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Concert Program

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Above all, we thank you for your support of our students as they cultivate their artistry and contribute to the world through music.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea Kalyn".

Andrea Kalyn
President

NEC Philharmonia

Hugh Wolff, conductor

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras

with

Leland Ko '24 AD, cello

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

7:30 p.m.

NEC's Jordan Hall

PROGRAM

Gabriela Lena Frank
(b. 1972)

Escaramuza (2010)

Witold Lutosławski
(1913–1994)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1970)
played without pause

Introduction
Four Episodes
Cantilena
Finale

Leland Ko '24 AD, cello

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873–1943)

Symphonic Dances, op. 45
Non allegro – Lento – Tempo I
Andante con moto
Lento assai – Allegro vivace

Millennia ago, before the invention of music or the written word, a prehistoric human likely picked up a stick and banged on a hollow log for the sheer joy of it. If rhythm is the first step toward music, then repeated notes are the first step toward melody. This concert features three works that start with these fundamentals and build into structures of imagination, complexity, and richness. Gabriela Lena Frank gets us in the mood with a furious bass drum solo, Witold Lutosławski builds an entire concerto from slowly repeated D's, and Sergei Rachmaninoff starts with a simple repeated-note figure that morphs into a menacing ostinato.

Escaramuza by **Gabriela Lena Frank** is scored for strings, harp, piano, and percussion. She writes:

Escaramuza, which signifies “skirmish” in the Spanish language, is inspired by the *kachampa* music of Andean Perú. Celebrating the pre-Hispanic Inca warrior, the *kachampa* dance is executed by athletic men who convey a triumphant, even joyful spirit. Inspired by the *kachampa* dances done with fast-snapping ropes that I’ve witnessed in Perú, especially in Paucartambo during the Virgen de la Carmen festival, I’ve created a brightly chiseled romp in an asymmetrical 7/8 rhythm that is launched after an extended bass drum solo. Through most of *Escaramuza*, no section of the ensemble is allowed to rest for long, maintaining the high energy typical of *kachampas*.

Witold **Lutosławski** wrote his Cello Concerto for Mstislav Rostropovich, who premiered it in London with the Bournemouth Symphony. Leland Ko, this evening’s soloist, has written this personal note about the music:

I’ve had a hard time containing my excitement about this piece. When Hugh Wolff reached out to me at the end of last year to decide on a concerto, Lutosławski’s was a logical conclusion — we both had interest in it, its popularity has been growing recently, and, at least in my thinking, for various reasons there is no piano reduction for this concerto, so the chance to learn the piece with orchestra was an opportunity I felt I had to take.

What I did not expect was just how obsessed I would become with this concerto. I vaguely understood that it was a unique piece, but what I soon found out was that it was like learning a new language which was able to communicate something extremely potent with me even as I was still trying to hash out its vocabulary, grammar, and at times even just its alphabet. This concerto is devoid of barlines, and is instead full of obsessive repeated units, frequently in odd numbers, grotesque glissandi and quarter tones, and bursts of energy interspersed with silence. But perhaps the most notable feature is Lutosławski’s frequent use of the aleatoric method (structured randomness... or perhaps controlled chaos?), in which the orchestra is given various units to play, but the “when” and “how often” are left up to the conductor and each player.

What results from this is a story that follows a very clear emotional arc from an intense stillness and uneasiness, to several episodes of increasing anxiety, to unhinged suffering and terror, and ultimately to intense determination and resilience. Lutosławski said that personal and political events did not directly influence his music, but also acknowledged that they did invade his creative process. Though there is no explicit narrative or political event to which it relates, it may be worth noting that this concerto was written in 1970 following several years of Polish troops and the Soviet regime suppressing liberal reforms and protests, and also the death of his mother — not to mention that Lutosławski himself was born to a democratic and politically active family just before the Russian Revolution, had lived through both World Wars, had enlisted in the army as a radio operator and escaped capture by German soldiers, and had lost his father and both his brothers to war or regime. Perhaps this helps explain the feeling that this concerto is about one against many, about the individual against society: every idea, every voice, every bit of resilience that the solo cello has is met by the orchestra rudely interrupting it, harassing it, creating fear, and even drowning it out.

I have always seen this concerto listed in concert programs as having four continuous movements — Introduction (Cadenza), Four Episodes, Cantilena, and Finale — and while no such explicit delineations nor their movement titles exist in the score, they've helped me organize the piece in my own head. The concerto opens with the cello alone: a five-minute cadenza book-ended and interspersed with repeated open Ds, filled in with rustlings and bursts of energy that have various markings from the composer — *indifferente* (indifferent), *grazioso* (graceful), *un poco buffo ma con eleganza* (a little funny but with elegance), *marziale* (march-like) — but that are perhaps shaded more than anything by the intensity and insanity of being alone. Towards the end of the cadenza, the spell is broken by three trumpets, and the cello consequently enters into the world.

The four episodes that follow are each established with a set of pizzicati from the solo cello, and all devolve into frantic repetition before being interrupted by the brass. The first episode begins with a certain degree of wonder, and the cello takes its time tentatively inspecting the new world around it. In the second episode, duplets turn into triplets as the cello becomes more anxious, as if skirting around or trying to avoid something. By the third episode, the triplets become quadruplets and the cello reaches full running speed and full fear. The fourth episode turns in a more rhythmic and determined direction, as if the cello has found some kind of resolve, but this fire, too, is put out by the brass.

The cello gets its first chance to interrupt the orchestra before the Cantilena, still with pizzicato, but this time forcefully and repetitively on low Es. The cello then begins a visceral lament and chant, amidst an unhinged murmuring from the strings in the orchestra, until rising to a climax in which the orchestra converges on a single G# and drowns out the solo cello.

I can only describe what happens next in the Finale as a total outcry. It begins with the only major orchestral tutti in the concerto, which includes some of the most terrifying sounds I've ever heard an orchestra make. Several lengthy attempts to fight back from the solo cello are interrupted by orchestral "schmears," until finally ten repeated chords from the orchestra mark its final blows, reducing the cello to pure wailing and whimpering. However, in a final burst of inspiration, the cello climbs all the way up to its highest registers and repeats an A until it is the only voice left — echoing the beginning of the concerto, somehow — as if the idea of freedom must continue.

My deepest thanks to Hugh Wolff and to all the musicians on stage for taking on this concerto with me. I can tell how much they believe in the power of this piece, and I could not be more excited to bring it to life with them tonight.

The wild success of the Ballets Russes in Paris in the early 1910s and the burgeoning international career of his younger compatriot, Igor Stravinsky, did not escape the notice of **Sergei Rachmaninoff**. He approached Michel Fokine, choreographer of Stravinsky's *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*, with the hope of collaborating on a ballet. Though nothing came of it at the time, the two did work together in London in 1934 on the ballet *Paganini*, based on the composer's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. Then, in the summer of 1940 as war engulfed Europe, Rachmaninoff found himself a refugee, living on Long Island. Nearby, were the Fokines (as well as Vladimir Horowitz and other artists fleeing Europe). Rachmaninoff spent his days practicing piano for an upcoming tour of the United States and composing a work he called *Fantastic Dances*. While he had in mind the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy for the music's premiere, he wanted Fokine to choreograph it. Rachmaninoff played his new composition on the piano for both Fokine and Ormandy, but sadly the former died before a ballet could be created. Ormandy and the Philadelphians premiered the music, now titled *Symphonic Dances*, in January of 1941. It was to be Rachmaninoff's last major work; he died just two years later.

The music has all the hallmarks of mature Rachmaninoff: deeply felt melodies, brilliantly colorful orchestration (note the alto saxophone's prominent role in the first movement's slow central episode), propulsive rhythm, and pervasive melancholy. The last is perhaps no surprise, given the composer's fragile health and the catastrophe of Nazism and the Second World War. The first movement, originally titled Noon and given the highly unusual tempo Non Allegro, conjures goose-stepping soldiers and the relentless march to totalitarianism of 1940. The middle section's aching melody has a Russian folk-song quality — the juxtaposition of the two a clear message. Toward the end of the movement, the pessimism lightens for a moment of quiet serenity before the music fades away. The middle movement (originally Twilight) opens with eerie dissonant brass chords, and a danse macabre style violin solo, before settling into a melancholy waltz with rapidly shifting moods. The third (Midnight) completes the journey from day into night. Very much in the spirit of a witches' dance, the music has an orgiastic quality. As in the other

movements, the energy subsides for a tranquil middle section, but the dance returns and builds to a frenzied apotheosis. Here Rachmaninoff quotes the Gregorian mass *Dies irae* chant, a life-long obsessive musical totem for him and perhaps a premonition of his own death. While *Symphonic Dances* received mixed reviews at its premiere, it has gradually caught on. Many now regard it as Rachmaninoff's orchestral masterpiece: brilliant, concise, and deeply personal. – Hugh Wolff

Leland Philip Ko (b. 1998), a cellist of Chinese-Canadian descent, is the kind of person who's always had an overflow of energy. His restlessness has led him to various callings, from competitive tennis and distance running to calligraphy and origami, but so far he's found that making music with and for others – and the process that goes into that – are the things that best focus his mind, and that this restlessness is what gives him an almost stubborn desire to experience something with his audiences and colleagues every time he walks out on stage. Though he has chosen to dedicate himself to classical music, he does his best to remember and live by a former mentor's advice that music is about life, not the other way around.

Leland was born and raised in the Boston area, where he studied with Kirstin Peltz, Ronald Lowry, and Paul Katz. He earned a B.A. from Princeton University in German literature, before attending The Juilliard School for his M.M., studying with Minhye Clara Kim, Timothy Eddy, and Natasha Brofsky. He has returned to Boston to pursue an A.D. at the New England Conservatory with Yeesun Kim and Donald Weilerstein, and resides in the city with his 11-year-old cat, Ham.

NEC Philharmonia
Hugh Wolff, conductor

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Angela Sin Ying Chan
Joy Wei
Byeol Claire Kim
Michael Fisher
Céline Bethoux
Hila Dahari
Sarah Campbell
Peixuan Wu
Joshua Brown
Gabriella Foster
Caroline Smoak
Cameron Alan-Lee
Jiaxin Lin
Rachel Wang

Second Violin

Clayton Hancock
Nathan do Amaral Oliveira
Tsubasa Muramatsu
Julian Rhee
Felicita Schiffner
Wangrui Ray Xu
Darwin Chang
Yilei Yin
Ching Shan Helen Yu
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K. J. McDonald
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Corley Friesen-Johnson
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Nathan Emans
Peter Jablokow
Sofia Beiran
Hyelim Kong
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Elton Tai

Cello

Bennet Huang
Annie SeEun Hyung
Hechen Sun
Michelle Jung
Pi-Wei Lin
Joanne Hwang
Asher Kalfus
Thomas Hung
Lily Stern
Andres Sanchez
Seoyeon Koo
Sophia Knappe

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Misha Bjerken
Yu-Cih Chang
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Yihan Wu
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Alyssa Peterson

Flute

Isabel Evernham §
Honor Hickman ‡
Jay Kim
Jungyoon Kim
Elizabeth McCormack

Piccolo

Anne Chao §
Honor Hickman ‡
Jay Kim
Elizabeth McCormack

Oboe

Dane Bennett
Donovan Bown
Abigail Hope-Hull §
Christian Paniagua ‡

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Gwendolyn Goble

Clarinet

Sarah Cho
Xianyi Ji
Phoebe Kuan §
Hugo Hyeokwoo Kweon ‡
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Bass Clarinet

Xianyi Ji ‡
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Bassoon

Matthew Heldt
Carson Meritt
Julien Rollins §
Andrew Salaru ‡

Contrabassoon

Garrett Comrie §
Carson Meritt ‡

Saxophone

Zeyi Tian

French horn

Grace Clarke
Jihao Li §
Graham Lovely
Willow Otten ‡
Noah Silverman
Qianbin Zhu

Trumpet

Eddy Lanois
Reynolds Martin §
Nelson Martinez ‡
Matthew Milhalko
Alex Prokop
Cody York

Principal players

* Frank
‡ Lutosławski
§ Rachmaninoff

Trombone
Eli Canales
Jaehan Kim ‡
Noah Korenfeld §

Bass Trombone
Roger Dahlin ‡
Scott Odou §

Tuba
Masaru Lin §
Hayden Silvester ‡

Timpani
Michael Rogers ‡
Lucas Vogelmann §
Zesen Wei *

Percussion
Gustavo Barreda
Jordan Fajardo-Bird
Eli Geruschat
Felix Ko *
Danial Kukuk §
Ngaieng Lai
Liam McManus
Eli Reisz
Michael Rogers ‡
Jeff Sagurton
Halle Hayoung Song
Connor Willits

Harp
Yoonsu Cha *‡
Shaylen Joos §

Keyboard
Kai-Min Chang, piano *‡
Yujin Han, piano §
Hyunjin Roh, celeste ‡

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Special thanks to Jason Horowitz, Daniel Getz, Mickey Katz,
and Anthony D'Amico for their work in preparing the orchestra
for this evening's concert.

Hugh Wolff

*Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras;
Chair, Orchestral Conducting*

Hugh Wolff joined the New England Conservatory faculty in 2008 and has conducted a large share of NEC's orchestral concerts every year since then. He has taught graduate students in an elite training program for orchestral conductors since 2009.

Wolff has appeared with all the major American orchestras, including those of Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Cleveland. He is much in demand in Europe, where he has conducted the London Symphony, the Philharmonia, the City of Birmingham Symphony, the Orchestre National de France, Czech Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Munich Philharmonic, and the Bavarian and Berlin Radio Orchestras. A regular guest conductor with orchestras in Japan, Korea, Scandinavia, Canada and Australia, he is also a frequent conductor at summer festivals.

Currently Laureate Conductor of the Belgian National Orchestra, Wolff was principal conductor of the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra from 1997 to 2006 and maintains a close relationship with that ensemble. He led it on tours of Europe, Japan, and China, and at the Salzburg Festival. Wolff was principal conductor and then music director of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (1988-2000), with which he recorded twenty discs and toured the United States, Europe, and Japan. Performances with the Boston Symphony have included the world premiere of Ned Rorem's *Swords and Ploughshares* in Symphony Hall. Wolff was music director of the New Jersey Symphony (1986-1993) and principal conductor of Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival (1994-1997). He began his professional career in 1979 as associate conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra under Mstislav Rostropovich.

Wolff's extensive discography includes the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra and music from the baroque to the present. He has recorded or premiered works by John Adams, Stephen Albert, John Corigliano, Brett Dean, Lukas Foss, John Harbison, Aaron Jay Kernis, Edgar Meyer, Rodion Shchedrin, Bright Sheng, Michael Torke, Mark-Anthony Turnage, and Joan Tower and has collaborated on CD with Mstislav Rostropovich, Yo-Yo Ma, Steven Isserlis, Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, Dawn Upshaw, Jennifer Larmore, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and jazz guitarist John Scofield. Three times nominated for a Grammy Award, Wolff won the 2001 Cannes Classical Award.

A graduate of Harvard College, Wolff studied piano with George Crumb, Leon Fleisher and Leonard Shure, composition with Leon Kirchner and Olivier Messiaen, and conducting with Charles Bruck. In 1985, Wolff was awarded one of the first Seaver/ National Endowment for the Arts Conducting Prizes.

A gift from the Calderwood Charitable Foundation endowed the Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras chair now occupied by Hugh Wolff.

He and his wife, harpist and radio journalist Judith Kogan, have three sons.

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Chloe Thum, soprano (BM)

Student of Jane Eaglen

Friday, December 15, 2023 at 8:30 p.m., Williams Hall

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