

September 13, 2024

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Conner Gray Covington, Conductor
Amy Owens, Soprano

Quinn MASON
(b. 1996)

A Joyous Trilogy
Running
Reflection
Renewal

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART
(1756–91)

Exsultate, Jubilate, K. 165

INTERMISSION

Antonín DVOŘÁK
(1841–1904)

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88
Allegro con brio
Adagio
Allegretto grazioso
Allegro ma non troppo



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MEET THE MAESTRO

Conner Gray Covington

Described as “a musician who lives the music” by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, **Conner Gray Covington** is one of the most versatile conductors of his generation. Covington recently completed a four-year tenure with the Utah Symphony as Associate Conductor and Principal Conductor of the Deer Valley® Music Festival. During his tenure in Utah, he conducted nearly 300 performances of classical subscription, education, film, pops, and family concerts as well as tours throughout the state. In the 2023–2024 season, Covington debuts with the Tucson Symphony and returns to the North Carolina Symphony, Portland (ME) Symphony, and makes several appearances with the Utah Symphony including his return to their Masterworks series in a program of Haydn, Richard Strauss, Samuel Barber and a world premiere by Quinn Mason. With an increasing presence in the opera world, Covington makes his Utah Opera debut conducting a production of Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro* and also collaborates on a production of Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* with Washington National Opera at The Kennedy Center. A four-time recipient of the Career Assistance Award from the Solti Foundation U.S., Covington was featured in the 2016 Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview.

Highlights of recent seasons include appearances with the symphonies of Kansas City, Nashville, Omaha, Rochester, San Diego, Sarasota, St. Louis, and Virginia as well as at the Bellingham Festival of Music, Grand Teton Music Festival, and New England Conservatory Opera. He has served as cover conductor for the Atlanta Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, and the Florentine Opera Company. In 2014, Covington was selected by members of the Vienna Philharmonic to attend the Salzburg Festival as a recipient of the Ansbacher Fellowship for Young Conductors.

Covington studied conducting at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia where he worked closely with the Curtis Symphony Orchestra, with whom he made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2016, and the Curtis Opera Theater while being mentored by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. While at Curtis, he also performed in masterclasses of Marin Alsop, Stéphane Denève, Vladimir Jurowski, and Michael Tilson Thomas. He also studied with Neil Varon at the Eastman School of Music where he earned the Walter Hagen Conducting Prize. For two summers, Covington attended the Aspen Conducting Academy at the Aspen Music Festival and School where he worked closely with Robert Spano, Larry Rachleff, and Hugh Wolff. He also spent two summers as a student at the Pierre Monteux School for Conductors.

Born in Louisiana, Covington grew up in East Tennessee and began playing the violin at age 11. He completed high school at the renowned High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Houston, Texas. He then went on to study violin with Dr. Martha Walvoord and conducting with Dr. Clifton Evans at the University of Texas at Arlington where he graduated summa cum laude with a degree in violin performance.

Conner currently lives in Boston with his wife Mischa and their two cats, Razel and Oreo and serves as a Visiting Faculty member at the Longy School of Music.



We are delighted that composer Quinn Mason is in tonight's audience

Quinn Mason (b. 1996) is a composer and conductor based in Dallas, TX. While on a class field trip when he was 10, he became interested in “classical” music and began composing after hearing Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* performed by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. He has since received orchestral commissions from the San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony, and the National Symphony Orchestra. In 2022 he was a “Classical Roots Composer” with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and he served as an Artist in Residence with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra from 2022 to ‘23. Mason has also been a guest conductor with the Hartford Symphony and West Virginia Symphony, and he debuted at the Kennedy Center in April 2023 conducting the National Symphony Orchestra. Composers David Maslanka, Jake Heggie, and Libby Larsen have been his mentors. **A Joyous Trilogy** was commissioned by Orchestra Seattle and the Seattle Chamber Singers in 2019. Mason composed it over a two-month period, September–October 2019, and revised it two years later. The composer himself conducted the premiere with the Harmonia Orchestra on 15 February 2020. *A Joyous Trilogy* won first prize in the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra of New York’s 2020–21 “Emerging Composers Competition.” In Mason’s own words, he “wanted to create a composition that was the very embodiment of happiness and cheerfulness, an accessible work that would put any listener in a good mood. The first movement, **‘Running,’** is so called because of its always-moving and seemingly never-waning energy that keeps going and going. The second, **‘Reflection,’** is a gentle and introspective meditation featuring a solo trombone. The third, **‘Renewal,’** picks the energy back up, but a little more spirited and zestful this time, and keeps it going to the very end, complete with

dynamic and vibrant interplay between all the orchestral sections.”

Most concertgoers are familiar with the story of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–91), the child prodigy whose father promoted (and benefited from) his children’s talents by taking them on concert tours that began when Mozart was only six. Wolfgang astounded the public with his performance skills, his memory, and his ability to improvise new compositions at the keyboard. He garnered a job as a court musician in Salzburg at age seventeen but left in August 1777, in part because of a low salary but also because he hoped to secure a position where he could stage his operas. Travels to Paris, Mannheim, and Munich did not result in any better offers, so he returned to Salzburg as court organist and concertmaster in January 1779. Two years later the composer decided to risk being a freelancer in Vienna, and that is where he worked for the last ten years of his life. There are numerous theories about the composer’s premature death (one rather fanciful one was presented in the film *Amadeus*), but many Mozart scholars today think he was the victim of either typhoid or rheumatic fever. He left his widow and two sons (aged seven and five months) in difficult financial circumstances, causing Constanze to hire some of Mozart’s students to finish his Requiem for the commission money. As a composer, Mozart was gifted in all genres and wrote over 600 works in his brief lifespan of thirty-five years. **Exsultate, Jubilate** was composed during a trip to Milan with his father when Mozart was 17 years old. It is a motet with sacred references to the Nativity, sung in Latin, yet set in a popular operatic style. Written specifically for a male castrato opera singer whose voice Mozart favored, it has a lively, joyous opening movement, a short recitative (speech-like ut-

terance), a genteel section of variations, “Tu virginum corona,” and the final Alleluia, which consists only of that one word. This last part is often sung separately as a popular excerpt.

Born near Prague in an area of the Czech Republic formerly known as Bohemia, **Antonin Dvořák** (1841–1904) learned the butcher’s trade of his father but also went to Prague Organ School and eventually composed and taught band. Brahms “discovered” him and sent the score of Dvořák’s Moravian Duets to his own publisher, Simrock, who subsequently commissioned Dvořák’s Slavonic Dances (1878). It was this composition that elevated Dvořák to the international scene. Between 1865 and 1895 he wrote nine symphonies. **Symphony No. 8** was composed in less than three months at the end of 1889, and the composer conducted the premiere in Prague that following February. It was known as Symphony No. 4 until the 1950s when the publication of Dvořák’s first four symphonies prompted a change in numberings to conform to chronological order. Dvořák is generous with his themes in this symphony, which begins with cellos and winds playing a somber melody in a minor mode that belies the **Allegro con brio** (fast, brilliant) marking. A chirping flute solo responds in the expected G major key. Then, in an abundance of riches, violins present another theme, and the woodwinds quietly play an additional closing theme to conclude the exposition. The composer himself said, “Melodies simply pour out of me.” In the development section, with its contrasts in dynamics and changes of key, a storm scurries in the strings amid timpani (thunder) rolls, which contrasts attractively with the bucolic sweetness of the woodwind melodies. This plethora of melodic material continues in the **Adagio**. Stormy sections alternate with

Program Notes, *cont'd.*

peaceful ones, making the movement so musically and emotionally enjoyable that one hates for it to end, but then a sweeping upbeat in the first violins tempts you to start waltzing to the **Allegretto grazioso** (a little fast, cheerful). A theme with a “scotch snap” (a dotted-rhythm of short–long) may remind you of the more familiar “New World” Symphony, which Dvořák wrote a few years after the Eighth. The ternary form of the scherzo fades away and a trumpet fanfare announces the final movement, **Allegro ma non troppo** (fast but not too fast). Cellos introduce the main theme, a flowing melody that goes through many guises as it is treated to theme and variation form. About halfway through the movement, the trumpet fanfare returns. The mood becomes reflective, suggesting that the symphony will end with a subdued voice; flutes

and oboe keep repeating the first three notes of the theme, each time more quietly and more slowly. Then, “Surprise!” The entire orchestra leaps into a triumphant burst of sound to conclude the work.

DID YOU KNOW?

While Dvořák was writing symphonies in the 1880s and 90s, a North Florida store owner named George W. Saxon was making loans to farmers, ultimately filing for a bank charter in 1895. That bank eventually became Capital City Bank. Also during this time period was the founding of Florida A&M University, first known as State Normal College for Colored Students (1887).

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Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University

HANDEL'S *MESSIAH*

Friday, December 13, 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, December 15, 3:00 p.m.
Trinity United Methodist Church

Dr. Michael Hanawalt, Conductor
Jessica Beebe, Soprano
Kristen Dubenion-Smith, Mezzo-Soprano
Eric Rieger, Tenor
Corey McKern, Baritone

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American soprano **Amy Owens** is known for her “high-flying vocals” and “scene-stealing” charisma on operatic and symphonic stages, as well as her innovative, multi-disciplinary pursuits across genres. Her performing career has taken her to some of America’s most illustrious venues, including the Kennedy Center with the National Symphony, for her debut as the soprano soloist in *Carmina Burana* under the baton of Gianandrea Noseda. Amy has also performed the work with the Omaha Symphony, Virginia Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Mobile Symphony and MidAmerica Productions for her Carnegie Hall debut.

Recent operatic engagements include her main stage debut with Virginia Opera as Mabel *THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE*, where she was praised by *Opera News* for her “silvery, focused soprano caressing each melodic contour”, Lucy *THE TELEPHONE* on tour with Santa Fe Opera, Chrisann Brennan *THE REVOLUTION OF STEVE JOBS* with Utah Opera, Emily *OUR TOWN* and Phoebe *A GENTLEMAN’S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER* with the Utah Festival Opera and Musical Theater, her debut with Chicago Opera Theater as Yan *BECOMING SANTA CLAUS* conducted by Lydiya Yankovskaya, Johanna *SWEENEY TODD* with Michigan Opera Theater, and Florentine in On Site Opera’s North American premiere of *LA MÈRE COUPABLE*.

Recent concert engagements include Beethoven Symphony No. 9 with the New Mexico Philharmonic, Handel *Messiah* with the Dayton Philharmonic and Lubbock Symphony orchestras, Grenados Canciones Amatorias with the Brooklyn Art Song Society, appearances with the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, Brooklyn Art Song Society, the Florida Keys Concert Association and the role of Cunegonde *CANDIDE* with Utah Symphony. Amy’s affinity for new music has made her a sought-after soprano for developing contemporary works, including creating the title role in Augusta Read Thomas’ *SWEET POTATO KICKS THE SUN* with Santa Fe Opera, the Metropolitan Opera workshop of *EURYDICE*, and multiple workshops with American Opera Projects.

Amy was a resident artist with Utah Opera, Wolf Trap Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and Central City Opera, and was a grand prize recipient from the Sullivan Foundation. She also holds awards from the Jensen Foundation (Finalist) and Metropolitan Opera National Council (Eastern Region Finalist). She is a multiple prize-winner with the George London Foundation and was a featured soloist on their recital series with Anthony Dean Griffey and Warren Jones.

She released two collaborative albums in 2019: a debut album of original music, *HAETHOR*, which received acclaim in the electronica world as “an enchanted force” (*Impose*), and Songs of Leonard Bernstein, including previously unrecorded vocal music. Other discography includes her performance as Mater Gloriosa in Utah Symphony’s recording of Mahler Symphony No. 8 and in New York Festival of Song’s *Picnic Cantata*. As an educator and producer, Amy co-founded The Collective Conservatory and developed a unique curriculum to forge new and innovative paths for online musical collaboration during the COVID19 pandemic. She assumed the role of director of the Young Voices of Santa Fe Opera in Fall of 2023. She holds a M.M. degree in vocal performance from Rice University and a B.M. in vocal performance from Brigham Young University.