

Royal Conservatory Orchestra with conductor Mei-Ann Chen

Friday, November 21, 2025 at 8pm

This is the 1,463rd concert in Koerner Hall

Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

Zane Mallett, harp

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Stewart Goodyear: *Seasons* (world premiere)

- I. Fanfare
- II. Cailleach -
- III. Spring - Zephyrus -
- IV. Xōchipilli -
- V. Notos -
- VI. Cailleach

Alberto Ginastera: Harp Concerto, op. 25

- I. Allegro giusto
- II. Molto moderato
- III. Liberamente capriccioso – Vivace

INTERMISSION

Igor Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring*

Part 1: The Adoration of the Earth

Introduction – Auguries of Spring (Dances of the Young Girls) – Mock Abduction – Spring Khorovod (Round-Dances) – Games of the Rival Clans – Procession of the Sage – Adoration of the Earth (The Sage) – Dance of the Earth

Part 2: The Sacrifice

Introduction – Mystical Circles of the Young Girls – Glorification of the Chosen One – The Summoning of the Ancients – Ritual of the Ancients – Sacrificial Dance of the Chosen One

Stewart Goodyear

Born in Toronto, ON, February 25, 1978

First ever Artist in Residence at The Royal Conservatory of Music, Stewart Goodyear studied at the Conservatory under James Anagnoson and Leon Fleisher. He made his Koerner Hall debut on November 28, 2010, and has performed here 15 times.

Seasons (2025) (world premiere)

As soon as I found out that Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* was on the second half of this concert, ideas poured out faster than ever. I envisioned a personal paean to all the seasons.

This is a rhapsody with five parts. As it is a concert opener, the piece begins with a brass fanfare – written after the completion of the piece and inspired by Paul Dukas's Fanfare from his ballet *La Péri*. After the audience has settled down to their seats, *Seasons* begins in earnest with Winter – the personification of the Cailleach, the wise old woman who shapes the icy mountains, hills, and rivers.

From the chilling wind to the warm breeze of Spring, the orchestra bridges Winter and Spring, and the second part depicts Zephyrus bringing a gentle embrace to this Rhapsody. Strings simmer, a solo muted trumpet sings a folk love song, and soon the entire musical forces are caught up and entranced.

The third part is a homage to the spirit of Xōchipilli, with calypso and jazz permeating the score. The entire percussion section is utilized, and the orchestra burns with syncopated rhythm and virtuosity.

Festivity turns to storm as the fourth part is a furious toccata representing Notos, the bringer of summer and autumn storms. The audience will hear sounds similar to late August thunderstorms. Afterwards, the music gets progressively colder and calmer, until we are again feeling the chill and majesty of the Cailleach. Winter has returned, and, like the seasons, the Rhapsody has gone full circle. - *Stewart Goodyear*

Alberto Ginastera

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, April 11, 1916; died in Geneva, Switzerland, June 25, 1983

Harp Concerto, op. 25 (1956-65)

With Italian and Catalan heritage, Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera drew deeply from both South American and European traditions. He was at ease with European forms – the concerto, sonata, string quartet, and toccata – yet infused them with imagery rooted in the Argentine landscape and, in later works, in the ancient pre-Columbian past. Ginastera was an innovator, not a revolutionary – receptive to new ideas, but never doctrinaire.

The Harp Concerto, dated Buenos Aires, 1956, falls midway in Ginastera's stylistic evolution. Commissioned by Edna Phillips but long delayed, revised, and not premiered until 1965 by Nicanor Zabaleta, it combines mid-century modernism with folkloric imagery. "I want to be in the society of my age as an artist and a composer," Ginastera often said. Underpinning the work is the gauchesco tradition – the figure of the solitary, horse-riding gaucho as a national symbol.

Both outer movements are driven by the malambo – the vigorous Argentine dance where gauchos compete through foot-stomping (zapateados) and brushing steps (cepillados). The opening theme alternates duple and triple rhythms, drawing the harp's crystalline articulation into the percussive world of the dance. A more lyrical second theme introduced by the harp alone provides contrast throughout the sonata structure movement. It dies away with echoes of this theme and a sonorous slowly rising scale from the harp (an arrastre), evoking the open strings of the gaucho's guitar.

The evocative, nocturnal textures of the slow movement, at times reminiscent of Bartók, reveal Ginastera's command of the orchestra. A brief, improvisatory-like passage in the middle is further developed by the harp in the cadenza (*Liberamente capriccioso*) which precedes the finale. Here, Ginastera exploits the full range of extended harp techniques: glissandos, pedal glissandos, harmonics, and percussive effects played near the soundboard or with the palm. It begins with the open strings of the guitar and builds directly into a propulsive finale.

A folk-like tune is passed between harp and orchestra in a finale of exhilarating drive, powered by a formidable battery of percussion instruments (four players, more than 30 instruments). "I could hardly dream that it was going to be the most difficult work I have ever written and that it would take several years to see the light," Ginastera said of this, the earliest of his five solo concertos – now the most popular harp concerto of the last century.

Igor Stravinsky

Born in Oranienbaum [now Lomonosov], nr. St. Petersburg, Russia, June 5/17, 1882; died in New York, NY, April 6, 1971

The Rite of Spring: Scenes of Pagan Russia in two parts (1911-13)

A little over a century ago, in a city long known for its protests, Paris became the scene of what is often described as the most infamous riot in Western music history. On May 29, 1913, during the premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, audience members erupted – shouting at the musicians, the dancers, the creators, and each other. In the wings, composer Igor Stravinsky joined choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, beating out rhythms and shouting counts to help the dancers stay on track over the audience rumpus. Even after an unprecedented 17 rehearsals, the dancers struggled with Stravinsky's unpredictable metres, with dancing flat-footed, and with standing knock-kneed as imagined ancient peoples. When impresario Serge Diaghilev, founder of the Ballets Russes, ordered the house lights flicked on and off to calm the uproar, the tension only escalated – much to his delight. The next morning, the riot made front-page news. One of the most groundbreaking scores of the 20th century had arrived.

The origins of *The Rite* date back to 1910, when stage designer Nicholas Roerich drafted a ballet called *Supreme Sacrifice*. Its primitivist scenario stirred something elemental in Stravinsky. Diaghilev was quickly brought in. Stravinsky seized on folk music as his raw material, transforming it into something utterly original. His sketchbooks reveal quotations from a range of sources, most famously the opening bassoon solo – adapted from a collection of 1,785 Lithuanian folk songs assembled by a Polish priest.

Stravinsky extracted fragments and rhythmic cells from these melodies and from other sources, including the stage works of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov. He forged driving ostinato rhythms layered with irregular accents and dislocated the metre, resulting in a hypnotic, propulsive force. Composing, as usual, at the piano, he superimposed contrasting chords – one black-note cluster in the left hand, a white-note cluster in the right, offset by a semitone – to create pungent dissonances. Composition, usually an intellectual process for Stravinsky, now became instinctual. "I was the vessel through which *The Rite* flowed," he said.

As for that riot – later eclipsed by the score's acclaim Roerich reflected: "Who knows, perhaps at that moment they were inwardly exultant and expressing this feeling like the most primitive of peoples."

- *Ginastera and Stravinsky program notes copyright © 2025 Keith Horner.*

Mei-Ann Chen

Conductor

Taiwanese American conductor Mei-Ann Chen is renowned as one of the most versatile, compelling, and dynamic international conductors today. Music Director of the MacArthur Award-winning Chicago Sinfonietta since 2011, her contract has been unanimously extended through the end of the 2028-29 season. Chief Conductor of Austria's Recreation - Grosses Orchester Graz at Styriarte (the first female Asian conductor to hold this position with an Austrian orchestra) since fall 2021, she also serves as Artistic Advisor of Springfield Symphony Orchestra (MA) since 2024, the first-ever Artistic Partner of Houston's ROCO since 2019, and Artistic Partner with Northwest Sinfonietta (WA) since 2022. Former posts include artistic director of the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra Summer Festival and music director Portland Youth Philharmonic. Ms. Chen was named Conductor Laureate of the Memphis Symphony after serving as music director (2010-2016). Chen has made recordings for Cedille Records, Innova Records, and Naxos, and releases her third album for Cedille and Chicago Sinfonietta with Flutronix later this season. A passionate advocate for music education, Maestra Chen is a Visiting Scholar at the National Taiwan Normal University. Ms. Chen dedicates significant time in mentoring young conductors through various programs, including the Chicago Sinfonietta Freeman Conducting Fellowship program (helping to launch professional careers for more than a dozen young conductors) and the Taki Alsop Fellowship, and conducts ensembles at important educational institutions, both nationally and abroad. An acclaimed communicator praised for her energy and enthusiasm, Ms. Chen is a sought-after guest conductor and has appeared with distinguished orchestras throughout the Americas, Europe, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and her native Taiwan (over 160 to date), and continues to expand her relationships with orchestras worldwide.

Zane Mallett

Harp

Zane Mallett is an award-winning harpist and teacher based in the San Francisco Bay Area. He was the principal harpist for the Baton Rouge Symphony from 2022-24.

As an orchestral harpist, Zane has appeared as a guest with the Rochester, Buffalo, Charlotte, and Winnipeg symphonies as well as the Canadian Opera Company. He has spent summers at the Aspen, Spoleto, Pierre Montoux, and Round Top music festivals.

Zane holds degrees in Harp Performance from Southern Methodist University (B.M., B.Ed), Rice University (M.M.), and The Royal Conservatory of (ADP), where he was the recipient of the full-tuition Rayla & George Myhal Scholarships.

He is deeply grateful to his mentors Naoko Nakamura, Paula Page, and Judy Loman.

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 RCO 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 Ichnatowicz 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. The RCO's Resident Conductor, Joaquin Valdepeñas, is supported by a generous gift from Robert & Ann Corcoran.