



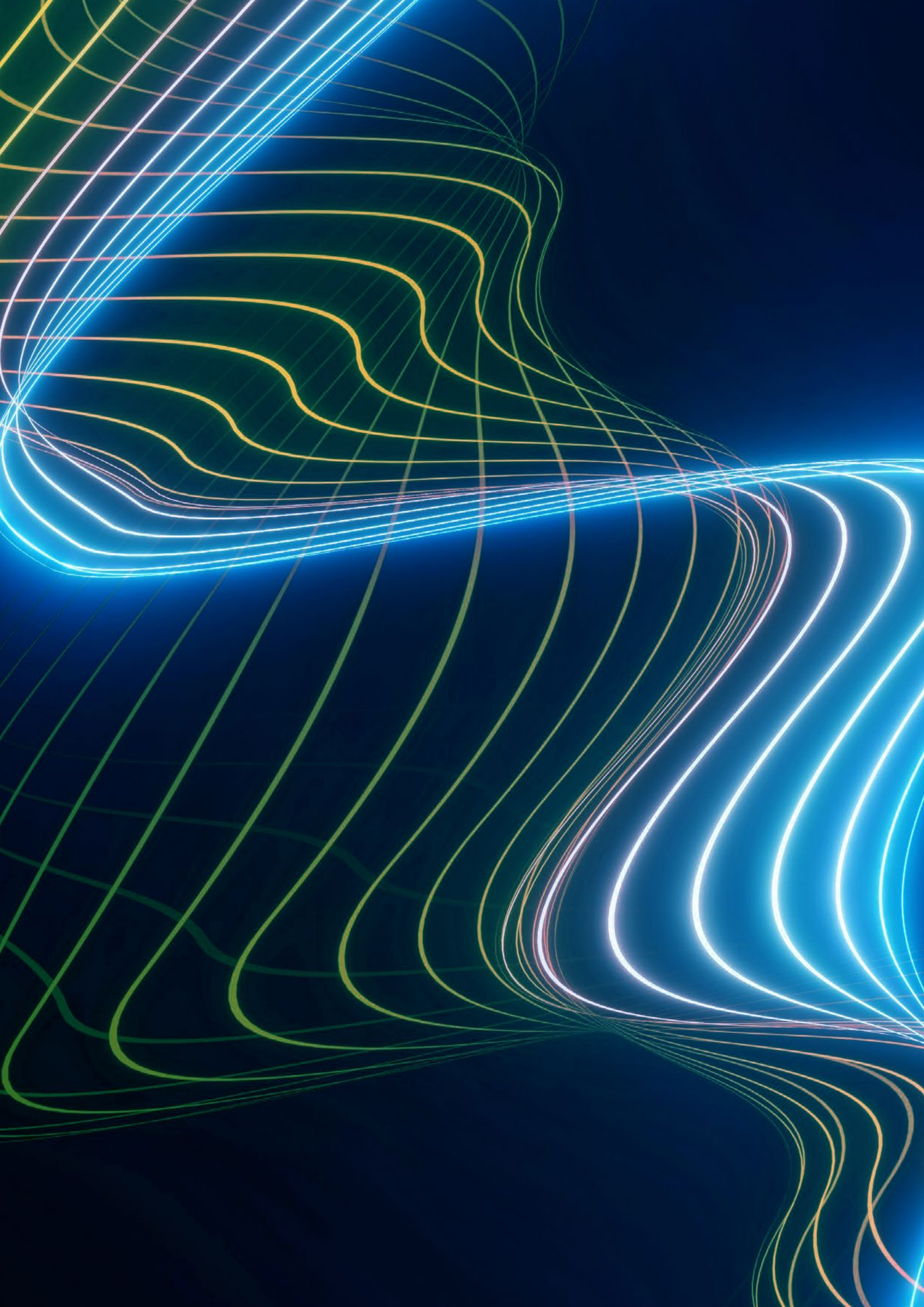
SYMPHONIC FLAIR

24 MAY 2025

ODEION

FREE STATE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

the celebration continues





SYMPHONIC FLAIR

CONDUCTOR:

AVLANA EISENBERG

SOLOIST (PIANO):

ILYA FRIEDBERG

PROGRAMME:

STILL:

CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM

SCHUMANN:

PIANO CONCERTO

- INTERVAL -

BEETHOVEN:

SYMPHONY NO. 2

24 MAY 2025

ODEION

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the celebration continues



PROGRAMME

WILLIAM GRANT STILL 1895-1978

CAN'T YOU LINE 'EM (1940)

Of his shorter works, Still's arrangement of Can'tcha line 'em is one of his most frequently played. The lyrics of the song, as recorded by William Ledbetter in a blues style, are both sad and humorous, with a good measure of cheekiness thrown in. It is a parody of the African American Spiritual, the singer lamenting his wretched life and longing for deliverance. Can'tcha line 'em originated as a folk ballad sung by African American prisoners complaining about the backbreaking work of securing railroad sleepers to the track in the heat of summer. The last line is particularly memorable: "Mary an' the baby lyin' in the shade thinkin' on the money that I ain't made." (After this, he dreams of begging Moses to part the Red Sea so he can escape his chains.)

Still was a well-respected American musician of international repute, known for his regal bearing and gentlemanly manner. His Afro-American Symphony of 1930 remained the most frequently performed American symphony for nearly two decades. So whilst he may have admired the humorous sentiments of Ledbetter's song, the refinement and sophistication of his musical style were a world away from that of his hard-living compatriot, an actual former convict. Still's orchestral fantasy indulges the composer's obsession with model trains, which he had collected since childhood. His version smooths off the rough edges of Ledbetter's performance, although most horn players can't resist reinstating a touch of the bluesman's earthy tenor delivery in the opening call-and-response. The orchestra evokes a romanticised portrait of the whistling engine sounds of Still's beloved steam locomotives.

PROGRAMME

ROBERT SCHUMANN

1810-56

PIANO CONCERTO, OP. 56 (1845)

- I. Allegro affettuoso
- II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso
- III. Allegro affettuoso

Schumann's Piano concerto has become such a staple of the repertoire, that audiences might be surprised to learn that the piece originally existed as a fantasy (Phantasie for piano and orchestra in A minor, composed in 1841), consisting solely of what is now the first movement. As with many of the composer's works, we have his wife to thank for its inspiration and gestation. Clara played the Phantasie in rehearsal with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, but it was not deemed of sufficient interest for public performance, the solo part being more lyrical than heroic. In the following years, she composed her own piano concerto, also in A minor, and encouraged her husband to 'complete' his 1841 work. Schumann did so, and in 1845 the Piano concerto was finished.

Clara was the soloist at the premiere, and the concerto was well-received by those wary of excessive bravura elements that had accompanied recent technological improvements in piano design. Sympathetic critics lauded its symphonic character, noting that the piano and orchestra were treated as equals. Arnold Schoenberg praised the seamless integration of the thematic material of the Phantasie into the intermezzo and finale as a towering achievement of the German Romantic tradition.

The opening movement does take some liberties with traditional sonata form for the sake of harmonic variety, as befits a fantasy. Two of the most memorable features are the arresting opening bars and the excursion to A-flat major before the development. Rachmaninov was surely influenced by this unconventional Andante episode, as was Grieg by the opening. The long cadenza appears just before a march-like coda. After this passionate movement, the beautiful Intermezzo is the perfect foil – it is at once tender and playful, with a particularly lovely cantabile passage for the cellos in the middle section. The soloist plays the part of a lazy cat, thwarting every attempt of the orchestra to turn the music more serious. The finale, in the tonic major, begins in an assertive and powerful manner. The piano takes the lead again, and Schumann finally allows his soloist some virtuoso pyrotechnics, although any excesses are firmly kept in check by the orchestra. The closing section is joyfully delirious, a fitting celebration of the composer's love for his wife.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN 1770 - 1827

SYMPHONY NO.2 IN D MAJOR, OP. 36 (1802)

- I. Adagio molto – Allegro con brio
- II. Larghetto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro
- IV. Allegro molto

Beethoven's Second Symphony, for all its good-natured humour, was written during a period of personal crisis. The composer's worsening deafness had caused him to become anxious and depressed – the latter compounded by his withdrawal from social gatherings for fear of embarrassment. At the same time, Austria was preparing for war with the sabre-rattling Napoleon. Ironically, however, Beethoven enjoyed great artistic success and recognition during these otherwise difficult years. He was now Vienna's leading composer, having eclipsed his old mentor Haydn with his C major symphony, in demand as a performer and sought out as a teacher by professionals and wealthy amateurs alike. And he found himself financially secure even at the age of thirty, the beneficiary of a generous regular stipend from a patron.

The Second has since been overshadowed by the audacious Third, the stormy drama of the Fifth, the dancelike Seventh and of course the cosmic grandeur of the groundbreaking Ninth. Even the orchestral forces are modest for the late classical era. The first reviews of the Second were mixed – critics admired the work's quality but deemed its length excessive. It is true that a half-hour symphony inspired by comic opera with three movements in the tonic key, might have seemed a little tame in the age of Goethe and Schiller, never mind Napoleon. But an audience that takes the Second on its own terms will be well rewarded; Beethoven's inventiveness, craftsmanship and colourful orchestration are astounding. Anyway, the music itself was not the culprit on that first occasion – rather, the orchestra had never played any symphonic work of this scope and probably gave a lacklustre performance of the (very difficult) finale; understandable, perhaps, at the end of a long concert that began with the First symphony, all after a six-hour rehearsal that same day!

After a long introduction, the first movement takes a decidedly Mozartean turn, recalling the Paris and Prague symphonies, and even Susanna nagging her henpecked husband in the opening of *The Marriage of Figaro*. The slow movement unfolds in an unhurried and gloriously indulgent manner, Beethoven treating us to a hybrid of pastoral serenade and developmental sonata procedures. By contrast, the scherzo is brief, and notable for its charming trio, with prominent parts for the oboes and bassoons. Its spirit is carried into the raucous finale, which parodies the last movement of Mozart's *Haffner* symphony. Beethoven is pleased to send his audience home with a veritable earworm – that hiccupping main theme is hard to forget.

There is no pathos in the Second, no hint of self-pity, no Heiligenstadt Testament – rather, Beethoven gives us a buffa work replete with unexpected harmonic twists, offbeat sforzandi and melodic non-sequiturs. Certainly, the ominous figure of Napoleon lurks at the gates; this villain is greeted by the optimistic but naïve composer in the military fanfares and cannon shots of the first and third movements. We all know what the composer would do to the title page of the 'Bonaparte' symphony a few years later. But in 1802, Beethoven was content to fire off the first salvos of his own musical revolution like champagne corks, in the most light-hearted and carefree manner imaginable.

A close-up portrait of conductor Avlana Eisenberg. She has wavy, light brown hair and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is wearing a dark teal or forest green collared shirt. The background is a light blue wall with a pattern of dark green circles, resembling a polka-dot design.

CONDUCTOR

AVLANA EISENBERG

Acclaimed conductor Avlana Eisenberg is a passionately committed advocate for emerging and underrepresented American composers, new works, and making symphonic music accessible for all. Hailed as “an imaginative and enterprising conductor,” she is Music Director of the Boston Chamber Symphony and has led orchestras throughout the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom.

Eisenberg's discography includes recordings with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra MAV and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Her recent Naxos recording, William Grant Still: Summerland, which includes 13 world premieres of orchestral music by Still, was praised as “stunning” by The New York Times and selected as Album of the Week by SiriusXM. ClassicalCDs.com notes, “This composer could not have better advocates than what we have here. The playing of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra is superbly accomplished and musically involving, and they are expertly led by Avlana Eisenberg.” Eisenberg's earlier recording of violin concertos of Sibelius and Barber and the world premiere recording of Ben-Haim's Three Songs Without Words with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra MAV and violinist Zina Schiff was hailed as “persuasive” and “finely balanced” by Gramophone Magazine, and “strongly recommended” by Fanfare. Her upcoming releases include an all-Hovhaness album with the Salzburg Chamber Soloists and a recording of works by Ravel and Ben-Haim with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

As Music Director of the Boston Chamber Symphony, Eisenberg has been credited with extending and deepening their impact in the community by making symphonic music accessible and riveting for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. In addition to mainstage and educational concerts, she has brought music to the community in non-traditional venues, including WBUR Radio-sponsored concerts in a local brewery, and the Boston Chamber Symphony's Healing Arts Initiative in collaboration with Harvard's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center to bring symphonic music to hospital staff, patients, and families. Committed to amplifying diverse compositional voices, Eisenberg and the Boston Chamber Symphony developed the

“Sounds of America” series to showcase the life and music of underrepresented American composers. In demand as a guest conductor, Eisenberg has also performed with ensembles at noted summer festivals including the Edinburgh Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Festival at Sandpoint, and in such venues as the Mozarteum, the Hungarian Radio Hall, and the Granada Theater.

Eisenberg regularly champions the work of contemporary composers, such as Kevin Puts, Faye Chiao, and David Biedenbender. She has conducted dozens of world premieres and served as conductor for the Juventas New Music Ensemble—a group that exclusively performs works by young composers. Eisenberg has also commissioned new works, including Banding Together, an operatic adaptation of Musicians of Bremen, the popular Brothers Grimm fairytale, which was premiered by the Boston Chamber Symphony at a sold-out family concert.

Recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship to work at the Paris National Opera, Eisenberg received her undergraduate degree at Yale University, where she founded and conducted the Silliman Symphony and was named one of Glamour Magazine's Top Ten College Women for her stellar academic record and strong leadership skills. She earned graduate degrees in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Michigan and the Peabody Institute and has participated in masterclasses by such renowned conductor-pedagogues as Michael Tilson Thomas, David Zinman, Marin Alsop, and Gerard Schwarz. A violinist by training, Eisenberg's primary teacher was Heifetz protégé Erick Friedman.

SOLOIST

ILYA FRIEDBERG



Ilya Friedberg, a Russian-Israeli pianist, chamber musician, and composer, was born in Moscow in 1982 to a piano teacher mother and a physicist father. His musical journey began at six, studying at the Central Moscow Gnesins' School of Music. In 1991, he moved to Israel, where he continued his training under Louise Joffe. At 16, he won first prize at the International Pianist of the 21st Century competition in Kyiv, Ukraine, leading to performances at venues like the Shostakovich Philharmonic Hall in St. Petersburg and the Jerusalem Theatre.

Friedberg pursued further studies at Oberlin Conservatory with Sanford Margolis and at Indiana University under Menahem Pressler, earning master's and doctoral degrees. He worked closely with Pressler as his assistant, forming a meaningful connection, and in 2023, he performed at Pressler's memorial in London alongside musicians like Matthias Goerne and Antonio Meneses.

As a soloist and chamber musician, Friedberg has performed with ensembles such as the Pacifica Quartet and musicians from the Chicago Symphony and New York Philharmonic, including violinist Stephanie Jeong and cellist Kenneth

Olsen. He has also appeared with the Kwazulu-Natal and Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestras under Daniel Boico during a 2022 South Africa tour.

Known for his thoughtful interpretation of Bach's Goldberg Variations, described as "mesmerizing" by Eric Stumacher, Friedberg supports new music. In 2024, he released a project featuring new variations on the Goldberg Aria by 18 composers, reflecting his creative commitment. Friedberg continues to engage audiences with his dedication to both traditional and contemporary repertoire.

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN I

Sharon de Kock
(Concertmaster)
Samantha Durrant
(Co-Concertmaster)
Richard Reid
(Assistant Concertmaster)
Francois Henkins
(Assistant Concertmaster)
Elzanne van Schalkwyk
Lizette Gous-Holloway
Abri van Nieuwenhuizen
Jani Liebenberg
Elma Salt
Louis van der Watt

VIOLIN II

Regomoditswe Molosioa
(Principal)
Tsholofelo Tshikare
Ezelle Erasmus
Stefné Raubenheimer
Stella Mtshali
Tinamari Viljoen
Sue-Phill Petersen
Maria Yazbek

VIOLA

Jeanne-Louise Moolman
(Principal)
Chair sponsor: André Venter
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Maja van Dyk
Juretha Swanepoel
Sehle Mosole
Japie Ngqondi

CELLO

Anmari van der Westhuizen
(Principal)
Chair sponsor: Frederick Fourie
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BASS

Ruan Baartman
(Principal)
Asta Budack
Siyolise Nyondo-Holliman

FLUTE

Handri Loots
(Guest Principal)
Renée Neuhoff

OBOE

Johan Ferreira
(Guest Principal)
Elize Loeb van Zuilenburg

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(Principal)
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Brahm Henkins
(Guest Principal)
Jan-Willem Hoorweg

FRENCH HORN

Shannon Armer
(Guest Principal)
Dylan Barker

TRUMPET

Paul Loeb van Zuilenburg
(Principal)
Dingaen Chabalala

TROMBONE

Vuyani Gxavu
(Guest Principal)

TIMPANI

Maritsa Barlow
(Principal)

DRUM KIT

Marie-Elize Venter
(Guest Principal)

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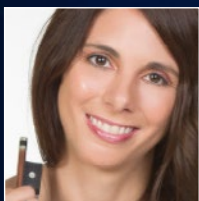
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PIANO:
BEN SCHOEMAN

Haydn: L'Isola disabitata
Ravel: Piano Concerto in G major
Mendelssohn: Symphony No. 3

18 OCTOBER

CONDUCTOR:
HO CHUNG YEH
SOLOIST:
TO BE ANNOUNCED

Mozart: Overture to the Marriage of Figaro
Wang Chenwei: Thaipusam
Schumann: Symphony No. 2

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