



## NEWS RELEASE

### Wichita Symphony Orchestra

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## THE WICHITA SYMPHONY CELEBRATES THEMES OF NATURE AND FRIENDSHIP

### The Symphony Performs Music by Jennifer Higdon, Jessie Montgomery, and Edward Elgar

(Wichita, KS) The Wichita Symphony presents its next Masterworks concert on Sunday afternoon, March 26, at 3 PM in the Century II Concert Hall in downtown Wichita. Rei (pronounced "Ray") Hotoda, Music Director of the Fresno Philharmonic in California, guest conducts the Wichita Symphony, and pianist Awadagin (pronounced ah-wah-dah-jin) Pratt is the soloist.

The music features two contemporary women composers, *All Things Majestic* by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon and *Rounds* for Piano and String Orchestra by Jessie Montgomery. The concert's second half is Edward Elgar's noble and majestic *Enigma Variations*.

Tickets starting at \$25 are available at the Symphony's website, [www.wichitasymphony.org](http://www.wichitasymphony.org), by calling the Symphony's Box Office at (316) 267-7658, or to walk-ins at the Symphony's second-floor office in the Century II Concert Hall between the hours of 10 AM and 4 PM, Monday through Friday. Student tickets are \$10.

*All Things Majestic* was commissioned from Jennifer Higdon by the Grand Teton Music Festival to celebrate the Festival's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and premiered during the Festival's summer season in 2011. The four movements evoke majestic images of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, with titles of 1) Teton Range, 2) String Lake, 3) Snake River, and 4) Cathedrals. While specifically referencing Grand Teton National Park, the composer writes that the music is a tribute to the grandeur and majesty of all national parks.

Jessie Montgomery's *Rounds for Piano and String Orchestra* was composed for Awadagin Pratt and premiered one year ago by Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra in South Carolina. 41-year-old Montgomery is one of the most frequently performed living composers today. *Rounds* is her first work for piano and was inspired by T.S. Eliot's epic poem *Four Quartets* and by the existence of fractals in nature and mathematics. [A fractal is a never-ending pattern created by repeating a simple process in an ongoing feedback loop.]

Everyone who has ever been to school graduations knows Edward Elgar's ubiquitous *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1*. Elgar's second most familiar work is the *Enigma Variations* that concludes this Wichita Symphony concert. The set of fourteen variations composed in 1899 is a musical portrait gallery of Elgar's closest friends, each characterized by music reflective of their personalities, sometimes gentle, boisterous, or noble. While these individuals remain forgotten by modern-day listeners, the music captures personalities and the essence of friendships held in common by everyone.

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Among his generation of concert artists, pianist **Awadagin Pratt** is acclaimed for his musical insight and intensely involving performances in recitals and with symphony orchestras.

Born in Pittsburgh, Awadagin Pratt began studying piano at the age of six. Three years later, having moved to Normal, Illinois, with his family, he also began studying violin. Entering the University of Illinois at 16, he studied piano, violin, and conducting. Pratt subsequently enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in three performance areas – piano, violin, and conducting. In recognition of this achievement and for his work in classical music, Mr. Pratt received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Johns Hopkins and an honorary doctorate from Illinois Wesleyan University after delivering the commencement address in 2012.

In 1992 Mr. Pratt won the Naumburg International Piano Competition and was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant two years later. Since then, he has played numerous recitals throughout the US, including performances at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, and the NJ Performing Arts Center. His many orchestral performances include appearances with the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, and the Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Baltimore, St. Louis, National, Detroit, and New Jersey symphonies, among many others. Summer festival engagements include appearances at Ravinia, Blossom, Wolftrap, Caramoor, Aspen, and the Hollywood Bowl. Mr. Pratt has toured Japan four times and performed in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Israel, Columbia, and South Africa.

Also an experienced conductor, Mr. Pratt has conducted programs with the Toledo, New Mexico, Vancouver (WA), Winston-Salem, Santa Fe, and Prince George County symphonies, the Northwest Sinfonietta, the Concertante di Chicago, and several orchestras in Japan.

A great favorite on college and university performing arts series and a strong advocate of music education, Awadagin Pratt participates in numerous residency and outreach activities wherever he appears. These activities include master classes, children's recitals, play/talk demonstrations, and question/answer sessions for students of all ages.

Mr. Pratt's recordings for Angel/EMI include *A Long Way From Normal*, an all-Beethoven Sonata CD, *Live From South Africa*, *Transformations*, and an all-Bach disc with the St. Lawrence String Quartet. His most recent recordings are the Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano with Zuill Bailey for Telarc and a recording of the music of Judith Lang Zaimont with the Harlem Quartet for Navona Records.

Mr. Pratt is a Professor of Piano at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. He also served as the Artistic Director of the World Piano Competition in Cincinnati and is currently the Artistic Director of the Art of the Piano Festival at CCM.

For more information about Awadagin Pratt, please visit his website at <http://awadagin.com/>.

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Conductor **Rei Hotoda** has been hailed as an inexhaustible dynamo with a deep commitment to reimagining the 21st-century concert experience. Her vision can be seen through her thought-provoking programming, passionate allyship with marginalized artists, advocacy for arts education, and unwavering commitment to presenting many of today's leading American composers.

Rei has appeared as a guest conductor with several prestigious orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and the symphony orchestras of Toronto, Winnipeg, St. Louis, Detroit, Hawaii, and Utah, as well as the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, among others. Her interpretations of epic centerpieces of the classical canon, such as Shostakovich's Symphony No. 8 and Britten's War Requiem, make her one of the most sought-after conductors in the industry. She is a tireless advocate for the music of our time and most recently conducted premieres by Derek Bermel, Juan Pablo Contreras, Kevin Day, Dinuk Wijeratne, John Wineglass, and Cynthia Lee Wong.

As a champion of today's living composers and an artist dedicated to amplifying marginalized voices, Rei's innovative programming and interdisciplinary collaborations continue to position her as a leader in the industry. Across nearly every concert in 22/23, Rei has programmed works by black, indigenous, Hispanic, and women composers, including Grażyna Bacewicz, Juan Pablo Contreras, Gabriela Lena Frank, Damien Geter, Adolphus Hailstork, Jennifer Higdon, Hannah Kendall, Arturo Márquez, Jessie Montgomery, Paola Prestini, Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

Her success as the Music Director of the Fresno Philharmonic since 2017 has extended her tenure through the 2025 season. She has worked tirelessly to build first-time and unique connections with the Fresno community to reach different audiences with a new music concert series, Proxima, and special concerts at Bitwise South Stadium. She has reimagined the pre- and post-concert experience by creating the ever-popular Green Room and Stay Tuned series. Her programming continues to push through the preconceived notions of the classical concert-going experience. Through her tireless efforts, she has successfully broken down the barriers between artist and listener and repositioned the Fresno Philharmonic as a leader in its community.

Rei is also an active and critically-acclaimed keyboardist and embraces her time conducting from the piano and harpsichord. Among her recent highlights was leading the Fresno Philharmonic from the piano in Beethoven's monumental Triple Concerto as part of the orchestra's Beethoven@250 and from the harpsichord in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 as part of their Digital Masterworks series. Last season she conducted both the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the Fresno Philharmonic from the keyboard in Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos in E-flat major.

As a recording artist, Rei's credits are wide-ranging and feature her as a conductor and piano soloist. She recorded the music of Nicole Lizée with members of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra on an album released in 2008 on the Centrediscs label entitled *This Will Not be Televised*. Also, in 2008, *Apparitions*, her first recording as a solo pianist, was released by Signpost Records and featured works by Noriko Hisada, Vincent Ho, and Toru Takemitsu. *Symphony Sessions* was released in 2007 (Signpost Records) and featured Rei conducting the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in works by Juno award winner Steve Bell.

Rei is the proud recipient of several prestigious awards, including the 2006 Taki-Alsop Conducting Fellowship, created by Marin Alsop to mentor women conductors. Additionally, she has received a Peabody Career Development Grant, the Women's Philharmonic Scholarship, and an Illinois Arts Council International Arts Exchange Grant. Her teachers and mentors include Gustav Meier, Marin Alsop, Jaap van Zweden, and Thierry Fischer.

For more information about Rei Hotoda, please visit her website at <https://www.reihotoda.com/>.

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