



Ton Hale

22123 SEASON

 UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

# LVIV NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF UKRAINE

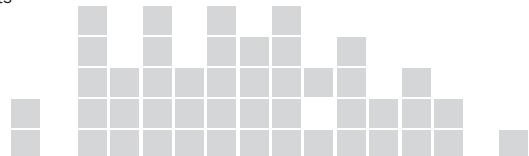
**THEODORE KUCHAR**, conductor  
**STANISLAV KHRISTENKO**, pianist

MON, JAN 23, 7:30 pm  
Hodgson Concert Hall

Supported by  
**CHARLES B. AND LYNNE V. KNAPP**

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## PROGRAM

**Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897)  
Tragic Overture, Op. 81 [12:00]

**Edvard Grieg** (1843-1907)  
Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 [28:00]  
I. Allegro molto moderato  
II. Adagio  
III. Adagio cantabile

## INTERMISSION

**Antonin Dvořák** (1841-1904)  
Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, “From the New World” [40:00]  
I. Adagio–Allegro molto  
II. Largo  
III. Molto vivace  
IV. Allegro con fuoco

Program is subject to change.

## PROGRAM NOTES

By Nick Jones

### **Tragische Ouvertüre (Tragic Overture), Op. 81** **Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897)

*Composed: 1880, Bad Ischl, Austria. Revised: 1881. First performance: December 26, 1880; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Hans Richter conducting. Orchestral forces: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, and strings.*

As Beethoven sometimes produced his symphonies in contrasting pairs, as Ravel worked simultaneously on his two divergent piano concertos, so Brahms composed two very different concert overtures during the summer of 1880 at the mountain resort of Bad Ischl. The carefree *Academic Festival Overture* was for the University of Breslau, where the composer was to be awarded an honorary doctoral degree, but the *Tragic Overture* was written solely because he felt impelled to do so. As he explained to his publisher, “I could not refuse my melancholy nature the satisfaction of composing an overture for a tragedy.”

Brahms seems not to have liked the title “Tragic,” but neither he nor the friends he consulted could come up with a better one. He had no specific dramatic work in mind for his overture, and the joyfully irreverent *Academic Festival* is all the evidence needed that there was no personal tragedy in his life at the time. He wrote to another friend that it was enough that one work should laugh and the other weep.

Whether measured by its grandeur of structure or its sincerity and depth of

feeling, this overture must be reckoned among Brahms’s greatest works. It contains no hysterical wailing, no self-absorbed pity. Rather, the tragedy speaks through the nobility of the music.

### **Concerto in A Minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 16** **Edvard Grieg** (1843-1907)

*Composed: 1868, Søllerød, Denmark. Premiere: April 3, 1869, Copenhagen, Denmark; Edmund Neupert, piano; Grieg conducting. Revised through 1907. Orchestral forces: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.*

Recognized as the greatest composer to emerge from Norway, Grieg is revered primarily as a miniaturist, the creator of numerous short piano pieces, orchestral dances, and exquisite art songs. Although Debussy’s description of these pieces as “bonbons wrapped in snow” was probably not intended entirely as a compliment, it does sum up the prevailing opinion that Grieg was at his best working in the smaller forms of composition.

He wrote one symphony and a piano sonata, but his most successful attempt at writing in the larger traditional forms is his Piano Concerto in A Minor. It is his only concerto; a second piano concerto in B minor was never completed. Traditionalists have always been able to perceive flaws in it, but the concerto has never lacked popularity with performers and audiences. Its bravura touches (uncharacteristic of Grieg’s usual style), its many melodic felicities, the composer’s harmonic originality, and his sure blending of orchestral colors have all contributed to the work’s continued success.

Grieg later recalled being a “stupid,” bored, and rebellious student in his early days. He found a purpose at age fifteen, when his musical talents were recognized by Norway’s great violinist and minor composer, Ole Bull. Bull persuaded the boy’s parents to allow him to study music and made arrangements for him to enter the Leipzig Conservatory. Bull also strove to inspire nationalistic feelings in Grieg, saying, “Do you see the fjords over there—the lakes and streams, the valleys and forests, and the blue sky over all? . . . Frequently when I am playing it seems to me as if I merely make mechanical motions and am only a silent listener while the soul of Norway sings in my soul.”

The young musician endured his Leipzig studies, even though he felt the teachers were reactionary and the curriculum designed to suppress all but German modes of expression. At the completion of his training he settled in Denmark, long the musical capital of Scandinavia and northern Europe, but he eventually moved back to the Norwegian capital, Christiania (later renamed Oslo), determined to foster wider appreciation of Norwegian music. His circle included the young musicians Rikard Nordraak, Johan Svendsen, and Halfden Kjerulf, the poet Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and the playwright Henrik Ibsen (author of *Peer Gynt*, for which Grieg supplied a famous score of incidental music).

The piano concerto was composed early in his career, during the summer of 1868, in a rented cottage in Denmark, and Grieg dedicated it to its first soloist, Edmund Neupert. The following year he showed it to Franz Liszt, who immediately sat down and played through it on the piano. Liszt

commended the work highly, telling Grieg, “Keep at it—you’ve got what it takes.” Conductor Hans von Bülow later added his own praise, calling Grieg “the Chopin of the North.”

Never fully satisfied with the work, Grieg revised it sporadically through the rest of his life. During his last summer, he was visited by composer-pianist Percy Grainger to discuss an upcoming performance of the Concerto. Grainger found him at work revising it further. These final changes and all others he made are incorporated in the standard edition of the score and used in all performances. Grieg died in September 1907, before he could attend Grainger’s performance.

The Piano Concerto’s first movement is frankly modeled on that of the Schumann Piano Concerto. The key is the same, and similar opening gestures—single orchestral chords followed by cascades of piano notes—occur in both. After related main themes introduced by woodwinds, however, the two works go their own ways, Grieg’s concerto opting for simple melodies based on Norwegian folk music while Schumann’s emphasizes emotional German Romanticism.

Grieg’s middle movement is a heartfelt song, its theme presented by muted violins and then ornamented by the piano. Again following Schumann’s lead, he provides a transition passage into the finale, which brings a cheerful evocation of peasant dances with a majestic piano theme that returns in triumph at the close.

### **Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, Op. 95, “Z nového světa” (“From the New World”)**

**Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904)

*Composed: January 10-May 24, 1893. Premiere: December 16, 1893; New York Philharmonic Society, Anton Seidl conducting. Orchestral forces: two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.*

Dvořák’s celebrated sojourn in America served as capstone to an already illustrious career. The son of a butcher from a small town in Bohemia, he had been named Professor of Composition at the Prague Conservatory, elected to the Czech Academy of Art and Science, decorated with an order from the imperial government in Austria, and awarded honorary doctoral degrees from both the University of Prague and England’s Cambridge University.

Small wonder that the energetic American philanthropist Jeannette M. Thurber wanted him as director and figurehead of her recently opened National Conservatory of Music. Besides the publicity value of his name, an important part of her plan in bringing him to New York was the hope that he could spark the formation of a “school” of nationalist American composers. His teaching duties were intentionally kept light to allow time for composition.

Dvořák responded well to America’s call for leadership. He sought out different types of folk music, using melodic fragments or folk-like themes in several works written during his stay here. He was especially impressed with Black and Native American songs sung to him by students of the Conservatory. (Mrs. Thurber had admitted a number of

talented Blacks and Native Americans, and all students paid only what fees they could afford.)

The composer’s principal source of Black songs was Henry T. Burleigh, a young student who later made a career singing and publishing arrangements of spirituals. To expose Dvořák to music of the Native Americans, Mrs. Thurber took him to see Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. He was later to meet a traveling band from the Kickapoo tribe when he spent the summer of 1893 among Czech compatriots in Spillville, Iowa.

With so much folk material as stimulus, he began work on a new symphony, his first in four years. Intended to show that indigenous American music could permeate a serious work in much the same way that his earlier symphonies had partaken of Czech influence, it was subtitled “From the New World,” both as an indication of where it was written and in acknowledgement of its sources of inspiration.

At its first performance an outpouring of applause greeted every movement. After the *Largo*, Dvořák had to stand and bow from his seat. The critic H. E. Krehbiel wrote that “the staidness and solemn decorum of the Philharmonic audience took wings.” Published soon after, the symphony quickly penetrated wherever orchestra concerts were given, even in countries that previously had ignored Dvořák’s music. More than a century later, it remains his best-loved composition, performed not only in the USA and Europe, but also in Asian and South American countries.

Analysts agree that, despite Dvořák’s research into indigenous music and his intention to write an American-flavored symphony, the “New World” is still a strongly Czech work. Dvořák could not

shed a lifetime of immersion in Czech music. The American songs to which he was most attracted were probably those that bore some resemblance to the music he already knew. But whatever its essence, it is an undoubted masterpiece, a sincere and original utterance of great dramatic power.

The symphony's opening movement, in sonata form, is preceded by a slow introduction that sets the work's mood of earnest nobility. As the *Allegro molto* begins, two horns play the rising main theme (already heard in the introduction) together, echoed by solo oboe. The beginning of another, softer theme, heard first from solo flute, sounds like the notes for *chariot* in "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The movement ends in a triumphant climax.

The *Largo* features a sad song for English horn. This lovely melody is so strong in folk-like flavor that, when

sung as "Goin' Home" to words added later, it has often been mistaken for an actual spiritual. Dvořák explained, however, that it was inspired by the scene of Minnehaha's funeral in *The Song of Hiawatha*.

A symphony's third movement is the traditional place for a stylized dance music, and Dvořák has evoked a spirited country dance in his scherzo. Although the dancers could just as convincingly be Czech peasants, he wrote that he had in mind "the feast in *Hiawatha* where the Indians dance." The "chariot" theme is quoted at the end.

A dignified and majestic march provides the finale, a movement of splendid sweep and assertiveness. In the course of the music, themes from all three previous movements are recalled, a final unifying element in an already impressively cohesive work.

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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### STANISLAV KHRISTENKO

Described as a "poet of piano" by *Le Soir* (Belgium), Ukrainian-born American pianist and conductor Stanislav Khristenko has performed as a pianist in some of the world's major concert halls and recently launched his second career as a conductor. He has been praised for "emotional intensity," "charismatic expression," and "precise technique" by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Miami Herald*; *The Gramophone* and BBC Music Magazine (UK) and *El Pais* (Spain).

In recent years Mr. Khristenko has appeared as a piano soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, Phoenix, Puerto Rico and Richmond Symphonies, National Orchestra of Belgium, Bilbao, Madrid and Tenerife Symphony Orchestras, Liege Royal Philharmonic, and Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra, among others. His performance highlights include solo recitals at Carnegie Hall, Vienna Konzerthaus, Palais de Beaux-Arts in Brussels, as well as performances with orchestras in The Berlin Philharmonie, Seoul Arts Center, Prague Rudolfinum, Moscow Conservatory Great Hall, among others. His recordings were released on Steinway & Sons label



(*Fantasies and Romeo and Juliet*), Naxos (*Soler Sonatas*), Oehms and Toccata Classics (*Ernst Krenek Piano Works*) prize winner at more than 30 international piano competitions, Stanislav Khristenko recently started an educational project for young pianists, "Rethink Piano." The project includes discussions about all aspects of competitions and a competition simulator that gives young pianists an opportunity to analyze competition selection processes in order to improve their own performance, overcome stress and develop a strategy for successful professional growth.

In his hometown in Ukraine, Mr. Khristenko initiated a music festival, KharkivMusicFest, which in just four years of existence presented performances by the world's top musicians as well as unique projects including outreach concerts, painted pianos on streets, the Festival Orchestra, a classical music forum, and a children's orchestra, among others. As a music director, he also founded the Nova Sinfonietta Chamber Orchestra, which performed works by more than 40 composers in its first three seasons.

Born in Kharkiv, Ukraine, Stanislav Khristenko studied with Vera Gornostaeva at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory and with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He also studied orchestral conducting at the Warsaw Chopin University with Tomasz Bugaj.

Stanislav Khristenko is a Steinway Artist. For details visit [khristenko.com](http://khristenko.com).

## THEODORE KUCHAR

The multiple award-winning conductor Theodore Kuchar is the most recorded conductor of his generation and appears on more than 140 compact discs for the Naxos, Brilliant Classics, Ondine, Marco Polo, Toccata Classics, and Centaur labels. He was recently appointed Principal Conductor of the Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine and has served as the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of two of Europe's leading orchestras, the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine and the Janacek Philharmonic Orchestra (formerly the Czech Radio Orchestra) while also serving as the Principal Conductor of the Slovak Sinfonietta. In the 2011-12 season he commenced his tenure as the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Orquesta Sinfonica de Venezuela and prior to that served as the Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra in Brisbane, Australia.

In addition to his conducting activities, he has served as the artistic director of two of the world's pre-eminent chamber music festivals, The Australian Festival of Chamber Music (1991-2007) and the Nevada Chamber Music Festival (2003-2018). In September 2021 he commenced duties as the artistic director and principal conductor of *The Thomas de Hartmann Project*, a concert and recording project which BBC Radio 3 recently described as "arguably the most important recording project by a major, yet relatively unknown, composer of this new decade." The project will be divided between record labels including Pentatone, Toccata Classics and Nimbus and include soloists Joshua Bell and Matt Haimovitz.



Kuchar's longest titled affiliation and relationship is with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, of which he was appointed the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor in 1994. They have appeared together in more than 250 performances, in Kyiv and on tour on four continents, while their discography totals more than 80 compact discs. Most recently, they completed a 44-concert tour of North America under the auspices of Columbia Artists Management in January-March 2017. With the Lviv National Philharmonic Orchestra of Ukraine, he will undertake a seven-week United States tour during the period January-February 2023, including performances in New York City's Carnegie Hall and Washington's Kennedy Center.

Conducting engagements during the past several seasons have included the major orchestras and opera houses of Ankara, Antalya, Beijing, Buenos Aires (Teatro Colon), Cape Town, Helsingborg, Helsinki, Istanbul, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Odessa and Prague, among others. The opening two months of the 2017-18 season included a three-week residency at The Cleveland Institute of Music, where he opened that distinguished institution's orchestral season and conducted daily masterclasses and seminars for advanced tertiary conductors and instrumentalists and a two-week engagement with the Staatskapelle Weimar in Bayreuth, Dresden and Weimar.

Highlights of the past several seasons have included a four-week, 20 concert tour of the USA with the Czech Symphony Orchestra and guest conducting engagements including the BBC Symphony, BBC National Symphony Orchestra of Wales (filling in on one day's notice to conduct Josef Suk's epic *Asrael* Symphony), Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, Israel Symphony Orchestra, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, and the National Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. Equally committed to musical theatre he has held a special relationship, totaling more than 200 performances, with the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. He has collaborated with major artists including James Galway, Jessye Norman, Lynn Harrell, Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma, Sarah Chang, Mstislav Rostropovich, Joshua Bell, Joseph Calleja, and Frederica von Stade, among others.

Among Mr. Kuchar's numerous accolades include BBC Record of the Year, Australian Broadcasting Corporation Record of the Year, Chamber Music America Record of the Year, Gramophone Magazine's Editor's Choice, the WQXR Record of the Year and a Grammy nomination in the category of Best Instrumental Album of 2013. Seven new compact discs are devoted to the complete symphonies of Ukrainian Boris Lyatoshynsky and Yevhen Stankovych (National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine), orchestral works by the Turkish composer Ulvi Camal Erkin (with the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra). In March 2019 the Brilliant Classics label released a 13 cd compilation — *Theodore Kuchar: The Complete Edition* — devoted to the conductor's complete discography for that label.