

PENINSULA *symphony*

Symphony Sounds

October 2012

46th Season, Number 1

Editor: Kenneth Gash

Concert I

Sunday, October 28, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Rolling Hills Covenant Church
2222 Palos Verdes Drive North
Rolling Hills Estates

PROGRAM

Brahms and the Red Violin

- Brahms** *Tragic Overture*
- Brahms** **Serenade No. 2 in A major**
- Brahms** **Violin Concerto in D major**
Elizabeth Pitcairn, Soloist

CONCERT DETAILS

Symphony Association members admitted at 6:00. Center-section priority seating is reserved for members at the Patron level and above.

Concert Preview by **Maestro Berkson** at 6:15.
General public admitted at approximately 6:50.

POST-CONCERT MEET THE PERFORMERS

After the concert, Symphony Association members at the Patron level (and above) are invited to meet the soloist, **Elizabeth Pitcairn** and **Maestro Gary Berkson** at a reception in the home of one of our members.

Directions to the reception will be sent with the membership cards to all who have contributed at the Patron level or above. Please call our office at 310-544-0320 if you have any questions about this event.

Welcome to the forty-sixth season of your Peninsula Symphony as we look forward to another wonderful series of concerts under the leadership of Maestro Gary Berkson. As we have come to expect, the season will include old favorites and a few surprises. You will hear a wonderful soloist at each concert during the regular season and then enjoy another Pops concert in July.



Michelle Tseng Performing at the Final 2011-2012 Concert

Music Preview

Someone once told me that the first concert of a season should be a "grabber." The audience members will love it and they will look forward to attending the next concert. The upcoming program, consisting of music by one of the most beloved composers of the Romantic Period, should certainly

measure up to that yardstick. The beautiful, romantic music of Brahms combined with the excitement of seeing and hearing one of the most famous Stradivarius violins played by a leading virtuoso, is an unbeatable combination.

That Stradivarius, an instrument that has captured the public consciousness since it became the inspiration of the movie, *The Red Violin*, in which a fanciful history of the violin's creation and line of successive owners has assumed mythic status.

The violin, which is named the Red Mendelssohn, was created in 1720 by Antonio Stradivari. Very soon after it was built, the violin disappeared and was not seen or heard about for more than two hundred years. The instrument eventually turned up in Berlin at about the turn of the twentieth century, owned by a family with a direct line of descent from Felix Mendelssohn. This, of course, explains the Mendelssohn part of its name and the "Red" comes from the distinctive red color of the instrument.

In 1990, Elizabeth Pitcairn's grandfather bought the violin as a gift for his sixteen year-old granddaughter through an auction at Christie's of London for a record price of \$1.7 million dollars. Numerous speculations as to the mysterious history of the violin have been proposed and the most romantically fanciful one, by Canadian film maker Francois Girard, led to the aforementioned dramatic film, "The Red Violin."

Johannes Brahms 1833-1897

This first concert of the forty-sixth season of the Peninsula Symphony Orchestra is unusual in that it contains music from a single composer. It certainly is fortuitous that Brahms wrote a large number of orchestral works, including four symphonies, two piano concertos, a violin concerto, a double concerto for violin and cello, two serenades,



and two companion orchestral overtures, the *Academic Festival Overture* and the *Tragic Overture*.

Brahms venerated Beethoven, perhaps even more than the other Romantic composers did. In his home there was a marble bust of Beethoven that looked down on the spot where he composed. His friend and mentor Robert Schumann declared him to be "the long-awaited successor to Beethoven." Brahms was also an uncompromising perfectionist who destroyed many of his completed works.

Is it any wonder then that his first symphony was so late in coming? Brahms himself declared that the symphony, from sketches to finishing touches, took 21 years, from 1855 to 1876. Perhaps the two serenades, written when Brahms was in his twenties, were "pre-symphonies" that allowed him to compose large orchestral works without actually doing anything that would engender comparison with Beethoven's masterworks.

Odd as it may seem today, both the first and the second Serenade in A, Op. 16, written in 1860 (without violins, only lower strings, winds, and brass) were considered avant-garde, on the cutting edge of modernism!

The other two works on Sunday's program were composed when Brahms was a fully mature, successful composer.

Brahms was unfamiliar with the violin and his path to the violin concerto was also a long one. In 1848 the fifteen-year-old Brahms, on tour as accompanist to the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi, was introduced to Joseph Joachim, a talented violinist two years his senior. The two young musicians were instantly drawn to one another, and a lifelong friendship ensued.

It was only natural that Brahms should wish to write a concerto for his friend, but thirty years would elapse before he could muster the confidence to do so. When he finally did, he showed that despite his doubts he was well able to write for an instrument with which he was unfamiliar. He sent a copy of the score to Joachim with a request for comments on what was "difficult, uncomfortable, impossible, etc.," but the violinist replied that "most of the material is playable---some of it, in fact, quite originally violinistic," although he expressed some reservations about the stamina required to play it "in an overheated concert hall!"

The audience (but not the critics) responded warmly to the concerto and it has continued to be one of the favorites of both performers and listeners. The music made into popular genre when Andrew Lloyd Weber used themes from the final movement in the song "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina" from *Evita*.

Brahms composed the *Tragic Overture* (Opus 81) and the *Academic Festival Overture* (Opus 80) in the same summer. The two overtures are like the faces of the famous thespian mask: Comedy facing one way and Tragedy the other. Brahms even commented, wryly, "One weeps, the other laughs." The *Academic Festival Overture* consists of a light-hearted medley of student songs and it was Brahms rather whimsical "thank-you" composition to Breslau University for awarding him (*in absentia*) an honorary doctorate. Evidently he meant the *Tragic Overture* to be a balance to the other, since he did not allude to any particular tragedy.

The overture itself is a solemn, striking work constructed in classic sonata form and is scored for a larger orchestra than any of his four symphonies. Despite its name, the *Tragic Overture* does not follow any specific dramatic program. Brahms was not very interested in musical storytelling and was more concerned with conveying and eliciting emotional impressions. The overture's overwhelming atmosphere is one of turbulent and ultimately unsuccessful struggle.

Elizabeth Pitcairn



Celebrated American violin virtuoso Elizabeth Pitcairn has earned a stunning reputation as one of America's most beloved soloists. Ms. Pitcairn made her New York debut at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in 2000 with the New York String Orchestra and she appeared as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Academy of Music. She has recently been named the Artistic Director of the Luzerne Chamber Music Festival. She is a member of the distinguished faculty at the Colburn School of Performing Arts in Los Angeles, where she currently resides. Her upcoming concert schedule and recordings are featured on www.redviolin.net.

Past Events: Final Concert(s)

The 45th season of the Peninsula Symphony Orchestra concluded with a pair of

exhilarating concert programs. The June concert (Celebrating Debussy: 150 Years Old) featured not one but **two** soloists!

The concert opened with the graceful Pavane of Gabriel Faurè. This music is based on a sixteenth-century court dance and is scored for small orchestra. With its blend of yearning sensuality and cool classicism it is characteristic of Faurè's style.

The first of our two soloists was Michelle Tseng, the first-place winner of the Edith Knox Performance Competition held on April 15, 2012. She performed the very popular and difficult Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto. Tchaikovsky had dedicated this concerto to the virtuoso violinist Leopold Auer, who refused to play it – declaring it “unplayable.” Ms. Tseng maneuvered her way through it, seemingly oblivious to the technical challenges, producing a sensitive and well-balanced reading. The audience was extremely enthusiastic in its appreciation of her musicality.

After intermission, we heard the second soloist of the evening, Beth Pfleuger. Beth is the principal flutist of the Peninsula Symphony Orchestra and she played Debussy's *Syrinx* for solo flute. This short, hauntingly beautiful piece was originally called "Flûte de Pan" and was inspired by the legend of the amorous pursuit of the nymph Syrinx by the faun, Pan.

The final piece on the program was *La Mer*, a masterpiece which musically depicts the ocean in its many moods. I understand that when Maestro Berkson first announced to the orchestra members that *La Mer* was being scheduled, someone cried out “You’ve got to be kidding!” The piece requires a large orchestra, and its use of sensuous tone colors and unusual orchestrations makes it a challenge for any orchestra. Your Peninsula Symphony rose to the occasion and we heard a stirring performance of *La Mer*.

The concert was a marvelous affirmation of the evolution of the orchestra under the leadership of Maestro Berkson.

Summer Pops Concert



Guest conductor Wayne Abrahams - former conductor of the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Show and currently maestro of the Coachella Valley Symphony and the Palm Springs Follies - led the orchestra in a rousing and nostalgic concert of American favorites.

The music ranged from show tunes to big-band through movie music and a depiction of a trip down into the Grand Canyon by mule. The 2011-2012 concert season concluded with a rousing encore by John Philip Sousa, *The Liberty Bell*.

Have you sent in your Membership?

If you haven't made a contribution to join the Peninsula Symphony Association for the 2012-13 season, then you are no

longer a member and this is the last issue of Symphony Sounds that you will receive. You will also lose your invitation to the pre-concert lectures - and a valuable tax deduction! To join, just call or write to the Peninsula Symphony Association (see the last page for phone and address). We now have the convenience of electronic subscription through our Web site at www.pensym.org. Just click on Membership.



You will be sent to a page where you can securely and easily join through PayPal or, if you wish, print out a copy of the membership form, and mail it in. If all else fails, you can come to the concert on October 28, and make your contribution at the membership desk in the lobby.

Matching-Gift Programs Membership contributions also qualify for employer matching-gift programs. Call the Peninsula Symphony Association office for details.

Peninsula Symphony Association Board of Directors

This year we have six new and one returning Director: **Jacky Glass, Joon Sung Jun, Dan Keller, Dorothy Lay, June Sung,** and **Larry Zinkiewicz** are new and **D. Paul Nibarger** is returning. Three Directors have retired: **Barbara Gerber, David Humphreys and Lee Raby.** We thank them for their dedicated service to the Peninsula Symphony Association and hope to work with them again. Please remember that all members of the Board of Directors of the Peninsula Symphony Association are volunteers and receive no compensation for their work to bring wonderful music to the community.

OFFICERS:

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2012 - 2013 Schedule

All regular concerts are held at
Rolling Hills Covenant Church
2222 Palos Verdes Drive North
Rolling Hills Estates

Concert II

February 17, 2013, 7 p.m.

Mimi Jung, Violin

Balakirev	<i>Overture on Three Russian Themes</i>
Tchaikovsky	Violin Concerto in D major
Shostakovich	<i>Suite for Variety Stage Orchestra</i>

Young Artists Showcase**April 14, 2013, 2 p.m.****ARMSTRONG THEATER****3330 Civic Center Drive, Torrance**

The finalists in the Edith Knox Performance Competition will play with their accompanists in a full-dress stage performance for professional judging. The first-prize winner will be selected at the end of the program, and will perform as soloist with the Peninsula Symphony Orchestra at our June 2 concert. This event is open to all members.

Concert III**April 14, 2013, 7 p.m.****Kevin Fitz-Gerald, Piano**

Grofé	<i>Mississippi Suite</i>
Gould	<i>Amber Waves</i>
Gershwin	<i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>
Gottschalk	<i>Grand Tarantelle for Piano and Orchestra</i>
Gottschalk	<i>Symphony: A Night in the Tropics</i>

Concert IV**The Norris Foundation Concert****June 17, 2013, 7 p.m.****2013 Edith Knox Competition Winner Soloist**

Jenkins	<i>Palladio</i>
TBA	Concerto chosen by winner of the Knox Competition
Wagner	Selections from <i>The Ring of the Nibelungen</i>

Summer Pops Concert**July 14 2013 5:00 p.m.**

Maestro Gary Berkson will lead the orchestra in an afternoon of music which he has entitled: **Movie Magic**

Friends of the Peninsula Symphony

The *Friends* of the Peninsula Symphony welcomes men and women interested in providing an extra measure of support to the Peninsula Symphony and having fun while doing it. The *Friends* perform an essential function for our Symphony by raising funds and providing a variety of volunteer opportunities to suit your time and talents.

The Friends music education outreach program which began as the Mozart Program has expanded. Starting in January, first-and-second grade students at all ten Palos Verdes elementary schools will listen to Peter and the Wolf performed by a woodwind quintet. The music teachers work with classroom teachers to prepare students in advance of the performance with knowledge of the composer, the instruments and how to listen. This preparation provides students with an enriched listening experience at the live performance.

Friends membership donation is in **addition** to your membership in the Peninsula Symphony Association and is open to any current Peninsula Symphony Association member. If you have not already responded to our membership mailing, we urge you to join now with your tax-deductible donation (Tax ID# 23-7008895).

Stop by the membership table in the lobby at intermission. We hope you will join us. Our suggested donation levels are:

Best Friend(s) - \$125

Good Friend(s) - \$75

Friend - \$50

Membership donations can also be mailed to:
Friends of the Peninsula Symphony
 PO Box 3961
 Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 90274

Friends Events

Friends members have fun while raising funds. This season's annual membership party, "Sip, Nibble and Stroll" was held on September 15 in the gardens of Jean and Charlie Shriver's historic 1930s Tuscan Estate. More than 100 members and guests were entertained by Palos Verdes High String Quartet and enjoyed an impressive array of Tuscan fare catered by Jeff Earle of *The Original Red Onion*.



Friends Committee (Mona Gifford, Jane Copper, Jean Dunn, Harriet Servis, Anita Gash) and Jeff Earle

Several events are planned for the coming season including a salon in April hosted by Allen and Dorothy Lay at their home in Rolling Hills. In keeping with the theme of the

April concert "American G-enius", the Pennyroyal Players will present a tribute to Stephen Foster in stories and song.

Thank you for being a *Friend*!

Mona Gifford, Chair
Friends Membership Committee
 monagee@cox.net
 310-377-7711

Join our Symphony Team - Become a Volunteer

The Symphony Association could not function without the help of volunteers. There are all sorts of opportunities where your talents could be used to help us continue to produce these concerts for the benefit and enjoyment of our community.

Some examples of these opportunities include helping us with mailings, ushering, intermission refreshments, receptions, membership campaign, pre-concert set up, and maintaining files. In addition, members have volunteered the use of their homes to host salons and other fund-raising events

If you have special skills that you would like to exercise on behalf of the Peninsula Symphony Association, we would be happy to provide you that opportunity. At present we would dearly love to have someone knowledgeable in QuickBooks to help us upgrade our old version.

This is only a partial list, but it shows the diversity of tasks that must be accomplished by our volunteers. If you have any questions call the office at 310-544-0320 or, if you are ready to become a volunteer, please contact Marion Ruth, Concerts Committee Chair, (310) 541-4144. We are looking forward to having you join us.

If you have comments about Symphony Sounds, contact me, Ken Gash at:
kgash@cox.net.



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Contact Information

Any questions or requests about the Peninsula Symphony, the Peninsula Symphony Association, **Symphony Sounds**, or the *Friends* of the Peninsula Symphony should be sent to the Peninsula Symphony Association office (we will route your message to the appropriate person):

The Peninsula Symphony Association
Post Office Box 2602
Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA 90274

The office is normally staffed from 9:00 a.m to noon on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. You may call at any time (310-544-0320) and leave a message on our answering machine, but phone replies will usually be made only during normal staffing hours. You can email us at music.pensym@verizon.net. General information about the Symphony (current season schedule, etc.) can be found on our website (www.pensym.org).

Other contacts are:

Peninsula Symphony Association President, John R. Williams
310-541-4660 John.R.Williams@morganstanley.com

Friends of the Peninsula Symphony, Mona Gifford, Chair
310-377-7711 monagee@cox.net

Music Director/Conductor, Gary Berkson conductor.pensym@verizon.net