

*Clarice Presents*

**BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA:  
ALSOP CONDUCTS SCHEHERAZADE**  
Marin Alsop, conductor | Gabriela Montero, piano



Friday, April 18, 2025 • 8PM

DEKELBOUM CONCERT HALL

AT THE CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF  
MARYLAND

*Clarice Presents*

**BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA:  
ALSOP CONDUCTS SCHEHERAZADE**

**Marin Alsop**, *conductor*  
**Gabriela Montero**, *soprano*

**Gabriela Ortiz**  
(b. 1964)

*Antrópolis*

**Gabriela Montero**  
(b. 1970)

Piano Concerto No. 1, "Latin"  
Mambo: Largo–Allegro  
Andante moderato  
Allegro Venezolano  
Gabriela Montero, piano

**INTERMISSION**

**Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**  
(1844–1908)

*Scheherazade*  
Largo e maestoso–Allegro non troppo  
Lento–Allegro molto  
Andantino quasi allegretto  
Allegro molto

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*This BSO performance is made possible in part by the major support of Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown. The BSO's performances at The Clarice, and across the State, are also made possible through the major support of Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker.*

*This performance is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council, The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and the University of Maryland's Arts for All initiative.*



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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Program Notes by Heather O'Donovan

### ***Antrópolis***

In a past life, Gabriela Ortiz might have been a flamenco dancer—or so the composer mused in an interview with NPR Music. A certain rhythmic moxie imbues Ortiz's music with its distinctive sound. The Mexico City native draws liberally from the myriad influences that shaped her city's musical heritage: African rhythms, introduced into the region in the 16th century; indigenous and folk rhythms; and the rhythms of Spanish and broader European musical forebears, including one of Ortiz's favorites, Stravinsky. The resultant alchemy, stunningly adroit and highly danceable, has catapulted Ortiz to international recognition.

In *Antrópolis*, Ortiz pays nostalgic tribute to the storied dance halls of Mexico City. The title, a neologism conjured by Ortiz and Mexican flutist/composer Alejandro Escuer, derives from the Spanish “antro”—a word originally used to refer to Mexico City's clubs of somewhat ill repute, but now commonly repurposed in reference to any bar or nightclub. For Ortiz, antros are cultural spaces that shaped and reflect Mexico City's musical heritage. *Antrópolis*, she writes, “is the sonorous reflection of a city through its ‘antros’” which “form an essential part of our history in this very complex but fascinating Mexico City.”

Rhythms of salsa, cumbia, tumbao and New Wave experimental sounds from Mexico City's erstwhile antros supply the heady heartbeat of *Antrópolis*. After an enigmatic opening solo by the timpani, the brass confidently herald the opening dance: a vast orchestral crescendo underscored by tropical percussion. Another timpani cadenza precedes the next dance, punctuated by yet further interjections from the timpani, before an orchestra-wide vocal swell rallies a feverish finale, complete with elephantine fanfare and trumpet glissandos.

## Piano Concerto No. 1, “Latin”

Venezuela once held the promise of riches. The discovery of oil in the early 1900s transformed the struggling nation’s economic foundation, shifting it from a modest, agriculture-based economy to a burgeoning petrostate. But mismanagement and corruption plunged the nation into economic freefall: a box of cereal cost a month’s salary; street vendors sold sculptures crafted from Venezuelan bills, rendered worthless by hyperinflation; criminal violence soared (2011 saw an average of 53 murders per day); and wrongful incarcerations became rampant under the authoritarian Chavismo government, once hailed as a movement for equality but now synonymous with oppression. Conditions have only worsened under Nicolás Maduro’s regime, which took power after Hugo Chávez’s death in 2013. As of August 2023, more than 7.7 million Venezuelans had fled the country, seeking refuge and a better life abroad.

Simón Bolívar, the revered liberator of much of South America from Spanish rule—and the namesake of Venezuela’s now devalued currency—once declared: “When tyranny becomes law, rebellion is a right.” Indeed, it was against the tumultuous backdrop of Venezuelan collapse in 2011 that Gabriela Montero made her compositional debut with the polemic *Ex Patria*, spurred by the wrongful incarceration of a friend.

In Montero’s first piano concerto—the “Latin” Concerto—composed in 2016, the composer broadens her view to the history and spirit of the wider South American continent in both a celebratory and reflective mood. Describing the work, Montero explained: “It’s a chiaroscuro reflection on who we are as a continent, dark and light. It has all the rhythms, the charm and the sensuality that people love about Latin America—but unfortunately, those characteristics keep the world from actually noticing what’s really going on. So it’s not a political piece, but it’s a statement: Not everything that glitters is gold.”

The opening movement draws upon the energy of the mambo, a fast-paced genre that originated in 1930s–40s Cuba and quickly became a sensation internationally, particularly in dance halls across the United States. Yet even from the piano introduction, eerie dissonances suggest an undercurrent of something darker, a sense of disruption that permeates the remainder of the movement. The central movement, *Andante moderato*, opens with the faintest echo of Chopin, then unfurls into an enigmatic marvel of shimmering beauty. In the closing movement, *Allegro Venezolano*, Montero returns to her homeland, citing the Venezuelan dance the Pajarillo; even here, however, the joy of the dance is interrupted by, as Montero explains, “the dark arts of black magic, a symbolic reminder of the malevolent forces that, too often, hold our continent hostage to tyranny in its multiple guises.”

## ***Scheherazade***

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was one of the great masters of his craft, respected in his time and remembered now for his genius. A virtuosic orchestrator with a roster of pupils who themselves became masters—Alexander Glazunov, Anatoly Lyadov, Igor Stravinsky and Ottorino Respighi—he was a technician and pedagogue without equal...despite having had no formal training himself!

Let us paint a scene: The year is 1871 and Rimsky Korsakov has been offered a professorship at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The composer is well-known, the author of celebrated orchestral works like *Sadko* and *Antar*. Frankly, though, his soon-to-be students likely know more of formal music theory than he. Rimsky-Korsakov realizes that he has been hasty: “Had I possessed a fraction more of knowledge than I actually did,” he would later write, “it would have been obvious to me that I could not and should not accept the proffered appointment [but] I was young and self-confident [and] accepted without blinking.” Determined to meet the demands of his new role nonetheless, he embarks on an intense program of self-study, working tirelessly to always remain ahead of his pupils, and, miraculously, he succeeds!

Writing later in life, Rimsky-Korsakov reflected on his youthful disdain for formal study and the outcome of his efforts: “I consider myself lucky that I bethought myself in time and forced myself to work. As for [the other members of the Russian Mighty Five] Balakirev, owing to his insufficient technique he writes little; Borodin, with difficulty; Cui, carelessly; and Mussorgsky, sloppily and often incoherently.” By the 1880s, Rimsky-Korsakov returned to orchestral composition with renewed vigor, and this decade gave rise to some of the composer’s most enduring works, including *Scheherazade*.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s symphonic suite *Scheherazade* was inspired by *One Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights), a collection of Eastern folk tales that had long captivated Western audiences. The tales are bound together by the frame narrative of *Scheherazade*. A resourceful storyteller, *Scheherazade* saves her own life from the embittered Sultan Shahryar who, betrayed by his unfaithful wife, resolved to execute his subsequent brides after their wedding night, by weaving a series of enthralling, nightly tales.

In composing the suite, Rimsky-Korsakov aimed to evoke the “fairy-tale wonders” and “[Eastern] character” of *Arabian Nights*, not to depict a definite program. The composer drew inspiration from separate and unconnected episodes from the collection—in order of the suite’s movements, the sea and Sinbad’s ship, the narrative of the Kalender prince, the young Prince and Princess, and the Festival at Baghdad—but employed these “seeming leitmotives” only as musical material for symphonic development. Two themes are central to the score: the Sultan Shahryar’s theme that opens the symphonic suite in brass and woodwinds supported by strings and *Scheherazade*’s sinuous theme, which is heard after the woodwind chords that follow the Sultan’s theme as a violin solo with harp accompaniment. The stern Sultan’s theme may open the score, but it is *Scheherazade*’s knowing voice, via the violin, that ends the suite; it is *Scheherazade*, this brave, cunning, resourceful woman, who thus guides the story to its resolution, closing the storybook until the next reading should commence anew.



## MARIN ALSOP, CONDUCTOR

One of the foremost conductors of our time, **MARIN ALSOP** is a powerful and inspiring voice. The first woman to head major orchestras in the United States, South America, Austria and Great Britain, she is internationally recognized for her innovative approach to programming and audience development, her deep commitment to education and her championing of music's importance in the world.

Alsop is Chief Conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Director & Chief Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony, Principal Guest Conductor of London's Philharmonia Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra and Chief Conductor of the Ravinia Festival, where she leads the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's annual residencies. She is the first Music Director of the University of Maryland's National Orchestral Institute + Festival, Conductor of Honour of Brazil's São Paulo Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Laureate and OrchKids Founder at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, after an outstanding 14-year tenure as its Music Director. Having made history as the first female conductor of the BBC's Last Night of the Proms and the first female and first American to guest conduct it three times, this season she becomes the first U.S.-born woman to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic.

To promote and nurture female conductors' careers, in 2002 she founded the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship. The only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship, she has also been honored with the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award. The Conductor, a documentary about her life, was nominated for an Emmy and recognized with a Naples International Film Festival award.





## GABRIELA MONTERO, PIANO

**GABRIELA MONTERO's** visionary interpretations and unique compositional gifts have garnered her critical acclaim and a devoted following on the world stage. Anthony Tommasini remarked in *The New York Times* that “Montero’s playing had everything: crackling rhythmic brio, subtle shadings, steely power...soulful lyricism...unsentimental expressivity.”

Montero’s forthcoming highlights feature performances of her own “Latin Concerto” with the San Francisco Symphony (Marin Alsop), New World Symphony (Stéphane Denève), Vienna and Polish National radio symphonies (Marin Alsop), BBC Scottish and Antwerp symphonies (Elim Chan), Swedish Radio Symphony (Marta Gardolińska) and National Arts Centre Orchestra (Alexander Shelley).

An award-winning and best selling recording artist, her most recent album, released in 2019 on the Orchid Classics label, features her “Latin Concerto” and Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G Major, recorded with the Orchestra of the Americas. Her previous recording on Orchid Classics features Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No. 2 and her first orchestral composition, *Ex Patria*, which won Montero her first Latin Grammy for “Best Classical Album.”

Born in Venezuela, Montero started her piano studies at age four, making her concerto debut at age eight in her hometown of Caracas. This led to a scholarship from the government to study privately in the U.S. and then at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Hamish Milne. Starting September 2024, Montero will be the Jonathan and Linn Epstein Artist in Residence, and piano faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

# 24/25 SEASON

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