



Santa Rosa Symphony

Thank you for attending today's performance

Geneva Plays Brahms

December 6, 7 & 8, 2025

Weill Hall, Green Music Center

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor

Geneva Lewis, violin

2025-2026 Classical Concert Series underwritten by

Anderman Family Foundation

Running time is approximately 100 minutes with intermission

Today's Program

RUGGERO LEONCAVALLO

Intermezzo from "Pagliacci"

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77

Allegro non troppo

Adagio

Allegro giocoso; ma non troppo vivace

INTERMISSION

JIMMY LÓPEZ

"Aino" Tone Poem for Orchestra (West Coast Premiere)

RICHARD STRAUSS

Suite from "Der Rosenkavalier," Opus 59

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PROGRAM NOTES

RUGGERO LEONCAVALLO

Intermezzo from “Pagliacci”

COMPOSER: Born April 5, 1857, Naples; died August 9, 1919,
Montecatini Terme, Tuscany

WORK COMPOSED: 1892

WORLD PREMIERE: “Pagliacci” premiered on May 21, 1893,
at the Teatro dal Verme in Milan

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes,
English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3
trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals,
tam-tam, triangle, 2 harps, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 3 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Ruggero Leoncavallo's short, powerful opera *Pagliacci* (The Clowns), expands on the verismo style of Italian opera that became popular in the 1890s. The story centers on a group of travelling "commedia del arte" players in mid-19th century Italy, and the murderous jealousy that erupts among the performers. Its drama, pathos, and searing raw emotion make for compelling entertainment, and "*Pagliacci*" remains a standard of operatic repertoire to this day.

The intermezzo, which falls between Act I and Act II, recalls an aria from the Prologio, and distills the intensity of the characters' emotions into an instrumental preview of the drama to come.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77

COMPOSER: Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, Vienna

WORK COMPOSED: During the summer of 1878. The Violin Concerto was written for and dedicated to violinist Joseph Joachim.

WORLD PREMIERE: January 1, 1879, in Leipzig, with Joachim

performing the solo.

INSTRUMENTATION: Solo violin, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 36 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Johannes Brahms' friendship with violinist Joseph Joachim changed the course of both men's personal and professional lives. Joachim's exceptional musicianship inspired Brahms to write his only concerto for that instrument, which Joachim subsequently performed, to great acclaim, throughout Europe. Since Brahms had only a passing familiarity with the violin's capabilities, Joachim's technical expertise proved essential to the concerto's creation. The collaboration between the two men resulted in what Joachim later termed one of the four great German concertos (the others were Mendelssohn's E minor Concerto, Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Max Bruch's G minor concerto).

A year after Brahms completed his Second Symphony, he returned to the lakeside town of Pörtschach on Lake Wörth in southern Austria, near the Italian border, and spent the summer writing his

Violin Concerto. In a letter to the critic Eduard Hanslick, Brahms wrote, “The melodies fly so thick here that you have to be careful not to step on one.”

Brahms intended Opus 77 to be a truly symphonic concerto; that is, a concerto that fully integrates the orchestra, rather than a showy piece designed to display the soloist’s virtuosity, in which the orchestra is relegated to mere accompaniment. Even without conventional solo pyrotechnics, Brahms’ Violin Concerto, written for Joachim’s prodigious technique, presents formidable challenges to any soloist.

The unusual format and style of the concerto elicited harsh comments from critics at its premiere. Perhaps the most famous is that of conductor Hans von Bülow, who remarked that Brahms had composed a concerto against the violin, whereupon violinist Bronisław Huberman responded, “It is a concerto for violin against the orchestra – and the violin wins!”

The Allegro non troppo is a true collaboration between orchestra and soloist. The slow orchestra introduction contains the seeds for

most of the subsequent themes presented in the movement. The soloist enters with dramatic flair, almost cadenza-like in its style, before presenting the expansive warmth of the main theme and its counterpart, a yearning, searching melody. Overall, this movement combines Brahms' laser-like intensity with gentler passages, and it ends with a cadenza composed by Joachim.

Although Brahms, in his usual self-deprecating way, described the second movement as "a poor Adagio," for some listeners it is the most beloved of the three. A solo oboe presents the main theme, one of immutable tranquility. In the words of a French critic, "Le hautbois propose, le violon dispose." (The oboe proposes, the violin disposes). The violinist echoes and elaborates on the theme, tracing airy arabesques of sound.

In the Allegro giocoso, Brahms gives us drama and fire. The main theme showcases Joachim's extraordinary facility with double-stops (sounding two notes simultaneously) and other violin techniques, but as with the preceding music, the violin and the orchestra blend their combined abilities to create a sound full of irrepressible joy.

On the day he premiered the violin concerto, Brahms apparently forgot his dress trousers and conducted the Gewandhaus Orchestra in a pair of ordinary gray pants. This faux pas was bad enough, but, in addition, Brahms's suspenders were either broken or not properly fastened, which elicited murmurs from the audience. For Brahms' sake, one hopes the power of the music and Joachim's stupendous playing overcame these sartorial mishaps.

JIMMY LÓPEZ

“Aino” (West Coast Premiere)

COMPOSER: Born October 21, 1978, Lima, Peru

WORK COMPOSED: 2022. Commissioned by l'Orchestre de Paris, Concertgebouworkest, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Dedicated to “the wondrous Klaus Mäkelä, whose young age belies his timeless wisdom and deeply profound understanding of music.”

WORLD PREMIERE: Klaus Mäkelä led l'Orchestre de Paris at the Philharmonie de Paris on September 8, 2022.

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, crash cymbals, glockenspiel, marimba, rain stick, snare drum, suspended cymbal,

tam-tam, thunder sheet, tubular bells, vibraphone, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 14 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Jimmy López, hailed as an “undeniably exciting composer” (Opera News), with “a brilliant command of orchestral timbres and textures” (Dallas Morning News) and possessing “a virtuoso mastery of the modern orchestra” (The New Yorker), is currently Composer-in-Residence at the San Diego Symphony and Orchestre symphonique de Montréal. A rising star, López’s works have been performed by leading orchestras and other ensembles around the world. In 2022, the Chicago Tribune said López’s orchestral tone poem *Aino* had “ ... all the hallmarks of great storytelling: foreshadowing, high-stakes drama, emotional appeals so plangent that the listener, too, aches.”

López writes, “In pure tone poem tradition, *Aino* follows the story of the eponymous hapless maiden as told in the fourth poem of the *Kalevala* (Finland’s national epic) ... I first learned of the *Kalevala* through Sibelius’ oeuvre, but it was not until I moved to

Helsinki that I fully grasped the unique place it holds in Finland's sense of national identity ... This piece is first and foremost a gift to Klaus Mäkelä ... but it is also a homage to the country that welcomed me as a young student, and with which I still have very strong and loving ties.

“As soon as I read Aino's story, I was struck by its rich sound world, which, although not obvious at first, becomes clear as the poem progresses. The anguished sobs of Aino; the mesmerizing vision of the three maidens bathing; the rock sinking to the bottom of the sea; the hare running across the forest to relay the news; the mother wailing upon learning of her daughter's fate, and the waterfalls, golden mountains, and trees that emerge from her endless stream of tears; and finally, the three cuckoos, singing eerily atop three birch trees. All these elements offer a plethora of tantalizing sounds, all of which inspired and guided the way I orchestrated the piece. The cuckoo's song, due to its universally known musical cadence, makes a prominent appearance at the climax across all instrumental sections, and makes its presence felt all the way up until the end (on Glockenspiel). But I also chose to thread the cuckoo's song into an earlier musical motive: my

imagined “song of the three maidens”, uttered as they first entice Aino to join them, and represented in the orchestra by two solo violins and a solo viola playing a haunting, whistle-like melody on high harmonics.

“Writing Aino has been a wonderful journey into the world of the *tondichtung* or tone poem, and in many ways, it is a departure from other relentless and rhythmically driven works of mine. Here, instead of trying to tell the story by imposing my point of view, I chose to quiet myself and listen to what the story had to tell me. It seemed all but fitting, given that it was in Finland that I learned the art of listening, and that Silence can be just as powerful as a thunderous orchestral tutti.”

RICHARD STRAUSS

Suite from “Der Rosenkavalier”

COMPOSER: Born June 11, 1864, Munich; died September 8, 1949, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

WORK COMPOSED: The Suite, based on music from Strauss’ 1911 opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*, was arranged by conductor Artur Rodziński in 1944.

WORLD PREMIERE: Rodziński led the New York Philharmonic on October 5, 1944.

INSTRUMENTATION: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 4 clarinets, (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, ratchet, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, 2 harps, celesta, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 24 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Richard Strauss' comic opera "Der Rosenkavalier" (Knight of the Rose) brought him his greatest fame and financial success.

Audiences flocked to Dresden to see "Der Rosenkavalier"; in fact, when the opera premiered in 1911, it was so well attended that special "Rosenkavalier" trains were chartered to shuttle audiences to Dresden from Berlin.

Strauss was not only one of the foremost composers of his time, but also a well-respected conductor. He programmed a wide spectrum of works and had a particular affinity for the music of

Mozart. After the 1909 premiere of Strauss' uncompromisingly modern opera *Elektra*, the composer declared, "I shall now write a Mozart opera;" *Der Rosenkavalier* is the result. It resembles "The Marriage of Figaro" in its convoluted plot twists, comic romantic entanglements, and highly singable melodies. Some critics dismissed it as old-fashioned and accused Strauss of abandoning the modern idiom in a grossly commercial attempt to appeal to audiences. Accurate or not, this criticism had no effect on either Strauss or the public, which adored *Rosenkavalier* from its first performance. The opera remained so popular for the next 30 years that at the end of WWII, Strauss identified himself to the American soldiers who knocked on his door simply as "the composer of *Der Rosenkavalier*."

The suite opens with the opera's signature horn solo and introduction, then recounts the exploits of the title character, Octavian, as he woos the aging Marschallin and later seals the engagement of his kinsman, Baron Ochs, to the youthful Sophie by presenting her with a silver rose. Strauss' incomparably beautiful Viennese waltzes are woven throughout the Suite like silken threads in a tapestry. The specific excerpts of the opera

featured in the suite are the Prelude to Act I, the Presentation of the Silver Rose (Act II), the Arrival of Ochs and Waltzes from Act II; “Ist ein Traum” (It is a Dream) from Act III, and the Grand Waltz.

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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. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR’s “Performance Today,” (now heard on American Public Media).

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