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photo by Leslie Plesser

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Sunday, February 8, 2026
2:00 p.m.

Gideon Ives Auditorium
Minnesota Masonic Heritage Center
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Bloomington

Manny Laureano
Music Director & Conductor

Soojung Hong
Piano

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Joan Tower

Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 1

Vivace – Moderato

Andante

Allegro vivace

*Soojung Hong, Piano**

— INTERMISSION —

Sergei Prokofiev

Selections from *Romeo and Juliet*,
Ballet Music, Op. 64**

The Montagues and Capulets (Dance of the Knights)

The Young Juliet

Minuet

Romeo and Juliet – The Balcony Scene

The Death of Tybalt

Romeo and Juliet Before Parting

Romeo at Juliet's Tomb

* Soojung Hong's performance is supported in part by benefactor William White.

** Romeo and Juliet music by Sergei Prokofiev. Scenario by Sergei Radlov, Adrian Piotrovsky, Leonid Lavrovsky, and Sergei Prokofiev. Romeo and Juliet presented under license from G. Schirmer, Inc. and Associated Music Publishers, copyright owners.

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Program Notes

by Manny Laureano

Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman

Joan Tower (b. 1938)

The career of Joan Tower reads like a map of American classical music's evolution over the last half-century, complete with experimentation and reinvention. Born in New Rochelle, New York, Tower spent her early childhood not in the United States but in Bolivia, where her father worked as a mining engineer. This experience shaped her ear in ways that would echo throughout her life. Surrounded by the rhythmic vitality of South American music, Tower absorbed a sense of pulse and propulsion that would later become a great part of her own compositional voice. When she returned to the United States as a teenager, she had to reconcile moving from a world of vibrant, communal music-making, to one that felt more formal and codified. Nonetheless, she played it to her advantage. She dove into piano studies (her first love) and completed her doctorate at Columbia University.

In 1969, she co-founded the Da Capo Chamber Players, a contemporary music ensemble that quickly became one of the most influential groups of its kind. Tower served as a composer and curator for the Da Capo Chamber Players, to help champion new works of her own and others. Great experimentation, successes, and failures followed, and she grew as a result.

By the 1980s, Tower had emerged as one of the leading American composers of her generation. Her music is unmistakably modern but never alienating. She favors clarity over obscurity, and energy over abstraction. Her works often unfold in long arcs of momentum, driven by rhythmic tension and released in bursts of color. She is a composer who thinks in gestures—bold, physical, almost choreographic movements of sound. And she is a composer who trusts the orchestra as a living organism, capable of both brute force and delicate nuance.

Her achievements—including a Grammy Award, major orchestral commissions, and a long tenure as composer-in-residence with the St. Louis Symphony—have opened doors for generations of younger musicians. Tower's advocacy for women in music is not rhetorical; it is lived experience, embodied in her mentorship, her programming, and her willingness to speak candidly about the challenges she faced. Therefore, it was in this context that Tower wrote *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*. The title is, of course, a nod to Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, a piece that has become almost mythic in American musical life. Copland's

fanfare, written in 1942, was a wartime tribute to the "common man" whose labor and sacrifices would sustain a nation. Tower's response, composed in 1986, reframes the idea for a different era and a different sensibility.

Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 1 in F-sharp minor

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

So . . . what were you doing when you were 18 years old? If you were Sergei Rachmaninoff, who is often remembered for the sweeping lyricism and emotional depth of his later works, you were writing your first piano concerto! It proved to be a bold, youthful statement from a musician already brimming with talent, ambition, and a pianist's instinct for drama.

Growing up in a Russia that was musically vibrant but also undergoing rapid cultural change, this is understandable. Rachmaninoff entered the Moscow Conservatory as a teenager, where he studied piano with the legendary Nikolai Zverev and composition with Anton Arensky and Sergei Taneyev. Even as a student, Rachmaninoff showed an unusual combination of gifts: a natural melodic instinct and a deep understanding of harmony. It was with these attributes that he would develop his unique penchant for igniting an audience.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 emerged from this environment of intense study and youthful confidence. Composed in 1891, it was Rachmaninoff's first major orchestral work and the piece he chose to designate as his official Opus 1. That choice is telling. Although he would later revise the concerto extensively, he always regarded it as the true beginning of his compositional voice—the moment when he stepped into the world as both pianist and composer.

What makes the Piano Concerto No. 1 so compelling is the way it balances youthful bravado with glimpses of the expressive depth that would define Rachmaninoff's later music. The opening is strikingly direct: a brilliant, ascending flourish from the piano that announces the soloist as the driving force of the piece. The orchestra responds with urgency, and the movement unfolds with a kind of restless energy that is full of sharp contrasts, sweeping gestures, and the unmistakable fingerprints of a young virtuoso eager to make his mark.

In the second movement, Rachmaninoff's gift for long, singing lines comes to the forefront. The music is tender without being sentimental, shaped by a sense of

Program Notes

continued

introspection that hints at the emotional world of his later works. Even at eighteen, he knew how to use the piano not just as a vehicle for display but as a voice capable of the unabashed lyricism that became his signature approach.

The finale returns to the boldness of the opening, propelled by rhythmic drive and sparkling passagework. It is music that revels in the possibilities of the piano—its brilliance, its power, and its ability to cut through the orchestra with clarity and force. The young composer who began the concerto with exuberance ends it with a clearer sense of direction, as though he is discovering his own voice in real time.

Romeo and Juliet

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

When Sergei Prokofiev set out to compose *Romeo and Juliet* in the mid-1930s, he was searching for a new musical vocabulary for human connection. How, indeed, does one portray the spark of attraction, the glow of young love, and the shattering weight of loss in a new and vibrant way? Would the four or so decades of his life be sufficient to convince an audience that he understood his subjects in depth, enough so to make them gasp, laugh, and weep as they would a tragic opera?

In a word, yes. The swaggering rhythms of the opening scenes paint a world ruled by pride and posturing, where the Montagues and Capulets cling to a feud so ancient that no one remembers its origin. It's a reminder that tragedy often grows not from malice but from the inability to see past old wounds. In "The Young Juliet," he offers a portrait not of a tragic heroine but of a girl on the cusp of adulthood. The music flits, teases, and glows, as if Juliet herself is discovering the shape of her own heart. The love music that follows is groundbreaking in its restraint. Rather than sweeping romanticism, Prokofiev gives Romeo and Juliet a sound world built on tenderness and wonder. Their encounter is painted in long, arching lines and luminous harmonies that seem to suspend time. The pounding rhythms he writes convey not just the brutality of the moment but the senselessness of it. Two families lose sons, nephews, and friends—and for what? Prokofiev is true to Shakespeare when he forces us to confront the cost of inherited hatred.

To be sure, Prokofiev was able to draw musical reference material from his own life in and away from the Soviet Union. Like his younger contemporary, Dmitri

Shostakovich (1906-1975), he endured the constant scrutiny and erosion of artistic freedom at the hands of the Communist regime. In addition, he was involved in an affair which weighed heavily on him for years. He knew pain, whether it was from external forces or self-inflicted. He also knew love of family and the illicit kind, as well.

Taken together, this suite of music traces a journey from innocence to catastrophe. It reminds us that attraction can be transformative, that love can be luminous, and that tragedy can descend with terrifying speed when pride eclipses compassion. Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* remains so gripping because it speaks to something timeless: the fragile, beautiful, and sometimes perilous ways we reach for one another.



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Featured Performers



Manny Laureano
Music Director & Conductor

The Bloomington Symphony appointed **Manny Laureano** the Artistic Director and Conductor in April 2013. Laureano has worked with a variety of ensembles, ranging in roles from the Music Director of the Calhoun-Isles Community Band in Minneapolis, and Music Director of the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, to several appearances in Young People's Concerts with the Minnesota Orchestra. He has been in demand as a clinician for youth orchestras and bands throughout the state of Minnesota.

In 2002, Manny and his wife Claudette were invited to guest conduct the National Suzuki Youth Orchestra Festival Orchestra and were invited to serve again in 2004. Manny served as Co-Artistic Director of the Minnesota Youth Symphonies (MYS) from 1988-2020. Laureano served as Assistant Conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra during the 2005-06 season and served as conductor of the 2008-09 Minnesota All-State Orchestra.

Manny was the conductor for concerts given by Musicians of the Minnesota Orchestra at Lake Harriet and various Twin Cities high schools, as well as for a Young Person's Concert for inner city youth in North Minneapolis under the auspices of the ACME/El Sistema program. He is also in demand as a guest conductor of community orchestras and clinician for school ensembles all over the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Manny and Claudette live in Plymouth, Minnesota.

Photo by Darrell Owens

A prize winner of many national and international competitions, and an active pianist for solo and ensemble, **Dr. Soojung Hong** performs internationally and at regional concert venues in the Midwest. Her solo recital at Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series at Chicago Public Library was broadcast and livestreamed on WFMT, Chicago's classical music station.

Dr. Hong is dedicated to exploring and elevating the work of female composers. With the support of the Minnesota State Arts Board's Artist Initiative Grant, she created a video production of Fanny Mendelssohn's cycle "Das Jahr" (The Year), which she complemented with a series of live concerts that were illuminated by contemporaneous paintings and readings of poetry. She also performed Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 7 with the Linden Hills Chamber Orchestra, and is currently engaged in a project highlighting a diverse array of female composers from around the world.

As a passionate educator, Dr. Hong is devoted to teaching musicians of all ages and abilities, guiding them toward a lifelong appreciation of music, recitals, competitions, and auditions. Her students have won and received awards in local and international contests. She is also a frequent master class presenter and competition adjudicator on college campuses. Dr. Hong serves as a piano professor at Normandale Community College where she has regularly performed and generated publicity for the Music Department. She is also piano faculty at MacPhail Center for Music, and North Central University.

Dr. Hong holds a Bachelor of Arts in Piano Performance from Ewha Women's University, South Korea, and a Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Minnesota on a full scholarship, where she studied with Alexander Braginsky.



Soojung Hong
Piano

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We gratefully acknowledge our concert benefactors, Dr. Leonard & Karen Nordstrom, and Allan & Deborah Schneider. These friends have been supporting the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra and the arts in Bloomington for decades. We are grateful for their impact and encouragement.

Thank you to the residents of the City of Bloomington who support the BSO through the Resident Arts Support grant program.

Sectional coaches Marlene Pauley, Kate Nettleman, Sarah Switzer, Kirsten Whitson helped prepare BSO musicians for this concert. We thank them for sharing their time and expertise with our musicians.

The Bloomington Symphony recognizes the late Mr. & Mrs. Bernard M. Granum for the donation of the Adams timpani set, given in 2003. Their gift is an enduring legacy to the BSO.

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