

Nostalgia and Nature

March 29, 2025

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Kellen Gray, Conductor
Stewart Goodyear, Piano

Antonín DVOŘÁK
(1841-1904)

My Home

Florence PRICE
(1887-1953)

Piano Concerto in D minor
Andantino
Adagio cantabile
Andantino – Allegretto

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Symphony No. 4 in B-Flat major, Op. 60
Adagio – Allegro vivace
Adagio
Menuetto: Allegro vivace
Allegro ma non troppo



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MEET THE MAESTRO

Kellen Gray

Scotland-based American conductor **Kellen Gray** has “earned a reputation as a versatile and imaginative artist through his diverse array of traditional and experimental programming, thrilling performances, and provocative multimedia concert experience curation,” according to *Broadway World*.

2024-2025 marks Gray's second season as the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's first-ever Associate Artist, a role earned after a two-year tenure as Assistant Conductor, in which he conducts, curates, and presents programs across the RSNO's series offerings. Simultaneous to his RSNO role, Kellen also serves as one of the Assistant Conductors at the English National Opera and maintains a consistent working relationship with the National Symphony Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra. Prior to his UK appointments, Gray completed respective tenures as Associate Conductor of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra, Assistant Conductor of Chicago Sinfonietta, and Assistant Conductor of the Valdosta Symphony Orchestra.

The Scotsman gave Kellen's Royal Scottish National Orchestra subscription debut 4-stars. Of the same performance, *Vox Carnyx: Scotland's Voice for Classical Music and Opera* reported he unfolded the smooth, mellifluous contours with patience and understanding. Kellen's 2022 debut album, *African-American Voices* with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Linn Records received 5-stars from *Pizzicato*(UK); Kellen pays attention to the minute details of Still's warm score, while he revels in the romantic outbursts and continual changes of pace that shake up Dawson's Negro Folk Symphony, stated *Musikzen*(France).

Kellen is a native of South Carolina and credits the many folk music styles of the southeastern United States as his earliest and most impactful musical influences. Though most known for his mastery of the works that feature American folk idioms, his thrilling performances of other folk-based composers such as Bela Bartok, Manuel de Falla, and Ralph Vaughan Williams root from the same passionate pursuit of authenticity.

As a champion for African-diasporic composers, Kellen is the founder and curator of the Charleston Symphony's Project Aurora, a programming and performance initiative aiming to illustrate the importance of African-American arts and culture as equally valuable to its European equivalent, as well as Assistant Editor and Conductor Liaison for the African Diasporic Music Project. His performances of William Dawson, William Grant Still, Coleridge Taylor Perkinson, Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, and George Walker have received critical acclaim. “Under Gray's sure-footed direction, the RSNO (particularly the brass and the all-important woodwind) bring out all the bluesy flavour of this essentially neo-Romantic music. The infectious third movement, with its clear anticipation of Gershwin's ‘I Got Rhythm’ (the two composers were close colleagues), has long been a popular concert favourite on its own. Here, it's the depth of feeling and tone that Gray and his musicians uncover in the other three movements (not least the noble-toned finale) that makes this performance a winner,” writes *Europadisk*.

His recent and coming conducting endeavors include: the Philharmonia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra(USA), Seattle Opera, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, English National Opera, Chineke! Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Virginia Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic, Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra, Colorado Springs Philharmonic, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, Oregon Mozart Players, Spoleto Festival USA, Chicago Sinfonietta, Chicago Philharmonic, Northwest Florida Symphony, Lafayette Symphony Orchestra, Savannah Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra.

Born near Prague in an area of the Czech Republic formerly known as Bohemia, **Antonín Dvořák** (1841–1904) learned the butcher's trade of his father but also went to Prague Organ School and eventually taught band and composed. 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. **My Home Overture** heard this evening is part of the incidental music that he **composed in 1881–2** for a play, *Josef Kajetán Tyl*, written by František Ferdinand Šamberk. The plot centers around a Czech playwright, Tyl, who penned the words "Where my home is" that were set to music in 1834 by František Škroup. This song later became the Czech national anthem. In addition, Dvořák incorporates a

native Czech folk tune in this concert opener. Primarily performed today as an individual work separate from the drama, the overture exhibits the composer's gift of contrasting moods through lyrical themes, stirring horn calls, impassioned strings, dramatic timpani, and individualistic treatment of various instruments. A suitably rousing finale signals the rising of the curtain for the play.

DID YOU KNOW?

At the same time that Dvořák was writing *My Home Overture*, the Boston Symphony Orchestra was preparing for its debut. At 6 a.m. on the day tickets went on sale, there were already 75 people in line to buy tickets. The inaugural concert on 22 October 1881 included a work by Beethoven, as does this evening's program; however, your ticket probably cost more than the 25- or 50 cents those 19th century patrons paid per seat!

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A classical pianist, organist, composer, and educator, **Florence Price** (1887-1953) played in her first piano recital at age four, encouraged by her dentist father and music teacher mother, a biracial couple living in Little Rock, Arkansas. Many well-known people were welcomed into their home, including Langston Hughes, Frederick Douglass, and neighbors such as the Still family. After finishing high school as valedictorian at age 14, Price enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music (1902-6), stating her residence was Pueblo, Mexico, in hopes of avoiding racial discrimination by intimating she was of Mexican descent. Her friend and neighbor, William Grant Still, eight years younger, later attended the New England Conservatory also. Both studied with George Chadwick who encouraged the use of Negro spirituals in their music, inspired by Antonin Dvořák's New World Symphony. Still's Afro-American Symphony was the first symphony by a black American to be performed by a major orchestra, premiered by the Rochester Philharmonic in 1931 (TSO performed in January 2024). Two years later (June 1933) Price's Symphony No. 1 in E minor was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a first for a black female. In addition to four symphonies and four concertos, Price's output includes choral works, chamber music, and songs, over 300 works in all. She was inducted into the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers in 1940. Because of her race and gender, much of her music was almost lost forever, but in 2009 a cache of compositions was discovered abandoned in her former summer home. In 2018, G. Schirmer Publishing Company purchased the exclusive global publishing rights for Price's *oeuvre*. Her style reflects not only the Western traditions of her classical training but also African-American spirituals and the rhythms of folk music and dance. There are hints

of Gershwin and William Grant Still in the **Piano Concerto in D minor**, composed between 1932 and 1934. The composition is often listed as the Concerto in One Movement, but it has three separate movements. In the opening **Andantino**, Price alternates piano and orchestra, thus inserting a solo cadenza at the beginning of the concerto. There are many repeated passages, chromatic scales, and extended arpeggiations for the pianist. The **Adagio cantabile** is exactly that, a slow, sweet, singing melody that creates an idyllic setting. Oboe and piano perform a lyrical duet. **Andantino—Allegretto** provides a jaunty conclusion to the concerto. Syncopated rhythms and clean piano chords (little or no damper pedal, as in ragtime music) conjure a carefree and happy attitude.

German-born composer **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) made his living primarily as a teacher and performer, but by the time he was thirty, his deafness made it increasingly difficult for him to concertize. After considering suicide and then determining in 1802 that he would persevere for his art, he continued to compose. The **Fourth Symphony** is dedicated to Count Franz von Oppersdorff, in whose palace Beethoven spent part of the summer and fall of 1806. The Count's private orchestra performed Beethoven's Second Symphony during that time and Oppersdorff commissioned the Fourth, giving the composer 500 florins in order to have six months' exclusive rights to the symphony. It premiered at a private concert at the Lobkowitz Palace in Vienna in March 1807, along with Beethoven's Coriolan Overture and the Fourth Piano Concerto (with the composer as soloist, despite his increasing deafness). **Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major** begins with a dark introduction in B-flat minor, the parallel minor key. Rests separate the notes of the melody, cre-

ating an atmosphere of suspense. This breathlessness feeds into an ominous timpani roll, and then, abruptly, an energetic and joyous first movement takes off in the announced key of B-flat major. Dynamic contrasts and syncopation produce an ongoing impression of the unexpected in this **Allegro** that, despite its introduction, is filled with a spirit of optimism.

Lyrical and yet rhythmic, the expressive **Adagio** is permeated with a persistent rhythm of long-short-long. It first appears as a quiet undercurrent in the second violins and is later emphasized by brass and timpani. As in the first movement, Beethoven provides ample opportunities for individual wind instruments to shine. When the primary theme returns, it is beautifully ornamented with additional notes. The timpanist quietly plays a final reminder of the distinctive rhythm before this elegant movement concludes. Although labeled a **Minuet** (perhaps tongue-in-cheek?), the third movement's rhythmic syncopation contributes to a quirky, scherzo-like character. Instead of an aristocratic dance, the composer conjures a sense of being off balance. Ironically, the slightly slower Trio section sounds more dance-like. Beethoven repeats both the trio and scherzo to design an ABABA form. The Symphony concludes with a dazzling *perpetuum mobile*. Winds and timpani punctuate whirling dervish passages played by the strings. The oboe and then flute provide the lyrical second theme. Dynamic contrasts and distant key relationships increase the tension in the development, which ends when a bassoon passage indicates the recapitulation of all themes.

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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



Proclaimed "a phenomenon" by the *Los Angeles Times* and "one of the best pianists of his generation" by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, **Stewart Goodyear** is an accomplished concert pianist, improviser and composer. Mr. Goodyear has performed with, and has been commissioned by, many of the major orchestras and chamber music organizations around the world.

Last year, Orchid Classics released Mr. Goodyear's recording of his suite for piano and orchestra, "Callaloo" and his piano sonata. His recent commissions include a Piano Quintet for the Penderecki String Quartet, and a piano work for the Honens Piano Competition.

Mr. Goodyear's discography includes the complete sonatas and piano concertos of Beethoven, as well as concertos by Tchaikovsky, Grieg and Rachmaninov, an album of Ravel piano works, and an album, entitled "For Glenn Gould", which combines repertoire from Mr. Gould's US and Montreal debuts. His Rachmaninov recording received a Juno nomination for Best Classical Album for Soloist and Large Ensemble Accompaniment. Mr. Goodyear's recording of his own transcription of Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker (Complete Ballet)", was chosen by the *New York Times* as one of the best classical music recordings of 2015. His discography is released on the Marquis Classics, Orchid Classics, Bright Shiny Things and Steinway and Sons labels. His newest recording, Adolphus Hailstork's Piano Concerto with the Buffalo Philharmonic under JoAnn Falletta, was released in March 2023 on the Naxos label. His composition for solo cello and piano, "The Kapok" was recorded by Inbal Negev and Mr. Goodyear on Avie Records, and his suite for solo violin, "Solo", was commissioned and recorded by Miranda Cuskon for the Urlicht Audiovisual label.

Highlights from the 2023-24 season are his performances at Summer for the City (Lincoln Center, NY), Southbank Centre (UK), Schleswig-Holstein Festival, his recital debut at Wigmore Hall, his debut with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and his return with the Milwaukee Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and his Carnegie Hall debut with the Royal Conservatory Orchestra.

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