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Dear ASO family,

I am so excited to welcome you to ASO's 60th anniversary season. What a milestone!!! This September, we celebrated the first anniversary of the ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, our first permanent home. If you have not attended a concert in Morgan Hall, please don't miss this year. *River Rhapsodies* concerts are now offered at night and during the day, so you can come when it works with your schedule. If you can't make a concert, drop by over the weekend to hear our youth ensembles or Community Orchestra rehearsing, or on a weekday to hear young violin students or our Quapaw and Rockefeller Quartets rehearsing. The acoustics in our home are so good that you can't actually hear the music unless you are in the room where it happens.



We could not be more delighted and surprised with the opportunities our new home has opened up to ASO and our community. Susie and Charles Morgan are making a \$1M investment in our youth programming so we can expand our most accessible programs to include *Intro to Violin* classes and a children's choir, and expand our service to our most advanced students, including chamber music coaching and two free private lessons before college or All-State auditions. That is just year one! We'll be announcing more programs for years two through five of the grant.

Community organizations, including the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center and the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum, have come to us with amazing partnership ideas. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with the Saint Mark Baptist Sanctuary Choir and CALS this year. Many windows and doors have opened up for us to share music and build community through music with our new home.

This year's concert season features incredible repertoire for new concert attendees and those of us who have been attending for more decades than we can count. *Don Juan*, *Carmina Burana*, Dvořák, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky are always new when I hear them; I'm truly a different person with each decade that zooms by.

Thank you for attending our concert tonight! If you are a subscriber, you get our deepest love. If you are a concert member, you are making orchestra history. And if you are neither, *why not?* Join the cool kids and become a subscriber or concert member so you don't miss a single moving, communal experience with your ASO. Visit our website or call our box office to find out how to enrich your life with more music!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Littlejohn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'C' and 'L'.

Christina Littlejohn

ASO

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Thank you



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MASTERWORKS Series

Dear Music Lovers,

Welcome to this concert with your Arkansas Symphony Orchestra! Whether this is your first symphony concert or your 100th, you can expect to be treated to an inspiring display of musicality, passion, and virtuosity from the outstanding professional musicians of the ASO. It is a true honor and pleasure to be in my third season as the Music Director of this fine ensemble, and we continue to work our hardest to achieve ever greater heights of artistic excellence. I believe that each concert we perform is an opportunity to build connections through the shared experience of listening to live music. Each concert is its own unique event that can never be precisely recreated, and I like to think of each as an opportunity to leave the audience in a harmonious and uplifted mindset.

As Music Director, one of my primary responsibilities is to select the music we will perform on this stage here at the Robinson Center. It is always my goal to introduce the audience and the orchestra to new music each season, written by talented and creative living composers, that shows that the orchestral art form is full of vitality and relevance in the 21st century. We also perform iconic works written by the giants of the past, that have thrilled music lovers for generations; we connect with our musical ancestors as we fill the air with the transcendent sounds of the Romantic, Modern, and Classical musical eras.

Over the course of the season, we also showcase the ensemble's versatility. Whether we are performing heart-thumping music from the soundtrack of an action film or a holiday favorite, paying tribute to a popular artist, or playing Broadway show tunes, the lush and vibrant sound of the ASO truly brings the music to life. I encourage everyone to hear the orchestra play music in a variety of styles, and our concert membership program is the ideal, most accessible way to have this experience.

As the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is now in its second year in its new home, the ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, I want to highlight that the orchestra's professional musicians do so much more than just play in the orchestra. Virtually everyone is a teaching artist, dedicated to sharing their knowledge and passion with younger generations, helping to ensure that central Arkansas remains a place where music education is accessible, fun, and a unifying experience.

The ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center is the home of our Youth Ensembles, String Academy, and all of our continuing education programs for youth and adults. I encourage everyone to visit our website, not just to find out about upcoming concerts, but to explore the full range of opportunities to play music and learn about music that are available in our Music Center, which we have dubbed a "radically welcoming hub of musical activity for ALL Arkansans." We are so proud of this facility, and of our world-class instructors who are all members of this wonderful orchestra!

With that, I invite you to sit back and enjoy this and every special concert this season with your Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey Robson". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.

Geoffrey Robson

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STELLA BOYLE SMITH MASTERWORKS SERIES

OPENING NIGHT:
Tchaikovsky's Piano
Concerto No. 1

Geoffrey Robson, *conductor*

Natasha Paremski, *piano*

FUNG, Vivian	<i>Earworms</i> (2018)	12'
(b. 1975)		

STRAUSS, Richard	<i>Don Juan</i> , Op. 20	18'
(1864-1949)		

I N T E R M I S S I O N

TCHAIKOVSKY, Pyotr	Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat, Op. 23	32'
(1840-1893)	I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso – Allegro con spirito	
	II. Andantino semplice – Prestissimo	
	III. Allegro con fuoco	

Natasha Paremski, piano

PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES. THANK YOU.

Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is supported in part by a grant from the
Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

Opening Night: Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1

GEOFFREY ROBSON, Conductor, *Pamela Diane Stephens Conductor's Chair*

NATASHA PAREMSKI, Piano

VIOLIN

Andrew Irvin
Concertmaster
Dora Paley Ronnel
Concertmaster's Chair
Kiril Laskarov
Concertmaster
Katherine Williamson
Assistant Concertmaster
*†Meredith Maddox Hicks
Principal Second Violin
Eric M. Hayward
Memorial Chair
‡Linnaea Brophy
†Charlotte Crosmer
Leanne Day-Simpson
‡Trisha McGovern Freeney
Karen Jarboe
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Dan Santelices
Algimantas Staskevicius
Ariya Tai
Leigh Wing

VIOLA

†Timothy MacDuff
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†Travis Scharer
Kristin Smith
‡Jacob Wunsch

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Kevin Fink
Patrick McKerlie
Sara Neilson
Sean O'Hara
Nicholas Quinnie

FLUTE

Carolyn Brown
Principal
Mara Goree
Gabriel Vega

PICCOLO

Mara Goree
Gabriel Vega

OBOE

Leanna Renfro
Principal
Rachel Fuller
Memorial Chair
Lorraine Duso Kitts

ENGLISH HORN

Lorraine Duso Kitts
Kristin Leitterman

CLARINET

Marianne Shifrin
Principal
Karla Fournier
Lyle Wong

BASS CLARINET

Lyle Wong

BASSOON

Susan Bell León
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Orchestra Guild Chair

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Madison Shake
Principal
Erick Saoud
Garrett Arney

HARP

Alisa Bekebrede
Principal



PHOTO: JOE MAZZA

GEOFFREY ROBSON, *Music Director*

Geoffrey Robson, violinist and conductor, is the Music Director of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. Prior to his appointment, his tenure as the Arkansas Symphony's Artistic Director and Principal Conductor was a significant success. His dynamic leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in national and state-wide visibility for the organization. The orchestra's *Bedtime with Bach* online concert series received nationwide acclaim and was featured by the *Washington Post* and the *Kelly Clarkson Show*.

During his tenure with the ASO, Robson has conducted critically acclaimed and sold-out masterworks, pops, chamber, and educational concerts throughout the state. His innovative programming has brought new audiences into the hall and made all feel welcome and has inspired and energized the orchestra.

In 2021, he conducted and served as executive producer for the recording of Florence Price's *Concerto in One Movement* with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, featuring pianist Karen Walwyn. This was the orchestra's first commercial release in over 20 years. In the fall of 2024, the orchestra released a recording of Christopher Theofanidis' *The Wind and Petit Jean*, also conducted and produced by Robson.

A champion of new music, he collaborates with and explores the music of renowned living composers. In 2016, he conducted the world premiere of James Stephenson's *Concerto for Hope* with celebrated trumpeter Ryan Anthony. He served as arranger, conductor, and violinist for the world premiere of *Billy Blythe*, a one-act opera based on the life of the young Bill Clinton, by Bonnie Montgomery. He conducted the premiere of *Into the Beautiful North* by Joe Brent, performed by the 9 Horses trio, as well as the premiere of *Richard III, A Crown of Roses, A Crown of Thorns*, an opera by Karen Griebeling. In 2021 and 2022, he secured co-commissions of new works by Tania León and James Lee III, which were performed by the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

An active violinist, Robson is an avid chamber musician and regularly collaborates with musicians across the country. He also serves as the Artistic Director of the Faulkner Chamber Music Festival, curating a summer concert series and directing the chamber music camp for students.

He served as concertmaster of the Connecticut Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra and as Assistant Concertmaster of the Waterbury Symphony. He is also recognized for his skill and versatility as a fiddle player and has established himself as a highly sought-after studio musician. He writes and performs string and orchestral arrangements for recording artists to assist them in achieving their goals in the studio. His arrangements have also been featured on numerous Arkansas Symphony Orchestra performances.

Robson studied orchestral conducting at the Mannes College of Music in New York City under the tutelage of David Hayes, and he holds violin performance degrees from Yale University and the Michigan State University Honors College. Primary violin teachers include Erick Friedman, Dmitri Berlinsky, James Krehbiel, and I-fu Wang.

He studied conducting at Yale University with Lawrence Leighton Smith, Edward Cumming, and Shinik Hahm. Other notable teachers include John Farrer, Neil Thomson, Joana Carneiro, Dirk Brossé, and Larry Rachleff.



NATASHA PAREMSKI, *Piano*

With her consistently striking and dynamic performances, pianist Natasha Paremski reveals astounding virtuosity and profound interpretations. She continues to generate excitement from all corners as she wins over audiences with her musical sensibility and a powerful, flawless technique.

Natasha is a regular return guest of many major orchestras, including Minnesota Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Grant Park Festival, Winnipeg Symphony, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Oregon Symphony, Elgin Symphony, Colorado Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Virginia Symphony, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with whom she has performed and toured frequently since 2008 in venues such as Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall, and Cadogan Hall. She has performed with major orchestras in North America including Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, San Diego Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Houston Symphony, NAC Orchestra in Ottawa, and Nashville Symphony. She has toured extensively in Europe with such orchestras as Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Vienna's Tonkünstler Orchester, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Orchestre de Bretagne, the Orchestre de Nancy, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Tonhalle Orchester in Zurich, and Moscow Philharmonic, under the direction of conductors including Thomas Dausgaard, Peter Oundjian, Andres Orozco-Estrada, Jeffrey Kahane, James Gaffigan, JoAnn Falletta, Fabien Gabel, Rossen Milanov, and Andrew Litton. In addition, she has toured with Gidon Kremer and the Kremerata Baltica in Latvia, Benelux, the United Kingdom, and Austria, as well as appearances with National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra in Taipei.

Natasha has given recitals at the Auditorium du Louvre in Paris, Wigmore Hall, Schloss Elmau, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival, Verbier Festival, San Francisco Performances, Seattle's Meany Hall, Kansas City's Harriman Jewell Series, Santa Fe's Lensic Theater, Ludwigshafen BASF Series, Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, Tokyo's Musashino Performing Arts Center, and on the Rising Stars Series of Gilmore and Ravinia Festivals.

A passionate chamber musician, Natasha is a regular recital partner of Grammy winning cellist Zuill Bailey, with whom she has recorded a number of CDs. Their Britten album on Telarc debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Classical Chart, remaining there for a number of weeks, in addition to being featured on *The New York Times Playlist*. She has been a guest of many chamber music festivals such as Jeffrey Kahane's Green Music Center ChamberFest, the Lockenhaus, Toronto, Sitka Summer Music, and Cape Cod Chamber Music festivals to name a few.

Natasha was awarded several prestigious prizes at a very young age, including the Gilmore Young Artists prize in 2006 at the age of eighteen, the Prix Montblanc in 2007, and the Orpheum Stiftung Prize in Switzerland. In September 2010, she was awarded the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year. Her first recital album was released in 2011 to great acclaim, topping the Billboard Classical Charts, and was re-released on the Steinway & Sons label in September 2016 featuring Islamey recorded on Steinway's revolutionary new Spirio technology. In 2012 she recorded Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Rachmaninoff's Paganini Rhapsody with Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Fabien Gabel on the orchestra's label distributed by Naxos.

With a strong focus on new music, Natasha's growing repertoire reflects an artistic maturity beyond her years. In the 2010-11 season, she played the world premiere of a sonata written for her by Gabriel Kahane, which was also included in her solo album.

Natasha continues to extend her performance activity and range beyond the traditional concert hall. In December 2008, she was the featured pianist in choreographer Benjamin Millepied's *Danses Concertantes* at New York's Joyce Theater. She was featured in a major two-part film for BBC Television on the life and work of Tchaikovsky, shot on location in St. Petersburg, performing excerpts from Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto and other works. In the winter of 2007, Natasha participated along with Simon Keenlyside in the filming of "Twin Spirits," a project starring Sting and Trudie Styler that explores the music and writing of Robert and Clara Schumann, which was released on DVD. She has performed in the project live several times with the co-creators in New York and the U.K., directed by John Caird, the original director/adaptor of the musical *Les Misérables*.

Natasha began her piano studies at the age of four with Nina Malikova at Moscow's Andreyev School of Music. She then studied at San Francisco Conservatory of Music before moving to New York to study with Pavlina Dokovska at Mannes College of Music, from which she graduated in 2007. Natasha made her professional debut at age nine with El Camino Youth Symphony in California. At the age of fifteen she debuted with Los Angeles Philharmonic and recorded two discs with Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra.

Born in Moscow, Natasha moved to the United States at the age of eight, becoming a U.S. citizen shortly thereafter, and is now based in New York City where she is Artistic Director of the New York Piano Society, a non-profit organization that supports pianists whose professions lie outside of music.

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EARWORMS / *Vivian Fung*

b. Edmonton, Canada / 1975

We've all experienced that little bit of music that loops endlessly in your head, no matter how you try to dislodge it. Whether it's a catchy jingle, a childhood song, or the chorus of a pop hit on the radio, earworms are part of the human experience; getting one stuck in your head means the loss of your sanity is not far away!

This work is virtuosic and constantly shifting. Musicians leap from one idea to the next with barely a moment to breathe; woodwind players are even asked to perform more than one pitch at once. The texture is chaotic and compelling, mimicking how musical snippets drift through our minds at random and often ad nauseam.

Fung writes of the piece, "It started with that idea of having these tunes nagging at me in my head, and it became this whole piece. We are so saturated with information every day...it's just non-stop information."

The work opens with a jarring, almost alarming, series of chords, like being jolted out of sleep. From there, fragments of melody ripple through the ensemble in layers, creating a swirling, kinetic effect. The first tangible melody heard in the bassoon is quickly taken over by the orchestra. At times, the piece feels like a musical cartoon chase scene—relentless, frenetic, and oddly funny.

And those earworms? They're hidden in plain sight! Listen closely, and you may hear bits of "Wheels on the Bus" in the percussion, Maurice Ravel's "La valse" in the strings, and surprisingly, Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance" in the horns.

The finale is a delirious mashup of all the piece's motives, with the brass section boldly announcing this culmination, though it feels more like a white flag of surrender. The earworms have taken over! In the end, *Earworms* is a hilarious and unsettling portrait of the cluttered modern mind, a musical "meme" that embeds itself in your brain long after the last note has sounded.

DON JUAN / *Richard Strauss*

b. Munich, Germany / June 11, 1864 – September 8, 1949

Don Juan is one of those characters who seems to live outside of time—truth or legend, hero or villain—either way, always in pursuit of that which he cannot seem to find. Don Juan first appears in early 17th-century Spain under the pen of Tirso de Molina. In this version, Don Juan is at his most original form: a trickster, a seducer, and a defier of societal norms. Since then, he has appeared in countless retellings: as a cad, a romantic, a fool, and a tragic hero. Perhaps the most famous musical portrayal before Strauss came in 1787, when Mozart's *Don Giovanni* brought the rogue to operatic life. Mozart's version draws from Molina's original material, but Strauss looked elsewhere for inspiration.

The source for Strauss's tone poem is a lesser-known version of the tale, an unfinished work by writer Nikolaus Lenau. Lenau's hero is less devilish and more philosophical. Here is a man who yearns for the "perfect love," for the one woman who can embody all women. Lenau wrote of his interpretation:

“My Don Juan is not a hot-blooded man eternally pursuing women. It is the longing in him to find a woman who is to him incarnate womanhood. Because he does not find her...at last Disgust seizes hold of him, and this Disgust is the Devil that fetches him.”

Lenau's Don Juan is exhausted from the impossibility of perfection, and in a final weary act, welcomes death in a duel.

By the late 19th century, composers were increasingly turning to music to tell stories. Enter the tone poem: a single-movement orchestral work that uses musical motifs and textures to paint scenes, evoke emotions, and tell a narrative. Hungarian composer Franz Liszt pioneered the form in the 1850s, and Richard Strauss became one of its most celebrated artists. Strauss's *Don Juan* (composed in 1888 and premiered in 1889) was his third tone poem, but the one that made people sit up and take notice of his artistry.

From the very first bar, Don Juan announces itself with larger-than-life confidence. A bold horn call bursts forth like the hero himself, sword drawn and cape flying. The tempo is fast, the rhythms complex, and the harmony urgent. The listeners are thrust into the world of Don Juan, in which every night signals a new adventure, and love is just around the corner. And love does come, in the form of a solo violin emerging from the texture, perhaps as one of the many women Don Juan encounters. Soon, the orchestra joins in a whirlwind of giggling flirtation, longing, and romance. Amidst this flurry, there are moments of true tenderness: a wistful, pleading oboe solo, for instance, suggests a deeper emotional connection than others. Then, just as the momentum seems unstoppable, the music halts and a chill sets in. Minor harmonies darken the score. It seems the hero has lost his spark. In his final moments, three quiet chords in the strings echo like a final breath. Don Juan has met his end, not with a bang, but with a sigh.

This work is as thrilling as it is difficult for musicians. It demands a virtuosic technique often used in professional orchestral auditions. For listeners, expect to feel a rollercoaster ride of color and emotion, balancing brilliance with tenderness.

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 1 / Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

b. Votkinsk, Russia / May 7, 1840 – November 6, 1893

With a thrilling opening, sure to become an earworm of its own, Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 is one of the most famous piano concertos to date. It did not start that way, however. Originally dedicated to the piano virtuoso Nicholas Rubinstein, the concerto was surprisingly ripped apart. Rubinstein offered to still play the concerto at his concert, with the caveat that Tchaikovsky change much of the work to Rubinstein's specifications. Tchaikovsky refused to change a note. And we are so glad he did, as you are sure to be moved to the extremes in this astounding work of art.

Instead of bowing to the whims of Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky sent the work to pianist Hans von Bulow, who loved every bit of it, saying, “...you have without a doubt enriched the world of music as never before.”

The opening of the first movement is majestic and bold, announcing the pianist in a flourish led by the horns and answered by a cascade of piano chords. The melody that follows first in the strings soars with passion. Those with an older ear may recognize this opening as the melody from the 1940s pop song, “Tonight We Love.” The rest of the gargantuan 20-minute-long opening movement is colored by three themes:

continued next page

PROGRAM NOTES *continued*

a Ukrainian folk song, a melancholy longing, and a gentle, hopeful theme introduced by strings.

The second movement, *Andantino semplice*, forces a change of pace. The initial excitement has worn down, and the listeners are treated to soft pizzicatos in the strings and an elegant flute solo. Tchaikovsky then inserts a fiery *Prestissimo* middle section with glittering passagework. The main theme is adopted from the French song, “Il faut s’amuser, danser, et rire” (One must have fun, dance, and laugh), a favorite of Tchaikovsky’s former fiancée, the Belgian soprano Desirée Artot.

The finale is marked “Allegro con fuoco,” fast with fire. Brimming with energy, it is based on a Ukrainian folk tune and bursts forward with a gallop. The piano and orchestra engage in a dazzling dialogue, racing to a conclusion that leaves no emotional stone unturned.

This concerto is a testament to conviction. Tchaikovsky’s refusal to change a note of his vision in the face of rejection gave the world a piece of art that continues to thrill listeners nearly 150 years later.

PROGRAM NOTES BY KAMI CURTIS © 2025

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Distributions from the Foundation **allow ASO to hire professional musicians to make a living and choose to call Arkansas home, be a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all, and remain a financially strong and flourishing organization.**

ASO has served Arkansas through music for 60 years, and **endowment gifts to the Foundation either in present or through legacy gifts make it possible for ASO to keep serving the community for the next 60 years and beyond.**

ASO's endowment is a source of long-term funding to support ASO's mission to serve Arkansas through music.

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IN CONCERT

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Music by John Williams

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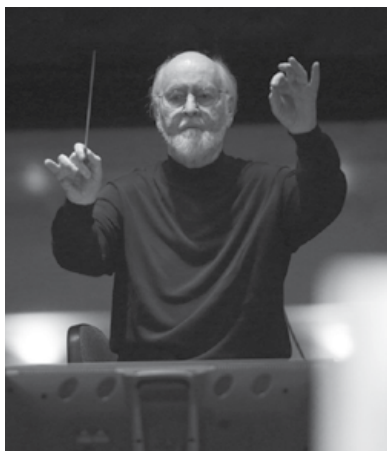
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In a career spanning more than six decades, John Williams has become one of America's most accomplished and successful composers for film and the concert stage. He remains one of our nation's most distinguished and contributive musical voices. He has composed the music for more than one hundred films, including all nine *Star Wars* films, the first three *Harry Potter* films, *Schindler's List*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Lincoln*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Superman* and the *Indiana Jones* films. He served as music director of the Boston Pops Orchestra for fourteen seasons and remains their Laureate Conductor. He has composed numerous works for the concert stage including two symphonies and more than a dozen concertos commissioned by some of America's most prominent orchestras. He has received five Academy Awards and fifty-four Oscar nominations, seven British Academy Awards, twenty-five Grammys, four Golden Globes, and five Emmys. His other honors include the Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of Arts, an honorary KBE from Queen Elizabeth II, the Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute, Spain's Princess of Asturias Award for the Arts, and the Gold Medal from the UK's prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society.



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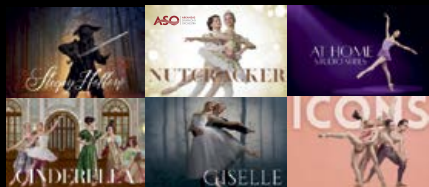
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