

BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

**BSO SESSIONS**

Marin Alsop, Music Director, Harvey M. and Lyn P. Meyerhoff Chair  
Peter T. Kjome, President and CEO



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# BSO SESSIONS

SEASON 1, EPISODE 4: **GRIT**

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**Nicholas Hersh**, conductor  
**Jonathan Rush**, conductor

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**NIELSEN**

**Suite for String Orchestra, op. 1**

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

**MICHAEL ABELS**

***Delights and Dances***

Jonathan Rush, conductor

**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**

**Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis**

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

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# CARL NIELSEN

## Suite for String Orchestra, op. 1

“It is no enviable fate to be an artist.” – Nielsen

### ABOUT THE COMPOSER

*Born 1865 in Sortelung, Denmark; died 1931 in Copenhagen, Denmark*

- Nielsen was born the seventh of 12 children to a poor family on a small island in Denmark.
- His father, a house painter, played music for local ceremonies, and his mother sang folk songs at home.
- Nielsen started his musical studies when he was given a violin by his mother at age six and wrote his first composition around age eight.
- Nielsen went on to learn several instruments, eventually becoming a bugler and alto trombonist for the army band, while also playing violin for barn dances on the side.
- He dedicated himself to his violin studies and enrolled at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. He later won a position with the Royal Danish Orchestra where he also became the orchestra’s assistant conductor.
- While traveling for several months around Europe, Nielsen met Anne Marie Brodersen, a renowned artist and sculptor. The two married but maintained a tumultuous relationship. Anne Marie left home for long periods of time for work, and Nielsen was unfaithful and even fathered a child with another woman. The two went through long periods of separation but remained married for the remainder of Nielsen’s life.
- While he experienced moderate fame as a composer in his lifetime, particularly in Scandinavia, Nielsen gained wider international fame in 1962 after Leonard Bernstein recorded his Fifth Symphony with the New York Philharmonic for CBS. He is remembered as one of his country’s most prominent composers.

### FUN FACT

Nielsen was pictured on Danish currency for a period of time.

### ABOUT THE PIECE

- One of Nielsen’s most widely performed works, Suite for String Orchestra was written in 1888. He was just 22, and it was still early in his career—the program notes that accompanied the premiere of the work referred to the composer as “Carl Nielsen, whom nobody knows.”
- Nielsen played violin in the ensemble that premiered the work, and the performance was so positively received that the second movement was played again as an encore.
- The piece was originally written for string quartet, but Nielsen’s teacher recommended he score the dense work for a larger ensemble. The piece is made up of three movements: Præludium (prelude), a short and hauntingly beautiful opening; Intermezzo, a delightful waltz-like movement; and the Finale, a lush and romantic finish to the work.

### THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

## 1888

⋮

#### MUSIC

Gustav Mahler’s  
Symphony No. 1

⋮

#### ART

Vincent van Gogh cuts  
off part of his left ear

⋮

#### LITERATURE

Friedrich Nietzsche’s  
*Twilight of the Idols*

⋮

#### SCIENCE

National Geographic  
Society is founded

⋮

#### HISTORY

Jack the Ripper  
murders

# MICHAEL ABELS

## *Delights and Dances*

“The best music feels like you’re not writing it; it feels like you’re just transcribing it. It feels like it’s already there, and you’re just the person who has been chosen to write it down.” – Abels

### ABOUT THE COMPOSER

*Born 1962 in Phoenix, AZ*

- Though born in Arizona, Abels grew up on a small farm in South Dakota.
- Abels started taking piano lessons at age four and had his first orchestral work performed when he was only 13.
- Abels studied music at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music in LA and studied West African music at the California Institute of the Arts.
- In 2017, the director Jordan Peele came across Abels’ music on YouTube and asked him to write the score for the Oscar-winning film *Get Out*, his first time writing a film score. Abels has since composed music for the movies *Us*, *Bad Education*, *See You Yesterday*, and more.
- Abels’ works have been performed by the Chicago Symphony, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Atlanta Symphony orchestras. He has received grants and commissions from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Sphinx Organization, and the LA Opera.
- Abels is the co-founder of the Composers Diversity Collective, an advocacy group to increase visibility of composers of color in media, and has served as the Director of Music at the New Roads School.

### FUN FACT

In addition to his life as a musician, Abels is an amateur triathlete.

### ABOUT THE PIECE

- *Delights and Dances*, commissioned by the Sphinx Organization in honor of the tenth anniversary of their founding, was premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2007.
- The work was composed for the Harlem Quartet, an ensemble of first-place laureates of the Sphinx Competition for outstanding young Black and Latinx string players.
- This vibrant work draws from a variety of musical styles and was described in a *New York Times* review as “an energetic arrangement...which incorporates jazz, blues, bluegrass, and Latin dance elements.”

### THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

## 2007

⋮

#### MUSIC

Rihanna’s “Umbrella”

⋮

#### FILM

Disney’s *Ratatouille*

⋮

#### TECHNOLOGY

The iPhone is introduced

⋮

#### LITERATURE

Junot Díaz’s  
*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

⋮

#### HISTORY

The UN General Assembly adopts the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

# RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

## Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

“It never seems to occur to people that a man might just want to write a piece of music.” – Vaughan Williams

### ABOUT THE COMPOSER

*Born 1872 in Gloucestershire, U.K.; died 1958 in London, U.K.*

- Ralph Vaughan Williams began his musical studies taking piano lessons from his aunt. He wrote his first composition at age five.
- Vaughan Williams attended the Royal College of Music despite some hesitation from his parents, who were apprehensive about him pursuing a career in music. He took a break from studying at the conservatory to receive a university education at the University of Cambridge.
- Upon his return to the Royal College of Music, he became friends with Gustav Holst, who would remain one of his closest lifelong friends.
- Vaughan Williams was committed to music-making for the whole community. He co-founded an amateur music festival and was involved in adult education.
- He developed an interest in folk songs and would travel the English countryside to notate and publish traditional songs. He incorporated some of these melodies into his works, and they greatly influenced his compositional style.
- After trying and failing to get lessons from Edward Elgar, Vaughan Williams was introduced to Maurice Ravel. Vaughan Williams moved to Paris to take lessons from Ravel, who was notoriously demanding. Ravel once said of Vaughan Williams: “my only pupil who does not write my music.”
- During WWI, Vaughan Williams volunteered for service despite being in his 40s. He drove an ambulance wagon in France and Greece and lost many friends in the war. While in service, the incessant noise of guns damaged his hearing, leading to deafness later in life.
- Vaughan Williams is recognized as one of the most prominent English composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During his lifetime he was awarded honorary doctorates from Oxford and Yale, composed music for Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation, and was offered knighthood (which he refused).

### FUN FACT

Charles Darwin was Ralph Vaughan William’s great-uncle.

### ABOUT THE PIECE

- Written in 1910, the work was premiered at the prestigious Three Choirs Festival with Vaughan Williams conducting.
- The work is based on a theme by Thomas Tallis, a composer during the English Renaissance in the 1500s and an important figure in English music history.
- The work was written for three distinctly sized string ensembles: a full-sized orchestra, a single desk from each section, and a string quartet. Each plays together with the intention of mimicking the sound of an organ.
- The work was immediately a major success and remains one of Vaughan William’s most famous pieces.

### THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

## 1910



#### MUSIC

Igor Stravinsky’s  
*The Firebird*



#### TECHNOLOGY

Modern neon light is  
first demonstrated



#### ART

Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s  
“Self Portrait”



#### OTHER

Boy Scouts of America  
is formed



#### HISTORY

The Mexican  
Revolution begins