

M Manhattan
School of Music

MSM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

George Manahan (BM '73, MM '76), Conductor
Yan Li (BM '17, MM '19, DMA candidate), piano
Winner of the Dora Zaslavsky-Koch Piano Competition

Friday, February 7, 2020 | 7:30 PM
Neidorff-Karpati Hall

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PROGRAM

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG *Five Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 16* (1909 version)
(1874–1951)

1. *Vorgefühle* (Premonitions)
2. *Vergangenes* (The Past)
3. *Farben* (Chord Colorations)
4. *Peripetie* (Peripeteia)
5. *Das obligate Rezitativ* (Obbligato Recitative)

ALEXANDER Scriabin *Poem of Ecstasy* (Symphony No. 4), Op. 54
(1872–1915)

Intermission

LUDWIG VAN
BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73
("Emperor")

Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso
Rondo: Allegro

Yan Li, piano

MSM SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

George Manahan, Conductor

VIOLIN 1

Vlad C. Hontilă,
concertmaster
Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Yuna Jo
Seoul, South Korea

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Montréal, Canada

Dennis Lee
Seoul, South Korea

Jeehyun Park
Seoul, South Korea

Jeeyoon Kim
Seoul, South Korea

TaTan Huang
Tainan, Taiwan

Maomao Huang
Wubu, China

Carlos Martinez
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Yujing Ming
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Wing Yan Kwok
Hong Kong

Corinne Au
Short Hills, New Jersey

Hajung Cho
Seoul, South Korea

Amos Lee
Astoria, New York

Yihan Zhu
Shanghai, China

Man Yin Yeung
Hong Kong, China

Ally Cho
Melbourne, Australia

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Oil City, Louisiana

Jaycee Cardoso
Huntington Station, New York

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Tainan City, Taiwan

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Haettenschwiler**
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piano⁺⁺
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* Beethoven

- Schoenberg

+ Scriabin

PROGRAM NOTES

Five Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 16 Arnold Schoenberg

Schoenberg's output between 1907 and 1909 was astounding not only in quantity but in its earthshaking ramifications for his own style and for the course of Western music. With these works—his Second String Quartet, Three Piano Pieces (Op. 11), Two Songs (Op. 14), song cycle *The Book of the Hanging Gardens*, Five Pieces for Orchestra, and monodrama *Erwartung*—he broke from tonality and triadic harmony by adopting a free chromatic style, exploring what he called “the emancipation of dissonance.”

In 1908 Richard Strauss turned down Schoenberg's opera *Pelleas und Melisande* saying he'd be interested in some short orchestral pieces “if I could find something among them which I could serve to the Berlin Opera House public, which unfortunately is madly conservative.” With nothing to send then, Schoenberg began composing the Five Pieces for Orchestra in May 1909 but was not about to bow to conservatism. Having completed three and almost the fourth, he wrote to Strauss: “I am expecting colossal things of them, sound and mood especially. That is all they are about: absolutely not symphonic—precisely the opposite—no architecture, no structure. Merely a bright, uninterrupted interchange of colors, rhythms, and moods.”

After receiving the first four pieces, Strauss returned them on September 2 with bad news: “Your pieces are such daring experiments that for the present I dare not perform them.” It took three years for any of the Five Pieces to be heard in public: Nos. 1, 2, and 4 were performed in a two-piano, eight-hands version in February 1912 in Berlin, and finally all five in their orchestral version on September 3, 1912, in London under the open-minded conductor Henry Wood.

According to Ernest Newman, perhaps the least hostile of the English critics, a third of the normally staid audience hissed, one third laughed, and the remaining third “seemed too puzzled either to laugh or to hiss.” He wondered whether the apparently chaotic tonal relations would one day seem clear. Even Schoenberg's 1948 statement that “the pieces are relatively easy to understand today” may have been premature. Now, more than a century after they were composed, the Five Pieces for Orchestra hold an honored position in the repertoire, and yet many listeners still consider them avant-garde.

In 1912 Schoenberg reluctantly devised programmatic titles at the urging of his publisher, saying in his diary that he had found some that were general enough not to divulge secrets, technicalities, or poetic content. Everyone

has “Premonitions” and a “Past,” he said, and “Peripetie” (from Greek drama: reversal of circumstances) was likewise general enough. He suggested “Chord Colorations” for the third piece (shortened to “Colors” in 1912 copies of the score) and, for the last, *Obligato Recitative*, though he thought “Extended” or “Unending” *Recitative* might be better.

The first edition did not contain the titles, but they were published in Schoenberg’s 1922 revision. The addition of “Summer Morning by a Lake” to the third title first appeared in a 1920 program for a performance he conducted in Salzburg and remained in his son-in-law’s 1925 chamber-orchestra arrangement. Schoenberg’s 1949 reduction of the original’s gargantuan scoring is the version most often performed.

The mercurial, atonal gestures that launch the first piece had to have stunned the first audience. Nor would those listeners have been reassured to know that Schoenberg draws on this material for the remainder of the piece, transforming his motives using all manner of canonic devices over a succession of ostinatos and a sustained chord. Despite their kinship, these manipulations range in expression from explosive climax to piquant marching.

In the gentle second piece, a recurring dissonant chord helps to delineate the form—roughly three parts—and ostinatos again play a role. His nod to “the past” may lie in using material from the opening section in the last, though he combines it with material from the contrasting middle. Delicate instrumental sonorities abound, highlighted by muted solo strings, celesta, and harp.

The slow-moving chords of the third piece offer a constantly changing palette of instrumental timbres. This famous and influential movement may have been the seed for *Klangfarbenmelodie* (tone color melody), a concept he named in 1911, referring to melodies that progress by means of timbre rather than pitch.

The fourth piece’s upward ripping motives and patterned snippets shatter the quiet, though this brief expository section ends in calm. The remainder of the piece, despite its surface diversity—raucous clamor, poignant solo gestures, and brash ending—is all carefully derived, as before, through transformation of the opening materials.

The last and most radical of the Five Pieces—together with the third of the Opus 11 pieces and *Erwartung*, which were composed just before and after—explored a new “athematic” method of construction in which a stream of newly conceived ideas, each its own little development, progresses from

one to another by sheer momentum and drama. With no repetition or traditional structural devices, this fifth piece was so incomprehensible to early conductors that Schoenberg developed a system, later used by many others, of indicating what was the most important musical material. A quiet beginning, several surges, and an intense climax shape the whole, but the return to an introverted atmosphere is no recapitulation. Schoenberg's material is ever new—an “unending recitative” as he suggested in his diary.

***Poem of Ecstasy* (Symphony No. 4), Op. 54** **Alexander Scriabin**

In 1905 when Scriabin began composing the *Poem of Ecstasy* he was gaining widespread recognition both as a gifted and unpredictable pianist—he always played to full houses—and as a composer who had composed three symphonies and more than 100 works for piano. He was temperamentally susceptible to many of the circulating philosophies and was considered something of a mystic philosopher himself. He had studied Marx and Nietzsche, identifying with the “superman” and Zarathustra; he had absorbed the theosophical teachings of Helena Blavatsky and the quasi-religious mysticism of Vladimir Solovyov; and he identified with the concept of Man-God as taught by Prince Trubetskoy, who also preached the oneness of erotic love with God.

In 1904 Scriabin began writing “a short exposition of my doctrine to be published as a booklet,” which he called *Poème orgiaque* (Orgiastic poem). By May 1906 he was still working on the more than 300-line poem, which he now called *Poem of Ecstasy*, and he had also begun a musical version of the poem. Scriabin considered the music and the poetry as separate, but parallel creations. Boris de Schloezer, one of Scriabin's early biographers, wrote: “He did not dare work on a musico-poetic unit. He feared losing the independence of his poetry. When he began working on the music, he was not concerned with matching the text precisely or strictly. The words did not comment on the music, and likewise, the music was not an illustration of the words.” Later Schloezer wrote, “Scriabin and I worked together comparing text and music. I remember the pleasure and surprise he felt when the music was fully free yet followed the development of the text.”

Scriabin loved his textual *Poème* and delighted in reading sections of it to friends even after his philosophy had changed. He insisted that copies be distributed for the first performance, but he decided not to print the text with the score, saying, “Conductors who want to perform the *Poem of Ecstasy* can always be apprised that it has such a thing, but in general I would prefer

for them to approach it first as pure music.” The lengthy poem makes difficult reading. The opening lines, variants of which recur throughout the poem, give an idea of its style (translation by Scriabin scholar Faubion Bowers):

Spirit
Winged with thirst for life,
Is drawn into flight
On the summits of negation.
There, under the rays of his dream
Emerges a magical world
Of heavenly forms and feelings.
 Spirit playing.
 Spirit desiring.
Spirit creating all with a dream.
Surrenders to the bliss of love.

Scriabin saw himself as Man-God the creator who gives the world his ecstasy and liberation; in the poem, “Man-God” became “Spirit.” The Spirit experiences a wide variety of feelings in its search for ecstasy, a blending of sexual and religious ecstasy. The music has also been characterized as sexual and erotic, which no doubt would have pleased Scriabin. Its themes are intended to represent yearning, aspiration, victory, and so on, by means of harmonic progressions of suspended dominant-ninth and eleventh chords and ever-erupting colors from the huge orchestra he requires. Scriabin also used performance directions in the score such as “*avec un volupté de plus en plus extatique*” (with a voluptuousness becoming more and more ecstatic). Without knowing the text of the poem or Scriabin’s performance directions, one is still struck by the uniquely haunting and intense emotional expression of Scriabin’s music.

Structurally the *Poem of Ecstasy* freely follows sonata form—introduction, exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda. The overall impression, however, is not one of structural manipulation of themes, but of mood patterns created by intensifying and relaxing the harmonic progressions and textural layers. Harmonically Scriabin’s *Poem of Ecstasy* comes at the stage of his development in which he uses less explicit tonal resolutions and no key signature but before the advent of his harmonic systems built on intervals of a fourth and his famous “mystic chord.” He had become enamored with juxtaposing dominant chords at the interval of a tritone since they could resolve in different ways, thus obscuring the tonality. The work ends in a blaze of C major, not arrived at by traditional harmonic progression but employed sheerly for its color. Scriabin was always concerned with translating sound into color; in his next large work, *Prometheus, the Poem of Fire*, he even envisaged a color keyboard that would project the colors he associated with the sounds in his head.

Scriabin's skill as an orchestrator has often been overlooked among the various fascinating aspects of his music and personality, but he was a master at handling an enormous orchestra. In the *Poem of Ecstasy* the writing for solo violin, viola, and trumpet particularly stands out, as does the use of eight horns, the frequent divisi writing for the string sections, and the detailed figural writing for all the instruments that contributes to an overall opulent texture.

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 73 ("Emperor")

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven's Fifth (and last) Piano Concerto was the first that he did not introduce himself as soloist, having become too deaf by this time. He completed it in Vienna in 1809, the year Austria was defeated at Wagram and Napoleon had invaded and occupied Vienna. Beethoven wrote:

Since May 4th, I have brought into the world little that is connected; only here and there a fragment. The whole course of events has affected me body and soul. . . . What a disturbing, wild life around me; nothing but drums, cannons, men, misery of all sorts.

Worried about protecting what was left of his hearing, Beethoven took refuge on at least one occasion in the basement of his brother Carl's house and covered his ears with pillows. Far from "fragments," however, he managed to compose such impressive works as this concerto, the *Harp* Quartet, and the Opus 78, 79, and 81a piano sonatas.

As in several of his "invasion year" works, Beethoven employed E-flat major, a key he favored for noble and heroic sentiments (as in the *Eroica* Symphony), imbuing the Concerto with a remarkable aura of grandeur. Nothing would have infuriated him more, however, than the nickname it received. According to one story, a French officer at the first Viennese performance acclaimed it as "an emperor among concertos." Beethoven's antiauthoritarian opinions and celebrated removal of Napoleon as the dedicatee of the *Eroica* confirm the impossibility of his having celebrated imperial grandeur.

The successful premiere in Leipzig in November 1811 by Johann Friedrich Schneider put the large audience into such "a state of enthusiasm that it could hardly contain itself with the ordinary expressions of recognition and enjoyment." Yet the first Viennese performance in February, with Beethoven's brilliant pupil Carl Czerny as soloist, earned such unfavorable commentary as: "He [Beethoven] can be understood and appreciated only by connoisseurs."

Since it's hard to imagine such a difference in the quality of the two performances, these conflicting reactions must simply reflect the different tastes of the critics or of the two cities.

Introduced and punctuated by full orchestral chords, the majestic work begins with a solo cadenza that firmly establishes the home key. Beethoven later recalls his introduction to set up the recapitulation. Toward the end, he prepares for a traditional solo cadenza, but then astonishes by ingeniously turning it into an extended coda involving yet another recapitulation.

Beethoven leads his tranquil slow-movement theme through three variations at a gloriously unhurried pace, whereupon he presents one of his most dramatic and thrilling coups. The bassoons sustain the home pitch, then gently lower it a half step. The horns sustain and the piano joins tentatively, whispering what will erupt as the finale's main theme. This sonata-rondo, colored by the upward-bounding main theme with its energy-charged syncopation, makes an exultant conclusion to this heroic work.

—*Program notes* ©Jane Vial Jaffe

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

George Manahan (BM '73, MM '76), Conductor

George Manahan is in his 10th season as Director of Orchestral Activities at Manhattan School of Music, as well as Music Director of the American Composers Orchestra and the Portland Opera. He served as Music Director of the New York City Opera for 14 seasons and was hailed for his leadership of the orchestra. He was also Music Director of the Richmond Symphony (VA) for 12 seasons. Recipient of Columbia University's Ditson Conductor's Award, Mr. Manahan was also honored by the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) for his "career-long advocacy for American composers and the music of our time." His Carnegie Hall performance of Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* was hailed by audiences and critics alike. "The fervent and sensitive performance that Mr. Manahan presided over made the best case for this opera that I have ever encountered," said the *New York Times*.

Mr. Manahan's guest appearances include the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Atlanta, San Francisco, Hollywood Bowl, and New Jersey, where he served as acting Music Director for four seasons. He has been a regular guest with the Curtis Institute and the Aspen Music Festival and has appeared with the opera companies of Seattle, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Chicago, Santa Fe, Paris, Sydney, Bologna, St. Louis, the Bergen Festival (Norway), and the Casals Festival (Puerto Rico). His many appearances on television include productions of *La bohème*, *Lizzie Borden*, and *Tosca* on PBS. The Live from Lincoln Center telecast of New York City Opera's production of *Madama Butterfly*, under his direction, won a 2007 Emmy Award.

George Manahan's wide-ranging recording activities include the premiere recording of Steve Reich's *Tebillim* for ECM; recordings of Edward Thomas's *Desire Under the Elms*, which was nominated for a Grammy; Joe Jackson's *Will Power*; and Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*. He has conducted numerous world premieres, including Charles Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, David Lang's *Modern Painters*, Hans Werner Henze's *The English Cat*, Tobias Picker's *Dolores Claiborne*, and Terence Blanchard's *Champion*.

He received his formal musical training at Manhattan School of Music, studying conducting with Anton Coppola and George Schick, and was appointed to the faculty of the school upon his graduation, at which time the Juilliard School awarded him a fellowship as Assistant Conductor with the American Opera Center. Mr. Manahan was chosen as the Exxon Arts Endowment Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony the same year he made his opera debut with the Santa Fe Opera, conducting the American premiere of Arnold Schoenberg's *Von Heute auf Morgen*.

Yan Li (BM '17, MM '19, DMA candidate)

Praised by critics as “a musician of integrity and depth” (*New York Concert Review*) after her Carnegie Hall performance in 2017, pianist Yan Li has been recognized as a rising star on many competitive stages. The gold medal winner of the International Virtuoso Competition, Ms. Li has also been a top prizewinner in the New York International Music Concours, National Artists Competition, and Rondo Forma Young Artists Competition, among others. She was also a prizewinner in the Metropolitan International Piano Competition, New York International Artists Competition, Bradshaw & Buono International Competition, New York Artists International Competition, Five Towns Young Musicians Competition, and Young Classical Virtuosos Competition. Ms. Li has given recitals around the United States, including performances at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall and Bruno Walter Auditorium at Lincoln Center.

Music festivals and master classes Ms. Yi has appeared in include the International Keyboard Institute and Festival and the Manhattan in the Mountains Summer Music Festival. In 2017, she was chosen through a competitive audition process to participate in a master class taught by pianist Yuja Wang at Manhattan School of Music. She has also gained professional guidance from other piano virtuosos such as Alexander Kobrin, Emanuel Krasovsky, Gerald Robbins, Tatiana Goncharova, Ilja Scheps, Inesa Sinkevych, Jeffrey Swann, Jonathan Klibonoff, Marian Hahn, and Ming-Qiang Lee.

Born in Shenzhen, China, pianist Yan Li began her piano studies at the age of 6. She received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from Manhattan School of Music and is currently a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree under the tutelage of Dr. Joanne Polk. Ms. Li is the recipient of the Roy M. Rubinstein Award at Manhattan School of Music.

ORCHESTRAL STUDIES AT MSM

George Manahan, Director of Orchestral Activities

Katharine Dryden, Managing Director of Instrumental Ensembles

Alejandro López-Samamé, Manager of Orchestral Operations and the Orchestral Performance Program

In the tradition of the classical music conservatory, the orchestral studies program at MSM forms the heart of the performing experience for classical instrumentalists. All students, placed by competitive audition, participate in a variety of orchestral projects under the guidance of George Manahan, Director of Orchestral Activities. Students play in a variety of orchestral formats, giving them ample opportunity to develop their audition and ensemble technique, broaden their knowledge of orchestral repertoire, and perform at New York City venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and Merkin Concert Hall. Winners of the School's annual Eisenberg–Fried Concerto Competition perform with the orchestras as soloists.

In addition to Maestro Manahan, the orchestras work regularly with Leonard Slatkin, Distinguished Visiting Artist in Conducting and Orchestral Studies, and guest conductors such as Jane Glover and Perry So.

The Centennial Project

Manhattan School of Music's Centennial Project was an ambitious program of improvements to the School's architecturally distinguished campus coinciding with MSM's 100th anniversary. The centerpiece of the Project was the renovation of Neidorff-Karpati Hall, MSM's principal performance space, which has been transformed into a state-of-the-art venue to showcase our talented students. Built in 1931 and designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, the architects of the Empire State Building, the hall has been called "one of the Art Deco treats in the city" by the *New York Times*. The Project also included a dramatic and welcoming new campus entrance on Claremont Avenue, new practice rooms, and an expansion of the main entryway and lobby.

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