



Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vänskä perform all-American programme at BBC Proms (6 August 2018), including Gershwin's Concerto in F with Inon Barnatan and Ives's ground-breaking Second Symphony

'The match here has always been thrilling – the conductor's dynamism on the podium plus the powerful engine of this band – and now there seems something irrepressibly triumphant about it,' *The Guardian*, August 2016

America's vibrant creative contribution to the international symphonic repertoire occupies centre stage when the Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vänskä return to the BBC Proms this summer. Their concert on Monday 6 August comprises the compelling combination of Leonard Bernstein's Overture to *Candide*, Gershwin's Concerto in F, with Israeli pianist Inon Barnatan as soloist, and Charles Ives's Symphony No.2. The latter, receiving only its second performance at the BBC Proms, stands among the most visionary and enduring of all American symphonies, the ideal vehicle for the critically acclaimed artistry of the Minnesota Orchestra and its Music Director.

"This will be a special occasion for us," comments Maestro Vänskä. "It's always great to be at the BBC Proms. The Minnesota Orchestra plays so well, with such richness and warmth, like a big chamber music ensemble in which the players listen very carefully to each other. They make a musical dialogue and the sound always comes from that point. We're in the process of recording the complete Mahler symphonies. If the orchestra is playing Mahler well, which it is, then they can play every kind of music well."

Much has changed in Minnesota since the Finnish conductor and his orchestra last performed at the BBC Proms eight years ago. The Minnesota Orchestra has weathered a financial crisis that resulted in the players being locked out from their workplace for sixteen months. The disruptive and difficult experience brought musicians and local audience members together in solidarity and paved the way for a remarkable recovery since the orchestra returned to work in February 2014.

Under Osmo Vänskä's leadership, the Minnesota Orchestra has enriched the warmth and variety of its sound and cultivated a profound collective artistry. It has also drawn favourable critical comparisons with the most illustrious names in the international orchestral league table. "This will be our first visit to the BBC Proms since the lockout, which was such a turning point for everyone in the orchestra," notes Vänskä. "We're happy to come to London to show how great the orchestra is now after those dark days. That's a very special feeling for us."

The Minnesota Orchestra will open its evening at the Royal Albert Hall with Bernstein's Overture to *Candide*, among the most popular of 20th-century American orchestral showpieces. "The orchestra has played it many times and has the piece in its blood," observes Osmo Vänskä. The conductor also looks forward to continuing his fruitful artistic partnership with Inon Barnatan. The pianist toured with the Minnesota Orchestra earlier this year and has become one of Vänskä's regular chamber music partners. "I'm playing clarinet and chamber music more than ever, and love working with Inon. He's a great pianist and I'm happy that he will come to London with us to play Gershwin's Concerto in F. Everyone knows *Rhapsody in Blue*, but Gershwin's concerto is not so familiar. There are similarities in the music of both works and it's a truly wonderful American piece. It is a tremendous honour for the orchestra to play this programme at the BBC Proms."

Charles Ives's Symphony No.2 stands as a monument to American individualism and to the free flow of creative influences between the United States and Europe. The five-movement late Romantic work, written

between 1899 and 1902, dates from its composer's so-called apprentice years as one of Horatio Parker's students at Yale University. Its reworkings of hymns, fiddle-tunes and American popular songs and quotations from and allusions to music by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Tchaikovsky and Wagner anticipate aspects of post-modernism. Ives's composition was not heard complete until Leonard Bernstein conducted its premiere in New York in 1951. Errors in the score and Bernstein's cuts and alterations to the music, which influenced subsequent performances of the work, were redressed in the late 1990s when Jonathan Elkus prepared a new critical edition for the Charles Ives Society. Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra will use Elkus's edition for their BBC Proms performance.

"In some ways Bernstein's version was controversial, but he made a great service by performing the piece and then recording it with the New York Philharmonic," notes the conductor. "I always aim to get as close as possible to what I think the composer intended and the new Ives edition really supports that. It's a wonderful adventure for me to find the right path to follow in building an interpretation. My job is to find out his language as well as I can. The more you discover, the more you want to dig deeper into the score. That's why I love music so much and why it's not a job – it's just a way to be. I am very enthused by Ives's Second Symphony and look forward so much to bringing it to the BBC Proms."

The Minnesota Orchestra will leave London to give five concerts in South Africa, the first tour there by a major professional US orchestra. The project, created to mark the centenary of Nelson Mandela's birth, arose directly from Osmo Vänskä's experience of working with the South African National Youth Orchestra in 2014. The orchestra's tour itinerary includes engagement activities with local young musicians, the world premiere of *Harmonia Ubuntu* by South African composer Bongani Ndodana-Breen, and performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Johannesburg and Soweto with the sensational Guateng Choristers.

"I felt during my last visit that Africa might need us more than the many places in China and Japan that are regularly visited by orchestras from America and Europe," recalls Maestro Vänskä. "To have the chance with the South African National Youth Orchestra to give this experience of symphonic music to everybody was thrilling. I wanted to return there with my orchestra, collaborate with local musicians and give people something to remember. I'm delighted that we have been able to make this tour happen."

www.minnesotaorchestra.org/

[Facebook](#) – [Twitter](#) – [Instagram](#) – [YouTube](#)

For press enquiries, please contact:

Valerie Barber PR
Suite 2, 9a St John's Wood High Street
London NW8 7NG
Tel: +44 (0)20 7586 8560
sabina@vbpr.co.uk
www.vbpr.co.uk

Monday 6 August 2018
Royal Albert Hall
BBC PROMS

Osmo Vänskä conductor | **Inon Barnatan** piano | **Minnesota Orchestra**

Bernstein Overture to *Candide*
Gershwin Piano Concerto in F
Ives Symphony No. 2