

Sunday, August 21, 2:30pm

Koussevitzky Music Shed

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
DIMA SLOBODENIUK conducting

- Unsuk CHIN *subito con forza* (2020)
- BRUCH Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Opus 26
 Prelude: Allegro moderato—
 Adagio
 Finale: Allegro energico
 ITZHAK PERLMAN
- {Intermission}
- BRAHMS Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68
 Un poco sostenuto—Allegro
 Andante sostenuto
 Un poco allegretto e grazioso
 Adagio—Più Andante—Allegro non troppo ma con brio—Più Allegro

Notes on the program

[Unsuk Chin \(b.1962\)](#)

[subito con forza \(2020\)](#)

Composition and premiere: Unsuk Chin wrote her brief *subito con forza* in 2020 on a co-commission from BBC Radio 3, the Cologne Philharmonic, and the Concertgebouw Orchestra; the latter gave the world premiere on September 24, 2020, in Amsterdam. This is the first performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the first Tanglewood performance.

Unsuk Chin wrote her *subito con forza*—“suddenly, with power”—as a miniature tribute to Ludwig van Beethoven in 2020, during which year many celebrations for the composer were planned and scuttled due to the pandemic. The score is inscribed “On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth.” Chin has said that she is strongly influenced by Beethoven’s constant search for new directions in his art and his creation of new challenges and new solutions in each of his significant pieces. The Italian expressive marking “*subito, con forza*” implies a sudden shift from one texture to another, a frequent even in Beethoven’s music. Chin embedded hidden references—some not so hidden—in her five-minute piece, explaining that “what particularly appeals to me are the enormous contrasts: from volcanic eruptions to extreme serenity.”

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Unsuk Chin was taught to read music by her father, took piano lessons, and aspired to be a concert pianist before focusing on composition at the National University of Seoul, where she studied with Sukhi Kang. Chin followed the example of Kang’s teacher, the imminent Korean composer Isang Yun, in deciding to further her studies in Germany, where she worked with György Ligeti. Ligeti’s example suggested to Chin the unbridled use of any number of musical styles to achieve her expressive aims, including non-Western music, as well as delight in the intricacies and puzzles of composition. She also worked intensely at the electronic music studio at the Technical University of Berlin, an experience that continues to affect her treatment of acoustic instruments. She received the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for her Violin Concerto in 2004.

One of the most accomplished and sought-after orchestral composers today, Chin has been commissioned by many of the most important orchestras in Asia, Europe, and the U.S. The Boston Symphony Orchestra co-commissioned her Violin Concerto No. 2, *Scherben der Stille*, for violinist Leonidas Kavakos, who this past spring gave the American premiere in Boston with the BSO and Andris Nelsons, who also performed it at Carnegie Hall. The BSO co-commissioned her orchestra piece *Mannequin* and gave the American premiere in November 2015, Ken-David Masur conducting; in 2011 the BSO, soloist Renaud Capuçon, and conductor Susanna Mälkki gave the American premiere of her Cello Concerto. The BSO will perform *subito con forza* again in Boston in the coming season. Her

ParaMETASring for string quartet and pre-recorded sound was performed during this year's Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music.

Unsuk Chin's works are characterized by brilliant surface activity, textures of highly active individual parts, and the use of unusual combinations of instruments and extended playing techniques to create unique, pungent sounds. Her interest in the spectral harmonic makeup of sound and use of microtones results in an ethereal, otherworldly kind of effect, used in conjunction with a broader harmonic palette. These sounds are incorporated into a musical architecture with a sure sense of narrative and expressive effect. *subito con forza*, packing a lot of varied events into a small space, is a microcosm of the composer's sonic imagination and delight in orchestral action.

ROBERT KIRZINGER

Composer and writer Robert Kirzinger is the BSO's Director of Program Publications.

Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Opus 26

Composition and premiere: Bruch completed a preliminary version of the concerto in 1866; that version was premiered in April 1866 under the composer's direction with Otto von Königslow as soloist. Working with violinist Joseph Joachim, Bruch revised the score thoroughly over the next year, completing a new version in time for its first performance on January 5, 1868, in Bremen, with Karl Martin Rheinthal conducting and Joachim as soloist. The first Boston Symphony Orchestra performance took place in October 1882, Georg Henschel conducting and Louis Schmidt as soloist. Arthur Fiedler led the first Tanglewood performance on August 8, 1975, with BSO assistant concertmaster and Boston Pops concertmaster Emanuel Borok as soloist. The most recent Tanglewood performance was soloist Joshua Bell's with Herbert Blomstedt leading the BSO on July 12, 2009.

Max Bruch was a child prodigy who grew into a gifted composer of extraordinary taste and refinement who could always be relied on to turn out works of professional finish and often of great beauty. He composed in virtually every medium and was highly successful in most. His cantata *Frithjof*, Opus 23 (1864), was extraordinarily popular for the rest of the century; it used to be given in Boston every year or so. Similarly, his *Odysseus* (a cantata on scenes from Homer), *Achilleus*, and a setting of Schiller's *Das Lied von der Glocke* were long popular in the heyday of the cantata and oratorio market that was fueled by annual choral festivals throughout Europe and America. He also wrote three operas, three symphonies, songs, choral pieces, and chamber music. He was active as a conductor in Germany and England and eventually became a professor of composition at the Berlin Academy.

Yet today he is remembered primarily for a few concertos. With the exception of a double concerto for clarinet and viola, all of his compositions for soloist with orchestra—three concertos, the *Scottish Fantasy*, a Serenade, and a *Konzertstück*—feature the violin. The absence of other media in his concerto output was not for lack of opportunity or invitation. When Eugen d'Albert specifically asked for a piano concerto in 1886, Bruch wrote to his publisher Simrock, "Well—me, write a piano concerto! That's the limit!" Twelve years earlier, when Simrock had suggested that there might be a market for a cello concerto, Bruch was even more outspoken: "I have more important things to do than write stupid cello concertos!"

The first of his three violin concertos was one of his earliest successes and remains the most frequently performed of all his works. The fact that his other music has almost totally dropped out of sight may have been caused, in large part, by his desire to compose music that was immediately "accessible," comprehensible to the bulk of the audience on first hearing. Bruch was certainly never embroiled in the kind of controversy that followed Brahms or Wagner or most of the other great innovators. Violinists themselves have kept the G minor concerto—along with his later *Scottish Fantasy* for violin and orchestra—before the world. Melodious throughout and ingratiatingly written, the G minor concerto is so popular that it is typically referred to as "the Bruch concerto," though he wrote two others for violin, both in D minor.

Bruch had a great deal of difficulty bringing the work to a successful conclusion; he reworked it over a period of four years, which included even a public performance of a preliminary version. In the end, many of the details of the solo part came about as the result of suggestions from many violinists. The man who had the greatest hand in it was Joseph Joachim (who would serve much the same function for the violin concerto of Johannes Brahms), to whom the score is dedicated. He worked out the bowings as well as many of the virtuoso passages; he also made suggestions concerning the formal structure of the work. Finally, he insisted that Bruch call it a "concerto" rather than a "fantasy," as the composer had originally intended.

Bruch's planned title, "Fantasy," helps to explain the first movement, which is something of a biological sport. Rather than being the largest and most elaborate movement formally, Bruch designs it as a "prelude" and labels it as such. The opening timpani roll and woodwind phrase bring in the soloist in a progressively more dramatic dialogue. The modulations hint vaguely at formal structures and new themes, but the atmosphere throughout is preparatory. Following a big orchestral climax and a brief restatement of the opening idea, Bruch modulates to E-flat for the slow movement, which is directly linked to the Prelude. This is a wonderfully lyrical passage; the soloist sings the main theme and an important transitional idea before a modulation to the dominant introduces the secondary theme (in the bass, under violin triplets). Though the slow movement ends with a full stop (unlike the Prelude), it is directly linked with the finale by key. The last movement begins with a hushed whisper in E-flat, but an exciting crescendo engineers a modulation to G major for the first statement (by the soloist) of the main rondo theme. This is a lively and rhythmic idea that contrasts wonderfully with the soaring, singing second theme, which remains in the ear as one of the most striking ideas of the work, a passage of great nobility in the midst of the finale's energy.

STEVEN LEDBETTER

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

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68

Composition and premiere: After perhaps decades of sketching, Brahms completed his First Symphony in September 1876. Its premiere was given in Karlsruhe, Germany, on November 4, 1876, Otto Dessoff conducting. The BSO's first performance was December 10, 1881, Georg Henschel conducting, in the orchestra's first season. Serge Koussevitzky led the first Tanglewood performance on August 15, 1937; the most recent Tanglewood performance was given by the BSO under Rafael Payare on August 10, 2019.

When Brahms finished his First Symphony in September 1876, he was 43 years old. (Beethoven was 29, Schubert 15, Schumann 30, Mahler 28 at the completion of their respective first symphonies; Mozart was 9, but that's another story altogether.) As late as 1873, the composer's publisher Simrock feared that a Brahms symphony would never happen ("Aren't you doing anything any more? Am I not to have a symphony from you in '73 either?" he wrote the composer on February 22), and Eduard Hanslick, in his review of the first Vienna performance, noted that "seldom, if ever, has the entire musical world awaited a composer's first symphony with such tense anticipation."

Brahms already had several works for orchestra behind him: the Opus 11 and Opus 16 serenades, the D minor piano concerto (which emerged from an earlier attempt at a symphony), and that masterwork of orchestral know-how and control, the Variations on a Theme by Haydn. But a symphony was something different and had to await the sorting out of Brahms's complicated emotional relationship with Robert and Clara Schumann (only after Robert's death in 1856 could Brahms finally begin to accept that his passion for the older Clara needed to remain unrequited), and, more important, of his strong feelings about following in Beethoven's footsteps.

Beethoven's influence is certainly to be felt in Brahms's First Symphony: in its C minor-to-major progress; in the last-movement theme resembling the earlier composer's *Ode to Joy*—a relationship Brahms himself acknowledged as something that "any ass could see" (perhaps less obvious is the relationship between the theme itself and the slow-moving violin phrase of the last movement's opening measures); and, perhaps most strikingly, in the rhythmic thrust and tight, motivically based construction of the work—in some ways quite different from the melodically expansive Brahms we encounter in the later symphonies. But at the same time, there is really no mistaking the one composer for the other: Beethoven's rhythmic drive is very much his own, whereas Brahms's more typical expansiveness is still present throughout this symphony, and his musical language is unequivocally 19th-century-Romantic in manner.

Following its premiere at Karlsruhe on November 4, 1876, and its subsequent appearance in other European centers, the symphony elicited conflicting reactions. Brahms himself had already characterized the work as "long and not exactly amiable." Clara Schumann found the ending "musically, a bit flat...merely a brilliant afterthought stemming from external rather than internal emotion." Hermann Levi, court conductor at Munich and later to lead the 1882 Bayreuth premiere of Wagner's *Parsifal*, found the two middle movements out of place in such a sweeping work, but the last movement he decreed "probably the greatest thing [Brahms] has yet created in the instrumental field." The composer's close friend Theodor Billroth described the last movement as "overwhelming," but found the material of the first movement "lacking in appeal, too defiant and harsh."

One senses in these responses an inability to reconcile apparently conflicting elements within the work, and the two inner movements do indeed suggest a world quite different from the outer ones. At the same time, these reactions also point to the seeming dichotomy between, as Hanslick put it, “the astonishing contrapuntal art” on the one hand and the “immediate communicative effect” on the other. But the two go hand in hand: the full effect of the symphony is dependent upon the compositional craft that binds the work together in its progress from the C minor struggle of the first movement through the mediating regions of the Andante and the Allegretto to the C major triumph of the finale.

The first Allegro’s two principal motives—the three eighth notes followed by a longer value, suggesting an abstraction of the opening timpani strokes, and the hesitant, three-note chromatic ascent across the bar, heard at the start in the violins—are already suggested in the *sostenuto* introduction, which seems to begin in mid-struggle. The movement is prevailingly somber in character, with a tension and drive again suggestive of Beethoven. The second idea’s horn and wind colorations provide only passing relief: their *dolce* and *espressivo* markings will be spelled out at greater length in the symphony’s second movement.

The second and third movements provide space for lyricism, for a release from the tension of the first. The calmly expansive oboe theme of the E major Andante is threatened by the G-sharp minor of the movement’s middle section (whose sixteenth-note figurings anticipate the main idea of the third movement), but tranquility prevails when the tune returns in combined oboe, horn, and solo violin. The A-flat Allegretto is typical of Brahms in a *grazioso* mood—compare the Second Symphony’s third movement, or the finale of the Piano Concerto No. 2—and continues the respite from the main battle. And just as the middle movements of the symphony are at an emotional remove from the outer ones, so too are they musically distant, having passed from the opening C minor to third-related keys: E major for the second movement and A-flat major for the third.

At the same time, the third movement serves as preparation for the finale: its ending seems unresolved, completed only when the C minor of the fourth movement, again a third away from the movement that precedes it, takes hold. As in the first movement, the sweep of the finale depends upon a continuity between the main Allegro and its introduction. This C minor introduction gives way to an airy C major horn call (originally conceived as a birthday greeting to Clara Schumann in 1868) which becomes a crucial binding element in the course of the movement. A chorale in the trombones, which have been silent until this movement, brings a canonic buildup of the horn motto and then the Allegro with its two main ideas: the broad C major tune suggestive of Beethoven’s Ninth, and a powerful chain of falling intervals, which crystallize along the way into a chain of falling thirds, Brahms’s musical hallmark. The movement drives to a climax for full orchestra on the trombone chorale heard earlier and ends with a final affirmation of C major—Brahms has won his struggle.

MARC MANDEL

Marc Mandel joined the staff of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1978 and managed the BSO’s program book from 1979 until his retirement as Director of Program Publications in 2020.

Guest Artists

Dima Slobodeniouk

Dima Slobodeniouk has been principal conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra and artistic director of the orchestra’s international Sibelius Festival since the 2016-17 season. In addition, he has been music director of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia since 2013. Linking his native Russian roots with his musical studies in Finland, he draws on the powerful musical heritage of both countries. He works with such ensembles as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Radio Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Vienna’s ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester, the London Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, and the Chicago, Houston, Baltimore, and Sydney symphony orchestras. Slobodeniouk opened the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia’s 2021-22 season in October with works by Alma and Gustav Mahler, featuring soprano Helena Juntunen, followed later in the month by a program of Shostakovich concertos and Weinberg’s Chamber Symphony No. 4. Among his guest conducting engagements this season, he leads the Minnesota Orchestra with mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra with violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, and Dresden Philharmonic with pianist Bertrand Chamayou, and makes a German tour with Junge Deutsche Philharmonie and cellist Nicolas Altstaedt. Other soloists he works with include Leif Ove Andsnes, Khatia Buniatishvili, Vilde Frang, Vadim Gluzman, Johannes

Moser, Baiba Skride, Simon Trpčeski, Yuja Wang, and Frank Peter Zimmermann. In 2020, BIS released two albums by Slobodeniouk and the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, including suites by Prokofiev and Kalevi Aho's percussion concerto *Sieidi* and Symphony No. 5. Other recent additions to his discography include works by Stravinsky with Ilya Gringolts and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia and bassoon concertos by Aho and Sebastian Fagerlund with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, the latter receiving the *BBC Music Magazine* award in April 2018. Born in Moscow, Dima Slobodeniouk studied violin at the Central Music School under Zinaida Gilels and J. Chugajev, at the Middle Finland Conservatory, and at the Sibelius Academy under Olga Parhomenko. He continued his Sibelius Academy studies with Atso Almila with guidance from Leif Segerstam and Jorma Panula, and has also studied under Ilya Musin and Esa-Pekka Salonen. Dima Slobodeniouk made his Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood in August 2018 and his subscription series debut in October 2019. He conducted the BSO at the Shed last Saturday, August 13, in music of Debussy, Dutilleux, Mendelssohn, and Ravel.

Itzhak Perlman

Violinist Itzhak Perlman is treasured by audiences throughout the world who respond not only to his remarkable artistry, but also to his irrepressible joy in making music. Having performed with every major orchestra and at concert halls around the globe, Perlman has been honored with sixteen Grammy Awards, four Emmy Awards, a Kennedy Center Honor, a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and a Genesis Prize. President Reagan honored Perlman with a Medal of Liberty, and President Clinton awarded him the National Medal of Arts, and President Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. In May 2021, Perlman commenced a three-season partnership with the Houston Symphony as artistic partner, in the first concert of which he play-conducted an all-Beethoven program in celebration of the composer's 250th anniversary. In 2021-22, Perlman opened the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra season, performed at the New York Philharmonic's gala, gave recitals at venues including Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and Jones Hall in Houston, and toured his multimedia program "An Evening with Itzhak Perlman." He recently launched a series of classes with Masterclass.com, offering an intimate and inspirational approach to the world of violin. As conductor, Perlman has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, the Los Angeles and New York philharmonics, National Symphony Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, as well as at the Ravinia and Tanglewood festivals. He was music advisor of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra from 2002 to 2004 and principal guest conductor of the Detroit Symphony from 2001 to 2005. Internationally, Perlman has conducted the Montreal and Toronto symphony orchestras, Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Philharmonic, English Chamber Orchestra, and Israel Philharmonic. The award-winning documentary *Itzhak*, directed by Alison Chernick, premiered in 2017 at the Hamptons International Film Festival. In 2018 it was released theatrically in the U.S. and abroad and was broadcast on PBS's *American Masters*. Perlman's most recent album, released by Warner Classics, features him in a special collaboration with Martha Argerich, exploring masterpieces by Bach, Schumann, and Brahms. In January 2009 Perlman took part in the inauguration of President Barack Obama, premiering John Williams's *Air and Simple Gifts* with clarinetist Anthony McGill, pianist Gabriela Montero, and cellist Yo-Yo Ma. A Kennedy Center Honor recipient, he performed at the 2007 State Dinner for Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, hosted by President George W. Bush and Mrs. Bush at the White House. Born in Israel in 1945, Perlman completed his initial training at the Academy of Music in Tel Aviv. An early recipient of an America-Israel Cultural Foundation scholarship, he came to New York and soon was propelled to national recognition with an appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958. Following his studies at the Juilliard School with Ivan Galamian and Dorothy DeLay, he won the prestigious Leventritt Competition in 1964, which led to a burgeoning worldwide career. Since then, Itzhak Perlman has established himself as a cultural icon and household name in classical music. For more information, visit www.itzhakperlman.com. Itzhak Perlman made his Boston Symphony Orchestra debut in December 1966 and his Tanglewood debut in August 1967, since which time he has appeared a great many times as concerto soloist with the BSO in Boston, on tour, and at Tanglewood, most recently in August 2011 doubling as soloist and conductor for music of Beethoven.