



KIP WINGER

Symphony of the Returning Light
Violin Concerto "In the Language of Flowers"

Peter Otto, Violin

Nashville Symphony • Giancarlo Guerrero



Kip Winger (b. 1961)

Kip Winger is a GRAMMY-nominated composer and multi-platinum recording artist whose genre-spanning career bridges rock, classical, and theatrical music.

After touring early in his career as bassist with Alice Cooper, and later performing with artists including Alan Parsons, Roger Daltrey, Bob Dylan, and the Hollywood Vampires, Winger founded his eponymous band in 1987. The group went on to sell millions of albums worldwide, earn six Billboard Top 40 singles, receive an American Music Awards nomination, and gain widespread critical acclaim for its exceptional musicianship. “Winger’s musical pedigree was practically unmatched in 80’s metal... the band crafted a debut album that combined hard-pop melodies with plenty of proggy, technically dazzling instrumental work” (*Rolling Stone*).

Winger has established himself as a leading voice in contemporary classical composition. He studied with Richard Danielpour, Michael Kurek, and Richard Hermann, and his music has since been performed by leading orchestras including the Nashville Symphony, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, Colorado Symphony, Tucson Symphony Orchestra, and the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra.

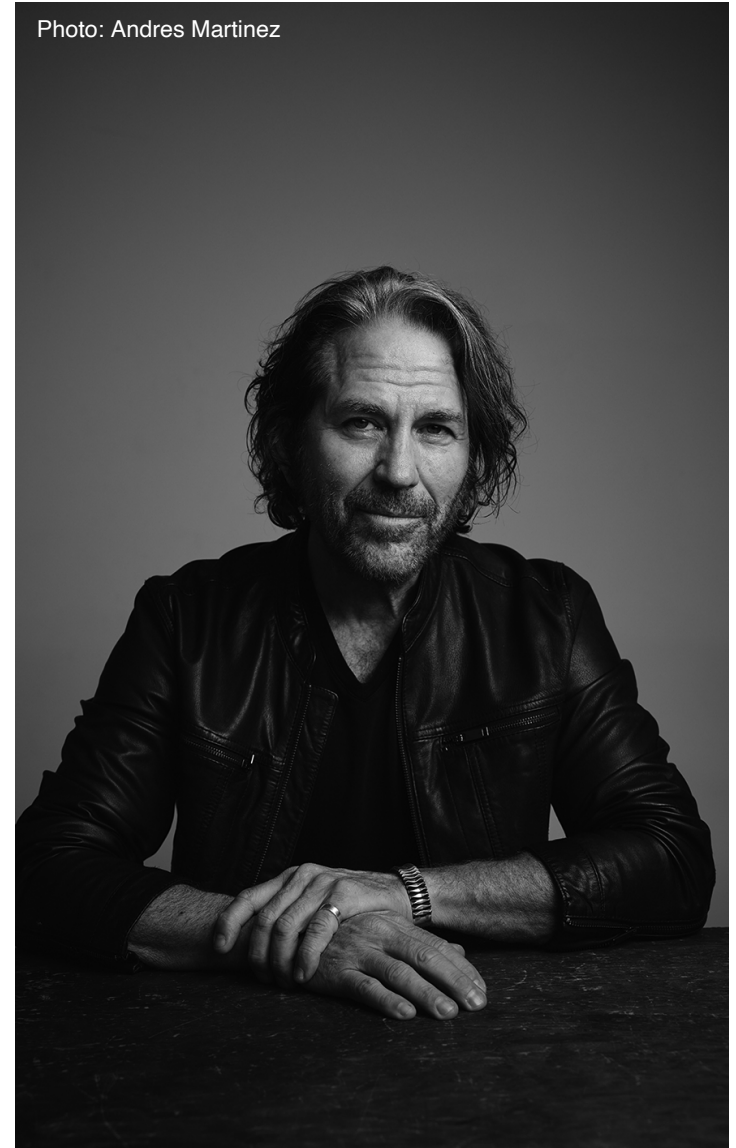
His ballet score *Ghosts* (2010), commissioned by Tony Award-winning choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, became one of the most celebrated contemporary ballet works of the decade, being performed at Lincoln Center (New York), Sadler’s Wells (London), and Théâtre du Châtelet (Paris), and earning a nomination for the Isadora Duncan Dance Award. In 2016, Winger released *Conversations with Nijinsky* with the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, which debuted at Number 1 on Billboard’s Traditional Classical chart and received a GRAMMY nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Tamara Nijinsky, daughter of the legendary dancer, stated: “Kip Winger has captured my father’s heart and soul... reminding us of his genius with his own work.”

Winger has since developed a close partnership with the Nashville Symphony, which premiered his *Symphony of the Returning Light* in 2023 under conductor Giancarlo Guerrero. The orchestra also commissioned his *Violin Concerto “In the Language of Flowers”*.

Winger has also expanded into theater, composing the musical *Get Jack! A Musical Thriller*, which debuted in New York in 2019. The cast recording entered Billboard’s Cast Album chart at Number 7.

Today, Winger continues to perform globally with his band while solidifying his reputation as a major voice in contemporary classical composition. His unique career bridges the worlds of rock and symphonic music, marked by innovation, critical acclaim, and worldwide performances. As *Classic Rock Magazine* has written, he is “one of the most gifted composers and arrangers of the past four decades.” In 2024, Winger received the Diamond Prize, the highest honor in composition at the Erik Satie International Music Competition.

Photo: Andres Martinez



Violin Concerto “In the Language of Flowers” Symphony of the Returning Light

“You’re a classical composer disguised as a metal guy.” That was the verdict of composer Richard Danielpour, from whom Kip Winger began taking private monthly lessons in the early 2010s following a breakthrough commission for San Francisco Ballet (*Ghosts*). Winger originally made his name as a bass guitarist and songwriter in the world of metal and glam rock, collaborating with such figures as Alice Cooper and making the charts with his own band Winger (whose platinum debut album was released in 1988). But Winger, who grew up in a family of jazz musicians, also harbored a love for classical music from a young age. “I studied dance and was in a ballet company when I was a kid. I always wanted to compose but got sidetracked into a rock band,” as he puts it.

Over the past two decades, Winger has been steadily establishing his credentials as a composer of orchestral music in classical forms, earning acclaim for his imagination and expressive authenticity. Nashville has been Winger’s home since just after the start of the century. In 2017, the Nashville Symphony performed his ballet score *Conversations with Nijinsky*, also commissioned by San Francisco Ballet, which was nominated for the Best Contemporary Classical Composition category in that year’s GRAMMY Awards. The enthusiastic reception led then-music director Giancarlo Guerrero to invite the composer to tackle two large-scale genres that are cornerstones of the classical orchestral repertoire: the concerto – specifically, for the violin – and the symphony. The proposal was, Winger recalls, both “inspiring and terrifying.” He explains: “I can write rock music easily – because I’ve done it my whole life. But orchestral music is the music that I hear. It’s what inspires me as an artist.”

Though the violin concerto was envisioned first, Guerrero asked Winger to begin with the symphony. The composer set the concerto aside for a few years to focus on the larger work, a decision he later described as “a blessing from the universe,” explaining, “I learned things while writing the symphony that I don’t think I would have known how to do otherwise.”

In the meantime, Peter Otto joined the Nashville Symphony as concertmaster, transferring from The Cleveland Orchestra to begin his tenure in January 2024. Guerrero had requested a concerto to showcase the orchestra’s concertmaster, and the pairing proved serendipitous. “It was a stroke of luck for me,” says Winger. “Peter Otto’s virtuosity is astounding. Many adjustments were made in the score per his excellent advice.”

Winger is a bassist by trade, yet the violin felt surprisingly familiar. “In my former life as a rock musician, I worked with great guitarists. So once I got over the intimidation, I was very at home writing for violin.” Still, the instrument posed new challenges. “There was a learning curve,” he admits. “The violin is tuned in fifths rather than fourths and a third [used for guitar], so some of the fingerings I was used to didn’t work so well. And it was a very different experience working with a soloist – more of a collaboration than writing solely for the orchestra. I very much enjoyed it, because the music came to life in real time.”

Winger imagined the concerto as a love story that “no words could adequately express.” He found a parallel language in nature: “One morning, while writing, I gazed upon beautiful flowers outside my window and imagined that they harbored a secret narrative.” This poetic impulse led him to research the symbolic meanings of flowers in art and culture. “There’s a long history of using flowers as metaphors,” Winger explains. “In my concerto, I weave four florigraphical meanings into a musical arc.”

Initially, Winger planned a conventional three-movement design, but he came to realize that the composition “did not feel complete” and “needed a legitimate first movement.” He found models in the four-movement *Violin Concerto* (1931) by Igor Stravinsky as well as Dmitry Shostakovich’s *Violin Concerto No. 1* (1947–48). The result is a vivid emotional journey: “The excitement, the dance, the passion, the strength,” as he puts it. But beyond this framework, Winger is especially interested in exploring “the space between the black and white – from the instability and uncertainties to the conviction and faith.”

The first movement, *Forsythia*, opens with a violin cadenza introducing the concerto’s four main themes. An unusual 7/8 time signature reflects Winger’s characteristic polyrhythmic treatment of the rapport between the soloist and orchestra. The fiery, rapid-fire second movement, *Viscaria*, frames a chromatic melody in varying guises, with accompaniment by persistently repeating chords that oscillate between consonance and dissonance.

Winger regards the slow third movement, *Ambrosia*, as containing “my all-time best melody.” He describes this music as “a waltz with a stormy undercurrent of passion, ending with a beautiful melodic ascension into the heavens.” In the finale, *Wisteria*, the soloist’s dazzling agility is brought to the fore, while the orchestra contributes contrasting atmospheres.

Winger’s understanding of classical composition has been shaped not only by his studies with Danielpour but also by friendships with Michael Kurek (author of *The Sound of Beauty*) and the late Christopher Rouse. Among composers of the past, he feels a particular kinship with the Swiss-born, Paris-based Arthur Honegger – especially his *Third Symphony* – as well as Samuel Barber and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

These influences reflect Winger's affinity for deeply personal, emotionally charged symphonic writing, placing his own first symphony, the *Symphony of the Returning Light*, within a tradition of autobiographical fantasies that arguably begins with Hector Berlioz and his unnumbered *Symphonie fantastique* of 1830. Berlioz's wildly original score traces the story of a tormented artist grappling with unrequited love – a manifesto of Romantic ideals fused with programmatic storytelling. Gustav Mahler's *First Symphony*, too, incorporates reflections of the artist as a young man, his early love, struggles, and triumph.

Winger describes this first symphony, composed between 2018 and 2020, as “something of an autobiographical piece of music centered around the theme of atonement.” The work imagines “a person who is receiving Morse code messages of atonement coming from his own lost soul.”

A one-word subtitle indicating the “messages” being sent from within is associated with each of the four movements of Winger's *Symphony of the Returning Light*. The Morse code rhythms that “spell” these words function as foundational patterns. For example, the first movement (*S.O.S.*) begins with the Morse code rhythm used to signal distress played by a MIDI keyboard: short–short–short–long–long–long–short–short–short. That pattern eventually develops across the sections of the orchestra, while Winger superimposes melodies and thematic ideas over it.

Eleos (“Mercy”) is the topic of the slow movement, which is followed by *Metamorphosis*, its staccato code tapped out at a rapid pace. The last movement, *Metanoia* (“Change of Heart”), begins with solo flute against a backdrop of strings and chimes. Elements shared among these words (the “s” sounds in *S.O.S.* and *Eleos* or “meta,” for example) allow for cross-connections between movements.

Along with the Morse code patterns, Winger assigns a major role to a recurring harmonic idea that he terms the “brick wall chord.” The image he had in mind involves his imagined protagonist “trying to follow the path of atonement but constantly coming up against this brick wall. He can't break through the barrier into a state of enlightenment.” Each time it recurs, the chord is orchestrated differently. At the end of the “Metamorphosis” movement, the chord finally resolves and leads directly into the last movement. Winger compares it to the sensation of “floating out to sea.”

Thomas May

Peter Otto



German-born violinist Peter Otto is concertmaster of the Nashville Symphony and enjoys a dynamic career as a soloist, chamber musician, and educator. He previously served as first associate concertmaster of The Cleveland Orchestra, including numerous national and international tours. Otto has frequently appeared as a soloist and guest concertmaster with leading orchestras, including the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, and National Youth Orchestra of Germany. A graduate of The Juilliard School and the Hochschule für Musik in Rostock, Germany, he has earned top international prizes. Otto appears regularly at festivals in Europe and the United States, serves as a faculty member of the Brevard Music Center, and leads masterclasses with the New World Symphony.

Nashville Symphony

Photo: Chris Lee



The Nashville Symphony is where music comes alive for Middle Tennessee and beyond. Founded in 1946, the orchestra performs at the world-class Schermerhorn Symphony Center, presenting a mix of classical masterpieces, ground-breaking new works, jazz, pop, film concerts, and family programming. A champion of contemporary American orchestral music, the Symphony has premiered and recorded works by today's most celebrated and innovative composers. Those recordings have earned an impressive 14 GRAMMY Awards and 27 nominations. The Nashville Symphony performs nearly 200 concerts, including many free and low-cost education and community programs that annually reach nearly 550,000 people of all ages across the Middle Tennessee region. Through broadcasts, recordings, and streaming, the Nashville Symphony reaches an additional 13 million listeners worldwide each year. The Nashville Symphony is dedicated to enriching the community, inspiring the next generation of music lovers, and showcasing the power of live music to unite and inspire.

www.nashvillesymphony.org

Giancarlo Guerrero



Photo: Matthew Holler

Giancarlo Guerrero is a six-time GRAMMY Award-winning conductor known for his imaginative programming. As music director for the Nashville Symphony for 16 seasons, he championed contemporary American music through commissions, recordings, and performances. Under his leadership, the Nashville Symphony premiered 24 works by composers including Béla Fleck, Ben Folds, Jennifer Higdon, Hannibal Lokumbe, Terry Riley, Wayne Shorter and Victor Wooten. He also helped launch the Composer Lab and Workshop with Aaron Jay Kernis, supporting emerging American composers. Currently serving as music director laureate for the Nashville Symphony, Guerrero also serves as music director for Sarasota Orchestra and artistic director and principal conductor of Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival. Guerrero is also a sought-after guest conductor who has led the world's leading orchestras, including those in New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Seattle, Toronto, Sydney, London, and Frankfurt. Guerrero's significant discography includes 21 recordings with the Nashville Symphony. A passionate advocate for music education, he is engaged with conducting training orchestras and has worked with the Curtis Institute of Music, Colburn School in Los Angeles, National Youth Orchestra (NYO2) and Yale Philharmonia.

www.giancarlo-guerrero.com



Kip Winger

Photo: Andres Martinez

Kip
WINGER
(b. 1961)

**Violin Concerto “In the Language
of Flowers” (2024–25)**

31:53

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|------|
| 1 | I. Forsythia | 6:42 |
| 2 | II. Viscaria | 5:48 |
| 3 | III. Ambrosia | 9:31 |
| 4 | IV. Wisteria | 9:52 |

**Symphony of the Returning Light
(2018–20)**

25:41

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| 5 | I. S.O.S. | 6:30 |
| 6 | II. Eleos | 7:21 |
| 7 | III. Metamorphosis | 7:46 |
| 8 | IV. Metanoia | 4:04 |

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Peter Otto, Violin 1–4
Nashville Symphony
Giancarlo Guerrero

Recorded live on 18–20 March 2023 5–8 and 10–11 May 2025 1–4
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Center, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

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Booklet notes: Thomas May • Publisher: Varseau Music (BMI)

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Kip Winger is a genre-bridging composer with a long and successful career in rock music. His celebrated ballet score *Conversations with Nijinsky* led conductor Giancarlo Guerrero to commission the two works on this album. Weaving four floriological meanings into the musical arc, *In the Language of Flowers* is a violin concerto that celebrates a love story “no words could adequately express.” *Symphony of the Returning Light* sits in the tradition of autobiographical fantasies stretching back to Berlioz. The symphony incorporates the use of Morse code rhythms, and is centered around the theme of atonement.

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Playing
Time:
58:00