

# SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

### KLEZMER & KRAKAUER | NOV 6, 7 & 8, 2021

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

#### DAVID KRAKAUER

ARRANGER

Traditional Klezmer  
melodies arranged for  
Clarinet and Orchestra



Klezmer is the traditional secular music of Ashkenazic Jews (Jews who trace their ancestry to Eastern Europe). This swinging, swaggering, virtuosic, improvisatory and deeply emotional instrumental music was an essential accompaniment for Jewish celebrations throughout the shtetls of Europe. Stylistically, klezmer combines the cantorial chanting of synagogue music and non-Jewish Eastern European folk traditions, particularly those of Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Russia and the Roma people. Weddings in particular featured a variety of klezmer tunes that served practical purposes: stately processions to accompany the bridal couple and their families through the streets; up-tempo dances for celebrating after the ceremony; and mournful melodies to facilitate weeping. What is a wedding without tears, after all? The music was an essential part of the event, as it connected people with their emotions. Players, responding to the mood of the crowd, would make their instruments imitate human sounds, particularly laughter, sighs and sobs. In addition, elaborate melodic improvisation was and remains an essential facet of klezmer sound.

Klezmer – the name comes from two Hebrew words: “kley” (vessel or instrument) and “zemer” (song) – originally referred to the musicians who played it. Over time, like the music itself, the word has evolved and today denotes an instantly recognizable and wholly distinctive instrumental style.

#### ABRAHAM ELLSTEIN

*Chassidic Dance*



When Jews began emigrating *en masse* to the United States at the end of the 19th century, klezmerim brought their music with them. In America, klezmerim quickly absorbed the musical influences of their new environs. With the advent of sound recording, traditional klezmer instruments such as violin, bass, drum, and zimbl (cymbalom) were augmented by the clarinet, accordion and various brass instruments. At the same time, klezmer and a newly emerging American music called jazz cross-pollinated. Some of jazz’s greatest stars, like Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw, shaped jazz with their Jewish musical sensibilities, and some traditional klezmer tunes became crossover jazz hits. *Der Shtiler Bulgar* morphed into the Johnny Mercer hit song *And the Angels Sing*, for example.

Klezmer music has been enjoying a revival since the mid-1970s, when musicians interested in folk and roots music rediscovered it. Today, klezmer sounds infuse a wide variety of genres, from traditional to jazz, fusion, rock, folk, hip-hop, avant-garde, classical and punk.

# DAVID KRAKAUER & KATHLEEN TAGG

## *The Fretless Clarinet: Concerto for Klezmer Clarinet and Orchestra*



**COMPOSERS:** David Krakauer was born on November 22, 1956, in New York City; Kathleen Tagg was born on August 16, 1977, in South Africa

**WORK COMPOSED:** 2021. Co-commissioned by the Santa Rosa Symphony (lead commissioner), the Eugene Symphony and the Adele and John Gray Endowment Fund and dedicated to Francesco Lecce-Chong and the two symphonies.

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Performed by the Santa Rosa Symphony at the Green Music Center's Weill Hall in Rohnert Park, California, November 6-8, 2021.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, solo tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 25 minutes



### ABOUT THE MUSIC

“We are the sum of our parts – it’s my greatest strength, but it also makes it hard to categorize me as a musician,” clarinetist David Krakauer acknowledges. Acclaimed for his unique sound and approach, Krakauer has received international praise as a key innovator in modern klezmer as well as a major voice in classical music. Krakauer is an endlessly curious musician; over the years he has collaborated with top musicians from the worlds of klezmer, hip hop, classical, avant-garde and jazz. In recent years, he has focused on his creative collaborations with pianist, composer and producer Kathleen Tagg.

Tagg has presented her music on four continents in leading venues such as Carnegie Hall, had her original music performed in world-class venues such as New York’s Lincoln Center, appeared on a host of classical, world music and multi-genre recordings, and produced numerous CDs and inter-disciplinary musical programs from South Africa to Los Angeles.

In 2004, Krakauer and Tagg met at the Manhattan School of Music, where Krakauer is a member of the faculty, and began working together in 2012. “We started off playing standard classical repertoire together, Brahms and Debussy,” Krakauer remembers, “but we wanted to do something more creative, so we started working on folk material and original compositions.”

Tagg and Krakauer bring distinct and complimentary musical skills and experiences to their creative partnership. “I’m an omnivorous listener,” Tagg explains. “I was a cellist, street musician, church organist, session musician and wrote music for the theatre. I was also deeply influenced by the environment in post-apartheid Capetown in the 1990s. I got to study African traditions and learn music from around the continent – marimbas, interlocking patterns, dances. There are 11 official languages in South Africa, and many diverse cultures. I appreciate the different cultures, but I’m not an expert in any one of them. For me, the lasting legacy I took away from that time when I was in conservatory doing counterpoint in the morning and marimba music in the afternoon was an essential openness and the desire to connect on a human level.”

The jazz and funk Krakauer grew up listening to flavors and sometimes dictates the direction of his own klezmer-oriented compositions. Tagg came to klezmer as an adult in her early 30s. “Each time we collaborate in a different way,” says Tagg. “This concerto is a piece for David to perform. It’s his world and it’s very personal to him. Every originating impetus was from David, while I brought form and structure and construction to it.”

Krakauer adds, “I gave Kathleen a simple clarinet melody and a primitive bass line, which she sculpted into a composition for clarinet and orchestra. She suggested structures and modulations. She was able to work with the form so that it retained a kind of ‘required simplicity,’ but still made it a work that felt good in the context of a clarinet and symphony orchestra.”

The concerto’s title comes from Krakauer’s reputation for virtuoso glissandi (sliding up or down a scale, like the opening of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*). A friend, listening to Krakauer’s effortless riffs, remarked, “You play a fretless clarinet,” by which he meant Krakauer’s ability to gliss seamlessly, with no rests or glitches.

Krakauer provided the following notes:

“**Sanctuary City** is informed by immigration struggles and the Black Lives Matter movement. New York City has been a sanctuary city for a long time; it provides opportunity for cultures to come together. I used material from a suite I’d written as an imaginary meeting between [jazz clarinetist] Sidney Bechet and [klezmer clarinetist] Naftule Brandwein, who have influenced my musical personality more than anyone else – I thought of them as immigrants coming from different places to meet in New York. This movement channels the intense feelings of fear, rage, worry, exhaustion and anger that were bubbling over during COVID lockdowns in summer of 2020. The orchestra is sliding around all over the place. On top it’s cantorial, melismatic, and the orchestra is very turbulent, and then it starts to resolve with a Terkisher beat that gains momentum and cohesion. You hear Bechet’s growling quality throughout.

“**Mozart on the Judengasse** – When I was a teen, I started playing Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet. The fourth movement is a theme and variations, and I heard Jewish underpinnings in the viola variation. In Salzburg, I visited Mozart’s birthplace and found the nearby Judengasse – the Jewish street. Mozart must have passed by as a kid and heard Jewish prayer when he lived there. I wrote a whole movement based on this viola variation, and Kathleen did her magic on it. It uses the same orchestration as Mozart’s clarinet concerto, and the structure is a traditional klezmer tune in form and proportion. Klezmer fans will hear the influence of the famous klezmer tune ‘Der Gasn Nign’ (Street Song).

“**Ancestral Grooves** [also the name of David’s current working band] – We were playing in Siena, Italy, and then in England for a wedding, and we had a week in between, so we rented an Airbnb on Lago Como [in northern Italy outside Milan]. There was an amazing storm on the lake – very driving and stormy – that gave birth to the beginning of this movement. The central melodic idea evolved from klezmer *doinas* – modal, monophonic, melismatic improvisations. Then I wrote an original *bulgar* based on that *doina* material – so the music goes from storm to *doina* to *bulgar*. The movement ends in a joyous romp.

“This concerto is about my world from the past 30 years. It’s a big part of my legacy.”

# NICKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

## *Scheherazade* (Symphonic Suite) for Orchestra, Opus 35



**COMPOSER:** born March 18, 1844, Tikhvin, near Novgorod, Russia; died June 21, 1908, Lyubensk [now Pskov district], near St. Petersburg

**WORK COMPOSED:** during the summer of 1888

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Rimsky-Korsakov conducted the premiere in St. Petersburg on November 3, 1888

**INSTRUMENTATION:** solo violin, 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (one doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle, harp and strings

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 42 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*, inspired by alluring images from the *Tales from the Arabian Nights*, established the Russian composer as a brilliant orchestrator. Rimsky-Korsakov described *Scheherazade* as an Eastern "narrative of ... varied fairy-tale wonders." The solo violin, as Scheherazade, stitches the exotic stories together.

The literary inspiration for Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral masterpiece is a collection of folk tales from Egypt, India and Persia that includes stories dating back over 1,000 years. In 1704, French translator Antoine Galland began publishing the *Tales from the Arabian Nights* in a series of installments, beginning with "Sinbad the Sailor." The otherness of the East captured the imaginations of Westerners. In their minds it became a quasi-magical realm tinged with mystery, the scent of foreign perfumes and spices, beguiling music and other sensual delights. Galland's translations created a frenzy among Europeans for all things Eastern and contributed to the rise of *turquerie*, an interest in the culture, art and style of the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

Rimsky-Korsakov capitalized on listeners' instant association of Scheherazade with the East when he immortalized the legendary storyteller and her fantastic tales in music. According to legend, Scheherazade's stories were invented to prevent her execution at the hands of her brutal husband. Sultan Shakriar believed all women were naturally deceptive and had each of his wives killed after one night. Scheherazade escaped this fate by telling stories that spun themselves out over 1,001 nights. Her stories were an ingenious amalgam of poems, folk songs and fairy tales. Infected by the universal desire to find out "what happened next," the sultan deferred her execution each morning and eventually commuted her death sentence.

In his memoir *My Musical Life*, Rimsky-Korsakov wrote, "I meant these hints to direct but slightly the hearer's fancy on the path which my own fancy had traveled. All I desired was that the hearer, if he liked my piece as symphonic music, should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders, and not merely four pieces played one after the other and composed on the basis of themes common to all four movements." More specifically, Rimsky-Korsakov indicates the solo violin, which opens the first two movements, the intermezzo of the third movement and the conclusion of the fourth all correspond to Scheherazade herself. (The forbidding theme in the brasses that opens the whole work and is sometimes associated with the Sultan is perhaps better perceived as a metaphor for Scheherazade's death sentence. Postponed as long as she continues to beguile the Sultan with her inventive stories, it is always present as a threatening, if unspoken, reminder.)

Rimsky-Korsakov's student, composer Anatoly Lyadov, suggested the names by which each of *Scheherazade's* four sections are known to most audiences. Although Rimsky-Korsakov approved them initially, he had them removed from subsequent editions of the score, in keeping with his conception that *Scheherazade* was not a linear narrative. Instead, Rimsky-Korsakov described it as a "musical kaleidoscope" of images: the ocean carrying Sinbad's ship from one near-escape to the next; the roguish exploits of a Kalendar Prince (Rimsky-Korsakov does not specify which prince tale he is illustrating but presents a lighthearted composite of mischief-making); an enchanting love story of a young prince and princess, possibly Aladdin and the princess Badur; and a vastly different ocean, now storm-tossed and deadly, which finally wrecks Sinbad's ship against the rocks.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Ms. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today" (now heard on American Public Media).

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