



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

19:20  
140th season

Stéphane Denève, conductor  
Gil Shaham, violin

Friday, November 15, 2019 at 10:30AM  
Saturday, November 16, 2019 at 8:00PM

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**AARON JAY KERNIS**

(b. 1960)

*Venit Illuminatio*

*(Toward the Illumination of Colored Light)*

(World Premiere, SLSO Commission)

**BARTÓK**

(1881–1945)

**Violin Concerto No. 2** (1937–1938)

Allegro non troppo

Theme and Variations: Andante tranquillo

Rondo: Allegro molto

Gil Shaham, violin

INTERMISSION

**BRAHMS**

(1833–1897)

**Symphony No. 4 in E minor, op. 98** (1884)

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Allegro giocoso

Allegro energico e passionato

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The 2019/2020 Classical Series is presented by **The Steward Family Foundation** and **World Wide Technology**.

These concerts are presented by **The Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation**.

Gil Shaham is the **William and Laura Orthwein Guest Artist**.

The concert of Friday morning, November 15, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Nancy and Don Ross**.

The concert of Saturday, November 16, is underwritten in part by a generous gift from **Susan Veidt**.

Pre-Concert Conversations are sponsored by **Washington University Physicians**.

# PROGRAM NOTES

BY TIM MUNRO

In life, nothing happens the same way twice.

Two viewings of the identical movie are different: affected by mood, climate, seat, audience. Two versions of the same road trip are different: affected by weather, traffic, music choices.

In music, this experience is captured in variation form. A melody is repeated, over and over. But each time it is different. Maybe the melody is quieter or louder, faster or slower. Maybe its color shifts with altered chords or a new orchestration.

This concert celebrates musical variation. The finale of Johannes Brahms' symphony and the slow movement of Béla Bartók's concerto are both in some sort of variation form. And Aaron Jay Kernis thinks a lot about change and renewal: in his music melodies are repeated, but their meaning has been altered by time, by experience.

"That which lives changes from moment to moment," wrote Bartók. "Because perpetual variability is a trait of every living creature's character."



RICHARD BOWDITCH

## AARON JAY KERNIS

**Born** January 16, 1960, Bensalem Township, Pennsylvania

### *Venit Illuminatio (Toward the Illumination of Colored Light)*

#### "The Language I Speak"

"[M]usic should contain everything at the same time," composer Aaron Kernis has said. His formative musical experiences were from college radio—inhaling 1920s jazz, minimalism, Irish folk music, 1950s rock and roll, disco—and his music reflects the variety of this experience.

Kernis first shone in his early twenties, when the New York Philharmonic played an early work, and he has since become one of America's most lauded composers. He is a winner of the Grawemeyer Award and the Pulitzer Prize, and his music is performed coast to coast.

Many of his works draw from non-musical inspiration: an image, an event, a literary work. Early in Kernis' career it was the darkness of war and the Holocaust, later it was the deep meaning of his Jewish faith and love for his family.

There are constants in Kernis' music: expressive melodies, lush harmonies, attentiveness to orchestral color and to the emotional impact of music. Kernis

thinks of himself primarily as a communicator. “Music is the language I speak [to audiences],” he says.

In fact, Kernis sings throughout his creative process. He strives “to create the long line through singing, through breathing; that’s the starting place. I think it came from very formative experiences as a choral singer and the first [voice] lessons I ever had as a child.”

If his work speaks directly to listeners, it is very challenging for performers. Kernis is not afraid to push instrumentalists right to the technical edge. One performer calls his writing “virtuosic...but not awkward.”

## The Music

The Latin title of this new work can act as a guide: *Venit*, meaning “coming”; *Illuminatio*, meaning “spiritual enlightenment” or “brightness.” Coming to enlightenment. Coming towards the light.

The composer writes:

Music for me is something magical. It goes beyond words into places where chords and sounds take the place of language and punctuation.

I am always thinking about the transformation and exchange of emotions and musical ideas and the creation of a wide range of orchestral colors deployed through this large group of brilliant musicians.

With this work I was trying to leave dark thoughts and conflicted emotions behind and find a transformative experience of ecstasy and light. Not just white light of inspiration, but the colored light of change and imagination.

The music of *Venit Illuminatio* is not one thing, speed, or idea. It traverses many things that shift constantly. Melodic shapes and particular chords are repeated over and over into different guises and characters, always in new contexts and with new meanings.

Sometimes, if I’m very lucky, I will come upon a compositional moment where a chord or an instrumental idea will burst out inside my head as color, or even in heightened Technicolor! Hence its place in the subtitle of this piece, *Toward the Illumination of Colored Light*.

## First performance This weekend’s concerts

**Scoring** 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (2nd doubling E-flat clarinet, 3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, bongos, chimes, congas, crash cymbal, crotales, glockenspiel, 3 gongs, 5 unpitched resonant pieces of metal, 3 nipple gongs, snare drum, 3 large suspended cymbals, 3 tam tams, tenor drum, 2 tom toms, triangle, vibraphone, xylophone), harp, celesta, strings

**Performance time** Approximately 14 minutes

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## **BÉLA BARTÓK**

**Born** March 25, 1881, Sânnicolau Mare, Romania

**Died** September 26, 1945, New York, New York

### **Violin Concerto**

In 1937, storm clouds gathered across Europe. The growing popularity of pro-Nazi political parties, along with economic dependence on Germany, left Bartók's Hungary vulnerable.

In this climate, Béla Bartók felt powerless. He was disgusted by Hitler and the Nazis, calling them “bandits and assassins,” but felt he could not leave his aging mother in Hungary. “In the last years of her life,” he wrote, “to abandon her forever—no, this I cannot bring myself to do!”

At this chilly moment, Bartók wrote one of his most lush works, the Second Violin Concerto.

#### **Love-soaked**

For Bartók, the violin had a specific, personal meaning. As a young man, he fell madly for the violinist Stefi Geyer. He wrote several pieces for Geyer, including an early violin concerto, and even after the love affair faded he found himself returning to her instrument, again and again.

Bartók could write for his own instrument, the piano, with bluntness and brutality. But when approaching the violin, he seemed caught in a very different world: hyper-expressive, love-soaked. Indeed, the Second Violin Concerto's soloist pushes deep into the violin's strings, sometimes with ragged violence, sometimes with unbridled passion.

#### **Folk**

When he wrote the Second Violin Concerto, Bartók was spending ten hours each day on folk music studies.

He had first felt called as a young man to gather the folksongs of forgotten people in Eastern Europe's towns and villages. As he transitioned from amateur folklorist to scientific investigator, this music leached into his own: its rhythms and shapes, its emotions, its un-smoothed quirks.

The opening of the Violin Concerto is marked “Tempo di Verbunkos.” Verbunkos began as army recruiting music—officers would perform dances with an ensemble—and it could be wild or sentimental.

In the opening bars, Bartók echoes the sound of a verbunkos ensemble: harp (mimicking the Hungarian cimbalom), strings, clarinet. The violin soloist sings with a raw, throaty intensity, and even gives a tiny, verbunkos-like musical hiccup.

## Variations

Zoltán Székely was a talented young violinist and friend of Bartók's. Listening now to recordings of Székely's playing, we can understand why he asked Bartók to write him a "traditional" concerto. His musicianship is refined, controlled, technically immaculate.

Bartók was resistant, feeling driven to experiment. The resulting concerto walks a middle-way: it has the show-off-y-ness, grand scale, and three movements of a traditional work; but Bartók also dives deeply into an experiment with variation form.

The first movement is a dramatic stand-off between simpler, folk-inspired melodies and a more angular, modern world. The third movement is a variation on the first: exploring its gestures and ideas, but with the dial turned up, leaning wild and whimsical.

The middle movement is a set of theme and variations. A tranquil theme goes on a journey through unexpected terrain: foreboding, dangerous, playful, wistful. When it returns, the theme has been changed: low instruments have withdrawn; solitary woodwinds and wisps of strings circle mournfully above.

The Violin Concerto would be among the last works Bartók would complete before leaving his beloved homeland. Bartók knew he was leaving his community, leaving his heartland. He suspected life would not be happy in the distant land of America.

Sadly, he was correct.

**First performance** March 23, 1939, in Amsterdam Willem Mengelberg conducting the Concertgebouw Orchestra, with Zoltán Székely as soloist

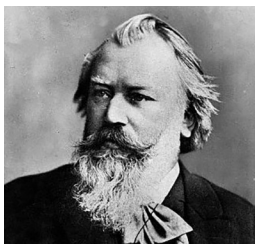
**First SLSO Performance** November 18, 1949, Vladimir Golschmann conducting, with Tossy Spivakovsky as soloist

**Most recent SLSO performance** April 9, 2006, David Robertson conducting, with Leonidas Kavakos as soloist

**Scoring** solo violin, 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (2nd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tam tam, triangle), harp, celesta, strings

**Performance time** Approximately 36 minutes

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## JOHANNES BRAHMS

**Born** May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

**Died** April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

### Symphony No. 4

Most musicians agree: Brahms' Fourth Symphony is a central, titanic work in the classical repertoire. It is performed hundreds of times each year across the world.

And yet. The music of this symphony is stern, bleak—early audiences found it complex, distancing. A first-time listener can feel caught in conversation with a dazzling intellectual: the experience might be compelling, but also mysterious, occasionally frustrating.

What draws us to this piece? And what made Brahms write such a beautiful, baffling work?

#### Fuego y Cristal

Brahms' music holds us in its thrall by balancing heart and head. Writer Jorge Luis Borges called this balance "*Fuego y cristal*" (Fire and crystal).

Take the symphony's opening. There is heart: A violin melody undulates, unfolding like a pure stream of emotion. But it is always ruled by head: Brahms has fixed these notes in place according to a strict pattern.

When Brahms first played the first movement of the Fourth Symphony for friends, they didn't understand it at all. "During the whole first movement," one wrote later to Brahms, "I felt as if I were being beaten by two very smart people."

But fastidious technical craft was more than just personal for Brahms. It was political. He observed a musical world where technical standards were slipping. And he fought back, not with words but with music that was unimpeachable—built on painstakingly-laid foundations.

#### Insect to a Flame

By any measure, the fifty-something Brahms was a success. Raised in a humble home, largely self-taught, ambition had pulled him to Vienna, where he fast became one of the city's musical stars, working as a conductor, pianist, and composer.

The Fourth Symphony was written during two quiet, productive summers in Mürzzuschlag, a sleepy town in the Austrian Alps. Brahms had no financial need to write the symphony: his modest life as a bachelor, combined with long tours and lucrative fees on the sales of his compositions, had made him wealthy.

An internal force drove him. For Brahms, the symphony was the ultimate musical form, and Beethoven the ultimate composer. Beethoven's example drew him like an insect to a flame: Brahms knew that writing symphonies would cause stress, would take years off his life, but he could not stop himself from the stretch, the struggle.

## Sour Cherries

As he sat in front of the unfinished score of his Fourth Symphony, Brahms realized something. The music of the symphony “tastes of the climate here,” he wrote. “The cherries are tart—you wouldn’t eat them!”

Brahms knew about tartness. In public he could be blunt and charmless, and according to one contemporary his speech was “curt, abrupt, vigorously rapping out his words, allusive rather than explanatory.”

The music of this symphony has something of Brahms’ own character: austere, stern, bleak, hollering instead of singing, stumbling instead of dancing. It is allusive, preferring hint and suggestion to unambiguous statement. And it rarely relaxes into the warmth of a smile.

The first movement sighs and storms, while the slow movement begins with a plaintive cry in something akin to the Phrygian mode—a sort of darkened minor scale. Brahms thought this mode expressed “profound need and remorse.”

The third movement, in bright C major, glitters with a metallic harshness that blinds. High winds and ringing percussion assault our senses.

## Finale Problem

As symphonies grew in size and scope, composers worried increasingly about how to end them. A finale had to do everything: sum up, give unity, provide closure, set pulses racing.

Brahms solved his fourth movement problem by looking to the past. He was a passionate music historian long before such a thing was common, filling his shelves with Bach and Mozart, pouring their techniques and ideas into his music.

It was the *Chaconne* from Bach’s Partita in D minor for solo violin that came into Brahms’ mind. Its form, he wrote, could inspire “a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings.”

The chaconne has its origins as a stately dance. When composers started playing with the form, the dance faded. What remained was a bass line, repeated over and over, with colors and shapes shifting above.

Brahms’ fourth movement is a chaconne, using the form to create an entire world of musical experience. At the opening, brass and winds are hard, granite. Strings wrap them in rich velvet, and later a flute wavers with a lonely song, before trombones emerge quietly from the underworld.

The conclusion goes off like a rocket. “[H]ow it thunders!” wrote Brahms.

**First performance** October 25, 1885, in Meiningen, Germany, the composer conducting

**First SLSO Performance** November 15, 1912, Max Zach conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance** February 26, 2012, Jaap van Zweden conducting

**Scoring** 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle, strings

**Performance time** Approximately 39 minutes

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## STÉPHANE DENÈVE

Music Director

Stéphane Denève is 13th Music Director for the 140-year-old St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, beginning his tenure in the 2019/2020 season. He also serves as Music Director of the Brussels Philharmonic, Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra, and Director of the Centre for Future Orchestral Repertoire (CffOR).

Recognized internationally for the exceptional quality of his performances and programming, Denève regularly appears at major concert venues with the world's greatest orchestras and soloists. He has a special affinity for the music of his native France and is a passionate advocate for music of the 21st century. A gifted communicator and educator, he is committed to inspiring the next generation of musicians and listeners, and has worked regularly with young people in the programs such as those of the Tanglewood Music Center, New World Symphony, the Colburn School, and the Music Academy of the West.

He is a frequent guest with leading orchestras such as the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, The Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Toronto Symphony, Orchestre National de France, Vienna Symphony, DSO Berlin and NHK Symphony. Last season, he led a major U.S. tour with the Brussels Philharmonic.

In the field of opera, Denève has led productions at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Festival, La Scala, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Saito Kinen Festival, Gran Teatro de Liceu, Netherlands Opera, La Monnaie, Deutsche Oper Am Rhein, and at the Opéra National de Paris.

As a recording artist, he has won critical acclaim for his recordings of the works of Poulenc, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Franck and Honegger. He is a triple winner of the Diapason d'Or of the Year, has been shortlisted for Gramophone's Artist of the Year Award, and has won the prize for symphonic music at the International Classical Music Awards. His most recent releases include *Lost Horizon*, a two-disc set of music by Guillaume Connesson with the Brussels Philharmonic, saxophonist Timothy McAllister, and violinist Renaud Capuçon on Deutsche Grammophon; Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra on its label; and *Cinema* with violinist Renaud Capuçon and the Brussels Philharmonic on Erato/Warner Classics featuring some of the most memorable melodies from the silver screen.

For further information, please visit [slo.org/deneve](https://slo.org/deneve).





## GIL SHAHAM

William and Laura Orthwein Guest Artist

Gil Shaham is one of the foremost violinists of our time; his flawless technique combined with his inimitable warmth and generosity of spirit has solidified his renown as an American master. The Grammy Award-winner, also named Musical America's "Instrumentalist of the Year," is sought after throughout the world for concerto appearances with leading orchestras and conductors, and regularly gives recitals and appears with ensembles on the world's great concert stages and at the most prestigious festivals.

Highlights of recent years include the acclaimed recording and performances of J.S. Bach's complete sonatas and partitas for solo violin. In the coming seasons in addition to championing these solo works he will join his long-time duo partner, pianist Akira Eguchi, in recitals throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.

Appearances with orchestra regularly include the Berlin Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, and San Francisco Symphony, as well as multi-year residencies with the Orchestras of Montreal, Stuttgart and Singapore. With orchestra, Mr. Shaham continues his exploration of "Violin Concertos of the 1930s," including the works of Barber, Bartók, Berg, Korngold, Prokofiev, among many others.

Mr. Shaham has more than two dozen concerto and solo CDs to his name, earning multiple Grammys, a Grand Prix du Disque, Diapason d'Or, and Gramophone Editor's Choice. Many of these recordings appear on Canary Classics, the label he founded in 2004. His CDs include 1930s Violin Concertos, Virtuoso Violin Works, Elgar's Violin Concerto, Hebrew Melodies, The Butterfly Lovers and many more. His most recent recording in the series 1930s Violin Concertos Vol. 2, including Prokofiev's Violin Concerto and Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2, was nominated for a Grammy Award.

Mr. Shaham was born in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, in 1971. He moved with his parents to Israel, where he began violin studies with Samuel Bernstein of the Rubin Academy of Music at the age of 7, receiving annual scholarships from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. In 1981, he made debuts with the Jerusalem Symphony and the Israel Philharmonic, and the following year, took the first prize in Israel's Claremont Competition. He then became a scholarship student at Juilliard, and also studied at Columbia University.

Gil Shaham was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1990, and in 2008 he received the coveted Avery Fisher Prize. In 2012, he was named “Instrumentalist of the Year” by Musical America. He plays the 1699 “Countess Polignac” Stradivarius, and lives in New York City with his wife, violinist Adele Anthony, and their three children.



## **AARON JAY KERNIS**

Winner of two 2019 Grammy Awards (including Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his Violin Concerto for James Ehnes), a Pulitzer Prize, Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, and Nemmers Award, Aaron Jay Kernis is one of America's most performed and honored composers.

His music appears prominently on concert programs worldwide, and he has been commissioned by preeminent performing organizations and artists, including the New York and Royal Liverpool

Philharmonics, San Francisco, Toronto, and Melbourne (AU) Symphonies, Los Angeles and Saint Paul Chamber and Minnesota Orchestras, Walt Disney Company, The Knights, San Francisco Girls and Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Joshua Bell, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, and Sharon Isbin to name a few.

His works have been recorded on Nonesuch, Naxos, Phoenix, Onyx, Signum, Virgin Cedille, and Argo, with which Mr. Kernis had an exclusive recording contract, and many other labels. Recent and upcoming are discs including his new flute concerto with flutist Marina Piccinini and Leonard Slatkin/Marin Alsop conducting the Peabody Symphony; his third string quartet (“River”) as part of the Jasper Quartet's The Kernis Project; the Grammy-winning recording of his violin concerto for James Ehnes with the Seattle Symphony and Ludovic Morlot; and the Nashville Symphony and Giancarlo Guerrero of recent orchestral music.

He is the Workshop Director of the Nashville Symphony Composer Lab and, for 15 years, served as New Music Adviser to the Minnesota Orchestra, with which he co-founded and directed its Composer Institute for 11 years. Kernis teaches composition at Yale School of Music, and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Classical Music Hall of Fame. Leta Miller's book-length portrait of Kernis and his work was published in 2014 by University of Illinois Press as part of its American Composer series.



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

19:20  
140th season

St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra    Sunday, November 17, 2019, at 3:00PM  
Gemma New, conductor

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**ROSSINI**

(1792–1868)

*Semiramide Overture* (1822)

**JOHN ADAMS**

(b. 1947)

*The Chairman Dances, Foxtrot for Orchestra* (1985)

INTERMISSION

**DEBUSSY**

(1862–1918)

*La Mer* (1905)

De l'aube à midi sur la mer  
(From dawn to noon on the sea)

Jeux de vagues  
(Play of the waves)

Dialogue du vent et de la mer  
(Dialogue of wind and the sea)

**SHOSTAKOVICH**

(1906–1975)

*Festive Overture* (1884)

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**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Presented by **Ameren and Kathleen Clucas.**

Supported by the **G.A., Jr. and Kathryn M. Buder Charitable Foundation** and the **Esco Technologies Foundation.**

# PROGRAM NOTES



## GIOACHINO ROSSINI

**Born** February 29, 1792, Pesaro, Italy

**Died** November 13, 1868, Paris, France

### *Semiramide* Overture

By Thomas May

#### What to listen for

Rossini took what was for him an unusual approach to the overture he composed for *Semiramide* (the score for the entire opera was said to have taken him less than a month). Many of his other overtures use material unrelated to the opera to come. The famous *Barber of Seville* overture, for example, actually recycles tunes originally written for non-comic operas. But *Semiramide*'s overture is woven from thematic ideas that do occur within the opera itself. Moreover, it's one of Rossini's most expansive curtain raisers, second only to the *William Tell* Overture in length.

*Semiramide* remains a work rarely encountered in the opera house, but the overture enjoys a life of its own in the concert hall thanks to its superb craftsmanship. This is a composer at the top of his game. Already in the opening gestures we hear a brief example of Rossini's signature crescendo: a tidal pull that involves not just an increase in volume but an increase in density as well, as more and more instruments are piled on to the texture. A slow reverie for a quartet of horns holds our attention for several minutes before the fast Allegro section takes off with another characteristically Rossinian theme in the strings. Notice the delectable writing for the woodwinds, especially in the second theme—and then a longer-range payout of that unmistakable crescendo. The pattern is repeated before Rossini caps the overture with a thrillingly energetic final section.

**First performance** February 3, 1823, in Venice, Italy, Antonio Cammerra conducting

**First SLSYO performance** November 25, 1977, Gerhardt Zimmerman conducting

**Most recent SLSYO performance** November 20, 2011, Ward Stare conducting

**Scoring** flute, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals), strings

**Performance time** Approximately 12 minutes

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## JOHN ADAMS

Born February, 15, 1947, Worcester, Massachusetts

### *The Chairman Dances, Foxtrot for Orchestra*

By Paul Schiavo

John Adams' "breakthrough" composition, the one that brought him international attention, was his opera *Nixon in China*. Completed in 1987 after two years of work, *Nixon in China* imagines in fantastical, sometimes surreal, terms the historic 1972 visit of the 37th President to the People's Republic of China and his meeting with Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong.

At the time he had begun working on the opera, Adams also was obligated to fulfill a commission from the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra for a new orchestral piece. Engrossed in the sound-world and *mise en scène* of *Nixon in China*, he wrote a "Foxtrot for Orchestra" that he originally planned to include in the opera's third act. This music, *The Chairman Dances*, ended up being, in the composer's words, "an out-take" from *Nixon in China*, but it has acquired a life of its own as a concert piece.

The scene for which *The Chairman Dances* was conceived centers, Adams explains, on Chairman Mao and his bride, Chiang Ch'ing, the fabled "Madame Mao," firebrand, revolutionary, executioner, architect of China's calamitous Cultural Revolution, and (a fact not universally realized) a former Shanghai movie actress. In the surreal final scene of the opera, she interrupts the tired formalities of a state banquet, disrupts the slow-moving protocol, and invites the Chairman, who is present only as a gigantic forty-foot portrait on the wall, to "come down, old man, and dance." The music takes full cognizance of her past as a movie actress. Themes, sometimes slinky and sentimental, at other times bravura and bounding, ride above a bustling fabric of energized motives.

**First performance** January 31, 1986, Lukas Foss conducting the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

**First SLSYO performance** March 14, 2004, Scott Parkman conducting

**Scoring** 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bell tree, castanets, claves, crotales, cymbals, glockenspiel, high hat, pedal bass drum, sandpaper blocks, snare drum, suspended cymbal, suspended sizzle cymbal, tambourine, triangle, vibraphone, wood blocks, xylophone), harp, piano, strings

**Performance time** Approximately 12 minutes



## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

**Born** August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

**Died** March 25, 1918, Paris, France

### *La Mer*

By Tim Munro

#### What's in a Title?

*La Mer* ("The Sea") is subtitled *trois esquisses symphoniques* ("three symphonic sketches"). Debussy chose these words carefully. Fearing the word "symphony" aligned him with a reviled conservative culture, he added the word "sketches." Sketches: musical drawings. Sketches: forms that are outlined, preliminary.

"I feel more and more that music," wrote Debussy, "is not something that can flow inside a rigorous, traditional form." The sounds of *La Mer* flow like ocean waters: sometimes still, sometimes storm-tossed, sometimes forming recognizable shapes, sometimes slipping from our grasp.

*La Mer's* new musical world confounded many listeners. Debussy dismissed the criticisms of those who "love and defend traditions which, for me, no longer exist. [Such traditions] were not all as fine and valuable as people make out. [T]he dust of the past is not always respectable."

#### The Music

Debussy is a sonic magician. With pen and paper he conjures whole worlds that might be gone in an instant. A trumpet and an English horn produce new colors through alchemy. Cellos (divided into four groups) soar through the air, leaving French horn contrails. Clarinet and flute play hide-and-seek amid plucked violas.

Each movement takes a journey that is unpredictable, yet feels organic:

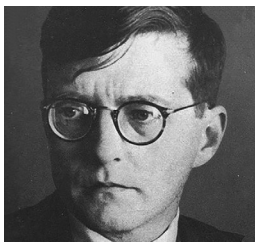
1. *De l'aube à midi sur la mer* ("From dawn to noon on the sea"): The first movement glows and flutters, ending with an overwhelming surge.
2. *Jeux de vagues* ("Play of the waves"): In the second, slippery melodies dart and weave around the orchestra.
3. *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* ("Dialogue of the wind and the sea"): The third movement is wild, violent, barely able to contain its radiant, hymn-like conclusion.

**First Performance** October 15, 1905, Paris, France, Camille Chevillard conducting the Orchestre Lamoureux

**First SLSYO performance** March 9, 2012, Ward Stare conducting

**Scoring** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, tam tam, glockenspiel, triangle), 2 harps, strings

**Performance time** Approximately 23 minutes



## DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born September 25, 1906, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Died August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia

### Festive Overture

By Yvonne Frindle

Shostakovich's *Festive Overture* makes the perfect finale for today's concert. Its vibrant, celebratory spirit is one reason. Another is its origin in a collection of easy piano pieces called *Children's Notebook*. The piece in question is called *Birthday*, so it's hardly surprising that it came to mind nine years later when Shostakovich was asked at the eleventh hour to write a concert overture for another kind of birthday celebration: the 37th anniversary of the October Revolution.

Two days before the dress rehearsal, Vasili Nebolsin, conductor at the Bolshoi Theatre, had called on Shostakovich in desperation: "You see, Dmitri Dmitriyevich, we are in a tight spot. We've got nothing to open the concert with." Shostakovich's laconic reply: "All right."

One of his friends recalled Shostakovich composing the overture before his very eyes, at a "truly astounding" speed, talking and making jokes at the same time. An hour later, Nebolsin began sending couriers to take the music to the copyists at the Bolshoi Theatre:

*What happened next was like the scene with the hundred thousand couriers out of Gogol's Government Inspector. Dmitri Dmitriyevich sat there scribbling away and couriers came in turn to take away the pages while the ink was still wet—first one, then a second, a third, and so on.*

His skill and mastery of musical form and style allowed him to shape the overture from two contrasting themes, which provided for intrinsic musical interest. He framed the whole work with splendid fanfares—simple but strong. Almost certainly modeled after Glinka's overture to *Ruslan and Ludmila*, Shostakovich's overture shares the same characteristics: orchestral virtuosity, exhilarating speed, and compelling melodies. He also borrowed existing musical ideas, taking the *Birthday* piano fanfare and transforming it for brass and adapting the fast theme in the overture from his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*.

At every turn, Shostakovich drew from craft and experience. The result wasn't original or groundbreaking, but then the Soviets didn't want original or groundbreaking, they wanted musical propaganda. It says something about the effectiveness of the *Festive Overture* that it has risen above its origins to become a popular concert work: brilliant and effervescent "like uncorked champagne."

**First performance** November 6, 1954, in Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, Alexander Melik-Pashayev conducting

**First SLSYO performance** December 12, 1975, Gerhardt Zimmermann conducting

**Most recent SLSYO performance** May 16, 2010, Ward Stare conducting

**Scoring** 2 flutes, piccolo, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle), strings

**Performance time** Approximately 7 minutes



## GEMMA NEW

Resident Conductor

Sought after for her insightful interpretations and dynamic presence, New Zealand-born Gemma New is a leader among the new generation of conductors. She is currently Music Director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Resident Conductor of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Hailed as “a rising star in the musical firmament” (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*), New was awarded Solti Foundation Career Assistance Awards in 2017 and 2019.

New’s 2019/20 season features her inaugural concerts as Principal Guest Conductor in Dallas and debuts with the National Symphony Orchestra D.C., Milwaukee Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Kristiansand Symfoniorkester, Beethoven Orchester Bonn and Ulster Orchestra. On the opera front, she makes her debut with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, where she will conduct a production of “Susannah” with Susanna Phillips in the title role. In the summer of 2019, New made five major conducting debuts with the Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Detroit Symphony and Indianapolis Symphony.

Last season, New led the opening concerts of the St. Louis Symphony, made her debut with the New York Philharmonic on a Young People’s Concert program, and conducted the SLSO on a live broadcast performance of *Live From Here* with Chris Thile. New has conducted the Atlanta Symphony, Toronto Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Florida Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic, Berkeley Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and many others. Her guest conducting has taken her internationally with orchestras such as the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Helsingborgs Symfoniorkester, Malmö Symfoniorkester, Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester, Filharmonia Szczecin and Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, and back home to New Zealand with the Auckland Philharmonia, Christchurch Symphony, Opus Orchestra and more.