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Princeton Symphony Orchestra's Fall Season is Virtual and Ambitious

ORCHESTRA ONLINE: Rossen Milanov, artistic director of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra, leads the ensemble in a recent live performance. Despite the limitations posed by the pandemic, Milanov is enthusiastic about the orchestra's upcoming virtual season.

By Anne Levin

Like most every arts organization, the Princeton Symphony Orchestra (PSO) has faced major challenges since COVID-19 put live performances on hold. The PSO, which holds regular seasons at Richardson Auditorium on the Princeton University campus, has worked hard to keep audiences engaged while the pandemic continues with no clear end in sight.

Artistic Director Rossen Milanov acknowledges these challenges. But he makes no apologies for the online series that begins October 4 and replaces the original fall subscription concerts. In fact, "Virtual Concerts: Your Orchestra, Your Home" is as ambitious a season as one that he might have programmed for live

performances. The series mixes known works by Mozart, Grieg, and Shostakovich with newer music by contemporary composers, much of which is a commentary on current social issues. Guest artists originally scheduled to appear with the orchestra will be performing solo as part of the series.

"We are still presenting pieces that are works for orchestra rather than extended chamber music, which seems to be the standard practice right now for orchestras our size," said Milanov, speaking from his home in Philadelphia. "And we didn't want to wait until we reopened the season in more regular fashion. We wanted to make a strong statement by premiering important works by African American composers spanning over several generations."

The October 4 performance will feature a piece by George Walker, with whom Milanov has worked in New York. Walker wrote *Lyric for Strings* while a graduate student at the Curtis Institute of Music, where Milanov also studied, and was the first Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music. Milanov also conducts a piece by Mozart on the program. Guest artist Inon Barnatan performs his own arrangement of Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* for solo piano.

On October 18, Milanov leads the PSO in Carlos Simon's *An Elegy: A Cry from the Grave,* a piece the composer dedicates to "those murdered wrongfully by an oppressive power." Milanov is especially enthusiastic about this work. "It's an elegy to the memory of four people wrongfully killed by the police," he said. "It's an emotional piece, a work that represents the time in which we live, but through the eyes of a person who belongs to that part of our society."

Also on the program are Shostakovich's *Chamber Symphony*, a transcription for string orchestra of his *String Quartet No. 8*, and a solo performance by cellist Pablo Ferrández**. "**The Shostakovich piece is important because it was completed after he visited Dresden," Milanov said. "He dedicated it to all the victims of fascist rule. I think it's interesting how two composers have found a way to reflect on social responses of their times. I find this parallel very inspiring."

The final work on the fall series is November 15, featuring the Andante moderato from Florence Price's *String Quartet in G Major* and Edvard Grieg's *Holberg Suite*, conducted by PSO Assistant Conductor Nell Flanders. Finnish violinist Elina Vähälä will perform her own solo selection.

The orchestra will begin taping and recording this week, using Morven Museum as a temporary studio. Additional taping will take place in Palmer Square at a date to be announced. "We'll be following social distancing of course," said Milanov. "I have other orchestras in Europe, which is already opening for audiences. I'm looking forward to when we have that here. But right now, we have this very interesting series."

All performances are at 4 p.m. For tickets and additional information, visit princetonsymphony.org or call (609) 497-0020.

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