

# **Royal Conservatory Orchestra with conductor JoAnn Falletta**

**Friday, October 10, 2025 at 8pm**

This is the 1,447<sup>th</sup> concert in Koerner Hall

**JoAnn Falletta**, conductor

**Jonathan Alter**, piano

**Royal Conservatory Orchestra**

## **PROGRAM**

John Adams: *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, op. 37

I. Allegro con brio

II. Largo

III. Rondo: Allegro

## **INTERMISSION**

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: *Scheherazade*, op. 35

“The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship”

“The Story of the Kalendar Prince”

“The Young Prince and the Young Princess”

“Festival at Baghdad – The Sea – Shipwreck”

## John Adams

Born in Worcester, MA, February 15, 1947

### ***Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986)**

*"You know how it is when someone asks you to ride in a terrific sports car, and then you wish you hadn't?"*

For the record, it was a Ferrari – driven by an inexperienced relative, late at night, on the highway. The adrenaline from that ride still lingered as American composer John Adams contemplated a fanfare commissioned to open the 1986 summer festival of the Pittsburgh Symphony. *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, Adams says, "is somewhat of an evocation of that experience, which was both thrilling and also a kind of white-knuckle, anxious experience."

The music launches with the insistent knock of a woodblock – a relentless pulse that Adams sees as "a rhythmic gauntlet through which the orchestra has to pass." Over the next four or five minutes, he weaves a complex, high-energy web of conflicting musical pulses, all set against the steady pulse of the woodblock, teasing the listener to find congruence amidst the swirl of competing pulses. "Part of the fun of *Short Ride* is making these large instruments – the tuba, double basses, contrabassoon, the entire brass section – move!" Adams says. "They have to boogie through this very resolute and inflexible pulse that's set up by the woodblock."

Only at the very end, when the woodblock suddenly drops out, does the orchestra feel a jolt of liberation. That is when, as Adams puts it, "we hear the triumphant, real fanfare music in the trumpets and horns." It is a brief moment of celebration after a careening, high-speed dash – exhilarating, unpredictable, and unmistakably Adams.

## Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, Germany, baptised December 17, 1770; died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

### **Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, op. 37 (c. 1800-03)**

Beethoven was to live for two years on the proceeds of a benefit concert that featured the premiere of his Third Piano Concerto, at Vienna's Theater an der Wien on April 5, 1803. The program was not for the faint of heart; it demanded stamina from both performers and audience. Alongside the debut of the new piano concerto and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* – each substantial works in their own right – Beethoven also introduced his Second Symphony, sharing the program with the already familiar Symphony No. 1.

Beethoven's first known thoughts about the concerto date back to 1796. While travelling to Berlin, he jotted down a curious note: "To the Concerto in C Minor, kettledrum at the cadenza." This refers to a striking moment near the end of the first movement. After a virtuosic cadenza (which Beethoven only wrote out fully in 1809) capped by one of Beethoven's signature multi-layered double trills, he highlights a key rhythmic figure of the opening movement (DUM-dee-DUM-dee-DUM), now played pianissimo by the timpani, while the piano presses ahead into the closing bars. It is a telling sign of how Beethoven was beginning to rethink the form of the piano concerto – an evolution that would take striking new turns in the two concertos to follow.

The concerto opens with an assertive Allegro, firmly grounded in the stormy key of C minor. The slow movement, in contrast, immediately ascends to a more exalted plane. This E major Largo is a solemn, spacious meditation on a theme first presented by the piano, which is symphonic in scale and serene in spirit. But the tranquillity does not last. At the start of the rondo finale, the piano brusquely wrenches the closing chord of the slow movement back to the concerto's home key of C minor – the key of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and some of his most fiery music. The mood is now turbulent, with martial exchanges between piano and orchestra that foreshadow the more expansive gestures of the "Emperor" Concerto. Yet the main theme carries a genial nonchalance. It still allows for some fireworks from the soloist, and, in the second of three episodes, Beethoven unexpectedly revisits the luminous E major of the slow movement. In the final bars, tension gives way to triumph as the music hurtles into the major for a dazzling coda.

## Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Born in Tikhvin, Russia, March 6/18, 1844; died in Lyubensk, Russia, June 8/21, 1908

### ***Scheherazade*, op. 35 (1888)**

*Scheherazade* is the legendary storyteller from *One Thousand and One Nights*, who avoids death at the hands of a murderous king by captivating him with cliffhanger tales night after night. Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov turned to her story in the winter of 1887, inspired by the West's growing fascination with Orientalism and exotic

fantasy. The result, completed in 1888, is a brilliantly orchestrated four-movement suite that invites the listener into an interactive musical journey – an unfolding drama where imagination is essential.

Scheherazade survives by her wits. Each evening, she tells a tale that ends mid-story, keeping her husband – convinced all women are unfaithful – so intrigued that he postpones her execution. After 1,001 nights and three children, she finally wins his trust and earns her freedom. Rimsky-Korsakov, though, was careful not to tie his score too tightly to a narrative: “I had in view the creation of an orchestral suite in four movements, closely knit by the community of its themes and motives, yet presenting, as it were, a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of oriental character,” he wrote in his autobiography.

The suite may echo a traditional symphony in structure, but it thrives on the suspense and variety of storytelling. The violin, representing Scheherazade, winds its way in and out of the music like a narrator drifting from tale to tale. As the suite unfolds, the listener is drawn deeper into an imagined world, guided by recurring motifs and vivid orchestral colours.

The first movement, “The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship,” juxtaposes two memorable motto themes, representing the protagonists: the stern, imperious voice of Shahryar, the Sultan, heard in the brass and low strings, and the sensual, winding solo violin of Scheherazade, accompanied by harp. What follows is a musical voyage – three surging climaxes and three calm lulls – mirroring either Sinbad’s journey across treacherous waters or, perhaps, a less literal voyage in the Sultan’s chambers. The ambiguity is intentional; the listener is invited to choose.

Scheherazade reappears at the start of the second movement, “The Story of the Kalendar Prince.” The music follows a royal figure disguised as a beggar in search of wisdom. Its exotic flair is filtered through a distinctly Russian lens, with wild flourishes and unexpected turns that suggest both fantasy and folkloric tradition. The third movement, “The Young Prince and the Young Princess,” serves as the suite’s slow movement. A gentle love theme unfolds with grace and elegance, enveloped in sumptuous orchestration. The music floats through imagined palaces and moonlit gardens, the fantasy never far from hand.

The final movement, “Festival at Baghdad – The Sea – Shipwreck,” begins in a blaze of celebration. Themes return in a frenzy as the Sultan and Scheherazade meet once more. The story spirals back to sea, now turbulent and overwhelming. Waves crash, the ship breaks apart, and themes collide in a stormy climax. A final tam-tam crash signals the end of the tempest.

In the stillness that follows, Scheherazade returns. The violin gently brings the suite to a close – this battle, at least, sweetly resolved.

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## JoAnn Falletta

### Conductor

Multiple Grammy Award-winning conductor JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Music Director Laureate of the Virginia Symphony, Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center, and Conductor Laureate of the Hawaii Symphony. She was named one of the 50 great conductors of all time by *Gramophone* magazine and ASCAP has honoured her as “a leading force for music of our time.”

As Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American orchestra. She has guest-conducted over 100 orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, and South America. She is a leading recording artist for Naxos, and has won two individual Grammy Awards, for *Richard Danielpour’s “The Passion of Yeshua”* with the BPO and *Spiritualist* by Kenneth Fuchs with the London Symphony. Her Naxos recording of John Corigliano’s *Mr. Tambourine Man* with the BPO received two Grammys. Her Scriabin recording with the BPO was nominated for a 2024 Grammy for Best Orchestral Performance.

Falletta is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has served by Presidential appointment as a Member of the National Council on the Arts. She has conducted over 1,600 orchestral works by more than 600 composers, including over 135 works by women composers, and over 150 premieres.

After earning her bachelor’s degree at Mannes, Falletta received master’s and doctoral degrees from The Juilliard School.

For more information, visit [www.joannfalletta.com](http://www.joannfalletta.com).

## **Jonathan Alter**

### **Piano**

Jonathan Alter is in his third year of Bachelor of Music studies at The Glenn Gould School, in the studio of Drs. John O'Connor and Michael Berkovsky. He is the recipient of the full-tuition Brenda J. Wilson Scholarship. Jonathan's recent accomplishments include winning The Glenn Gould School's Chamber Competition and Robert W. and G. Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition in Koerner Hall, reaching the semi-finals in the Kaufman Junior International Piano Competition in New York City, First Place in the Canadian Music Competition, and being named the recipient of the 2024 Ben Steinberg Musical Legacy Award for an emerging Canadian Jewish musician. He is a recent alumnus of Pianofest in the Hamptons, where he studied with Richard Goode, Pavel Nersessian, and Paul Schenly as their youngest fellow. He is also a graduate of The Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy for Young Artists and the Claude Watson Arts Program at Earl Haig.

In addition to his piano studies, Jonathan has been leading numerous professional ensembles while studying conducting with Maestro Simon Rivard. As a choral conductor, he has served as apprentice conductor for both the Exultate and Cantabile Chamber Singers and conducted The Glenn Gould School Choir last season. Jonathan has also led orchestras of members of the RCO in multiple performances, including a sold-out recital of Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto which he conducted from the piano, and will lead Brahms's First Symphony this November.

In his spare time, Jonathan enjoys playing tennis and chess, learning about theoretical physics, and serving as President of The Glenn Gould School's Student Council.

## **Royal Conservatory Orchestra**

### **Joaquin Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor**

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. Through the RBC Guest Conductor Program, four renowned conductors work with the RCO each season, allowing Glenn Gould School students to gain experience through professional rehearsal and performance conditions. A full week of rehearsals culminates in a Koerner Hall performance under the batons of such distinguished guest conductors as Sir Roger Norrington, former Ichnatowycz Chair in Piano Leon Fleisher, Bramwell Tovey, Johannes Debus, Peter Oundjian, Gábor Takács-Nagy, Ivars Taurins, Tania Miller, Andrei Feher, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Nathan Brock, Julian Kuerti, Uri Mayer, Tito Muñoz, Andrés Keller, Earl Lee, Naomi Woo, William Eddins, and Lior Shambadal. With four annual performances, participation in the RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Bachelor of Music and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, winners of The Robert W. and G. Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Tafelmusik, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. In addition to performances in Koerner Hall, the RCO has performed on numerous occasions at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston, has been heard repeatedly on the national broadcasts of the *CBC Radio*, and in May 2024 made its Carnegie Hall debut under Maestro Peter Oundjian.

*JoAnn Falletta made her Royal Conservatory debut on November 24, 2023 and this is her second appearance with the Royal Conservatory Orchestra.*