

Salvation

Saturday, October 5, 2024 • 7:30 p.m.

Shorecrest Performing Arts Center

Harmonia Orchestra & Chorus

William White, conductor



GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ (1909–1969)

Overture

Allegro — Andante — Allegro energico

SAMUEL BARBER (1910–1981)

Prayers of Kierkegaard, Op. 30

Grave and remote — *Moderato* —

Andante con moto tranquillo — *Un poco mosso* — Gradually increasing in intensity —

Allegro molto — Frenzied —

Quietly — Broad and straightforward

Cassandra Willock, soprano

Karen Dunstan, soprano

Lyon Stewart, tenor

— intermission —

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)

Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116

Introduzione: *Andante non troppo* — *Allegro vivace*

Giuoco delle coppie: *Allegro scherzando*

Elegia: *Andante non troppo*

Intermezzo interrotto: *Allegretto*

Finale: *Presto*

Please silence cell phones and other electronics, and refrain from the use of cameras and recording devices during the performance.

Harmonia wishes to thank Marc McCartney and the Shorecrest Performing Arts Center team for their assistance this evening.

Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, music director • George Shangrow, founder

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Maestro's Prelude

Dear Listener,

I bid you welcome and salutation to the first concert of Harmonia's 2024–2025 season! With every one of our "Pinnacles" performances, we will scale a new musical height. I am so glad that you have joined us on our first expedition.

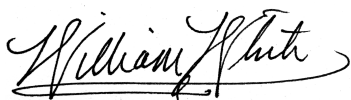
Tonight's program, "Salvation," presents three works, each of which was a lifeline of sorts for its composer. Two were written in the midst of the second world war: Grażyna Bacewicz's Overture and Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, both from 1943. Bartók was a fervent opponent of the Nazi regime, and had emigrated from Europe to the U.S. in 1940, but he wrestled with homesickness and serious illness (leukemia) during the entirety of his life in America. Feeling abandoned and unsuccessful — and spending increasing amounts of time in the hospital — he was nearly ready to give up on music and on life itself until his friend and fellow émigré, Serge Koussevitzky, asked him to write a major piece for orchestra. The resulting Concerto has become his most popular work, and it is as joyous and life-affirming a composition as he ever wrote.

Grażyna Bacewicz found herself in rather the opposite position during the war, unable to escape her native Poland. She made the best of a bad situation, producing underground concerts in Warsaw to raise money for the resistance. During the Warsaw uprising, she was able to escape the city with her newborn daughter and save all of her music — apart from her Overture, which she later managed to reconstruct. Salvation, indeed.

The choral work on tonight's program, one of the lesser-known efforts of Samuel Barber, was commissioned by Koussevitzky a year before Bartók's Concerto, but took a decade to come to fruition. In setting words of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, Barber wrestles with the idea of the salvation of the human soul itself. This piece has interested me for several years, and I am so glad that I've finally found the perfect context in which to present it: a "Three B's" concert quite unlike any other.

If you're anything like me, you have probably found your own salvation through music at points during your life, and perhaps this concert will offer you comfort in some way tonight. This is not easy-listening music, but it does make for a compelling listening experience. The dramatic arcs in these works are beset with thickets and thorns, but that's what makes their conclusions all the more satisfying.

Finally, let me just say that this concert offers little in the way of salvation for the musicians on stage — all three of these pieces are quite challenging! But without great ambition there can be no great achievement, and that's what this season is all about. So, once again, thanks for being part of a "pinnacle performance" and we look forward to seeing you as we scale our next peak.



Solo Artists

Soprano **Cassandra Willock** has performed a number of operatic roles, appeared as featured soloist on the concert stage, and toured elementary schools in the Pacific Northwest as Pamina/2nd Lady in NOISE's outreach production of *The Magic Flute*. Other notable roles include Angelica from Handel's *Orlando*, Fiordiligi, the Countess and Rose Maurrant. She is currently a staff singer in the music program at Blessed Sacrament Church and is a student of Cynthia Sieden, with whom she studied as an undergraduate at Pacific Lutheran University before obtaining a Master's of Music in Voice and Opera Performance from McGill University, where she studied with Dominique Labelle.

Soprano **Karen Dunstan**, a native of Ypsilanti, Michigan, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music and in 2023 completed a Master of Music in Vocal Performance at the University of Washington. She has performed in many opera productions, including *La bohème*, *Dido and Aeneas* and *L'Elisir d'Amore*, as well as the role of Grimgerde in the "Flight of the Valkyries" scene from *Die Walküre*.

Tenor **Charles Lyon Stewart** hails from Washington, DC, where he began singing with the Washington National Cathedral Choir at age 9 and made his solo debut with the National Symphony in the annunciation scene of Handel's *Messiah* at age 13. He holds a Bachelor of Music in vocal performance from Indiana University and is a cardiothoracic intensive care nurse enrolled in the Doctor of Nursing Practice program at the University of Washington.

Program Notes

Grażyna Bacewicz Overture

Bacewicz was born February 5, 1909, in Łódź, Poland, and died in Warsaw on January 17, 1969. She composed this work in 1943. Mieczysław Mierzejewski conducted the Kraków Philharmonic in the world premiere at the Kraków Festival of Contemporary Music on September 1, 1945. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds (plus piccolo and bass clarinet), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Grażyna Bacewicz began studying violin and piano with her father, before enrolling at age 10 in a conservatory in her hometown of Łódź. In 1923, she moved with her family to Warsaw and eventually took up studies at the Warsaw Conservatory, from which she earned diplomas in violin and composition in 1932. A grant then allowed her to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, where she produced a prize-winning wind quintet. Between 1936 and 1938, Bacewicz served as concertmaster of the Polish National Radio Symphony in Warsaw and toured Europe as a recitalist. After the onset of World War II, she performed concerts in secret and continued to compose until the destruction of the city by the Nazis in 1944 forced her to flee to Lublin (about 170 km southeast of Warsaw). Following the war, she became a professor of composition in Łódź and gradually gave up performing in favor of composing music.

Bacewicz's catalog contains an impressive number of chamber and symphonic works, many featuring the violin (including seven concertos for the instrument), but for decades her music remained largely unknown outside of her native Poland. Recently, long-overdue interest in the music of female composers has sparked recording projects as well as numerous performances of her first work for full orchestra — an overture dating from 1943 — that has vaulted from obscurity to prominent concert presentations by many of America's leading orchestras, as well as multiple recordings by European ensembles.

The overture betrays little of the dire circumstances faced by the composer and her fellow Warsaw residents during the time of its composition. Instead, it overflows with life-affirming optimism, more likely reflecting the mood at the time of its premiere just months after V-E Day.

Samuel Barber

Prayers of Kierkegaard, Op. 30

Samuel Osmond Barber II was born March 9, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and died January 23, 1981, in New York. He began this work in the summer of 1953, completing it in January of the following year. Charles Munch conducted the Boston Symphony and the Cecilia Society Chorus in the premiere on December 3, 1954. In addition to solo soprano (plus incidental tenor and alto solos) and chorus, the score calls for pairs of woodwinds (plus piccolo, English horn and bass clarinet), 4 horns, trumpets, trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano and strings.

During his quarter century helming the Boston Symphony, Serge Koussevitzky was responsible for commissioning a number of 20th-century masterpieces, many of them resulting from grants by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, established in 1942 in conjunction with the Library of Congress. The first round of Foundation commissions resulted in Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* and Bohuslav Martinů's Symphony No. 1, both premiered within three years, as well as Samuel Barber's *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, which had a much longer gestation.

At age 14, Samuel Barber was the second student

through the door at the newly opened Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. The precocious young musician had some years earlier served notice to his mother that he "was not meant to be an athlete. I was meant to be a composer and will be I'm sure." At Curtis he studied piano, voice, composition and theory. His compositions at Curtis leaned heavily on chamber music, including a serenade for string quartet (his Op. 1), *Dover Beach* for baritone and string quartet, and a cello sonata, but during a 1931 visit to Italy he began writing his first published orchestral work, the Overture to *A School for Scandal*, which would attain great popularity. He won the Prix de Rome in 1935, resulting in his Symphony No. 1. A November 5, 1938, broadcast performance by Arturo Toscanini of Barber's *Adagio* for Strings and first Essay for Orchestra brought widespread recognition and his first major commission: a violin concerto.

During a visit to Rome in December 1950, Barber attended a midnight service at "St. Anselmo, on the Aventine, a plain, cold little church where a choir of 60 Benedictine monks sang a Gregorian Mass to a few onlookers. The simplicity and sincere style with which they sang this overwhelming music warmed all the corners of my heart." Barber would return to this church upon future visits to Rome, calling the Gregorian chant "the only religious music possible" and taking notes as he "began to be able to distinguish the different modes of the chants and the tremendous variety which one does not perceive at first; and I never missed a day and several times went twice a day." By May 1953 his infatuation with Gregorian chant inspired him to turn to the long-overdue Koussevitzky commission.

Barber selected texts for his new work from the writings of Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) found in *Journals, The Unchangeableness of God and Christian Discourses*. "For Barber, who was by most accounts not conventionally religious," wrote Phillip Ramey in the New York Philharmonic program book, "perhaps the unorthodox, sometimes puzzling writings of Kierkegaard, with their emphasis on self-awareness and self-determination, were attractive as an intellectual approach to belief."

O Thou Who are unchangeable,
Whom nothing changes,
May we find our rest
And remain at rest
in Thee unchanging.
Thou art moved
and moved in infinite love by all things;
the need of a sparrow,
even this moves Thee;
and what we scarcely see,
a human sigh,
the moves Thee, O infinite Love!
But nothing changes Thee,
O Thou unchanging!

Lord Jesus Christ
Who suffered all life long
that I, too, might be saved,

and Whose suffering still knows no end,
this, too, wilt Thou endure;
saving and redeeming me,
this patient suffering of me
with whom Thou hast to do —
I, who so often go astray.

Father in Heaven,
well we know that it is Thou
that givest both to will and to do,
that also longing,
when it leads us to renew
the fellowship with our
Savior and Redeemer,
is from Thee.
Father in Heaven, longing is Thy gift.
But when longing lays hold of us,
oh, that we might lay hold of the longing!

when it would carry us away, that we also
might give ourselves up!
when Thou art near to summon us,
that we also in prayer might stay near Thee!
When Thou in the longing
dost offer us the highest good, oh, that we
might hold it fast!

Father in Heaven,
Hold not our sins up against us
But hold us up against our sins,
So that the thought of Thee
should not remind us
Of what we have committed,
But of what Thou didst forgive;
Not how we went astray,
But how Thou didst save us!

— Søren Kierkegaard

Prayers of Kierkegaard falls into four major sections, played without pause, opening with the tenors and basses of the chorus evoking the monks of St. Anselmo in melodic material that will reappear throughout the work. The orchestra enters quietly, building to a full-throated oration ("But nothing changes Thee!") from the entire chorus. In the second episode, an oboe introduces the solo soprano ("Lord Jesus Christ"), followed by a return of the chorus ("Father in Heaven") and then a new melody that seems to flirt with twelve-tone writing, building in waves to a declamatory climax. A "frenzied" orchestral march ensues, followed by a "broad and straightforward" chorale.

Reviewing a Carnegie Hall performance that followed the Boston premiere, *The New York Times* called *Prayers of Kierkegaard* "a work of imposing dimensions and grand and serious line. . . . The instrumentation is intensely dramatic. The final chorale is not more an imitation of Lutheran form any more than the choral recitative comes from the Catholic direction. Universality is the suggestion."

Béla Bartók

Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116

Bartók was born March 25, 1881, in Nagyszentmiklos, Austria-Hungary (now Romania), and died in New York City on September 26, 1945. He composed this work between August 15 and October 8, 1943. Serge Koussevitzky conducted the Boston Symphony in the premiere on December 1, 1944. The score calls for triple woodwinds (including piccolo, English horn, bass clarinet and contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle), 2 harps and strings.

Béla Bartók and his wife Ditta arrived in New York in October 1940, having fled their native Hungary due to the war in Europe. They had hoped to earn income playing duo-piano concerts, but audiences and critics did not warm to Bartók's unfamiliar music, so within a year their concert engagements dwindled considerably. Columbia University awarded the composer an honorary doctorate and offered him a part-time job as a musicologist, but the position was tenuous — in fact, the university's funds ran out and only through the covert intervention of some of Bartók's friends did his meager salary continue to be paid. Bartók stopped composing and his health was failing: his weight dropped to a mere 87 pounds, the result of previously undiagnosed leukemia. Confined to a hospital, his medical bills would have gone unpaid had ASCAP not stepped in to help.

Hoping to bolster the composer's spirits and provide him a bit of income, two of Bartók's fellow countrymen — violinist Joseph Szigeti and conductor Fritz Reiner — arranged (in secret) for the Koussevitzky Foundation to commission an orchestral work. Boston Symphony Orchestra music director Serge Koussevitzky visited Bartók in his hospital room to deliver a check for half of the amount up front — a mere \$500. Reluctantly, Bartók accepted, unsure that he could find the strength to compose music once again.

The commission did wonders for the composer's spirits, however, and his health improved enough for him to

spend the summer of 1943 at New York's Saranac Lake, where he was able to complete the work. The first performance took place just over a year later, on December 1, 1944, with Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony. Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra achieved instant acclaim, sparking a renewed interest in the composer and his music. Although new commissions flooded in, Bartók was only able to complete a third piano concerto and (most of) a viola concerto before succumbing to his illness in September 1945. At the time of the work's premiere, Koussevitzky told Bartók that his Concerto for Orchestra was "the best orchestral piece of the last 25 years." It now stands as one of the undisputed masterpieces of 20th-century music, a rare combination of musical substance, immediate accessibility and bravura showmanship.

Bartók was not the first to title a work "Concerto for Orchestra," a modern reimagining of the Baroque concerto grosso form. Paul Hindemith, Walter Piston and Zoltán Kodály had written such pieces in the 1920s and '30s, and notable compositions by Michael Tippett, Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions (among others) have followed. Yet only Witold Lutosławski's 1954 Concerto for Orchestra has achieved even a fraction of the fame of Bartók's.

For the 1944 BSO premiere, Bartók wrote: "The general mood of the work represents, apart from the jesting second movement, a gradual transition from the sternness of the first movement and the lugubrious death song of the third to the life assertion of the last one.

"The title of this symphony-like orchestral work is explained by its tendency to treat single instruments or instrumental groups in a concertante or soloistic way. The 'virtuoso' treatment appears, for instance, in the fugato sections of the development of the first movement (brass instruments) or in the *perpetuum mobile*-like passage of the principal theme in the last movement (strings), and, especially, in the second movement, in which pairs of instruments consecutively appear with brilliant passages.

"As for the structure . . . the first and fifth movements are written in a more or less regular sonata form. The development of the first fugato contains sections for brass; the exposition in the finale is somewhat extended, and its development consists of a fugue built on the last theme of the exposition. Less traditional forms are found in the second and third movements. The main part of the second movement consists of a chain of independent short sections; I used here wind instruments, which are consecutively introduced in five pairs (bassoons, oboes, clarinets, flutes, muted trumpets). . . . A kind of trio — a short chorale for brass instruments and side drum — follows, after which the five sections are repeated in a more elaborate instrumentation.

"The structure of the third movement is also chain-like; three themes appear successively. These constitute the core of the movement, which is enframed by a hazy texture of rudimentary motifs. Most of the thematic material of the movement derives from the introduction of the first movement. The form of the fourth movement — *Intermezzo interrotto* — could be rendered by the letter symbols A–B–A–

Interruption–B–A.” The fourth movement’s “interruption” is a burlesque treatment of the endlessly repeated theme from the opening movement of Dmitri Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 7, which Bartók heard on the radio at the time we was composing his Concerto for Orchestra. Writers have often claimed that Bartók found the Shostakovich work banal and was thus parodying it, but Bartók’s son Peter later insisted that the melody had reminded his father of a Viennese cabaret tune, and it was this cabaret song to which Bartók referred.

The overall shape of the work is palindromic, the large-scale outer movements bookending the more lighthearted second and fourth movements, which themselves surround the highly atmospheric central slow movement. Just as Bartók builds the third movement out of musical material

from the slow, quiet opening of the first, other such allusions and cross-references abound throughout the Concerto.

The finale opens with a declamatory horn statement marked by an opening octave leap. Scurrying string passages then quicken the tempo, interrupted by Hungarian dance tunes, until bassoons attempt to begin a fugue based on the opening horn motive. Instead, a tranquil woodwind interlude ensues, leading to another energetic string passage over which trumpets introduce a heroic new theme, which horns then play in inverted form; this melody undergoes a fugato development, building to a slightly slower fugal section initially dominated by strings. Material from the opening of the movement then returns, ushering the work to its thrilling conclusion.

—Jeff Eldridge

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Manchung Ho
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