

## Brahms Third – April 10 – 12, 2026

Be prepared for a special treat: our April Masterworks features renowned and much-adored composer/musician Clarice Assad, in a performance of her own piano suite, *Flow*. This edition of *Prelude*, based on our recent interview with Assad, offers treasured insight into a wonderful person, a remarkable composer, the work she will perform, and her approach to composition.



Clarice Assad and Sergio Assad

Clarice Assad, who has been performing professionally since the age of seven, was born into a family of musicians including her father, guitarist Sergio Assad, her uncle guitarist Odair Assad and her aunt, singer-songwriter Badi Assad. Born in Rio de Janeiro, her work frequently reflects Brazilian culture, world music and jazz. With her father's assistance, Clarice began composing at age six.

A prolific, engaging and popular composer, Assad has written extensively for voice and orchestra as well as multiple different instruments and small ensembles. Today, at age 48, Assad is a Grammy Award-nominated composer, pianist and

vocalist. Described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a “serious triple threat”, Assad is a composer, performer, and band leader, and now adds “educator” to her list of achievements. She is fluent in Portuguese, French and English, and sings in all three languages, as well as Spanish and Italian. Assad came into the national spotlight in the United States in 2004, when her violin concerto, composed for soloist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, was performed at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, under the direction of Maestro Marin Alsop. In the last 20-plus years, Assad's popularity has only increased exponentially. Today, Assad's music is commissioned by countless institutions and performers, including Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Chicago Sinfonietta to name just a few.

The piano concerto we will hear on the April program was originally commissioned by the Albany Symphony, when Assad was their Composer in Residence. David Alan Miller, Music Director of Albany Symphony, asked Assad to compose a work, with specific instructions that she would be the one to perform the piece with the orchestra. Assad is often known for the improvisational quality of her work, but she told us that the piano composition we will hear on this program is intended to be played precisely as written, without improvisation. “It is written to be played not only by me, but by any other pianist.”

The piece, which Assad refers to as a “piano suite,” was specifically commissioned in 2024 to honor the bicentennial of the Erie Canal. The broader community, consisting of towns in upstate New York that are along the path of the Canal, funded multiple art projects to celebrate the occasion. The anniversary celebration acknowledges the groundbreaking importance of the Canal to the region.

Assad’s website explains the significance of the Canal in this way:

***“The Erie Canal, an engineering marvel of the early 19th century, revolutionized transportation and commerce and served as a conduit for the “flow of ideas” that shaped the United States. The concept of the “flow of ideas” refers to the exchange and spread of various social, political, and religious movements along the canal corridor. As people from diverse backgrounds traveled the waterway, they shared their beliefs, customs, and perspectives, fostering a vibrant intellectual and societal change atmosphere.***

***The canal facilitated the spread of social reform movements such as abolitionism and women’s suffrage, as activists could more easily disseminate their messages and garner support. The influx of immigrants brought by the canal further enriched the nation’s***

***cultural tapestry, introducing new languages, traditions, and ideas that helped define the country’s character and history.”***

With that history in mind, Assad utilized themes of “flowing water” and “flowing ideas” and wanted her music to tell the story of how the canal opened the country not merely geographically, but through an unprecedented and rapid flow of ideas. “The Canal,” explained Assad, “moved not just products but people. I thought so much about how the Canal was built, about the people that died building it, and how it suddenly facilitated the flow of social reform.”

In thinking about the impact of the Erie Canal on the country, Assad discussed how it impacted the development of capitalism:

***“People could settle in a new region, produce more than the family needed, and then utilize the Canal to bring those products to new markets. It was also the start of a kind of globalization, bringing products from other regions. For example, for the first time, people in upstate New York could enjoy oysters, a common dish in New York City but unheard of in Troy. The Canal turned the country around; people ‘inside’ of the country could look ‘outward’ towards the ports, so New York City became an even larger port and transportation center.”***



A brief video about the “canal project”, featuring Maestro David Alan Miller, may be viewed here:

**[What Happens When a Historic Waterway Inspires a Modern Symphony?](#)**

It took Assad roughly four months to compose the piece, and she started by first writing the piano part, the inner score, and then the orchestration. The piano part is so interwoven and connected with the orchestra that it could not exist on its own and Assad stressed that it is NOT a piano work with orchestral accompaniment, but a fully integrated piece that requires all of the instrumental voices.

Assad is unbelievably busy, and the life of a composer, she explained, requires a good balance between necessary networking and the time to write:

***“Every time I am approached to write a piece, I want to connect with the people involved. I love networking, meeting new people and becoming more deeply connected to different communities. But then I must balance that with the quiet time needed to write, and the time I want to devote to the family.”***

As every working mother knows, juggling parenthood and work is a delicate balancing act, but even more so for Assad, who must maintain performance-level proficiency on instruments, in addition to her increasingly demanding composition schedule. She credits an excellent partnership with her husband (“Mister Mom”) who makes it possible for her to combine parenthood and a multi-pronged career. Assad’s two daughters, Antonia and Stella, are now 5 and 3, and while Assad wishes she could have the family together all the time, she acknowledges that it is hard for the children to travel with her.

Assad shared that 2025 was a packed and prolific commission year; between January and September of 2025, she composed 14 different works, including four large orchestral works, plus three string quartets and additional chamber works. Off stage, Clarice spent last semester teaching at the University of Maryland. She also works with young people in schools in both the United States and Brazil under her education initiative, *Voxploration*, which helps young students gain confidence to express themselves freely.

**[Clarice Assad | VOXPLOATION](#)** If you are interested, Assad’s website offers links to some of her many teaching videos: **[Clarice Assad | Educational Videos](#)**

With each commission, Assad’s creative process begins with in-depth conversations with the commissioning entity, as well as the performer who will premiere the work.

***“I need to have extensive conversations to understand what their ideas are, because some have very specific concepts, while others suggest more vague concepts such as themes and technique. I work hard to make every commission a true collaboration.”***



Clarice Assad - Voxplorations

Assad is exceptionally proud of a commission she did for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the world-famous Brazilian-based dance company *Grupo Corpo* and notes that she is the first female composer ever to work with the company. The work, titled *Piracema*, evokes indigenous themes, tribal sounds, and the struggle of fish who swim upstream to mate and persevere, a struggle remarkably consistent with modern times, in which each of us often find ourselves battling against the current merely to survive. It was a challenging collaboration, and Assad shared that much of what she wrote initially was rejected. But Assad persisted and now sees the collaboration as one of her most rewarding endeavors. The work had its premiere in 2025 and is now being performed by the company as part of their touring program. More about *Piracema* may be viewed on the company website: [Piracema - Grupo Corpo](#).

Assad loves challenges and is excited by the continuing evolution of music. For the first ten years

Clarice Assad

of her composition life, she wrote almost exclusively for strings, and she observes that composition, as with everything, improves with experience. “The more you do, the better you get,” she laughs. But to write for voice, she left little to chance. She took classes in opera, studying with various composers and librettists:

**“They were very hard on me, but it forced me to learn how to approach different projects and different instruments. The best education comes from doing, making mistakes and accepting constructive criticism.”**

Wise words, Clarice, applicable to many careers. We hope that all of you, like all of us at the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, are looking forward to spending time with Clarice Assad!

## JOIN US!

Please join the HSO on April 10-12, 2026, to enjoy a thrilling performance by guest artist/composer Clarice Assad of her piano concerto, *Flow*, Hector Berlioz’s *King Lear*, and two orchestral works by Johannes Brahms, *Hungarian Dances No. 5* and *Symphony No. 3*, all under the direction of Carolyn Kuan, HSO’s much adored Music Director!

**Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you’re a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to [dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org). We’ll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!**

## Interested in hearing other works by Clarice Assad or samples of her performances? Here are some links to music we think you will enjoy!

Assad's engaging *Suite for Lower Strings*, with themes many may recognize, can be heard through this link on SoundCloud:

[\*\*Suite for Lower Strings / Clarice Assad - Noite "De Bach a Assad" OJA.\*\*](#)

Assad's discussion of *É Gol!*, her interactive piece for audience and orchestra, can be heard here:

[\*\*É Gol! An interactive piece for orchestra, singer and audience members. - YouTube.\*\*](#)

Want to hear Clarice as performer and vocalist? Enjoy this performance with Sergio Assad (on guitar):

[\*\*Sergio & Clarice Assad - House Concert 2021 - YouTube.\*\*](#)

For a taste of the unexpected, listen to Assad's *Brazilian Fanfare Overture*, performed by the 5<sup>th</sup> Wave Collective:

[\*\*5th Wave Collective | Clarice Assad: Brazilian Fanfare Overture \(youtube.com\).\*\*](#)

Enjoy this wonderful recording of Assad's orchestral composition, *Sin Fronteras*, performed by the Chicago Sinfonietta:

[\*\*Sin fronteras - YouTube.\*\*](#)

Enjoy the second movement of Assad's *Scattered*, a Concerto for Scat Singing, Piano and Orchestra:

[\*\*CLARICE ASSAD - SCATTERED: Concerto for Scat Singing, Piano & Orchestra.\*\*](#)

Assad's delightful work *Baião 'n Blues* is performed beautifully by the University of Texas, with Maestro Douglas Kinney Frost:

[\*\*"Baião 'n Blues" - Clarice Assad \(feat. The UT Symphony Orchestra\).\*\*](#)

Enjoy one of Assad's compositions for guitar, performed by Duo Noire:

[\*\*Hocus Pocus: III. Klutzy Witches by Clarice Assad, Duo Noire, guitars.\*\*](#)



## WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Here is HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage!

*King Lear* by Hector Berlioz, is beautifully performed by the Staatskapelle Dresden, conducted by Sir Colin Davis:

[\*\*Berlioz Overtures: King Lear, Op. 4.\*\*](#)

Delight in this performance of *Flow*, featuring composer/pianist Clarice Assad, with the Albany Symphony, under the baton of David Alan Miller:

[\*\*FLOW - Suite For Piano & Orchestra.\*\*](#)

Watching Maestro Gustavo Dudamel conduct *Hungarian Dances No. 5* is pure joy:

[\*\*Gustavo Dudamel - Hungarian Dance No. 5 - Brahms.\*\*](#)

Enjoy a wonderful performance of Brahms' Symphony No. 3 by the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Herbert von Karajan:

[\*\*Brahms Symphony No 3 in F Major, Op 90 Karajan.\*\*](#)



Clarice Assad Albums

