

SEASON OPENER

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September 13, 2025

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Evren Ozel, Piano

Gabriela ORTIZ
(b. 1964)

Kauyumari

Béla BARTÓK
(1881-1945)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in E major
Allegretto
Adagio religioso
Allegro vivace

INTERMISSION

Sergei RACHMANINOFF
(1873-1943)

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27
Largo – Allegro moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro vivace



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The parents of **Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964, Mexico City)** were musicians in Los Folkloristas, a Mexican group dedicated to preserving and performing Latin American folk music. Their daughter learned to play guitar and charango with them while also studying classical piano. She eventually earned a masters degree from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and a doctorate in composition and electronic music at University of London. Ortiz has received commissions from many prestigious orchestras and organizations, including seven from the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Gustavo Dudamel at the helm. The famed conductor thinks that Ortiz is “one of the most talented composers in the world—not only in Mexico, not only in our continent—in the world. Her ability to bring colors, to bring rhythm and harmonies that connect with you is something beautiful, something unique.” Earlier this year Ortiz won three Grammy awards for the album *Revolución diamantina*, recorded by the LA Philharmonic and Dudamel. The title track is a ballet for eight voices and orchestra. Ortiz has also written chamber works, concerti, solo pieces, music for film (*Frontierland*) and for the operatic stage (*Only the Truth; Firefly*). Awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright-García Robles Fellowship, and membership in the Academy of the Arts. Ortiz is currently composer-in-residence at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, at Carnegie Hall, and at the Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León. In addition, she teaches composition at Mexico’s National Autonomous University.

Dudamel and the LA Philharmonic premiered tonight’s work, *Kauyumari*, in October 2021. The title from the Huichol tribal language is translated as “Blue Deer,” a spirit which acts as a guide for people trying to communicate with their ancestors while under the influence of pey-

ote. The Huichol are indigenous to the Sierra Madre Occidental area of Mexico; many of them have also settled in the Southwestern United States. A Huichol folk melody is the basis of this composition that engages a large orchestra, alternating instrumental colors in repetitive rhythmic patterns. The initial solo trumpet call is answered by a muted off-stage trumpet, and the phrase is repeated antiphonally by various instruments. When the piccolo repeats the theme, chords plucked by the harpist provide a unique textural accompaniment. The spiritual aspect of *Kauyumari* is emphasized by this quote from the composer, “Each year, these Native Mexicans embark on a symbolic journey to ‘hunt’ the blue deer, making offerings in gratitude for having been granted access to the invisible world, through which they also are able to heal the wounds of the soul.”

A native of Hungary, **Béla Bartók (1881–1945)** initially studied piano with his mother, and at age eleven he gave his first recital, which included an original composition. Eventually he taught piano for twenty-seven years at the Budapest Academy of Music, his alma mater. Interested in the folk music of not only Hungary but its surrounding neighbors, Bartók spent ten summers with his countryman Zoltan Kodály traveling to remote villages to record and preserve peasant songs. The characteristics of this native music, including the pentatonic scales that figure prominently in Magyar melodies, were absorbed and incorporated into his own works. By 1934 he was able to compose almost exclusively by commissions. During World War II, the composer took a strong anti-Nazi stance and would not permit his music to be played in Germany or even on a radio station that broadcast in Germany or Italy. In 1940 he found it necessary to emigrate to the United States,

and for several years he earned \$3,000 a year (current equivalent about \$50,000) as a research scholar in folk music at Columbia University. Unfortunately his compositions were not well-received in the U.S., so the importance of Serge Koussevitsky’s 1944 commission for the Concerto for Orchestra cannot be underestimated. Koussevitsky conducted the Boston Symphony for the work’s premiere in December 1944, and that same year Yehudi Menuhin commissioned Bartók to write the Sonata for Solo Violin. Along with the solo concertos, six string quartets, Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celeste, Mikrokosmos for piano solo, and his ballet The Miraculous Mandarin, these compositions cemented his reputation as a composer, which grew after his death in 1945 due to complications from leukemia.

Bartók composed the **Third Piano Concerto** as a gift for his wife’s 42nd birthday in October 1945. Bartók’s leukemia was in remission and this composition is lighter in mood than many of his works, reflecting his improved health and overall mood; however, he passed away a month before her birthday. The last seventeen bars of music had been sketched but not orchestrated. This was accomplished by his countryman and fellow composer Tibor Serly, but Bartók’s widow did not perform the concerto until the 1960s. Its premiere took place in February 1946 with György Sándor at the piano and fellow Hungarian Eugene Ormandy conducting. The primary theme introduced by the soloist in the first movement, **Allegretto**, is an original melody in the style of Hungarian folk music. Bartók followed traditional sonata form with two themes that undergo a short “development” before being recapitulated. The “religious” aspect of the **Adagio religioso** is a hymn-like chorale. In early adulthood the composer embraced atheism, but in 1916 he publicly an-

nounced he had become a Unitarian. This movement is contemplative with slow-moving harmonies that go in unexpected directions. Pentatonic scales and bird calls inform the central section, an example of Bartók's signature "night music" that evokes the sounds of insects and other creatures in the dark. Individual woodwind instruments, sounding almost improvisatory, depict the birdsongs. The joyous **Allegro vivace** in rondo form (ABACABA) also incorporates folk-like melodies. Dialogues between the soloist and the orchestra are dramatic and virtuosic. The "B" section has a drastic change of mood and expression, and the central fugal section, "C," demonstrates Bartók's interest in classical forms and in architectural symmetry. Dazzling octaves on the piano bring the concerto to a close.

At age fourteen **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)** moved by himself from his home near Great Novgorod, Russia, to study at the Moscow Imperial Conservatory. At his 1892 graduation, he was a co-winner of the Gold Medal for Piano along with Josef Lhévinne and Alexander Scriabin. That same year, Rachmaninoff achieved great success with the famous Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2, which sold thousands of copies. He grew to hate the piece because it was requested so often during his performance tours. After a disappointing premiere of his first symphony in 1897 and his subsequent depression, the composer underwent hypnotherapy for a time and did not attempt to compose another symphony until 1906. (Symphony No. 1 was never performed again in Rachmaninoff's lifetime.)

Symphony No. 2, which premiered in St. Petersburg in 1908, was more widely praised by both critics and the public. Cellos and basses enter with a brooding **Largo** (slow) introduction that is extended by the horns. Different instrumen-

tal sections imitate and build on each other's phrases, phrases that are long-breathed and seemingly without resolution. Listen for the English horn's yearning theme that announces the **Allegro Moderato**, "the first movement proper." Later the bass clarinet gives the first warning of an approaching storm. Conflict and resolution, those necessary components of good literature and music, are expressed through Rachmaninoff's memorable melodies and luxurious orchestration. Really, who needs a musicologist to explain Rachmaninoff?!

The second movement, **Allegro molto** (very fast), is in rondo form (ABACABA) and begins with scurrying strings and a distinctive horn theme. A solo clarinet leads to the "typically Rachmaninoff" secondary theme before the tempo accelerates and returns to the primary theme. Strings initiate a frantic central fugal section ("C") that includes an episode for brass before the entire first section (ABA) is heard again. A brief coda provides one last glimpse of the brass melody before fading away. The first clarinetist shines in the **Adagio** with more long-breathed melodies. Both oboe and English horn have cameos in this Romantic slow movement. You may recognize the main theme from the 1976 hit "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again" by Eric Carmen. **Allegro Vivace** abruptly destroys the atmosphere with lively merry-making that is itself interrupted by a march-like section. There are flashbacks to the three earlier movements, and Rachmaninoff's gift for beautiful themes and dramatic orchestration is on full display in the final movement of this hour-long symphony.

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Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University

DID YOU KNOW?

Pop songwriter Eric Carmen borrowed another Rachmaninoff theme, this time from Piano Concerto No. 2, for the melody of "All by Myself," another Billboard chart-topper in 1976. Carmen studied classical music, including piano and violin; his first violin teacher was an aunt who played in the Cleveland Orchestra.



American pianist **Evren Ozel** has been described as "an absolute wow" (*Third Coast Review*) and "an artist capable of lifting everyone to another level" (*LaScena Musicale*), praised for his blend of technical mastery and compelling artistry. He is the Bronze Medalist of the 17th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (2025), where he also received the special prize for the Best Performance of a Mozart Concerto.

Ozel has performed extensively throughout the United States and internationally, and is the recipient of a 2023 Avery Fisher Career Grant and a 2022 Salon de Virtuosi Career Grant. He is currently represented by Concert Artists Guild as an Ambassador Prize Winner of the 2021 Victor Elmaleh Competition. Since making his orchestral debut with the Minnesota Orchestra at age 11, Ozel has appeared as so-

Guest Artist

loist with the Cleveland Orchestra, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, and Jacksonville Symphony, performing under conductors such as Marin Alsop, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Jahja Ling, and Ruth Reinhardt. His debut album—Mozart concertos recorded with the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra and conductor Howard Griffiths—was released in 2025 on Alpha Classics.

Highlights of Ozel's 2025–26 season include solo recitals for Portland Piano International, the Chopin Society of Minnesota, and Chamber Music Detroit. He has previously performed for the Harvard Musical Association, La Jolla Music Society, Cal Performances, and The Gilmore. A laureate of both the Cleveland International Piano Competition and the Dublin International Piano Competition, Ozel gave a recital at Salle Cortot (Paris) during

the 2024–25 season as part of a series of international performances resulting from the Cleveland Competition, and will continue with appearances at Brandenburgische Sommerkonzerte (Germany) and the Vilnius Piano Festival (Lithuania).

A committed chamber musician, Ozel collaborates with artists including David Finckel and Wu Han, Stella Chen, Zlatomir Fung, Paul Huang, Kim Kashkashian, Daniel Phillips, and Marcy Rosen. He spent four summers at the Marlboro Music Festival, and is currently a 2024–27 Bowers Program Artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, with upcoming appearances at Alice Tully Hall. He will also perform in 2025–26 for the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society.

Ozel resides in Boston and holds Bachelor's, Master's, and Artist Diploma degrees from the New England Conservatory, where he studied with Wha Kyung Byun. His other important mentors include Jonathan Biss, Imogen Cooper, Richard Goode, András Schiff, and Mitsuko Uchida.



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