

# **NEC Symphony**

Hugh Wolff, conductor Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras

> Wednesday, March 13, 2024 7:30 p.m. NEC's Jordan Hall

# PROGRAM

Reena Esmail

*RE* | *Member* (2021)

(b. 1983)

Joel Thompson

(b. 1988)

An Act of Resistance (2022)

Intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich

(1906–1975)

Symphony No. 5 in D Minor, op. 47

Moderato Allegretto Largo

Allegro non troppo

Tonight's program is about struggles against adversity and music's power to speak the truth in difficult situations. Reena Esmail celebrates the return of live orchestra performances after the Covid pandemic. With the theatrical device of offstage and onstage oboes – first alone, then brought together – her short work *RE* | *Member* moves from the loneliness of isolation to the warmth of communion. Joel Thompson's *Act of Resistance* similarly uses a theatrical device: after a loud, grim, and violent orchestral climax, the individual musicians stand and quietly sing. Thompson acknowledges the vulnerability and inherent riskiness of this unusual gesture, but its power to move is found in exactly those elements. And Dmitri Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* is a masterpiece that speaks truth to power in the dark days of Stalin's tyranny.

For **Reena Esmail**, *RE* | *Member* is a chance to explore what the world has gone through: "When I first spoke to Maestro Dausgaard [Seattle Symphony] about this piece, we thought it would be opening the 2020 season. We spoke about that feeling of returning to the concert hall after the summer – a change of season, a yearly ritual. But as the pandemic unraveled life as we knew it, the 'return' suddenly took on much more weight."

Now the piece charts the return to a world forever changed... writing the musicians back onto a stage that they left in completely uncertain circumstances, and that they are re-entering from such a wide variety of personal experiences of this time."

I wanted this piece to feel like an overture, and my guides were two favorites: Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and Bernstein's *Candide*. Each is breathless and energetic, with pockets of intimacy and tenderness. Each contains many parallel universes that unfold quickly. Each has beautiful, memorable melodies that speak and beckon to one another. I strove for all of this in *RE | Member.*"

It is a multifaceted title, and by happy coincidence also allowed Esmail to 'sign' the work with her initials, RE: "I only noticed that after the fact! This piece connects two meanings of the word 'remember'. Firstly, the sense that something is being brought back together. The orchestra is re-membering, coalescing again after being apart. The pandemic will have been transformative: the orchestra is made up of individuals who had a wide variety of experiences in this time. And they are bringing those individual experiences back into the collective group. There might be people who committed more deeply to their musical practice, people who were drawn into new artistic facets, people who had to leave their creative practice entirely, people who came to new realizations about their art, career, life. All these new perspectives, all these strands of thought and exploration are being brought back together."

"And the second meaning of the word: that we don't want to forget the perspectives which each of these individuals gained during this time, simply because we are back in a familiar situation. I wanted this piece to honor the experience of coming back together, infused with the wisdom of the time apart."

– Excerpted from Seattle Symphony 2021 premiere notes by Raff Wilson

# **Joel Thompson** writes this about *An Act of Resistance*:

"If you don't use it, you'll lose it." Many consider this oft-used saying to be true as it relates to physical fitness, artistic skills, and even mental fortitude. Given the ubiquitous divisiveness and turmoil in the world over the last few years, it seems that this adage may also have other applications. Maybe I'm naive, but I think our current condition can be diagnosed as a severe deficiency in empathy— our world is lacking the strength to love. We haven't been using it, so we've lost it.

This dearth in empathy is so pervasive that is now the new norm. People pride themselves in their rigid opposition of even listening to someone of differing viewpoints in a spirit of openness. So I decided to write a piece that would help me, and hopefully others, rebuild the strength necessary to love deeply, genuinely, and passionately.

This piece is essentially a battle between selfishness and empathy—pride v. love—and because one is easier than the other, the victor is clear towards the end of the piece. It is important that the decision to perform the music that follows "the end" remains a choice for each individual member of the ensemble.

Asking orchestral musicians to put down their instruments and stand up and sing is risky. The act requires a certain vulnerability. It can be perceived as cheesy; It can elicit negative reactions. Only a few people may choose to do it, and therefore be lonely. It can be uncomfortable. But such is the love that is required to truly change our current circumstance.

At the beginning of 1936, Dmitri Shostakovich was regarded as one the biggest musical talents in the Soviet Union. He had achieved success remarkably young: his First Symphony, premiered when he was 19, had been performed internationally, and a year later he won honorable mention as a pianist in the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw. His Second and Third Symphonies were avant-garde experiments that shrewdly praised the October Revolution and pleased the critics. His opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (1934) was hailed as a masterpiece. By 1936 it had received 180 performances in Russia and had been produced New York and London. But everything changed on January 28, 1936 when an unsigned article entitled "Chaos, not Music" appeared in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*. Stalin (certainly no music connoisseur) had seen the opera and was not pleased. He made sure this scathing review declaring the music "screaming and neurotic...coarse, vulgar and primitive" was published. This was a powerful warning to all creative artists that Modernism and avant-garde ideas were forbidden by the regime. For Shostakovich personally it was cataclysmic. Fellow composers rushed to denounce him; his music was suddenly unplayable. At this time, Stalin ruled by pure fear: people were routinely arrested and even executed on trumped-up charges. No one was immune from criticism; offending the wrong people could bring ruin. As the writer Isaak Babel noted, "a man could talk freely only with his wife and even then only at night, with the blankets pulled over their heads." Fearful, Shostakovich withdrew his Fourth Symphony (already in rehearsals) and retreated into silence. It is no

exaggeration to say that from this moment on, Shostakovich lived in fear of arrest and kept a packed suitcase ready in case of a midnight knock on the door. This is the context in which his Fifth Symphony was created. Subtitled "The Creative Reply of a Soviet Artist to Justified Criticism," it premiered a year and a half after the *Pravda* review. An immediate and enormous success, it helped rehabilitate the composer in the eyes of the regime.

But with this symphony Shostakovich began a lifelong cat-and-mouse game with the authorities. The aim was to invent a musical language that could speak truth to power without offending the party-appointed hacks who passed judgment on creative work. The music had to avoid excessive modernism and dissonance; melodic and harmonic language had to be based in traditional tonality. On one hand, it needed some degree of optimism to reflect the official view of Soviet society, but on the other, it had to reflect the darkness of that troubled time to anyone inclined to hear such a message. In this respect, the symphony is brilliant. The tone is at turns angry, tragic, and melancholy. Brief glimpses of light shine through, but the pervasive mood is somber. The finale ends with a powerful coda in D major, but its intent is ambiguous. Originally thought to be fast and jubilant, it is now often performed more slowly, with an unrelenting, even punishing sense of grim power. Shostakovich himself quietly changed the metronome mark from quarter = 184 to eighth = 184 for later published editions. Years after Stalin's death, Shostakovich was quoted saying, "I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in my Fifth Symphony. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in *Boris Godunov*. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, 'Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing' and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, 'Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing."

Further evidence of the work's hidden meaning can be found in a song Shostakovich wrote in 1936, between the publication of the *Pravda* review and the premiere of the Fifth Symphony. Shostakovich chose a politically safe poet in Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), but the text is:

#### Rebirth

A barbarian artist with his lazy brush Blackens the painting of a genius And senselessly covers it with His own illegitimate drawing.

But with the passing years, the alien colors Flake off like threadbare scales; The creation of the genius emerges before us in its former beauty. Thus vanish the delusions From my tormented soul And in it appear visions Of former innocent times.

First Violin

Joseph Zamoyta

William Kinney

Kearston Gonzales Lauren Ahn

Joanna Peters

The melody of the first line of Shostakovich's song is identical to the opening of the Fifth Symphony's finale – Stalin as "the barbarian artist" defacing artwork. And the music for "Thus vanish the delusions" is identical to the harp's gentle B-flat major figuration, a rare moment of quiet beauty just before the finale's grim coda begins. The message is clear to those who notice: art will survive the worst tyranny, and the tormented artist will find peace. - Hugh Wolff

# **NEC Symphony** Hugh Wolff, conductor

Bass

Yi-Ting Ma ‡

Cole Turkel §

E-flat Clarinet Evan Chu

Viola

I II SI V IUIIII	v ioiu	ризэ
Maxwell Fairman	Jessi Kaufman	Dennis McIntyre
Isabella Sun	Dylan Cohen	Lawrence Hall
Ravani Loushy Kay	John Turner	Brian Choy
Abby Reed	QingHong He	Isabel Atkinson
Ashley Tsai	Jiashu Yin	
Tzu-Ya Huang	Harry Graham	Flute
Sofia Skoldberg	Pharida Tangtongchit	Sadie Goodman ‡
Jeremiah Jung	Rita Hughes Söderbaum	Amelia Kazazian *
Yirou Zhang	Haobo Bi	Anna Ridenour §
HyoJeong Hwang	Nina Dawallu	Nina Tsai *
Eleanor Markey	Charlie Picone	
Aidan Daniels	Yu-Heng Wang	Piccolo
Ian Johnson		Amelia Kazazian
Ryan Tully	Cello	JouYing Ting ‡
	Ethan Murphy	
Second Violin	Zanipolo Lewis	Oboe
Emma Servadio	Jonathan Fuller	Yuhsi Chang §
Tara Hagle	Ching-yu Tseng	Rebecca Mack *
Ava Kenney	Nahar Eliaz	Victoria Solis Alvarado ‡
Yeji Hwang	Amelia Allen	(* offstage)
Minkyung Kang	Eric Schindler	
Audrey Weizer	Angela Sun	Clarinet
Kevin Kang	Yuxin Du	Evan Chu *

Austin Topper

Phoebe Chen

Bass Clarinet Trumpet Percussion Cole Turkel Maxwell DeForest \* Isabella Butler \* Sebastián Haros § Mark Larrivee ‡ Bassoon Alexandra Richmond ‡ Eli Reisz Daniel Arakaki Rohan Zakharia § Mingcheng Zhou Yerin Choi Trombone Seth Goldman § Becca Bertekap ‡ Zilong Huang ‡ Devin Drinan Harp Wilson Lu\* Allie Klaire Ledbetter § Jingtong Zhang Alex Russell \* Contrabassoon Piano, Celeste Wilson Lu Bass Trombone Yali Levy Schwartz Jason Sato § French horn Shin Tanaka \*‡ Elijah Barclift Mattias Bengtsson § Tuba Principal players Mauricio Martinez ‡ \* Esmail Hayden Silvester Xiaoran Xu \* ‡ Thompson Timpani § Shostakovich Mark Larrivee § Rohan Zakharia ‡

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		Rachel Yi
		Stage Crew

Special thanks to Zenas Hsu, Noriko Futagami, Guy Fishman 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.

# Symphonic Music at New England Conservatory

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras Hugh Wolff is joined by Associate Director of Orchestras David Loebel, Chamber Orchestra founder Donald Palma, and a rich array of guest conductors and coaches for dozens of FREE orchestral concerts in NEC's Jordan Hall this year.

Visit **necmusic.edu** for complete and updated concert information:

# NEC PHILHARMONIA, Hugh Wolff, conductor

Chen Wu Xing (Five Elements); Strauss Death and Transfiguration; Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 2, Changyong Shin '24 AD, piano Wednesday, April 3, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

#### STRAUSS: Die Fledermaus

performed by NEC Opera students and members of NEC Philharmonia; Joshua Major, director; Robert Tweten, conductor Thursday–Sunday, April 11-14, 2024, Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre, times vary

#### NEC CHAMBER ORCHESTRA, Donald Palma, artistic director

Shaw Entr'acte; Schoenberg Verklärte Nacht for string sextet, op. 4; Harberg Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra, Elizabeth McCormack, flute Wednesday, April 24, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

#### **NEC LAB ORCHESTRA**

Thursday, April 25, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Brown Hall

#### NEC Symphony, David Loebel, conductor

Simon The Block; Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition; Jennings Five Miniatures from Greenwich Village

Tuesday, April 30, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

#### NEC PHILHARMONIA, Hugh Wolff, conductor

Mahler Symphony No. 7

Wednesday, May 1, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

# Other Upcoming Concerts at NEC

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SONATA NIGHT 50, Music for Cello and Piano a collaboration with the cello studio of Yeesun Kim *Thursday, March 14, 2024 at 6:30 p.m., Burnes Hall* 

#### HUMPERDINCK: Hansel and Gretel

performed by NEC Undergraduate Opera Studio, Michael Meraw, artistic director Steven Goldstein, stage director Thursday-Friday, March 14-15, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

FACULTY RECITAL: KENNETH RADNOFSKY, saxophone Monday, March 25, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

#### TUESDAY NIGHT NEW MUSIC

New music by NEC composers, performed by their peers *Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at 7:00 p.m., Burnes Hall* 

NEC SAXOPHONE ENSEMBLE: Kenneth Radnofsky, director Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

#### PIANO DEPARTMENT CONCERT: IVES 150

Bruce Brubaker, curator of piano programming - "Ives Extended": NEC piano students perform *The Celestial Railroad*, the *Set of Five Take-Offs*, works by Carl Ruggles, Lou Harrison and Henry Cowell, and rarely heard music for two pianos in quarter-tones by Ives, David Fulmer, and Georg Haas. *Wednesday, March 27*, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

# **NEC Peyton Residency Concert**, curated by Sid Richardson "The Music of Valerie Coleman"

Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

"CONNECTIONS" CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES, Max Levinson, director Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

# FIRST MONDAY IN JORDAN HALL, Laurence Lesser, artistic director

Mozart Ein musicalisches Spass (A Musical Joke), K. 522; Smetana Trio in G Minor, op. 15; Bruckner Quintet in F Major, WAB 112; Ayano Ninomiya, violin; Kim Kashkashian, viola; Lluís Claret, cello; HaeSun Paik, piano; Borromeo String Quartet Monday, April 1, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

# Other Upcoming Concerts at NEC

-continued

#### NEC CMA HONORS ENSEMBLE: RED BIRD

Karl Henry, voice, cello; Yifei Marine Zhou, voice; Adrian Chabla, voice, piano, Jacqui Armbruster, voice, viola; Evan Haskin, guitar *Tuesday, April 2, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall* 

#### NEC Jazz Honors Ensemble: moon.unit

Koki Renwick, trumpet; Jake Walters, piano; Dominic Vance, percussion *Thursday, April 4,* 2024 at 7:30 p.m., *Jordan Hall* 

NEC Percussion Group, Will Hudgins, director Monday, April 8, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

ARTIST DIPLOMA RECITAL: Leland Ko '24, cello Tuesday, April 9, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

# **ENCHANTED CIRCLE**, Steven Drury, artistic director

The Callithumpian Consort performs piano trios by Ives and Ravel and Elliott Carter's *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano Tuesday, April 9, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Williams Hall* 

#### NEC HONORS ENSEMBLE: TRIO NOMAD

Shalun Li, piano; Felicitas Schiffner, violin; Jiheuk Choi, cello Wednesday, April 10, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

BRASS BASH, James Markey, director Sunday, April 14, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Jordan Hall

MARION RUBIN BERMAN '31 PIANO HONORS CONCERT Monday, April 15, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

#### TUESDAY NIGHT NEW MUSIC

New music by NEC composers, performed by their peers *Tuesday, April 16, 2024 at 7:00 p.m., Brown Hall* 

#### NEC WIND ENSEMBLE & SYMPHONIC WINDS

Carl Atkins, William Drury, Rachel Brake '24 MM, and Jackie Hu '24 MM, conductors Atkins We Free Kings; Johnson Poem for Brass; Dello Joio Scenes from the Louvre; Dove Figures in the Garden; Bach/Mowett Brandenburg Concerto No. 3; Nieske Pop's Parade; Schoenberg Theme and Variations, op. 43a Tuesday, April 16, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

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