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Photo credit: Owen Zhou.

Symphony Orchestra

Scott O'Neil, guest conductor

Tuesday, April 21, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Macky Auditorium

PROGRAM

Cuban Overture

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 55, G Major

Serge Prokofiev (1891-1953)

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Moderato ben accentuato
- III. Toccata: Allegro con fuoco
- IV. Larghetto
- V. Vivo

Ohad Nativ, piano

Intermission

Symphony No. 4, Op. 120, D minor

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

- I. Ziemlich langsam - Lebhaft
- II. Romanze: Ziemlich langsam
- III. Scherzo: Lebhaft
- IV. Langsam - Lebhaft

PROGRAM NOTES

Cuban Overture

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Composed in 1932 following a trip to Havana, George Gershwin's *Cuban Overture* is a vibrant orchestral response to the sounds and energy of Cuban musical life. Immersing himself in the city's rhythmic vitality, Gershwin returned not only with melodic ideas but also with percussion instruments—claves, bongos, maracas and guiro—which lend the work its unmistakable color.

Originally titled *Rumba*, the piece is far more than a picturesque souvenir. Beneath its infectious rhythms lies a carefully crafted structure, often understood as a broad ternary form, in which driving dance sections frame a more lyrical and atmospheric middle. Gershwin combines syncopated rhythms with sophisticated orchestral techniques—counterpoint, ostinato and richly layered textures—demonstrating his ability to merge popular idioms with symphonic thinking.

The result is music that is both exuberant and refined: a work that captures the spirit of a place while expanding the expressive possibilities of the orchestra.

Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 55, G Major

Serge Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Also composed in 1932, Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 5 offers a strikingly different vision of what a concerto can be. At one point, Prokofiev considered calling the work simply *Music for Piano and Orchestra*, reflecting his departure from the Romantic model of a virtuosic soloist set against a full orchestra.

Instead of a traditional three-movement form, the concerto unfolds in five concise movements, each sharply characterized and economical in design. The result is a suite-like sequence of musical ideas—playful, motoric, lyrical and at times ironic—held together by rhythmic vitality and clarity of texture.

Here, virtuosity is redefined: not as sheer display, but as precision, wit, and responsiveness. The piano engages in a more conversational interplay with the orchestra, often blending into the ensemble rather than dominating it. Transparent textures and tightly controlled forms reflect Prokofiev’s neoclassical tendencies and his growing interest in structural balance.

Though less overtly dramatic than his earlier concertos, this work reveals a composer refining his language, favoring clarity, invention, and subtle complexity.

Symphony No. 4, Op. 120, D minor

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Robert Schumann’s Fourth Symphony grew out of happy circumstances. His wedding to pianist Clara Wieck, which came to pass only after years of struggle with her father, coincided with his first mature efforts as a symphonist. Many commentators have referred to the year following Clara and Robert’s marriage in September 1840 as the composer’s “Symphony Year.” Between January and March 1841, he wrote the First Symphony; April and May saw the *Overture*, *Scherzo* and *Finale* and the first movement of the A-minor Piano Concerto; and he started work on the present symphony immediately afterward. Before he started sketching the work, Robert told Clara of his intention to portray her in the

work. It was completed, in its first version, in time for a December premiere in Leipzig, played by the Gewandhaus Orchestra under the direction of its concertmaster, Ferdinand David. The work was not a particular success—Clara’s performance of a duo-piano version of Franz Liszt’s *Hexaméron* alongside Liszt himself had eclipsed her husband’s symphony—and Robert shelved it for a decade.

When he returned to the symphony, Schumann revised it mainly in the details, simplifying the music in certain places, reworking the transitions into the second and fourth movements, and thickening the orchestration. Schumann scholar John Daverio pointed out that Schumann “consciously sought to convey an air of solemn grandeur in his orchestral pieces in D minor, other examples being the Faust overture and the Violin Concerto.”

In crafting the revision, a task that occupied seven days in December 1851, Schumann did nothing to compromise the visionary layout and taut musical structure of the work. The four movements are connected, not just structurally (they are played without a pause), but also thematically. Three motives bind the symphony together: the sinuous, flowing music that opens the work; the first theme of the ensuing *Lebhaft* section; and a fanfare-like figure, first played by the winds before it’s punctuated by brass and timpani, about five minutes into the first movement. The music from the opening returns in the *Romanze* and the central trio section of the *Scherzo*; the *Lebhaft*’s first theme is the basis of the driving outer sections of the *Scherzo* and returns during the transition to the finale, one of the most mesmerizing passages in all of Schumann. The fanfare motive becomes the main theme of the finale.

Schumann's performances of the revised symphony in Düsseldorf, where he was music director, including at the opening concert of the Lower Rhine Music Festival on May 15, 1853, were among the final musical triumphs of his life. Nine months later, the composer, who had been suffering from auditory disturbances and a host of other complaints indicative of mental illness, attempted suicide by plunging into the Rhine. Some fishermen pulled him out, and he spent the rest of his life in a sanatorium outside of Bonn.

— Note by John Mangum

PERSONNEL

Scott O’Neil, guest conductor

In January 2025, Scott O’Neil was officially named the sixth music director of Denver Philharmonic Orchestra. O’Neil brings a rich and illustrious musical background to the DPO, including a nine-year tenure as resident conductor with the Colorado Symphony. During his time there, he performed with some of the classical world’s elite soloists, such as Itzhak Perlman, Joshua Bell, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, Pinchas Zukerman, Lang Lang, Van Cliburn, Christopher O’Riley, Cameron Carpenter and Sharon Isbin, as well as leaders in the larger musical world, such as Steve Vai, Chris Botti, Bela Fleck, Victor Wooten, Tracy Silverman, Eileen Ivers, Sarah McLachlan, Ben Folds, Ingrid Michaelson, Amos Lee, Rufus Wainwright, Gregory Alan Isakov, Devotchka, The Lumineers, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Susan Egan and Will Chase.

O’Neil has also created and developed an extensive series of concerts, entitled *Inside the Score*, which combined art, entertainment and enlightenment to engage audiences in explorations of a wide variety of music and ideas. Under the umbrella of *Inside the Score* fell a number of sub-series, including biography (*Letters from Mozart*, *The Best of Beethoven*, *Brahms: A Life in Music*, *Rachmaninoff: From Tragedy to Triumph*), individual masterpieces (*Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony – This I Believe!*, *Eroica!*, *Beethoven’s Fifth*, *Stravinsky’s Petrushka*, *Debussy’s La mer*, the “*The Debussy Code*”) and a cross-genre concert – *Shuffle* – which includes everything from Bach, Elgar, and Prokofiev to Metheny, Björk, and Philip Glass, as well as a feature concert with cross-over artist Kip Winger. (Once the front man for the band Winger,

he now composes “classical” music reminiscent of Honegger and Messiaen.) In this vein, O’Neil has also presented Masterworks programs with “cross-over” elements, notably featuring Victor Wooten, performing the premiere of his own Bass Whisperer concerto, co-written with Conni Ellisor.

O’Neil’s engaging manner in addressing audiences has led to extensive speaking engagements, including a TED-talk on music he composed for Arrow Electronics.

As an arranger/orchestrator, O’Neil has created and orchestrated numerous works for the Colorado Symphony (*Arrow: Five Years Out!* – an original composition, Pat Metheny’s *The First Circle* as well as *Minuano*, Björk’s *Overture*, *107 Steps* and *New World*, a live version of Philip Glass’s *Changing Opinions*); he has also written orchestrations for Ingrid Michaelson, Eileen Ivers and Bela Fleck.

O’Neil continues to guest conduct and to lead his own ensemble, the Rosetta Music Society, in Denver, creating new, innovative programming and constantly seeking to draw wider audiences to live performances of music from Bach to today’s cutting-edge artists.

Ohad Nativ

Ohad Nativ is a classical pianist and musicologist with versatile experiences as a performer, teacher, conductor, and scholar. Nativ was born in Israel, grew up in New Jersey, and spent significant time in Europe. Currently pursuing a musicology PhD at CU Boulder, Nativ has performed in a large variety of international

festivals, concert series and competitions, as well as taken lessons and masterclasses with significant world-class pianists including Andrew Cooperstock, James Giles, Peter Takacs, Spencer Myer, Alexander Kobrin, Ilana Vered, Matti Raekallio, Jason Hardink and others. During a master's in piano performance at Northwestern University, he also served as a graduate teaching assistant in piano, accompanied and performed in many varied settings, and was named a concerto competition finalist. During his time in Oberlin Conservatory, from which he graduated with a bachelor's in piano performance, he has performed twice as concerto soloist with major ensembles, appeared in the 2020 Dannenberg Honors recital, and earned the prestigious Ernst Hatch Wilkins award for general excellence. He also performed chamber music regularly as part of the local Sacred Heart Performance Series. As a musicologist, Nativ's interests and experience range from analytical and critical theory to history, particularly focusing on the ontology and taxonomy of music, as well as explicit interest and expertise in the works of Max Reger.

Symphony Orchestra

Violin 1

Kristen Barrett
Ryannah Blackman
Leo Matsuoka
Katharine Nelson
Concertmaster
Laura Pérez Rangel
Eli Pouliot
Bb Seidenberg
Emilie Tupper
Shai Wexler
Daniel Yu

Violin 2

Alex Earle
Milan Forrester
Michael Han
Ellie Kaszycki
Ellie Lim
Sidney Lofthouse
Principal
Ginevra Strasser
Adam Weller

Viola

Shelley Armer
Principal
Walt Conte
Jane Hänselman

Aaron Lockhart
Aimée McAnulty
Taylor Sapanara
Kenji Sor
Xi Xin
Izzy Zak

Cello

Julian Bennett
Principal
Thea Dardanis
Marti Flickinger
Katharine Fornshell
Matthew Huff
Priscilla Kim
Sam Moore
Logan Moser
Everlin Roark
Caleb Seifert

Bass

Asher Dobrin
Carson Fast
Claire Koch
Sasha Nepomnyashy
Principal
Willem Rohwer
John St. Cyr

Flute

Regan Buttermore
Paige Michaud
Alex Westervelt
Mallory Wood

Oboe

Lauren Breen
Laura Lambrech
Grace Stringfellow
Luka Vezmar

Clarinet

Harold Gomez Montoya
John Petefish
Ben Rathje
Paige Scott

Bassoon

Larissa Harrison
Ben Mangonon
Grace Moon
Dean Weatherbie

Horn

Nathan Bonin
Aurora Conroy
Susannah Greenslit
Jordan Spivack
Danielle York

Trumpet

Toshiro Chun
Sydney Hoehl
William Reynolds
Leilani Spurlock

Trombone

Ben Garcia
Corey Nance
Wesley Shores

Tuba

Jared Hartl

Timpani

Jack Arman
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Percussion

Max Adams
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*The Drowsy Chaperone (2023).
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