

Concert Program for November 6, 2011

Live at Powell Hall
St. Louis Symphony

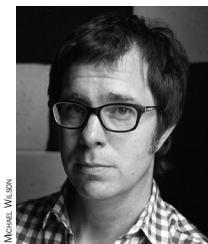
Ben Folds with the St. Louis Symphony

Ben Folds, piano and vocals
Jayce Ogren, conductor

Selections will be announced from the stage.

There will be one 20-minute intermission.

Media support provided by the *Riverfront Times*.



MICHAEL WELSON

Ben Folds

As a solo artist and leader of Ben Folds Five, Folds has sold more than 3 million records over the course of his 17-year recording career. His new recording, *The Best Imitation of Myself: A Retrospective*, includes Fold's demos, iconoclastic 1990s indie rock recordings and live shows with Ben Folds Five, 21st-century solo work and collaborations, topping off with three new Ben Folds Five recordings, the group's first in nearly 12 years. The collection, Folds says, "is my best shot at an honest assessment of where I was in each period of my career."

In autumn 2011, Ben Folds returned to his role as celebrity judge on *The Sing-Off*, the a cappella singing competition series returning for its third season on NBC.



Jayce Ogren

Jayce Ogren is rapidly developing a reputation as one of the finest young conductors to emerge from the United States. In recent seasons he has conducted the Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, New World Symphony, and the Grand Rapids Symphony. Ogren also made his New York debut in two programs with the International Contemporary Ensemble under the auspices of the Miller Theater, resulting in an immediate re-invitation. In addition, he stepped into a last-minute cancellation for James Levine conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra in a challenging program that included the world premiere of Peter Lieberson's song-cycle *Songs of Love and Sorrow* (with Gerald Finley).

This season, Ogren will make his debut throughout Europe and the States with the Copenhagen Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, Napa Valley Symphony, Berkeley Symphony, and following a highly successful debut with the Asturias Symphony he will return to this orchestra for two separate periods (with pianist Joaquín Achúcarro and baritone Gerald Finley). Ogren's critically acclaimed performances with New York City Opera have led to a re-invitation and he will return there to conduct performances of Rufus Wainwright's opera *Prima Donna*.

Orchestrally Speaking: An Interview with Ben Folds

BY TERRY PERKINS



Combining rock musicians with symphony orchestras in live performance may seem like a winning combination. Seemingly incongruous pairings such as Metallica playing with the San Francisco Symphony, Kiss performing with Australia's Melbourne Orchestra, or Deep Purple sharing the stage with the London Symphony have actually taken place and done well at the box office. And everyone involved apparently survived the experience.

But making these very different musical genres work in tandem to create a memorable and artistically successful concert experience can be quite a challenge for both rock and classical artists.

Ben Folds, who makes his debut with the St. Louis Symphony tonight, has been performing with symphony orchestras for the past five years. Although Folds is best known for his recordings with the high-energy alt-rock trio, Ben Folds Five, in the 1990s, and his solo work over the past decade, he actually began playing music in orchestral settings in his hometown of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

"I used to play percussion in orchestras when I was a kid," explains Folds. "The North Carolina School for the Arts was near my house. I really liked the way that percussion fit into classical music. That's what I thought I was going to do—be a percussionist in an orchestra."

But Folds gravitated from playing drums as a session musician in Nashville to playing the bass and eventually the piano. And after spending time in New York, he moved back home and started Ben Folds Five, which released its self-titled debut album in 1995.

Although Folds and the band were playing stripped-down music with piano, bass, and drums, the songs he was writing for the band were actually sounding much different to him—and much more orchestral—in the creative process.

"I always heard my songs in an orchestral context rather than a rock-band context," explains Folds. "There were songs we did for our first album that were recorded as a trio. But I had string parts in my head. I would bring that up to the band and they disciplined me not to do it. It was their thought to keep it simple and just get the point across."

Eventually, Folds decided to perform his music in orchestral settings, making his debut in that format in a concert with the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra in Perth in 2005. It was not Folds' idea, and he was actually against the concept at first.

"A guy in Perth, Australia convinced me that it was a good idea," recalls Folds. "I really didn't think it was a good idea at first, because I'd seen a couple rock bands play with orchestras and thought it was a weird

exercise. It's a situation that has a lot of problems. If you're in the band, drums and guitars just spill over into the orchestra, which is relegated to playing whole notes."

But the concert was a great success, and was released as a DVD, *Live in Perth*, later that year. The experience prompted Folds to continue working with orchestras on a regular basis, and since then he's performed with the Boston Pops and with symphony orchestras in Dallas, Washington, D.C., Colorado, Pittsburgh, and now St. Louis to sold-out audiences and critical acclaim.

"Orchestras have grooved for hundreds of years."

For Folds, performing with orchestras has become more than just an occasional break from his usual concert appearances as a rock musician. He's taken the time to really make his music work in orchestral settings.

"What's exciting to me about this is that we work to arrange my music in a way that makes the orchestra the rock band," says Folds. "Orchestras have grooved for hundreds of years. So why does the orchestra have to sit up there and go 'eeehhh' while the band beats the song up? So it ends up that the orchestra is really taking care of a lot of the percussive elements of the songs."

But pulling all this together takes considerable effort on Folds' part to bridge the gap between rock and classical and make his music work as effectively as possible in orchestral settings.

"I work with about five or six different arrangers on making the songs work," he says. "I could do it myself, but if I did, I would literally not have time to do anything else except that. For the structure of the songs, there's the voice leading them, and then the potential arrangement inside the song can be carried by an orchestra, or it could be carried by a choir. The songs are built so that they can stand up to a lot of different treatments."

But Folds realizes that finding the correct balance for his music in orchestral settings is not always easy. He looks at it as a commitment and project that he is committed to for some time to come.

"When I first started playing with orchestras, I thought of it as a long-term work in progress," explains Folds. "Sometimes the arrangements of the songs don't work after months and months of scoring and then playing them with orchestras. Maybe one out of three don't work. And when I play with orchestras, I will find things almost every night and think, that needs to be changed or we can do it better. But, hearing them with an orchestra, in a funny kind of way, it's like coming back home for those songs."

Terry Perkins has written about music for DownBeat, Jazz Times, the St. Louis Beacon, and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. He also writes for RollingStone.com, oxfordamerican.org, and AllAboutJazz.com.