

Friday, August 5, 8pm

Koussevitzky Music Shed

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
EARL LEE, conductor

Brian Raphael NABORS

Pulse (2017/19)

POULENC

Concerto in D minor for two pianos and orchestra
 Allegro ma non troppo
 Larghetto
 Finale: Allegro molto

CHRISTINA and MICHELLE NAUGHTON

{Intermission}

MENDELSSOHN

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Opus 56, *Scottish*
 Introduction and Allegro agitato
 Scherzo assai vivace
 Adagio cantabile
 Allegro guerriero and Finale maestoso

Notes on the program

Brian Raphael Nabors (b.1991)

Pulse (2017/19)

Composition and premiere: Brian Raphael Nabors wrote *Pulse* originally for chamber orchestra; that version was premiered at the inaugural concert of the Midwest Composers Symposium at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on November 10, 2017, by Oriol Sans leading the Contemporary Directions Ensemble. Nabors created the present version for the Nashville Symphony Orchestra's Composer Lab Showcase; it was premiered by that orchestra under Giancarlo Guerrero's direction on September 9, 2019. The Boston Symphony Orchestra first performed the piece in January 2022 at Symphony Hall led by Elim Chan; this is the first Tanglewood performance. The piece is about 12 minutes long.

Brian Raphael Nabors grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, in an artistically engaged family. His father is a visual artist, and his mother plays keyboards for church and for other functions. Nabors was mostly self-taught as a keyboardist and had little formal training until he was about 12. As a composer, he began with piano music and in his teens started writing for chorus. Gospel, jazz, and R&B were his “daily bread,” but he expanded his awareness of the classical tradition via piano method books. Meanwhile, the deft and characterful film music of such composers as John Williams and Danny Elfman revealed the possibilities of the orchestra. By age 16, he says—already having strongly contemplated a career in architecture—he knew that composing was his “destiny.”

Nabors grew up interested in drawing and painting; linking his visual and auditory worlds, he has the trait of synesthesia, which in his case correlates visual colors with aural harmonies. His music explores his interests in art, nature, science, and history, including his own lived experience as an African American. Some of his works explicitly address issues of race in U.S. history and in the present day, such as his Paul Laurence Dunbar setting *We Wear the Mask*, composed for Castle of Our Skins' I AM A MAN concerts in 2019.

Nabors attended Birmingham's Samford University as an undergraduate, since returning to join its faculty. He attended graduate school at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, where his teachers included Douglas Knehans, Ellen Ruth Harrison, and Miguel Roig-Francolí. He was a 2020 Fulbright Fellowship recipient for study in Sydney, Australia, and in 2021 he was a Tanglewood Music Center Fellow; his brief orchestra work *Iubilo* was performed here in August 2021. Current and upcoming projects include a consortium commission via NewMusicUSA for orchestras in Berkeley, Detroit, and Seattle as well as the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra (ROCO) in Houston and the Landmarks Orchestra in Boston; *Of Earth and Sky: Tales From the Motherland*, an orchestra work on African legends commissioned by the Fort Worth Symphony, and a new orchestra work for the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, *Letters from Birmingham*, about the history of the composer's hometown.

Nabors's *Pulse* began life as a work for a chamber orchestra—single instruments on each part, plus three percussion and a quartet of saxophones. The full-orchestra version gave Nabors an even greater range of instrumental colors and combinations to work with in illustrating the rapidly changing images and concepts in his piece. He writes,

My conception of *Pulse* began as a long contemplation of daily life as we know it, combined with thoughts of life in nature. The universe seems to have this natural rhythm to it. It is as if every living and moving thing we are aware and unaware of is being held together by a mysterious, resolute force. *Pulse* is an episodic rhapsody that explores several phases and colorful variants of rhythm all held together by an unwavering pulse. Each episode is meant to symbolize a different scenario of life for the listener, be it a buzzing modern metropolis, a deep wilderness abundant with animalia, or the scenic endless abyss of the ocean. All of these worlds and their philosophical meanings are then brought together in a contemplative theme of “unification” in the strings that symbolizes our deep connection as living beings to everything within, over, under, and around us.

The quote reveals Nabors's deep interest in the natural world and our place in it. *Pulse* is also an exuberant display of expressive virtuosity: a demonstration of his ability, like a film composer, to shift through emotional gears quickly while strongly maintaining the thread of the musical narrative. The driven music is enhanced by quick changes in orchestration and occasionally offset by sustained, long-line melodies. A percussion episode in the middle of the piece encourages percussive sounds and behaviors from other quarters, especially the winds; this section ends with a brief pause that marks one of the few resting-points. The constant energy of the pulse is sometimes the foreground, sometimes receding, present largely in the listener's memory and expectation of its continuation. The onset of glissandos in the strings marks a complete breakdown of both rhythm and harmony for a short time. Lyrical string melodies emerge from this miasma, underpinned by quiet pulsing in the piano and harp—subdued but still present.

ROBERT KIRZINGER

Composer and writer Robert Kirzinger is the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Director of Program Publications.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Concerto in D minor for Two Pianos

Composition and premiere: Francis Poulenc wrote the Concerto for Two Pianos in 1932; it was first performed September 5, 1932, during the Festival of the International Society of Contemporary Music in Venice, Italy. The composer and Jacques Février were the soloists in the first performance; Desiré Defauw conducted. The first BSO performances were January 1961, under Charles Munch with Poulenc and Evelyne Crochet, though Arthur Fiedler led the Boston Pops and soloists Jesús María Sanromá and Leo Litwin in a June 1936 performance at Symphony Hall. The first Tanglewood performance was July 21, 1967, Erich Leinsdorf conducting and Bracha Eden and Alexander Tamir, soloists. Martha Argerich and Alexander Gurning were soloists with the BSO in the most recent Tanglewood performance, on August 27, 2004; Charles Dutoit conducted.

Around the turn of the last century it was—significantly—French composers who began openly twitting the profundities of late Romantic music, in the cheeky jests of Erik Satie and, around 1920, in many works by the group that claimed him as their inspiration, the “Group of Six,” which included Francis Poulenc. Having made his name as a composer of brilliant small piano works, during the first half of his career, Poulenc's work was so much in the lighter vein that he could be taken as a true follower of Satie's humorous sallies. That changed in 1935, when, following the death of a close friend in an automobile accident, Poulenc reached a new maturity, recovering his lost Catholic faith and composing works of an unprecedented seriousness, though without ever losing sight of his lighter style as well. Thereafter sacred and secular mingled almost equally in his output, and he could shift even within the context of a single phrase from melancholy or somber lyricism to nose-thumbing impertinence. He became a successful opera composer and indisputably the greatest French song composer since Debussy. Critic Claude Rostand once wrote of Poulenc that he was “part monk, part guttersnipe,” a neat characterization of the two strikingly different aspects of his musical personality. As Ned Rorem said in a memorial tribute, Poulenc was “a whole man always interlocking soul and flesh, sacred and profane.”

Possessing the least formal musical education of any noted 20th-century composer, Poulenc learned from the music that he liked. His own comment is the best summary:

The music of Roussel, more cerebral than Satie's, seems to me to have opened a door on the future. I admire it profoundly; it is disciplined, orderly, and yet full of feeling. I love Chabrier: *España* is a marvelous thing and the *Marche joyeuse* is a chef-d'oeuvre.... I consider *Manon* and *Werther* [by Massenet] as part of French national folklore. And I enjoy the quadrilles of Offenbach. Finally my gods are Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Chopin, Stravinsky, and Mussorgsky. You may say, what a concoction! But that's how I like music: taking my models everywhere, from what pleases me.

One of the composers omitted from this list is Debussy, from whom Poulenc may have learned what one analyst calls "cellular writing," in which a musical idea one or two measures in length is immediately repeated, with or without variation. This kind of mosaic construction is the opposite of a long-range developmental treatment in which themes are broken down into their component parts and put together in new guises. The aim (and the effect) is to produce music that seems somehow instinctive, not labored or intellectual, but arising directly from the composer's spontaneous feelings. It is a device employed by Mussorgsky and Debussy (who, like Poulenc, admired Mussorgsky), and it was taken up by both Satie and Stravinsky with the aim of writing music that might be anti-Romantic.

Poulenc composed the two-piano concerto during his early period, when he was creating a large number of delightfully flippant works rich in entertaining qualities. He may perhaps have been influenced in the lightheartedness of his 1932 concerto by the fact that Ravel, the year before, had composed two piano concertos, both of which had somewhat the character of divertimentos. Certainly Poulenc's work could join the two Ravel compositions in cheerfulness: its main goal is to entertain, and in that it has succeeded admirably from the day of its premiere.

Poulenc's additive style of composition makes his music particularly rich in tunes; they seem to follow, section by section, one after another, with varying character, sometimes hinting at the neoclassical Stravinsky, sometimes at the vulgarity of the music hall. The very opening hints at something that will come back late in the first movement, a repetitious, percussive figure in the two solo pianos inspired by Poulenc's experience of hearing a Balinese gamelan at the 1931 Exposition Coloniale de Paris.

The second movement begins in the unaccompanied first piano with a lyric melody which Poulenc described as follows:

In the Larghetto of this concerto, I allowed myself, for the first theme, to return to Mozart, for I cherish the melodic line and I prefer Mozart to all other musicians. If the movement begins *alla* Mozart, it quickly veers, at the entrance of the second piano, toward a style that was standard for me at that time.

Though the style soon changes, there are returns to "Mozart" and possibly some passages inspired by Chopin as well. The finale is a brilliant rondo-like movement, so filled with thematic ideas that it is hard to keep everything straight. But then, Poulenc was here showing us the most "profane" side of his personality. This is the "guttersnipe," a genial, urbane, witty man whose acquaintance we are glad to have made.

STEVEN LEDBETTER

Steven Ledbetter, a freelance writer and lecturer on music, was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1979 to 1998.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Opus 56, *Scottish*

Composition and premiere: Felix Mendelssohn sketched the opening of his *Scottish* Symphony following his trip to the British Isles when he was just 20. He returned to it over a decade later, in 1841. He led the first performance on March 3, 1842, with Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, and it was published the following year. Georg Henschel conducted the first BSO performance in January 1883. Charles Munch led the first Tanglewood performance with the BSO on August 5, 1960, and Asher Fisch the most recent, with the BSO on August 3, 2019.

It was in 1829 that Mendelssohn made his first visit to England, the country where he became more appreciated, more adored, than in any other. He conducted his Symphony No. 1 with the London Philharmonic, played Weber's *Konzertstück* and Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto with that orchestra (creating a sensation because he did it from

memory), gave a piano recital, and capped his stay with a benefit concert for Silesian flood victims. In mid-July he was ready for a vacation, and so, with Karl Klingemann, a friend from Berlin now posted in London as Secretary to the Hanoverian Legation, he set out for Scotland. He was both a diligent and a gifted letter writer, as was Klingemann, which means we have a remarkably complete picture of their journey to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth, Inverness, Loch Lomond, and the Hebrides islands of Iona, Mull, and Staffa. On August 7, after his visit to Staffa and Fingal's Cave, he jotted down the opening of his *Hebrides* Overture. A week before, on July 30, he had written home, jotting down for himself on that occasion sixteen bars of music—the opening, still in preliminary form, of what would become his *Scottish* Symphony.

But it was years before either of his musical mementos from Scotland reached final form. The *Hebrides* Overture went through three stages, to be completed only in June 1832. Mendelssohn did not even return to his plan for what he called, in correspondence and conversation, his “Scotch Symphony”—a title that appears nowhere on the score—until 1841, the score and parts being published in February 1843 (making it, despite the number, actually the last of Mendelssohn's symphonies to be completed). Before that, in 1842, on his seventh visit to England, he had made two new friends, enthusiastic and competent performers of his songs and chamber music, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and Her Majesty graciously consented to accept the dedication of the *Scottish* Symphony.

Aside from similarities among the movements of melodic shape, character, and so on, Mendelssohn was also concerned with the idea of connection in another sense: the score is prefaced by a note asking that the movements not be separated by the customary pauses. The introduction begins solemnly. The hymnlike opening gives way to an impassioned recitation for the violins, and it is from this passage that the rest of the introductory Andante takes its cue. The music subsides into silence, and after a moment the Allegro begins, its “*agitato*” quality set into higher relief by the *pianissimo* that Mendelssohn maintains through twenty-one measures. Though the *Scottish* is very much a *pianissimo* symphony, the scoring tends to be dense and dark in a manner we are much inclined to interpret as Northern and peaty.

The scherzo emerges with buzzing sixteenth-notes and distant horn calls (on all sorts of instruments). The flavor of the tunes is distinctly Scots. The Adagio cantabile alternates a sentiment-drenched melody with stern episodes of march character. The fiercely energetic fourth movement—Allegro guerriero and Finale maestoso—again seems very Scots indeed, and every bit as macho and athletic as Mendelssohn's “*guerriero*” promises. Near the end he invents yet another of his magical *pianissimos*, this time to emerge into a noble song, scored in surprisingly dark and muted hues for such a peroration. Robert Schumann caught the cousinage of this hymn to the one that begins the symphony and remarked: “We consider it most poetic; it is like an evening corresponding to a lovely morning.”

MICHAEL STEINBERG

Michael Steinberg was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1976 to 1979, and after that of the San Francisco Symphony and New York Philharmonic. Oxford University Press has published three compilations of his program notes, devoted to symphonies, concertos, and works for chorus and orchestra.

Guest Artists

Earl Lee

Making his Tanglewood and BSO debuts tonight, Korean-born Canadian conductor Earl Lee was appointed an assistant conductor of the BSO in 2021. He received the 2022 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award and in 2021 he was a Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award recipient. His passion for music is reflected in his diverse career as both a conductor and cellist. His recent appearances include leading the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, New Japan Philharmonic, Gangnam Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, and Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, along with other orchestras worldwide. Lee recently concluded his position as the associate conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra after serving as the resident conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra from 2015 to 2018. He received the 50th Anniversary Heinz Unger Award from the Ontario Arts Council in 2018 and was one of two performers chosen by the late Kurt Masur to receive the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Scholarship in 2013. That same year, Lee was awarded the Ansbacher Fellowship by the American Austrian Foundation and members of the Vienna Philharmonic and spent six weeks at the Salzburg Festival in Austria. Lee seeks ways to connect with fellow musicians and audiences on a personal level and often accompanies his concerts with outreach events. He has mentored young musicians as former artistic director and conductor of the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra and as music director of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra. As a cellist, Lee toured as part of the Musicians from Marlboro ensemble and with Gary Burton and

Chick Corea as a guest member of the Harlem String Quartet. He has performed at prestigious summer festivals such as the Marlboro Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire, Caramoor Rising Stars, and Ravinia's Steans Institute. He is currently a member of a conductor-less chamber ensemble, the East Coast Chamber Orchestra (ECCO). Lee holds degrees in cello from the Curtis Institute of Music and the Juilliard School. He began his conducting studies in 2010 with Ignat Solzhenitsyn, received his master's in 2013 from the Manhattan School of Music with George Manahan, and pursued postgraduate studies in conducting at the New England Conservatory with Hugh Wolff prior to his tenure with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Christina and Michelle Naughton

Making their Tanglewood debuts this evening, the pianists and twin sisters Christina and Michelle Naughton have captivated audiences around the globe with the remarkable unity of their duo playing. The Naughtons' work was recognized in 2019 when they became the first piano duo to receive the Avery Fisher Career Grant presented by Lincoln Center. Their career was launched in 2009 with a recital debut at Kennedy Center and an orchestral debut at the Mann Center with the Philadelphia Orchestra; their international career followed shortly with performances at Munich's Herkulesaal and with the Hong Kong Philharmonic. Christina and Michelle have immersed themselves in several projects devoted to 20th-century American music. 2019's *American Postcard*, the second album of their exclusive contract with Warner Classics, showcases that repertoire with work by composers such as John Adams, Aaron Copland, Conlon Nancarrow, and Paul Schoenfield. The Naughton sisters have given several premiere performances, including the world premiere of John Adams's *Roll Over Beethoven* and the European premiere of Paul Lansky's *Shapeshifters*, and have participated in the LA Phil's Green Umbrella Series; a weeklong American chamber music residency with musicians of the New World Symphony; and several concerts devoted to 20th-century American music at Germany's Klavierfestival Ruhr, as well as many major festivals. Christina and Michelle have played as soloists with orchestras across the U.S. and abroad, including the Minnesota, Philadelphia, and Royal Scottish National orchestras; the St. Petersburg and Hong Kong philharmonics; the Houston and New Zealand symphonies; and the Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Nashville, and St. Louis symphony orchestras. Past and future seasons feature collaborations with conductors such as Stéphane Denève, Edo de Waart, Charles Dutoit, JoAnn Falletta, Giancarlo Guerrero, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, and Leonard Slatkin. Born in Princeton, NJ, to parents of European and Chinese descent, Christina and Michelle are graduates of the Juilliard School and the Curtis Institute of Music, where they were each awarded the Festorazzi Prize. They are Steinway Artists. Christina and Michelle Naughton made their BSO debut in October 2021, Andris Nelsons conducting, stepping in on short notice for Lucas and Arthur Jussen.