

NOVEMBER 16, 2025

@3pm

MASTERWORKS II

SYMPHONIC GLORY

LUCAS RICHMAN, CONDUCTOR

KELLY HALL-TOMPKINS, VIOLIN

William Grant Still

(1895–1978)

Festive Overture

Wynton Marsalis

(b. 1961)

Violin Concerto in D major

I. Rhapsody

II. Rondo Burlesque

III. Blues

IV. Hootenanny

Kelly Hall-Tompkins, violin

INTERMISSION

Antonín Dvořák

(1841–1904)

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88

I. Allegro con brio

II. Adagio

III. Allegretto grazioso

IV. Allegro ma non troppo

Guest Artist Sponsor



Festive Overture

William Grant Still | 10 minutes

In the American musical pantheon, William Grant Still (1895–1978)—often called the “Dean of African American Composers”—stood at the crossroads of jazz, popular, and classical idioms that animated early-20th-century Americana. His career embodies the breadth of American modernism. A prolific composer whose output includes five symphonies, numerous ballets and operas, and hundreds of smaller works, William Grant Still also broke barriers on the podium: in 1936 he became the first Black conductor to lead a major U.S. orchestra when he led the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

Festive Overture (1944) arrived at the height of World War II. That year the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra marked its 50th anniversary with a nationwide, blind competition for a new concert “opener.” From 39 anonymous submissions, a panel led by CSO music director Eugene Goossens, with Pierre Monteux and critic-composer Deems Taylor, unanimously chose Still’s overture; the prize carried a \$1,000 war bond. The world premiere followed shortly thereafter—January 19–20, 1945, in Cincinnati under Goossens—where the piece was welcomed with exuberant applause.

In form and function, *Festive Overture* sits comfortably beside the great American and mid-century openers and overtures: a brilliant brass fanfare yields to racing strings and buoyant rhythms, a lyrical middle section provides momentary repose, and a bright reprise propels the work to its close. It is companionable with Copland’s populist concert works and even the celebratory genre later epitomized by Shostakovich’s *Festive Overture*—yet Still’s voice is distinct, shaped by his Harlem Renaissance ties and his long experience as an orchestrator for theater, radio, and film.

Within William Grant Still’s catalogue, the overture complements the long-lined lyricism and blues-inflected speech of the *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), his most widely known orchestral score. Where the symphony’s idiom leans inward—absorbing spirituals and blues into sonata form—the overture projects outward: streamlined, cinematic, and festive by design. Together they chart Still’s mission to “sound” an American classicism without abandoning his music’s often vernacular roots.

Early accounts stress both the anonymity of the judging and the immediate success of the premiere—testimony to the work’s craft and appeal at a moment when American orchestras were actively defining a nationalistic American repertoire. Recent critics have also noted the score’s wartime energy and gleaming orchestration—the kind of rhythmic drive and sheen that recall contemporary newsreels and Hollywood studios where Still honed his craft. As one 2025 review put it, *Festive Overture* is a “rousing concert opener,” its “luminous strings and crackling brass” giving full voice to Still’s partwriting.

Heard today, *Festive Overture* is more than occasional music: it is a concise manifesto of Still’s Americanism—crafty, inclusive, and irresistibly communicative—claiming its place among the repertoire’s most effective and uplifting openers.

Violin Concerto in D Major

Wynton Marsalis | 40 minutes

Wynton Marsalis (b. 1961, New Orleans) is a monolithic figure in American music—as fluent in jazz as in classical, and equally a composer, performer, educator, and advocate for creative tradition. The only artist to win GRAMMY Awards in both jazz and classical categories in the same year, and recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for his oratorio *Blood on the Fields*, Marsalis embodies American musical flexibility and depth.

Composed in 2015 for violinist Nicola Benedetti, who premiered the concerto with the London Symphony and later recorded it with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Cristian Măcelaru, this work represents Marsalis's intent to “invite a diverse world of people into the experience of this piece.” It presents formidable demands of color and virtuosity for the soloist and full symphony orchestra alike, delivered through the lens of a jazz musician hailing from New Orleans and trained in New York City.

The concerto unfolds across four movements—each a quadrant of an unfolding dream:

Rhapsody: “a complex dream that becomes a nightmare, progresses into peacefulness and dissolves into ancestral memory.”

Rondo Burlesque: “a syncopated, New Orleans jazz, calliope, circus clown, African gumbo, Mardi Gras party in odd meters.”

Blues: “the progression of flirtation, courtship, intimacy, sermonizing, final loss and abject loneliness.”

Hootenanny: “a raucous, stomping and whimsical barnyard throw-down” that drives toward exuberant transcendence.

Across these movements, jazz, swing, blues, ragtime, spirituals, gospel, and big-band gestures are woven into the concerto's architecture, transforming the traditional form into something characteristically and simultaneously American, jazz, and classical. The result is a 40-plus minute work of vast ambition, akin in scale to the Beethoven or Brahms violin concertos, yet of Marsalis's idiom.

Within Marsalis's body of work, the concerto stands alongside his symphonies, string quartet, and oratorio not only as a personal statement but as a conversation between traditions. It advances the violin concerto genre by bridging classical form with vernacular expression—asserting that the instrument can speak blues, groove, and fiddle with equal eloquence.

Today, the *Violin Concerto in D Major* is embraced not merely as a genre-blending novelty but as a landmark in 21st-century American repertoire—a piece whose emotional force, rhythmic vitality, and imaginative scope continue to reward repeated listening and performance.

Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88

Antonín Dvořák | 34 minutes

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) was born the son of a village butcher in Bohemia. Through talent, persistence, and a deep well of musical imagination, he rose to become one of the most beloved composers of the late Romantic era. Trained at the

Prague Organ School, he absorbed the harmonic sophistication of Germanic masters such as Brahms and Wagner while retaining a distinctly Czech voice. His career unfolded at a time when questions of national identity were central across Europe, and Dvořák's music—filled with the rhythms and melodic inflections of Slavic folk song—helped to affirm the cultural vitality of his homeland within the broader landscape of Western classical music.

The Symphony No. 8 in G major, Op. 88, composed in 1889 at his country retreat in Vysoká, represents Dvořák at the height of his creative powers. Written quickly after his election to the Bohemian Academy of Science, Literature, and Arts, he conceived this work as a celebration of Czech spirit. Unlike the darker, more dramatic *Symphony No. 7*, the *Eighth* radiates warmth, optimism, and pastoral charm. Dvořák himself conducted the premiere in Prague in 1890, in a hall long tied to Czech cultural pride. Prague, with its centuries-old Charles Bridge, Gothic spires, and vibrant café culture, was at that time a city negotiating its Austro-Hungarian political realities even as it asserted a distinctive Czech identity. That same cultural ferment resonates in Dvořák's buoyant symphony. Its four movements range from bird-call motifs and sudden harmonic shifts in the opening Allegro, through a melancholy Adagio and rustic dance, to a jubilant finale of variations crowned by triumphant brass.

Anecdotally, when Dvořák later brought the symphony to London, audiences responded with rapture, confirming his place as an international figure. In Prague, however, the symphony carried extra resonance. The city—home to Charles University, founded in 1348, and a long history of resistance to outside rule—recognized in Dvořák's music a mirror of its own resilience and vibrancy.

Today, the *Eighth* remains a concert favorite for its generosity of spirit. It embodies Dvořák's ability to balance classical form with folk vitality, making his voice unmistakably Czech yet universally broad in its appeal. More than a century later, it continues to resonate the joy of a composer who found beauty in the fields and forests of Bohemia and gave that joy to the world.

Meet the Guest Artist



**Kelly
Hall-Tompkins**
Violin

Winner of a Naumburg International Violin Competition Honorary Prize, Concert Artists Guild Career Grant, Sphinx Medal of Excellence and featured in the Smithsonian Museum for African-American History, **Kelly Hall-Tompkins** is a trailblazing and innovative violin soloist entrepreneur who has been acclaimed by the New York Times as “the versatile violinist who makes the music come alive,” for her “tonal mastery” (BBC Music Magazine) and as New York Times “New Yorker of the Year.”

A new collaboration with 5-time Emmy-winning composer Jeff Beal features a new violin concerto written for her. The collaboration also features celebrated conductor Leonard Slatkin. Ms. Hall-Tompkins and Maestro Slatkin performed the Sold-Out world premiere

with the St. Louis Symphony to critical acclaim: “The world premiere was a treat even by the rarified standards of world premieres...masterful... she premiered the concerto with dynamic intensity in her SLSO debut.” Kelly Hall-Tompkins also performed the European premiere with Maestro Slatkin and the Orquesta of Gran Canaria, Spain this spring. The first American artist to perform in China after the pandemic, Ms. Hall-Tompkins received a Chinese “Rare Talent Visa” to perform as soloist with the Shanghai Symphony. Past appearances also include soloist in Carnegie Hall with Glenn Dicterow and conductor Leonard Slatkin, in London with *Chineke!*, at Queen Elizabeth Hall with conductor Michael Morgan, Brevard Festival with Keith Lockhart, recitalist at Lincoln Center, soloist as the Inaugural Artist in Residence with the Cincinnati Symphony, and with the Symphonies of Baltimore, Dallas, Jacksonville, Oakland, Greensboro, recitals in Paris, New York, Toronto, Washington, Chicago, and festivals of Tanglewood, Ravinia, Santa Fe, Gateways, and in France, Germany and Italy. At home with genres beyond classical music, Ms. Hall-Tompkins is the first soloist to perform the Wynton Marsalis *Violin Concerto* after the original dedicatee, with over 16 performances to date, including the upcoming Lucerne Festival Premiere of the work this summer, and opening nights with the Las Vegas Philharmonic, California and Elgin Symphonies; additionally, she also toured for 5 years with American Roots-style Violinist/Composer Mark O’Connor.

She was “Fiddler”/Violin Soloist of the GRAMMY/Tony-nominated Broadway production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Inspired by her experience, she commissioned and developed the first ever Fiddler solo disc of all new arrangements, *The Fiddler: Expanding Tradition*, which is featured alongside her recital in Kiev, Ukraine in the recent documentary “Fiddler: A Miracle of Miracles” on the 55-year history of the musical. Ms. Hall-Tompkins’ *Imagination Project* was called “groundbreaking” by STRINGS Magazine and has received over 1 million views on YouTube to date. Actively performing virtually throughout the pandemic, numerous projects include premiering 4 pieces written for her, creating and being invited to unique collaborations, including a co-composition with Tony-nominated actor Daniel Watts, *Echo: Shostakovich in Catharsis* with aerial dancer Alexandra Peter and Frisson Films, Gil Shaham’s *Gilharmonic*, and with WQXR as part of the inaugural Artist Propulsion Lab.

As founder of Music Kitchen-*Food for the Soul*, Kelly Hall-Tompkins is a pioneer of social justice in classical music, bringing top artists in over 100 concerts with over 200 top artists, in homeless shelters, reaching over 30,000 clients coast to coast from New York to Los Angeles, and in internationally in Paris, France. Through Music Kitchen, Ms. Hall-Tompkins commissioned 15 award-winning composers, with support from Carnegie Hall, to set the prose feedback comments of shelter clients into a composite song cycle entitled, *Forgotten Voices*, premiered individually at homeless shelters around New York City, then in its entirety in a Sold-Out World Premiere in Association with Carnegie Hall in March 2022.

Ms. Hall-Tompkins is on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, recipient of two Honorary Doctorates (Manhattan School of Music and Adelphi University), Distinguished Alumni and Centennial Awards (Eastman School of Music) and is a published author contributor to *Music and Human Rights* on Routledge Press.