NORTH CAROLINA **SYMPHONY**

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 1

SUN, NOV 22, 2026 | 3PM
MEMORIAL HALL, CHAPEL HILL

North Carolina Symphony
Carlos Miguel Prieto, *conductor*
Alessio Bax, *piano*

PROGRAM

Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964)
Tzam

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in C, Op. 15
I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo: Allegro
Alessio Bax, *piano*

Intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54
I. Largo
II. Allegro
III. Presto

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About the Artists



Carlos Miguel Prieto, *Music Director*

The Maxine and Benjamin Swalin Chair

Mexican conductor and Grammy-winner Carlos Miguel Prieto started his tenure as Music Director of the North Carolina Symphony at the beginning of the 2023/24 season. Since 2008, he has been the music director of Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería (OSM), guiding the ensemble to a Latin Grammy award and residencies at Bravo! Vail in 2024 and 2025. In 2023, he received the Fine Arts Medal—Mexico's highest honor for a musician. He served as Music Director of the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra from 2006 to 2023, helping lead the cultural renewal of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and earning a Grammy in 2024. From 2007 to 2022, he was Music Director of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de México.

Prieto is in demand as a guest conductor for major orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Dallas, and Toronto; The Cleveland Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra; and the San Francisco, Houston, and New World symphonies. In 2025, he led concerts with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London and Switzerland and conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. He also served as Semifinal and Final Round Conductor for the 2025 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. In March 2026, Prieto conducted Britten's *War Requiem* with the Radio Television Orchestra Madrid (RTVE) in a special concert for victims of terrorism attended by the Spanish Royal Family; he also returned to the National Orchestra of Spain this past season.

Since 2002, Prieto has conducted the Orchestra of the Americas, serving as Principal Conductor until 2011, when he was appointed Music Director. He has also worked extensively with young musicians at The Juilliard School, the Colburn School, the Curtis Institute, and elsewhere. In 2025 he led the Sinfónica Azteca, Mexico's acclaimed youth orchestra, on a tour of Mexico. He continues to mentor emerging talent through the Carlos Miguel Prieto Conducting Fellowship at OAcademy, an online conservatory bringing together teachers and students from around the world. He has also worked with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and conducted both the National Youth Orchestra USA and NYO2 at Carnegie Hall.

Prieto has conducted over 100 world premieres of works by Mexican and American composers, many commissioned by him. He has an extensive discography and was recognized by *Musical America* as Conductor of the Year in 2019. He is a graduate of Princeton and Harvard universities.



Alessio Bax, *piano*

A frequent guest soloist, Alessio Bax most recently performed with the North Carolina Symphony in 2025.

Alessio Bax has performed on five continents as a recitalist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist, including appearances with nearly 200 orchestras. For ten years, he has been the Artistic Director of the Incontri in Terra di Siena Festival, a Summer Music Festival in the Val d'Orcia region of Tuscany, and he is the founding and current Artistic Director of the London Festival of Chamber Music at Smith Square Hall in London.

Since his First Prize wins at both the 2000 Leeds International Piano Competition and the 1997 Hamamatsu International Piano Competition, Bax has appeared with nearly 200 orchestras, including the New York, London, Royal, and St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestras, the Boston, Baltimore, Dallas, Cincinnati, Seattle, Sydney, BBC Scottish, and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras, The Cleveland Orchestra, and the Tokyo and NHK Symphony in Japan. He appears regularly in festivals such as Seattle, Bravo Vail, Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Salon-de-Provence, Le Pont in Japan, Great Lakes, Verbier, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, Aspen and Tanglewood. In 2009, he was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and four years later he received both the Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award and the Lincoln Center Award for Emerging Artists.

Bax's most recent album releases are the complete Beethoven Cello Sonatas with Paul Watkins, a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice; *Forgotten Dances*, a solo recital; and *Debussy & Ravel for Two*, with Lucille Chung. His discography also includes *Italian Inspirations*; Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* and "Moonlight" Sonatas (also a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice); Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto; *Bax & Chung*, a duo disc with Lucille Chung; *Alessio Bax plays Mozart*, recorded with London's Southbank Sinfonia; and *Alessio Bax: Scriabin & Mussorgsky* (named "Recording of the Month … and quite possibly … of the year" by MusicWeb International). He performed Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata for Daniel Barenboim in the PBS-TV documentary *Barenboim on Beethoven: Masterclass*, available on DVD.

About the Music

Tzam [2021]

GABRIELA ORTIZ (B. 1964)

During her childhood in Mexico, Gabriela Ortiz was surrounded by the folk music of her homeland, with both of her parents participating in a groundbreaking amateur ensemble that worked to preserve Latin American folk traditions. Her education took her from Mexico City to Paris and London. Commissions from around the globe for her orchestral works, chamber music, dance scores and operas have made Ortiz not just a defining voice of Mexico, but a towering figure in the broader world of new music, as demonstrated by her back-to-back Grammy awards for Best Classical Composition in 2025 and 2026.

Ortiz composed *Tzam* for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 2021, at a time when she was grieving the loss of her father and two dear friends, including her former composition teacher and mentor Mario Lavista, to whose memory the score is dedicated. "Somehow, as I began to compose *Tzam*," Ortiz wrote in a program note, "I found it impossible to defer what I felt was a pressing need to express my gratitude toward all of them through music."

"'Tzam' means 'dialogue' in Ayapaneco," she explained, "one of more than 60 indigenous languages found in Mexico today although, with fewer than ten speakers, it is lamentably on the verge of extinction. I chose TZAM as a title not only for its attractive sound, but also because implicit in its meaning is our ability to converse and dialogue, not only with all that surrounds us and nourishes us as human beings within this secret, timeless space, but also and above all with what it means to be a human being on this Earth."

Central to her concept of dialogue, Ortiz specified the placement of the brass instruments in two groups, "so that a stereophonic exchange of ideas could arise among them," starting with a fanfare. "I then tried to emulate the idea of representing an ocean of sounds—its rising and ebbing tides," she wrote, "acting time and again as a colorful harmonic and instrumental surprise." In the central portion of the work, a "surprising and contrasting adagio for strings" represents "a genuine attempt to dialogue" with the loved ones she lost.

Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, trumpet in D, three trumpets in C, two trombones, bass trombone, timpani, percussion, strings

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C, Op. 15 [1795, rev. 1800]

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1795-1827)

When Beethoven left his hometown of Bonn for Vienna at the age of 21, his patron, Count Ferdinand von Waldstein, sent him with this blessing: "May you receive Mozart's spirit from the hands of Haydn." Mozart had died a year earlier, but his spirit certainly still pervaded Vienna, especially for Beethoven, who entered the freelance scene as a keyboard virtuoso, just as Mozart had a decade earlier. Beethoven did get a chance to take some lessons from Haydn (who was back in Vienna briefly between his visits to London), and in his early symphonies Beethoven used Haydn as his clear model. For piano concertos, the line of inspiration went straight to Mozart, whose 27 examples set the standard for generations to come.

Despite its numbering, the Piano Concerto in C was not Beethoven's first. After an early attempt failed to reach fruition, his first real concerto was the one in B-flat (now known as No. 2), initiated in 1788 and completed in 1795. This concerto in C followed later that year, and Beethoven introduced it in December at a concert in Vienna presented by Haydn. It was probably this same concerto, in its revised version, that appeared on Beethoven's breakout concert in 1800 at the Burgtheater, the same venue where Mozart made history with his piano concertos in the 1780s.

One sign of Beethoven's distinctive voice is the first movement's embrace of a unifying motive, recognizable by its rhythmic pattern of long-short-short-long. This approach points the way toward some of Beethoven's most memorable orchestral constructions, like the Fifth Symphony's pervasive short-short-short-long motive.

The central *Largo* opens with a variant of that same long-short-short-long rhythm in the accompaniment, establishing continuity across the movements—another Beethoven hallmark. The orchestration excludes the brighter tones of flute, oboes, trumpets, and timpani, and instead features prominent clarinet lines to play off the sweet, melodious phrases from the piano.

The tempo marking of *Allegro scherzando* indicates a joking, playful aspect to the fast finale. The rondo structure incorporates colorful antics (including mischievous detours to minor-key harmonies) between returns of the perky main theme.

Solo piano; flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54 [1939]

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

After enrolling at the Petrograd Conservatory at the age of 13, Dmitri Shostakovich excelled as a piano and composition student while also working a side job as an accompanist for silent films. He completed his education at 19 with a masterful First Symphony as his graduation piece, and soon performances at home and abroad positioned the young Shostakovich as the defining musician of the young Soviet Union.

Then everything changed when Joseph Stalin walked out of Shostakovich's esoteric new opera in 1936, and an official party newspaper delivered a frightening critique. The 30-year-old star became a pariah, and he proceeded with understandable caution in that time when Stalin's enemies were disappearing by the thousands. After he completed his Fifth Symphony the next year, no established conductor would even take it on, but a young assistant conductor at the Leningrad Philharmonic agreed to lead the premiere that turned out to be a watershed moment in Shostakovich's career, capped by a 30-minute ovation.

Two years later, when the same conductor and orchestra took up Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony, the expectations were enormous. Shostakovich had suggested at one point that it might be a grand tribute to Lenin, complete with chorus and soloists, but instead the new symphony emerged as a purely instrumental work, and one with a relatively subdued tone that, according to Shostakovich, was meant to convey "the moods of spring, joy, youth."

Considering the climate of paranoia and doublespeak that suffused Soviet life under Stalin, it's hard to know if we can take Shostakovich at his word. Is it truly an expression of "spring, joy [and] youth" to begin a symphony with a 20-minute rumination in a glacial *Largo* tempo? This extended slow movement constitutes about two-thirds of the symphony's unusual structure.

The *scherzo* follows in an exuberant triplet pulse, filled with dizzying woodwind solos (including a starring role for the bright and chipper E-flat clarinet) and wild blasts that speak to Shostakovich's knack for cinematic showmanship. The finale maintains maximal forward momentum with a galloping figure that recalls the manic orchestral dashes of Haydn, Mozart and Rossini, especially the latter's *William Tell* Overture. There is an explosive hilarity to this music that teeters on the edge of menacing —a fine line that Shostakovich toed brilliantly in the self-protective, multilayered style he mastered for the sake of his own survival.

Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta, strings

Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story* [1961]

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Leonard Bernstein was just 25 and fresh off his much-heralded debut conducting the New York Philharmonic when his new ballet, *Fancy Free*, opened at the Metropolitan Opera House, with choreography by Jerome Robbins. The compelling scenario of three Navy sailors on shore leave in New York City had Broadway producers seeing dollar signs, and with help from his lyricist friends Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Bernstein expanded it into *On the Town*, his first hit musical. From then on, his identity as a composer would continually straddle the loftiness of classical music and the populist appeal of music theater.

It was his old collaborator Jerome Robbins who hatched the idea that would become Bernstein's most iconic musical. At first Robbins suggested adapting Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to take place on Manhattan's Lower East Side, and the playwright Arthur Laurents drafted a scenario he called *East Side Story*. Later the immigrants were recast as Puerto Ricans, and the setting shifted to the rough, rundown streets of San Juan Hill west of Central Park (an entire neighborhood that would soon be razed, ironically, to make way for Lincoln Center, the arts complex where Bernstein later directed the New York Philharmonic). Bernstein was disappointed when his old pals Comden and Green weren't able to join the creative team, but the silver lining was that it led him to an aspiring young songwriter by the name of Stephen Sondheim who signed on to help with the lyrics.

West Side Story was a hit when it opened on Broadway in 1957, and it made history when the 1961 feature film version won Best Picture and nine other Oscars at the Academy Awards, while its soundtrack topped the *Billboard* charts for an astonishing 54 weeks. Bernstein also worked with assistants in 1961 to make an orchestral adaptation that he titled Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*.

Piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta, piano, strings

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Assistant Conductor
The Lucy Moore Ruffin Chair

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The Annabelle Lundy Fetterman Chair

Kai Bryngelson, Associate Concertmaster
The Assad Meymandi and Family Chair

Anna Black, Assistant Concertmaster
The Anne Heartt Gregory Chair

Karen Strittmatter Galvin, Assistant Concertmaster

Emily Rist Glover
The Jessie Wyatt Ethridge Chair

Paul Goldsberry
The Richard and Joy Cook Chair

Seula Lee
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Tiffany Kang, Associate Principal
The Blanche Martin Shaw Chair

David Kilbride, Assistant Principal

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Nicholas Garcia-Hettinger
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Janet Gayer Hall

Chris Jusell

Oskar Ozolinch

Subin Shin

Jeanine Wynton

Viola

Samuel Gold, Principal
The Florence Spinks and Charles Jacob Cate and Alma Yondorf and Sylvan Hirschberg Chair

Kurt Tseng, Associate Principal
The Betty Ellen Madry Chair

Brian Sherwood, Assistant Principal

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Alexandra Stokes*

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Wenmin Zhang, Assistant Principal,
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Kimberly Van Pelt,
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The Paul R. Villard and Gabriel Wolf Chair

Gabriel Mairson
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Bass Trombone
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Anonymously Endowed

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**Acting position*
***Leave of absence*

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The North Carolina Symphony Foundation gratefully acknowledges the generous gift of the Lupot violin from Arnold and Zena† Lerman.
†deceased

NORTH CAROLINA
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