

# Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's opening weekend set to sparkle

BY DAVID GORDON DUKE, SPECIAL TO THE SUN    SEPTEMBER 16, 2015

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Juno award-winning composer Vivian Fung's new work, Biennale Snapshots, is a

joint commission from the VSO and the Vancouver Biennale. She performs Sept. 26 & 28 at the Orpheum in Vancouver.

**Photograph by:** Photo courtesy of VivianFung.ca

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consider the start-up event of the new classical music season to be the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's opening weekend, which arrives right at the end of September this year. Invariably, the VSO goes out of its way to make the event memorable.

Months ago, while maestro Bramwell Tovey and I talked about his stepping down as music director at the end of the 2017/18 season, we touched on the complications of a steady stream of guest conductors test-driving the orchestra. Tovey candidly discussed the programming challenges, ending with a confession: "I want to keep some of the good stuff for myself."

Well, he certainly has done so this fall, starting off with a festive, sparkling opening program. Right from the downbeat, the show bears the Tovey stamp: Something Mainstream (Beethoven's symphonic-weight Violin Concerto with soloist Miriam Fried); Something Flashy (Berlioz's *Le corsaire* overture); Something Sweet (music from Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*): and Something Very New, in the form of a commissioned work by Vivian Fung.

Fung was born in Edmonton in 1975, and one her first teachers was pioneer Alberta composer Violet Archer, a diminutive powerhouse of enthusiasm and an unabashed disciple of the great Paul Hindemith. Fung then found her way to New York's Juilliard School, where she earned her doctorate and stayed on to teach for the better part of a decade. These days she's based in San Francisco.

Fung is a musical explorer; she visited Bali, where she played with/wrote for a gamelan ensemble; her 2011 Yunnan Folk Songs led to a study trip

to Southwest China the following year. This breadth of musical enthusiasms plays out in her new work, *Biennale Snapshots*, a joint commission from the VSO and the Vancouver Biennale.

We are used to commissions exploring word and music fusions; Fung was charged with envisioning music that relates to visual arts. Her five-movement *Biennale Snapshots* is inspired by pieces of contemporary art from China, Brazil, India and Australia featured in the Biennale exhibition. Fung's music references Sumakshi Singh's meditative *Breath Song*; Konstantin Dimopoulos's *Blue Trees*; the urban grit of OSGEMEOS's *Giants* (the Vancouver landmark painted on concrete silos on Granville Island); Ren Jun's elegant *Water*; and Ai Weiwei's "defiant" *F Grass*.

The VSO's popular composer-in-residence Jocelyn Morlock, who will offer a pre-concert talk about the program, is particularly enthused about the new commission.

"By combining aspects of B.C.'s cultural landscape and diverse musical references (hip-hop to fanfare) with her own inimitable orchestral style, Vivian Fung has synthesized a most substantial work. *Biennale Snapshots* is both international in scope and distinctly Vancouverian in flavour, and we are thrilled to be presenting the world premiere performance on Sept. 26," she said.

### **Beethoven Violin Concerto**

**Sept. 26 & 28, 8 p.m., Orpheum Theatre**

**Tickets and info: [vancouverSymphony.ca](http://vancouverSymphony.ca)**

Other VSO highlights:

There's much more to Bramwell Tovey's fantastic fall lineup than the opening pair of concerts. Canadian pianist Anne-Marie McDermott will

play Rachmaninoff's ever-popular Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini on Oct. 24/26. On that program, Tovey premieres a new work on the (in)famous Paganini theme by Poul Ruders, whose very dark, very impressive Nightshade was one of the most talked about pieces from the VSO's New Music Festival.

If there is contemporary music, there are also modernist classics. Performances of a spectacular orchestral showpiece, Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra, a magical fusion of folk and folk-like melodies and a lasting homage to the great structures of symphonic music, take place Nov. 14-16. Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms is on tap Nov. 21/23 in tandem with Fauré's popular Requiem. Tovey is a spectacular Stravinsky interpreter and the performance of his neoclassical masterpiece with the Phoenix Chamber Choir and UBC's University Singers promises to be a season highlight.

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