends but to a rival: Richard Wagner, the musical radical who had died shortly before Brahms began composing the Third. Just before the clarinet introduces the second theme, Brahms includes an allusion to the Siren’s Chorus of Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*.

The clarinet inaugurates the *Andante* with a tender, pastoral theme. In an atypical omission, the second theme—a melancholy melody introduced by the clarinet and bassoon—doesn’t reappear until the final movement. Like the first movement this one also ends softly; in fact, the Third Symphony is unusual in that all four movements end quietly.

Rather than the scherzo that had been popularized by Beethoven and Schubert, Brahms wrote an intensely lyrical waltz for the third movement. Its yearning cello theme, taken up by solo horn in the reprise, made the movement an immediate audience favorite and regular encore.

In the finale Brahms ties together the disparate threads introduced in earlier movements. The melancholy clarinet and bassoon melody from the *Andante* returns, this time in a string and woodwind chorale. As the movement draws to its *sotto voce* ending, the flutes play one last iteration of the “Free but happy” motto as the violins recall the “Rhenish” theme.

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Schumann’s work on the Piano Concerto in A minor overlapped a period of professional and mental health crises. The year 1844 began with a monthslong concert tour of Russia that, while financially successful, left Robert feeling musically inferior to Clara. Attacks of dizziness that impaired his sight forced him to seek medical advice in Moscow, while an eyewitness in St. Petersburg described him as uncommunicative and depressed. By the end of the tour, Schumann had developed a “nervous fever” that confined him to bed for nearly a week.

A mountain holiday did little to quell his “wretched melancholy.” Schumann sold his music journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, to focus on composition; this marked the end of a ten-year tenure at the journal. Yet within a month his mental health had reached its lowest point. He suffered from depression, insomnia, and auditory hallucinations (in later years the tuning pitch for orchestras rang constantly in his ears). His mental state grew so severe that his doctor recommended he give up music altogether. Against this advice, Schumann persevered: he completed the concerto in the summer and it premiered that December.

The concerto’s history is fundamentally tied to Clara. It began in 1841 as a one-movement fantasy for piano and orchestra which Clara premiered shortly before the birth of their first child. Schumann later wrote two additional movements to create a more traditional tripartite concerto. Clara gave the finished work its premiere, again while heavily pregnant. Even the music itself may have been influenced by her, for Clara had composed her own A-minor piano concerto years earlier. Robert, who was familiar with that piece, may have subtly incorporated some of its musical ideas into his own concerto, even if subconsciously.

Following a brief and fiery introduction, the oboe introduces the brooding principal theme. Here Schumann's scoring points to the importance of the woodwinds throughout the movement. Clarinet, oboe, and piano trade solos leading into a rousing major-key tutti section. The ensuing development advances in dreamy piano arpeggios alongside a woodwind dialogue. A startling return of the piano's introductory gesture gives way to an *apassionato* section before a true return of the opening material. The music grows increasingly triumphant leading into the impassioned cadenza. A series of trills, the typical signal for the orchestra to resume, is deceptive: only after several more solo bars does the orchestra return for an extended, runaway coda.

The slow, tranquil *Intermezzo* unfolds in a simple ABA form. The A section, filled with delicate melodic fragments, alternates with a singing cello and woodwind-dominant B section. Following the reprise of the A section, the piano reiterates the opening bars of the first movement. This material leads without pause into the finale. Its main theme is a reworking of the principal theme of the first movement, now transfigured into sunny A major. Lively and with a ceaseless rhythmic drive, Schumann's writing pairs nobility with playful syncopation. A long coda takes advantage of the full might of the orchestra for a thundering climax.

Overture to *Tannhäuser*, WWV 70

Richard Wagner (1813–1883)

Though the creative process has proven arduous for many artists, *Tannhäuser* literally made its creator sick. In his autobiography Wagner describes illness brought on by the composition process: "Meanwhile I was very much troubled by excitability and rushes of blood to the brain. I imagined I was ill, and lay for whole days in bed." After working on the music for two years, Wagner premiered *Tannhäuser* in Dresden in 1845. It was poorly received, partly due to the tenor singing the title role. His "expressionless" rendition led Wagner to cut one scene entirely.

The Paris premiere was even more calamitous. Parisian operatic tradition dictated the inclusion of a ballet, normally in the second act. To maintain dramatic continuity Wagner placed the ballet at the beginning, much to the fury of Parisian high society. The aristocratic Jockey Club, incensed at being forced to leave dinner early to catch the ballet, created so much noise that Wagner withdrew *Tannhäuser* after only three performances.

The opera frustrated Wagner for the rest of his life. Weeks before his death his wife Cosima wrote, "He says he still owes the world a *Tannhäuser*."

In a program note for the opera, Wagner wrote,

At first the orchestra introduces us to the "Pilgrims' Chorus" alone. It approaches, swells to a mighty outpouring and finally passes into the distance. —Twilight: dying echoes of the chorus. —As night falls, magic visions show themselves. A rosy mist swirls upwards, sensuously exultant sounds reach our ears, and the blurred motions of a fearsomely voluptuous dance are revealed. This is the seductive magic of the Venusberg, which appears by night to those whose souls are fired by bold, sensuous longings. Lured by the tempting visions, the slender figure of a man draws near: it is *Tannhäuser*, the minstrel of love. Proudly he sings his jubilant chant of love, exultantly and challengingly, as if to force the voluptuous magic to come to him....

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Bamberg Symphony

The Bamberg Symphony is the only orchestra of world renown that is not based in a vibrant metropolis. Almost 10% of the local population subscribe to one of the orchestra's five concert series, in many cases for decades. However, the "magnetic effect" of the orchestra goes above all outward: the traveling orchestra has been carrying its characteristically dark, somber, and warm sound and the musical echo of its hometown into the world since 1946. With almost 7,500 concerts in more than 500 cities and 64 countries, they have become a cultural ambassador for Bavaria and the whole of Germany. They regularly tour the US, South America, Japan, and China, for example, and are invited by renowned concert halls and festivals worldwide. The Bamberg Symphony therefore describe their mission in short as *Resonating Worldwide*.

The circumstances of its founding make the Bamberg Symphony a mirror of German history: in 1946, former members of the German Philharmonic Orchestra Prague met colleagues in Bamberg who had also had to flee their homeland as a result of the war and post-war turmoil. Starting with the Prague orchestra, its lines of tradition can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Thus the roots of the Bamberg Symphony reach back to Mahler and Mozart. Since 2004, the orchestra has held the honorary title of Bavarian State Philharmonic Orchestra and is substantially financed by the Free State of Bavaria.

Four principal conductors, including Joseph Keilberth, James Loughran, Horst Stein, and Jonathan Nott, as well as Artistic Director Eugen Jochum have led the orchestra since 1946. With the Czech Jakub Hrůša, the fifth principal conductor, since 2016, a bridge has been built again between the historical roots of the Bamberg Symphony and its present day, more than 75 years after the orchestra was founded. They regularly perform with their honorary conductors Herbert Blomstedt, Christoph Eschenbach, and Manfred Honeck as well as with other leading conductors such as Andris Nelsons and Lahav Shani.

A not insignificant contribution to the worldwide high profile of the Bamberg Symphony has also been made by countless concert broadcasts in cooperation with the Bavarian Radio (BR) as well as radio, record, and CD productions. In 2019, the orchestra broke new ground with a recording of Smetana's *Má vlast* using the direct-to-disc process, in which the recording is made directly onto the disc without digital post-processing, creating a unique sound experience. The recording of Mahler's Fourth Symphony (2020; accentus music) was awarded the Annual Prize of the German Record Critics at the end of 2021. This was followed by a recording of Anton Bruckner's Fourth Symphony in all three versions, united in one edition—a unique project to date, which won the 2022 International Classical Music Award (ICMA). Subsequently, the orchestra also received the ICMA 2023 for its recording of Hans Rott's First Symphony (2022; Deutsche Grammophon). The Bamberg Symphony completed a cycle of four double CDs with symphonies by Brahms and Dvořák (2018-2022; TUDOR). In November 2022, two of these CDs were awarded Recording of the Month by *BBC Music* magazine.

The fact that this collaboration also places a great deal of emphasis on programmatic content at the concerts is attested to by the award from the German Music Publishers Association for Best Concert Program in spring 2018. In 2020, the orchestra received the Bavarian State Prize for Music. In 2021, an audio book was published (accentus music) that musically retells the unique history of the Bamberg Symphony from Mozart in Prague to the present day.

In 2022, the Bamberg Symphony set a goal to act and travel in a more climate-friendly manner. For trips abroad, the orchestra is working to optimize travel routes and tour procedures. For this tour, the orchestra will offset most of the carbon dioxide emissions caused by its travels by financially supporting the environmental organization Running Tide, a global leader in ocean carbon removal. The Bamberg Symphony's donation will support critical research and development in Iceland related to the safe, effective, and durable removal of carbon through the natural pathways of the ocean.

Jakub Hrůša chief conductor

Jakub Hrůša is chief conductor of the Bamberg Symphony, and principal guest conductor of both the Czech Philharmonic and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Starting late next year, he will take up the post of music director at the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in London.

He appears frequently as a guest conductor with the world's greatest orchestras, including the Berlin, Vienna, Munich, and New York philharmonics; the Bavarian Radio, NHK, Chicago, and Boston symphonies; the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Lucerne Festival, Royal Concertgebouw, Mahler Chamber, and Cleveland orchestras; and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Dresden Staatskapelle, Orchestre de Paris, and Tonhalle Orchester Zürich.

He has led opera productions for the Vienna State Opera, Royal Opera House, Opéra National de Paris, Zurich Opera, and the Glyndebourne Festival. In 2022 he made his debut at the Salzburg Festival with a new production of *Kát'a Kabanová*.

For his recordings with the Bamberg Symphony, he received an ICMA for Hans Rott's First Symphony in 2023, previously an ICMA for Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, as well as the Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik for Mahler's Fourth Symphony, and a BBC Music Magazine Award for Dvořák and Martinů piano concertos with Ivo Kahánek; *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine* Award nominations for Martinů violin concertos with Frank Peter Zimmermann.

Hrůša studied at Prague's Academy of Performing Arts, where his teachers included Jiří Bělohlávek. He is president of the International Martinů Circle and the Dvořák Society. He was the inaugural recipient of the Sir Charles Mackerras Prize, and in 2020 was awarded the Antonín Dvořák Prize by the Czech Republic's Academy of Classical Music, and – with Bamberg Symphony – the Bavarian State Prize for Music. In 2023, Jakub Hrůša was awarded honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Lukáš Vondráček piano

The indisputable winner of the Grand Prix at the 2016 International Queen Elisabeth Piano Competition, Lukáš Vondráček's 2023/24 season highlights are a tour with Bamberg Symphony Orchestra and Jakub Hrůša and returns to long term partners such as Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, and Janáček Philharmonic. Following recent appearances at the Flanders Festival, the "Le Piano Symphonique" Festival and the Weiwuying International Festival in Taiwan, recital engagements lead him to the "Chopin and his Europe" Festival in Warsaw and the Piano Loop Festival in Split, Croatia.

Over the last decade Lukáš Vondráček has travelled the world working with orchestras such as the Philadelphia and Sydney Symphony orchestras, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic, and Netherlands Philharmonic orchestras under conductors such as Paavo Järvi, Gianandrea Noseda, Jakub Hrůša, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Marin Alsop, Christoph Eschenbach, Pietari Inkinen, Vasily Petrenko, Anu Tali, and Stéphane Denève, among many others.

Recitals have led him to Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, the Flagey in Brussels, Leipzig's Gewandhaus, Wiener Konzerthaus, and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and to renowned festivals such as Menuhin Festival Gstaad, PianoEspoo in Finland, Prague Spring Festival, and Lille Piano Festival.

At age four, Lukáš Vondráček made his first public appearance. As a fifteen-year-old in 2002 he made his debut with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Vladimir Ashkenazy which was followed by a major US tour in 2003. His natural and assured musicality and remarkable technique have long marked him as a gifted and mature musician. He has achieved worldwide recognition by receiving many international awards, foremost first prizes at the Hilton Head and San Marino international piano competitions and Unisa International Piano Competition in Pretoria, South Africa, as well as the Raymond E. Buck Jury Discretionary Award at the 2009 International Van Cliburn Piano Competition.

After finishing his studies at the Academy of Music in Katowice and the Vienna Conservatoire, Lukáš Vondráček obtained an Artist Diploma from New England Conservatory under the tutelage of Hung-Kuan Chen, graduating with honors in 2012.

From the Celebrity Series of Boston archives...

The Bamberg Symphony has been presented by the Celebrity Series of Boston once previously, in October 1983. Czech pianist Lukáš Vondráček made his Celebrity Series debut in November 2011 when he was an Artist Diploma candidate at New England Conservatory. At that time, he was engaged to join the Borromeo Quartet and Rob Kapilow in a *What Makes It Great?* exploration of a Dvořák piano quintet. Celebrity Series is pleased to present conductor Jakub Hrůša in his Series debut.



Bamberg Symphony

Jakub Hrůša chief conductor

Herbert Blomstedt, Christoph Eschenbach, Manfred Honeck honorary conductors

First violins

Bart Vandenbogaerde,
First Concertmaster,
Ilian Garnet
First Concertmaster
Aki Sunahara,
Second Concertmaster
Minkyung Sul,
Second Concertmaster
Serge Zimmermann,
Second Concertmaster
Birgit Hablitzel
Sabine Lier
Thomas Jahnel
Michael Hamann
Dagmar Puttkammer
Berthold Opower
May-Britt Trunk
Angela Stangorra
Jueyoung Yang
Manon Stassen
Benjamin Gatuzz
Julia Hoover
(*Position vacant*)
Annika Fuchs-Rath
Dong Chan Shin
Ryo Shimakata
(*Position vacant*)

Second violins

Raúl Teo Arias, Principal
Melina Kim-Guez, Principal
Geworg Budagjan,
Associate Principal
Miloš Petrović, Section Leader
Dorothee Klatt
Barbara Wittenberg
Hansjörg Krämer
Mayra Budagjan
Quinten de Roos
Michaela Reichel Silva
Vladislav Popyalkovskiy
Julia Fortuna
Boris-Alexander Jusa
Nina Junke
Gabriele Campagna
Magdalena Kraus
Julia Bubenzer

Violas

Lois Landsverk, Principal
Wen Xiao Zheng, Principal
Branko Kabadaic,
Associate Principal

Raphael Lambacher
Martin Timphus
Mechthild Schlaud
Zazie Lewandowski
Christof Kuen
Wolfgang Rings
Christine Jahnel
Yumi Nishimura
Katharina Cürlis
Wolfram Hauser
Paulina Riquelme Díaz
Wakana Ono
(*Position vacant*)

Cellos

Marius Urba, Principal
(*Position vacant*), Principal
Indrek Leivategija,
Associate Principal
Nikola Jovanović,
Section Leader
Achim Melzer
Markus Mayers
Eduard Resatsch
Katja Kuen
Verena Obermayer
Lucie de Roos
Tobias Tauber
Guilherme Nardelli Monegatto

Double basses

Stefan Adelman, Principal
N.N., Principal
Orçun Mumcuoglu,
Associate Principal
Christian Hellwich,
Section Leader
Luuk Godwaldt
Mátyás Németh
Tim Wunram
Jakub Fortuna
Jan Rosenkranz

Flutes

Ulrich Biersack, Principal
Daniela Koch, Principal
Timea Ascai
(*Position vacant*)

Oboes

Barbara Bode, Principal
(*Position vacant*), Principal
Yumi Kurihara
Zsófia Magyar

Clarinets

Günther Forstmaier,
Principal
Christoph Müller,
Principal
Christian Linz
Lina Neuloh

Bassoons

Alexei Tkachuk, Principal
Rie Koyama, Principal
Hana Hasegawa
Ulrich Kircheis

Horns

Christoph Eß, Principal
Andreas Kreuzhuber, Principal
Peter Müseler
Swantje Vesper
William Tuttle
Hasko Kröger
Tristan Seyb

Trumpets

Markus Mester, Principal
(*Position vacant*), Principal
Thomas Forstner
Lutz Randow
Till Fabian Weser
Johannes Trunk

Trombones

Angelos Kritikos, Principal
(*Position vacant*), Principal
Stefan Lüghausen
Christoph Weber
Volker Hensiek

Tuba

Heiko Triebener

Timpani

Robert Cürlis, Principal
Holger Brust, Principal

Percussion

Jens Herz, Principal
Gregor Moser, Principal

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