Santa Rosa Symphony

Thank you for attending today's performance

Echoes of Innocence

November 14, 15, & 16, 2026

Weill Hall, Green Music Center

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor

Oliver Herbert, cello

Elisa Sunshine, soprano

2026-2027 Classical Concert Series underwritten by

Anderman Family Foundation

Running time is approximately 100 minutes with intermission

Today's Program

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

"Vocalise" in C-sharp minor for Soprano and Orchestra, Opus 34/14

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 33

Allegro non troppo

Allegretto con moto

Allegro non troppo

INTERMISSION

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 4 in G major for Soprano and Orchestra

Bedächtig: nicht eilen

In gemächlicher Bewegung: ohne Hast

Ruhevoll

Sehr behaglich

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PROGRAM NOTES

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Vocalise in C-sharp minor for Soprano and Orchestra, Opus 34/14

COMPOSER: Born Semyonovo, Russia, April 1, 1873; died Beverly Hills, CA, March 28, 1943

WORK COMPOSED: Originally for voice and piano, 1915. Orchestrated by the composer in 1915/16.

WORLD PREMIERE: Moscow, January 25, 1916, with soprano Antonina Nezhdanova, orchestra conducted by Rachmaninoff.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 6 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The ever-popular “Vocalise” is a “song without words,” but not in the sense of Mendelssohn, who gave this title to several of his short piano pieces. Rachmaninoff’s piece is unusual in that it is a real song, written for a singer (the word “vocalise” means a vocal exercise), and included in a collection of 14 songs (the others with words, of course). This beautiful melody, full of longing and nostalgia, has been arranged countless times for various instrumental combinations. The present orchestration, by the composer himself, gives the original vocal line to the entire first violin section.

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 33

COMPOSER: Born Paris, October 9, 1835; died Algiers, December 16, 1921.

WORK COMPOSED: 1872. Dedicated to cellist Auguste Tolbecque.

WORLD PREMIERE: Paris, January 19, 1873. Auguste Tolbecque, soloist, and the orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire, conducted by Édouard Deldevez.

INSTRUMENTATION: Solo cello, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2

bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 20 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

No composer has ever been able to reach the unbelievable precocity of Mozart, who wrote his first symphony at the age of eight. Camille Saint-Saëns, however, came close. He first played the piano in public at age five, and at ten, gave his formal debut at Paris's Salle Pleyel, during which, as the legend goes, he offered to play any of Beethoven's 32 sonatas from memory. Saint-Saëns grew up to become a veritable national institution in France as one of the country's most prominent composers, pianists and organists.

At the time of his death at age 86, Saint-Saëns's catalog comprised no fewer than 169 opus numbers, plus a great many unnumbered works, including about a dozen operas. His output covers just about every type of concert music that existed in France at the time, from symphonies and concertos to sacred music, chamber music, songs, and works for keyboard.

Though not a string player himself, Saint-Saëns had a strong affinity for string instruments. He wrote three concertos and numerous solo works for the violin, as well as two concertos and two sonatas for cello (not to mention “The Swan,” that most beloved of cello solos, which is part of the popular “Carnival of the Animals”).

The First Cello Concerto was written for Auguste Tolbecque (1830-1919), principal cellist of the Paris Conservatory Orchestra. It stands out among Saint-Saëns’s concertos by its serious tone and its structural innovations. The concerto is played without pause; the usual three movements condensed into one. It begins without any introduction as the soloist launches into a passionate theme with a wide melodic range, strong offbeat accents, and fast runs. The tremolos (rapid repetitions of notes) in the violins and violas add to the excitement. Except for a few moments when a more lyrical idea takes over, this passionate tone is sustained throughout the entire movement. Then everything suddenly changes: the music moves to a new key, tempo, and meter, and we hear a delicate minuet, intentionally old-fashioned, played by muted strings. The solo cello adds a nostalgic countermelody to the minuet; at one point, the solo part evolves into a brief cadenza. The passionate melody of the

opening then returns and is expanded into a brilliant finale. At the very end, the tonality changes from minor to major, and the piece ends with a flourish.

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 4 in G major for Soprano and Orchestra

COMPOSER: Born Kalischt, Austrian Empire (now Kaliště, Czech Republic), 1860, July 7, 1860; died Vienna, May 18, 1911

WORK COMPOSED: 1892/1899-1900, with numerous later revisions.

WORLD PREMIERE: Munich, November 23, 1901. Soprano Margarethe Michalek, Kaim Orchestra (predecessor of the Munich Philharmonic), conducted by Mahler.

INSTRUMENTATION: 4 flutes (third and fourth doubling piccolos), 3 oboes (third doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (second doubling small clarinet in E-flat, third doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, percussion (bass drum, triangle, sleigh bells, glockenspiel, cymbals, tam-tam), harp and strings. A soprano singer joins the orchestra in the fourth movement.

ESTIMATED DURATION: 60 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

“Actually, I only wanted to write a symphonic humoresque,” Gustav Mahler told his close friend and confidante Natalie Bauer-Lechner, “and out of it came a symphony of the normal dimensions—whereas, earlier, what I imagined would be a symphony turned out, in my Second and Third, to be three times the normal length.”

The Fourth is the shortest and the sunniest of the Mahler symphonies, and definitely the one for the novice to start with. The composer’s use of the word “humoresque” is revealing, for that was also what he had called his songs after texts from “Des Knaben Wunderhorn” (“The Youth’s Magic Horn”) at the first performances. One of these songs, “Das himmlische Leben” (“Heavenly Life”), later became the last movement of the Fourth Symphony.

“Des Knaben Wunderhorn” was a collection of German folk verse collected and published by poets Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim (heavily edited and interspersed with their own poems) between 1805 and 1808. The peculiar combination of simplicity and refinement, found in many of these poems, greatly appealed to Mahler, who repeatedly turned to the collection for texts to set to

music. Mahler wrote his first “Wunderhorn” songs (for voice and piano) in 1887 to 1890. The great “Wunderhorn” songs with orchestra date from 1892 to 1899, the same years during which Mahler included vocal settings from the collection in his Second and Third Symphonies. Both of these symphonies also contain “instrumental” movements that are adaptations of “Wunderhorn” songs.

The symphony opens with the characteristic sound of sleigh bells, which will return several times later on. The first real theme almost sounds like Mozart, as if to evoke some nostalgic memories from the past. For the most part cheerful and genial, this opening movement nonetheless contains a moment where, suddenly, the fun is over. Toward the middle, clouds begin to gather on the horizon, and the trumpets turn their jolly melody from before into a desperate, dramatic statement: they are instructed to raise the bells of their instruments for better projection. Soon after this brief outburst, everything returns to normal, and the music of the coda is once again idyllic and happy.

Alma Mahler wrote in her memoirs that when her husband was

writing the second movement of his Fourth, he “was under the spell of the self-portrait by Arnold Böcklin, in which Death fiddles into the painter’s ear while the latter sits entranced.” Mahler captured this image in the title he originally gave the movement (he deleted the title before publication): Freund Hein spielt auf, or “Friend Hein strikes up,” “Friend Hein” being a euphemistic name for Death in German folklore. The scherzo-type movement, in the style of the Ländler (an Austrian folk dance), features a solo violin tuned one whole tone higher than usual, producing a brighter, shriller sound. The character of the music, though somewhat grotesque, is never frightening. The main melody, with the retuned violin, alternates with two gentler “trios” or middle sections.

The slow movement, which stands in third place, seems to come from a completely different world. It begins as a hymn-like Adagio that brings to mind such Beethovenian models as the Adagio of the Ninth Symphony. It is a set of variations on a simple and serene major-mode theme, twice interrupted by passionate interludes in the minor mode. The great conductor Bruno Walter, who in his youth had worked closely with Mahler, recalled that the composer had mentioned the image of a “tombstone on which

was carved an image of the departed" as an inspiration. The main melody of the movement arises from an image of absolute immobility and increases gradually in volume as the subsequent variations become more and more animated. Finally, the great moment arrives: the music has almost faded into complete silence when suddenly we hear a veritable explosion in a surprising new key (E major after G major), and the horns burst in with a theme from the first movement. It is like a sudden and isolated flash of lightning, after which the music returns to is initial tranquility as the violins play a melody to which Mahler was to return in his song "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" ("I have become lost to the world").

The song that became the last movement was written seven or eight years before the rest of the symphony. Originally called "Das himmlische Leben," it originally served as a counterpart to a tragic piece entitled "Das irdische Leben" ("Life on earth"). The poem describes life in Heaven as a child would imagine it; yet naïveté is combined with some deliciously subtle irony. The music captures this duality perfectly, as it makes allusions to folksong while also using such un-folksong-like elements as long melismas (many

notes sung to the same syllable) and sudden key changes. The narration of Heaven's delights is punctuated with a return of the sleigh-bell music we heard earlier in the first movement. In the last section, the music suddenly modulates from G major to E major (the same succession of keys that brought about the great "explosion" in the third movement). Here, however, the melody becomes ever softer and sweeter as the words, after describing heavenly food and drink, turn to heavenly music. Which is exactly what Mahler gave us in the final measures of the symphony.

© P.L., Ph. D., Program Annotator, The Cleveland Orchestra (1990-2007) Visiting Associate Professor, Bard College (2007-2024)