



ABOUT THE MUSIC

A NEW WORLD

March 22, 23 & 24, 2025

Program Notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

GABRIELA LENA FRANK

Elegía Andina for Orchestra



COMPOSER: Born September 26, 1972, Berkeley, CA

WORK COMPOSED: 2000. Made possible by the Albany Symphony Orchestra American Voices Commission and dedicated “to my older brother Marcos Gabriel Frank.”

WORLD PREMIERE: David Alan Miller led the Albany Symphony Orchestra on December 10, 2000, at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in Troy, NY.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, glockenspiel, suspended cymbal, temple blocks, 2 triangles, whip, woodblocks, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 11 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

One of the foremost American composers working today, whose music has been “crafted with unself-conscious mastery” (*Washington Post*), Gabriela Lena Frank is currently serving as Composer-in-Residence with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Born to a mother of mixed Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Frank’s rich multicultural identity is a cornerstone of her music. Frank has traveled extensively throughout South America to absorb folklore, poetry, mythology, and indigenous musical styles, which are reflected and refracted through her work.

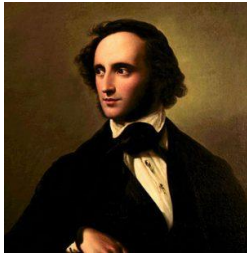
Winner of a Latin Grammy and nominated for Grammys as both composer and pianist, Frank also holds a Guggenheim Fellowship and a USA Artist Fellowship, given each year to fifty of the country’s finest artists. She has also been commissioned by the Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, and Houston symphonies; Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble; cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han; and the Kronos, Brentano, and Cuarteto Latinoamericano String Quartets, among others.

In 2020, Frank received the 25th annual Heinz Award in the Arts and Humanities for “weaving Latin American influences into classical constructs and breaking gender, disability, and cultural barriers in classical music composition.”

“*Elegía Andina* for Orchestra is dedicated to my older brother, Marcos Gabriel Frank,” Frank writes. “As children of a multicultural marriage ... our early days were filled with Oriental stir-fry cuisine, Andean nursery songs, and frequent visits from our New York-bred Jewish cousins. As a young piano student, my repertoire included not only my own compositions that carried overtones from Peruvian folk music but also rags of Scott Joplin and minuets by the sons of Bach. It is probably inevitable then that as a composer and pianist today, I continue to thrive on multiculturalism. *Elegía Andina* ... is one of my first written-down compositions to explore what it means to be of several ethnic persuasions, of several minds. It uses stylistic elements of Peruvian arca/ira zampoña panpipes (double-row panpipes, each row with its own tuning) to paint an elegiac picture of my questions. The flute part was particularly conceived with this in mind but was also inspired by the technical and musical mastery of Floyd Hebert, principal flutist of the Albany Symphony Orchestra. In addition, as already mentioned, I can think of none better to dedicate this work to than to ‘Babo,’ my big brother – for whom Perú still waits.”

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 64



COMPOSER: Born February 3, 1809, Hamburg; died November 4, 1847, Leipzig

WORK COMPOSED: July 1838 – September 1844

WORLD PREMIERE: Niels Gade led the Gewandhaus Orchestra and violinist Ferdinand David in Leipzig on March 13, 1845.

INSTRUMENTATION: Solo violin, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 27 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

“I would like to write a violin concerto for you next winter,” Felix Mendelssohn wrote to his longtime friend and colleague Ferdinand David in the summer of 1838. “There’s one in E minor in my head, and its opening won’t leave me in peace.” Mendelssohn and David had known each other for years. The two prodigies met as teenagers; 15-year-old David was a budding violin virtuoso, and 16-year-old Mendelssohn had just completed his Octet for Strings. Years later, when Mendelssohn was appointed director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra concerts in 1835, he hired David as concertmaster.

Mendelssohn had played the violin since childhood and, by all accounts, was quite accomplished. However, the E minor Violin Concerto required a level of knowledge and skill beyond Mendelssohn’s abilities, so he turned to David for hands-on advice. During the composition of the E minor Concerto, Mendelssohn wrote the music and designed the concerto’s structure, while David served as technical consultant.

In this concerto, the violin is always and indisputably the star. Music this familiar can be difficult to hear as a “composed” work at all; instead, it seems to emerge *sui generis*, like Athena bursting fully formed from the head of Zeus.

In a break with convention, the solo violin rather than the orchestra opens the Allegro molto appassionato with the main theme. Mendelssohn also defied expectations by placing the first movement cadenza, which David composed, between the development and return of the main theme instead of in its customary place at the end of the movement.

A solo bassoon holds the last note of the Allegro and pivots without interruption to the Andante. Here the soloist leads with a singing melody of tender poignancy. The gentle Andante flows almost without pause into the Allegro molto vivace. The exuberant quicksilver theme of the finale contrasts sharply with the intimate Andante, and demands all the soloist’s technical and artistic skill.

Opus 64 turned out to be Mendelssohn’s last completed orchestral work; he died two years after its premiere.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Opus 95, *From the New World*



COMPOSER: Born September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, near Kralupy in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic); died May 1, 1904, Prague

WORK COMPOSED: 1892-1893, in New York City

WORLD PREMIERE: Anton Seidl led the New York Philharmonic on December 16, 1893, at Carnegie Hall.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 40 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Antonín Dvořák began his Ninth Symphony in December 1892, shortly after he arrived in America, and completed it the following May. He had come to the United States at the invitation of Jeanette Thurber, who had invited Dvořák to head her newly-founded National Conservatory of Music in New York City.

During his three-year sojourn in New York, Dvořák explored the city, watched trains and large ships arrive and depart, fed pigeons in Central Park, and met a variety of people. “The Americans expect great things of me. I am to show them the way into the Promised Land, the realm of a new, independent art, in short, a national style of music!” Dvořák wrote to a friend back home. “... This will certainly be a great and lofty task, and I hope that with God’s help I shall succeed in it.”

Dvořák also immersed himself in Native American melodies and Negro spirituals; their distinctive sound and style fired his creative imagination. “The influence of America can be readily felt by anyone with ‘a nose,’” Dvořák observed. That is, the uniquely American flavor of the Ninth Symphony is clearly discernable, as Dvořák made use of the syncopated rhythms, repeated patterns, and particular scales common to much of America’s indigenous music. However, the Ninth Symphony is not a patchwork of previously existing materials, and all the melodies in the Ninth Symphony are Dvořák’s own, including the Largo’s beloved English horn solo.

“I have simply written original themes embodying the peculiarities of Indian music; ... using these themes as subjects, [I] have developed them with all the resources of modern rhythms, harmony, counterpoint, and orchestral color,” Dvořák continued. “I should never have written the symphony like I have if I hadn’t seen America.” The title “From the New World,” Dvořák explained, was intended as an aural picture postcard to be mailed back to friends and family in Europe.

The Adagio-Allegro molto opens with a slow introduction. Turbulent strings, timpani, and winds signal the beginning of the Allegro, with horns sounding the main theme. Its vigorous energy suggests the bustling excitement of a typical New York City street and its many colorful distractions. Later, a flute solo hints at the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” a favorite of Dvořák’s.

Of all the movements in the Ninth Symphony, the Largo, with its haunting English horn solo, is the most beloved. When writing it, Dvořák was inspired by Longfellow’s *Song of Hiawatha*, a poem he knew well. This music has come to be associated with the death and funeral of Minnehaha, although others have suggested it refers to Hiawatha’s wooing of Minnehaha. In choosing the English horn as the solo instrument, Dvořák explained that it reminded him of the voice of Henry T. Burleigh, also known as Harry, a Black baritone and one of Dvořák’s composition students, who had sung spirituals for Dvořák in the composer’s New York home. William Arms Fisher, another of Dvořák’s students, later wrote lyrics for the solo tune and gave it the title “Goin’ Home.”

The Scherzo-Molto vivace continues the nod to *Hiawatha* with its strong, percussive rhythms and bold opening statement. Dvořák notes that Longfellow’s description of the dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis inspired this vigorous theme. The middle trio is a graceful, contained dance, refined and elegant. It contrasts strongly with the wild abandon of the scherzo, whose insistent rhythms whirl and eddy like an untamed river.

In the Allegro con fuoco, Dvořák’s energetic brass melody embodies America’s irrepressible energy. The strings’ gigue-like tune bounces over the brasses and timpani. Tantalizing hints of thematic material from the previous movements flicker by before the first theme reasserts itself with a blast. The strings play a gentler contrasting melody while the winds utter birdcalls, but the horns signal a return to the fiery first theme, this time with the strings playing bits of the wild gigue underneath. The whole movement builds in energy and tension and ends with an unexpected chord and a triumphant shout.

At the premiere, the audience applauded every movement with great enthusiasm, especially the Largo, which they cheered without pause until Dvořák rose from his seat and took a bow. A critic writing for the *New York Evening Post* spoke for most when he wrote, “Anyone who heard it could not deny that it is the greatest symphonic work ever composed in this country ... A masterwork has been added to the symphonic literature.”

© Elizabeth Schwartz

Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR’s “Performance Today,” (now heard on American Public Media.)

NOTE: These program notes are for Santa Rosa Symphony patrons and other interested readers. Any other use is forbidden without specific permission from the author, who may be contacted at classicalmusicprogramnotes.com