



KANSAS CITY  
SYMPHONY

# Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique"

**MATTHIAS PINTSCHER**, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR  
**JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET**, PIANO

April 4-6, 2025

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

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# Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique"

Friday, April 4, 2025 at 8 p.m. (Symphonic Piazza)

The works by Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky will be performed without intermission for the Symphonic Piazza concert.

Saturday, April 5, 2025 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, April 6, 2025 at 2 p.m.

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

**MATTHIAS PINTSCHER**, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

**JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET**, PIANO

**JOAN MAGRANÉ FIGUERA**

*Fortuny-Venise*, tableau pour orchestre  
(KCS commission, world premiere)

**CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS**

Concerto No. 5 in F Major for Piano and  
Orchestra, op. 103, "Egyptian"

I. Allegro animato

II. Andante

III. Molto allegro

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

Intermission

**PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY** Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, op. 74, "Pathétique"

I. Adagio — Allegro non troppo

II. Allegro con grazia

III. Allegro molto vivace

IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso



# Matthias Pintscher

**MUSIC DIRECTOR  
AND CONDUCTOR**

Matthias Pintscher is the newly appointed music director of the Kansas City Symphony, effective from the 2024/25 season. He launched his tenure with a highly successful tour to Europe in August, with concerts at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Berlin Philharmonie and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. Pintscher recently concluded a decade-long tenure as the Music Director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the iconic Parisian contemporary ensemble founded by Pierre Boulez and winner of the 2022 Polar Prize of the Royal Swedish Academy. During his stewardship, Pintscher led this most adventurous institution in the creation of dozens of world premieres by cutting-edge composers from all over the world and took the ensemble on tours around the globe — to Asia and North America and throughout Europe to all the major festivals and concert halls.

The 2023/24 season was Pintscher's fourth year as Creative Partner at the Cincinnati Symphony, where he conducted a new work by inti figgis-vizueta, as well as an immersive video concert of Olivier Messiaen's *Des canyons aux étoiles*. He also toured with the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie

where he is artist-in-residence. As guest conductor, he returned to the RAI Milano Musica, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, NDR Hamburg, Indianapolis Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Barcelona Symphony, Lahti Symphony, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, La Scala and Berlin's Boulez Ensemble. Pintscher has conducted several opera productions for the Berliner Staatsoper, Wiener Staatsoper and Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. He returned to the Berliner Staatsoper in 2024 for Beat Furrer's *Violetter Schnee*.

Pintscher is also well-known as a composer, and his works appear frequently on the programs of major symphony orchestras throughout the world. In August 2021, he was the focus of the Suntory Hall Summer Festival — a weeklong celebration of his works with the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra as well as a residency by the Ensemble Intercontemporain with symphonic and chamber music performances. His third violin concerto, *Assonanza*, written for Leila Josefowicz, premiered in January 2022 with the Cincinnati Symphony.

# Jean-Yves Thibaudet

PIANO



Over the course of three decades, Jean-Yves Thibaudet has performed worldwide, recorded more than 50 albums and built a reputation as one of today's finest pianists. From the start of his career, he has delighted in music beyond the standard repertoire, from jazz to opera, which he transcribed himself to play on the piano. His profound professional friendships crisscross the globe and have led to spontaneous and fruitful collaborations in film, fashion and visual art.

Thibaudet has a lifelong passion for education and fostering young musical talent. He is the first-ever Artist-in-Residence at the Colburn School in Los Angeles, where he makes his home. In 2017, the school announced the Jean-Yves Thibaudet Scholarships, funded by members of Colburn's donor community, to provide aid for Music Academy students, whom

Thibaudet selects for the merit-based awards regardless of their instrument choice.

Thibaudet's recording catalogue has received two Grammy nominations, the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik, the Diapason d'Or, the Choc du Monde de la Musique, the Edison Prize and Gramophone awards. His most recent solo album, 2021's "Carte Blanche," features his first recordings of a number of deeply personal solo piano pieces. He is the soloist on Wes Anderson's 2021 film "The French Dispatch." His playing can also be heard in "Pride and Prejudice," "Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close," "Wakefield" and the Oscar-winning and critically acclaimed film "Atonement." His concert wardrobe is designed by Dame Vivienne Westwood.

In 2010, the Hollywood Bowl honored Thibaudet for his musical achievements by inducting him into its Hall of Fame. Previously a Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Thibaudet was awarded the title Officier by the French Ministry of Culture in 2012. In 2020, he was named Special Representative for the promotion of French Creative and Cultural Industries in Romania. He is co-Artistic Advisor, with Gautier Capuçon, of the Festival Musique & Vin au Clos Vougeot.



## Joan Magrané Figuera (b. 1988)

### **Fortuny-Venise, tableau pour orchestre**

(2025)

13 minutes

*Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, Chinese cymbals, glockenspiel, suspended cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, vibraphone, harp and strings.*

The score includes two quotes before the music:

**If I had never seen Venice, I would dream of it constantly. — Marcel Proust**

**We dream of Venice, before being there. And without knowing it, suddenly, we are there in our dreams. — André Suarès**

Figuera writes this about his piece:

**“Fortuny-Venise” were the only two words on the business card of the polymath artist, inventor and fashion designer (among other things) Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (son of the great romantic painter, master of the Mediterranean light, Marià Fortuny i Marsal, born in Reus). These two words appear to me like an invitation to an extraordinary world of multiple and fascinating references and connections: Venice, Wagner, Proust ... stage lighting, photography, *haute-couture* ... I tried to translate all this in music: flashes of powerful and colourful light, the Wagnerian melodic sensuality, the sinuous flow of the Venice canals, the tender polyphony of the intertwined threads, silk-like, of the dresses, the floating and apparently ungraspable complexity of the Proustian phrasing ...**



## Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)

### Concerto No. 5 in F Major for Piano and Orchestra, “Egyptian,” op. 103

(1896)

28 minutes

*Solo piano, piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, tam-tam and strings.*

#### THE STORY

The French composer Camille Saint-Saëns was an avid traveler throughout his life. He frequently toured Germany and England as a pianist and conductor and would typically spend winters in Algeria or Egypt (as the cold Parisian winter affected his health). In the winter of 1896, he traveled to Cairo to work on

his fifth piano concerto, a genre to which he had not returned in the previous 20 years. Despite the extensive gap, he finished composing the piece in a mere three weeks.

When the weather turned warmer, he returned to Paris and premiered the piece himself at his “jubilee concert.” He had first performed

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in Paris' Salle Pleyel concert hall in 1846, as a 10-year-old, playing piano concertos by Mozart and Beethoven; he performed his fifth concerto in this same hall in 1896, at a concert celebrating the 50th anniversary of his first.

The nickname “Egyptian” was not given to the concerto by Saint-Saëns, and in fact the foreign influences extend far beyond Egypt to the music of Spain and Indonesia, with the Javanese gamelan that had been part of the 1889 world fair in Paris.

### THE MUSIC

The piano introduces both of the main melodies of the first movement, which is fairly standard in its form — two themes that are introduced, developed through multiple variations and brought back at the end. Both melodies are quiet and simple at first, but the piano soon launches into fast scales and arpeggios. The texture is always clear, both in the piano and the orchestra, which, far from being a foreign influence, is instead very French.

Saint-Saëns said that the second movement “takes us on a journey to the East and even, in the F-sharp passage, to the Far East.” Second movements are traditionally slow and lyrical, but this one starts off literally with a bang, as a timpani hit sets

off a driving rhythmic figure in the strings. The piano enters with fast figurations with lowered sixth and raised seventh notes, creating the effect of an “exotic” scale. The slower melody in the middle of the movement was claimed by Saint-Saëns to be an authentic Nubian love song that he heard boatmen on the Nile singing; the passage that follows mimics the gamelan sound with a pentatonic melody in the left hand and repetitive octaves in the right. Further sections follow in a rhapsodic, almost improvisatory way, and the movement closes quietly with piano arpeggios after some guttural notes from the strings that imitate croaking frogs on the banks of the Nile.

The composer likened the feel of the final movement, rather sardonically, to “the joy of a sea-crossing — a joy that not everyone shares.” The main themes are cheerful and adventurous by turns. The soloist is kept busy, sometimes playing the melody, sometimes playing arpeggios that traverse the whole keyboard. Thundering octaves in the piano herald the concerto’s exuberant ending.

— *AJ Harbison*



## Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

### Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique," op. 74

(1893)

47 minutes

*Piccolo, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam and strings.*

#### THE STORY

Much like Mozart's Requiem, which we performed earlier this season, a lot of breathless speculation has surrounded the circumstances of Tchaikovsky's sixth and final symphony since it was written and premiered. He told friends that it had a program or story associated with it, but refused to say what it was. It does not end triumphantly, as many symphonies do, but instead fades to silence. Nine days after conducting its premiere, Tchaikovsky died, and the official explanation (cholera) seemed suspect. Finally, there is evidence Tchaikovsky believed his homosexuality, which he had kept hidden throughout his life, was about to be exposed. Did the composer commit suicide to avoid a public scandal? Did the unusual symphony serve as a musical suicide note? Or did he feel his own death coming upon him and write, in a sense, his own requiem?

Also, much like Mozart's Requiem, the real story is less dramatic. While Tchaikovsky did suffer from depression throughout his life, multiple sources point to a happier frame of mind around the symphony's composition and premiere. He wrote to a friend that he was in no mood to compose a requiem (which the friend had suggested); he arrived in Saint Petersburg for the premiere "in excellent spirits," and his brother wrote about that period, "I had not seen him so bright for a long time past." The most likely explanation for his death was that a cup of water he drank at a favorite local restaurant was contaminated with cholera.

Regardless of the circumstances, though, the symphony is powerful, deeply moving and a revolution in the form. No other symphony composed to that point had ever had such an

ending. And that revolution had important after-effects on symphonies early in the 20th century and beyond; music critic Tom Service says, “He had re-invented the symphony on his own terms, and for so many composers who came after him. Mahler, Shostakovich, Sibelius, and many others could not have composed the symphonies they did without the example of Tchaikovsky’s Sixth.”

The nickname of the symphony, “Pathétique,” was long thought to be suggested by the composer’s brother, but recent research has indicated that it may have come from Tchaikovsky himself. Far from “pathetic” (the English word it looks closest to), the term actually means “impassioned” or “emotional” — certainly fitting terms for this music.

### THE MUSIC

The symphony opens with a darkly foreboding melody that slowly unwinds from a solo bassoon over long held chords in the low strings. The introductory adagio gives way to allegro for the main theme, lighter in character and scoring but still in a minor key. The movement slows again to adagio for the major-key second theme, introduced by the violins, marked “tenderly, in a singing manner, expansively.” (The clarinet has several solos on this theme throughout the movement.) A stormy middle section casts the first theme in a frenzied, hectic setting, but the movement ends quietly in B major. The second movement demonstrates Tchaikovsky’s mastery of dance forms, gained through his famous ballets like *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*, as

the irregular 5/4 meter never sounds clunky or off-kilter. The central section continues the sweeping lyricism, but with an insistent pulse underneath played by double basses and timpani; this omen dissipates, however, with the return of the opening material.

Here Tchaikovsky inverts the traditional four-movement structure. Normally, the slow “Adagio lamentoso” movement would be either second, with the dance movement coming third and the fast movement concluding the symphony; or, less commonly, the slow movement would follow the dance movement. But instead Tchaikovsky makes the fast, finale-esque movement third. The strident, march-like main theme that emerges partway through, with its accompanying fanfares, bears some similarities to John Williams’ “Indiana Jones” score (or, rather, the other way around!). The end of the movement sounds very much like a triumphant conclusion and often provokes applause. But wait — Tchaikovsky’s not finished.

The fourth movement starts with a slow, anguished outcry from the strings that relentlessly pushes downward. The second theme in major provides some relief, but the first theme comes back again and again. Toward the end the second theme returns, but this time it is reframed in a minor setting and only intensifies the despair. It too now pushes relentlessly downward, getting lower and lower in the strings until only cellos and basses are left to die away into silence.

— AJ Harbison



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In only its 42nd season, the Kansas City Symphony has already become one of America's most vibrant major orchestras and has gained national and international recognition. With the 2024/25 season, the Symphony welcomes conductor and composer Matthias Pintscher as its new music director. Pintscher regularly conducts many of the world's best orchestras and opera companies and ranks as one of the world's foremost composers of orchestral music.

Continually creating live music experiences in Helzberg Hall, located in the prestigious Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, the Symphony serves Kansas City's metro population of more than 2.2 million people as well as welcoming visitors from around the globe. The Symphony's 80 full-time musicians from around the world bring a diverse and dynamic range of musical experiences to our audiences in both orchestral and chamber music formats each season. In addition to concerts in Helzberg Hall, Symphony musicians perform throughout the region on our portable stage, the Mobile Music Box. The Symphony also serves as the

orchestra for the Kansas City Ballet and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, adding to the rich cultural experiences that these organizations offer to the community.

Top international soloists perform with the Symphony every season, including brilliant classical musicians, popular singer/songwriters, rock bands and other creative performers. The Symphony also performs live soundtracks for a variety of fan-favorite films, with the movie projected on a giant screen above the stage.

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Friday, April 25 at 8 p.m.

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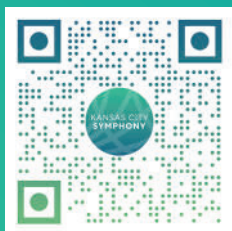
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**Jane Glover**, guest conductor

**Ying Li**, piano



Ying Li

**BENJAMIN BRITTEN** Suite on English Folk Tunes, "A time there was..."

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**F.J. HAYDN** Symphony No. 104 in D Major, "London"

## The French Masters

DEBUSSY'S NOCTURNES

Friday, May 9 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, May 10 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, May 11 at 2 p.m.

**Matthias Pintscher**, music director and conductor

**Sophia Burgos**, soprano

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Sophia Burgos

**GABRIEL FAURÉ** *Masques et bergamasques*

**FRANCIS POULENC** Gloria

**CLAUDE DEBUSSY** Nocturnes

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MAHLER'S THIRD SYMPHONY

Friday, May 30 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, May 31 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, June 1 at 2 p.m.

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Matthias Pintscher