



OPENING WEEKEND:

BEETHOVEN'S TRIPLE CONCERTO and SYMPHONIC DANCES

Friday and Saturday, September 14-15, 2018 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, September 16, 2018 at 2 p.m.

MICHAEL STERN, *conductor*

SEAN CHEN, *piano*

NOAH GELLER, *violin*

MARK GIBBS, *cello*

AARON JAY KERNIS

New Era Dance

BEETHOVEN

Concerto in C Major for Piano, Violin, Cello
and Orchestra, op. 56 ("Triple Concerto")

I. Allegro

II. Largo

III. Rondo alla polacca

SEAN CHEN, *piano*

NOAH GELLER, *violin*

MARK GIBBS, *cello*

INTERMISSION

RACHMANINOFF

Symphonic Dances, op. 45

I. Non allegro

II. Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)

III. Lento assai – Allegro vivace

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American composer Aaron Jay Kernis wrote his *New Era Dance* “in hope for a time of imperative political and social change in this country.”

The vibrant orchestral work is a brilliant synthesis of popular American dance styles and traditions.

AARON JAY KERNIS (b. 1960)

New Era Dance (1992)

6 minutes

Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, 4 percussion, piano, synthesizer and strings.

The New York Philharmonic (for its 150th anniversary) and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra jointly commissioned *New Era Dance* by American composer Aaron Jay Kernis. In his brief program notes, Kernis explains:

New Era Dance is dedicated and written in celebration of a new era of leadership at the New York Philharmonic [Kurt Masur began his tenure as the orchestra’s Music Director in 1991 – Ed.], in anticipation of the new millennium to come in the year 2000, in hope for a time of imperative political and social change in this country.

In *New Era Dance*, Kernis invokes a wide range of American dance traditions and styles to create a brilliant orchestral opener.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Aaron Jay Kernis: *New Era Dance*

Baltimore Symphony / David Zinman, conductor

Label: Decca Catalog # 444454



Beethoven wrote the “Triple Concerto” at a time when he was confronting the onset of deafness that would plague him for the remainder of his life.

Still, there is no sense of despair in this genial work, full of lyricism as well as virtuoso opportunities for the three soloists.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Concerto in C Major for Piano, Violin, Cello and Orchestra, op. 56 (“Triple Concerto”) (1804)

34 minutes

Solo piano, violin and cello, flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.

By the turn of the 18th century, Ludwig van Beethoven had firmly established himself as one of Vienna’s most prominent musicians — a virtuoso pianist and composer of the first rank. It appeared as if nothing could stand in the way of his continued rise to greatness, but then tragedy struck. In 1800, Beethoven, not yet 30, began to realize his hearing was deteriorating. He sensed that he would soon lose his hearing altogether.

The irony was not lost on Beethoven. Soon, he would be a pianist unable to perform in public, and a composer unable to hear his own musical creations. This turn of events engendered a supreme crisis in his life. On

October 6, 1802, he penned the immortal letter to his brothers known as the “Heiligenstadt Testament.” Beethoven confessed that the onset of his deafness

...almost made me despair, and I was on the point of putting an end to my life — The only thing that held me back was my art. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence — a truly miserable existence.

Indeed, Beethoven responded to his adversity by composing at a furious pace. Masterpieces from the first decade of the 19th century include his second through sixth symphonies, the “Razumovsky” string quartets, the “Waldstein” and “Appassionata” piano sonatas, and the

composer's only opera, *Fidelio*. The "Triple Concerto" belongs to that same fruitful period. Beethoven began composition of the concerto in late 1803, completing the work in the summer of 1804.

He scored the "Triple Concerto" for a trio of soloists (piano, violin and cello) and orchestra. While composed around the same time as his pathbreaking "Eroica" Symphony, the Concerto presents a far more genial and lyrical side of Beethoven's craft. The opening Allegro is the most expansive of the work's three movements. A hushed Largo leads, without pause, to the finale, which is a rondo based on the sparkling Polish dance, the polonaise.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Beethoven: "Triple Concerto"

Eugene Istomin, *piano*; Isaac Stern, *violin*; Leonard Rose, *cello*

Philadelphia Orchestra / Eugene Ormandy, *conductor*

Label: Sony Catalog # 826772



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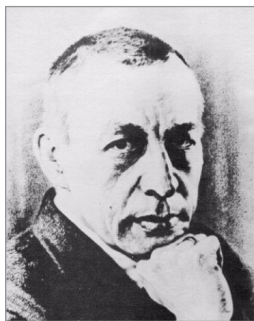
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In describing *Symphonic Dances*, his final composition, Rachmaninoff commented, “I don’t know how it happened, it must have been my last spark.”

The work, in three movements, features themes Rachmaninoff employed throughout his career, including the ancient plainchant “Dies irae” (Day of wrath), which makes a dramatic appearance in the finale.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Symphonic Dances, op. 45 (1940)

35 minutes

Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, side drum, orchestra bells, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, harp, piano and strings.

On June 30, 1938, Russian choreographer Michel Fokine presented the world premiere of *Paganini*, his ballet adaptation of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s work for solo piano and orchestra, *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, op. 43 (1934). Rachmaninoff hoped to attend the London performance but an injury sustained after a fall made that impossible.

Rachmaninoff soon regained his health, and the composer/pianist resumed a demanding European and American concert tour. Finally, in spring 1940, Rachmaninoff was able to enjoy a period of rest. He traveled to Orchard Point, an estate near Huntington, New York, on Long Island. There, Rachmaninoff composed his final

work, *Symphonic Dances*.

It appears that Rachmaninoff first conceived *Symphonic Dances* as another potential ballet subject for Fokine. Rachmaninoff originally entitled the work *Fantastic Dances*, with the three movements representing “Midday,” “Twilight” and “Midnight.” Rachmaninoff later discarded these titles and designated the various movements simply by their tempo markings. Prior to orchestrating the work, Rachmaninoff played excerpts of the dances on the piano for Fokine. However, the choreographer’s death in 1942 prevented any

contemplated ballet from becoming a reality.

Rachmaninoff initially scored *Symphonic Dances* for two pianos before completing the orchestration in the autumn of 1940. He dedicated the work to conductor Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, who gave the premiere on January 3, 1941. The initial critical reception was not enthusiastic. However, in time, *Symphonic Dances* became widely admired as the composer's finest orchestral achievement. Rachmaninoff was rather surprised by his accomplishment, observing, "I don't know how it happened, it must have been my last spark."

Rachmaninoff died two years after the premiere of *Symphonic Dances* and never composed another work. While it is not clear Rachmaninoff intended it to be his final composition, the piece has a decidedly valedictory character. *Symphonic Dances* features quotations of earlier Rachmaninoff compositions as well as the "Dies irae" (Day of wrath) chant — a recurring leitmotif in his music. Further, the masterful orchestration, captivating melodies and brilliant juxtaposition of dramatic and lyric elements are all trademarks of Rachmaninoff's art.

Symphonic Dances is in three movements. The first opens with various winds, over furtive string accompaniment, introducing the movement's principal descending "short-short-long" rhythmic figure. An expansive, lyrical interlude features a solo alto saxophone, the only time Rachmaninoff included this instrument (for this, the composer sought the advice of a friend, Broadway orchestrator Robert Russell Bennett). The second movement is an extended and brilliantly scored waltz. The finale is a fantasia on the "Dies irae" plainchant. As in the opening movement, the finale offers a lengthy contrasting central episode in slow tempo before the "Dies irae" returns in the propulsive conclusion.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Rachmaninoff: *Symphonic Dances*

Moscow Philharmonic / Kiril Kondrashin, *conductor*

Label: Urania Records Catalog # 303

TWENTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD AMERICAN PIANIST SEAN CHEN IS

hailed as a charismatic rising star with “an exceptional ability to connect with an audience combined with an easy virtuosity” (Huffington Post). As recipient of the DeHaan Classical Fellowship, winner of the 2013 American Pianists Awards and third-prize winner at the 2013 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, he continues to earn accolades for “alluring, colorfully shaded renditions” (New York Times) and “genuinely sensitive” playing (LA Times). He was named a 2015 fellow by the prestigious Leonore Annenberg Fellowship Fund for the Performing Arts.



Chen has performed with many prominent orchestras, including the Fort Worth, Hartford, Hudson Valley, Indianapolis, Knoxville, Louisiana Philharmonic, Milwaukee, North Carolina, Pasadena, Phoenix, Plano, San Diego, Santa

Fe, Tucson and New West symphony orchestras, as well as the Philadelphia, Indianapolis and South Bay chamber orchestras, collaborating with such esteemed conductors as Leonard Slatkin, Gerard Schwarz, Nicholas McGegan, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Marcelo Lehninger, Nir Kabaretti, James Judd, George Hanson, Hector Guzman and Boris Brott.

As a result of his relationships with both orchestral musicians and audience members, Chen has made return appearances with several orchestras, including the San Diego Symphony, Santa Fe Symphony, Columbus Indiana Philharmonic, Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, Carmel Symphony Orchestra and Sunriver Music Festival Orchestra.

His CD releases include “La Valse,” a solo recording on the Steinway label hailed for “penetrating artistic intellect” (Audiophile Audition), a live recording from the Cliburn Competition released by Harmonia Mundi and praised for his “ravishing tone and cogently contoured lines” (Gramophone), and an album of Michael Williams’ solo piano works on the Parma label. Chen also has contributed to the catalog of Steinway’s new Spirio system and is a Steinway Artist.

Born in Florida, Chen grew up in Oak Park, California. He received his artist diploma in 2014 from the Yale School of Music as a George W. Miles Fellow. His teachers include Hung-Kuan Chen, Tema Blackstone, Edward Francis, Jerome Lowenthal and Matti Raekallio. He currently lives in Kansas City, Missouri, and is an artist-in-residence at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance. His wife Betty is a violinist with the Kansas City Symphony. When not at the piano, he enjoys tinkering with computers. ■

VIOLINIST NOAH GELLER HAS PERFORMED EXTENSIVELY

throughout the United States and abroad. Prior to his appointment as Seattle Symphony concertmaster in 2018, he served as Kansas City Symphony concertmaster from 2012 to 2018 where he appeared frequently as a soloist. He made his solo recording debut on the Kansas City Symphony's Reference Recordings album featuring music by Saint-Saëns. Additionally, Geller worked as adjunct associate professor of violin at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance.



Geller began his professional career in the first violin section of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2007 while still pursuing his master's degree. He served as acting assistant concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra for the 2010 and 2011 seasons. Geller has performed as guest concertmaster with the orchestras of Pittsburgh, Houston and Beijing (China National Symphony) and appears regularly with the dynamic, spirited and conductorless East Coast Chamber Orchestra.

An active chamber musician, Geller has performed at the Marlboro, Kingston, Saratoga, Heartland and Skaneateles festivals, and has appeared on the Lyon and Healy (Chicago), Philadelphia Museum of Art and Lyric Chamber Music Society (New York) series, among others. He is an original member of Shir Ami, an ensemble dedicated to the music of composers whose lives were adversely affected by the Holocaust. Geller has organized and presented concerts by Shir Ami for the Kansas City community, garnering remarkable support and enthusiasm.

Geller grew up in the Chicago area, studying privately with Jennifer Cappelli. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Juilliard School where he studied with Hyo Kang, Donald Weilerstein and Cho-Liang Lin. When not on stage, Geller enjoys spending time with his wife, percussionist Mari Yoshinaga, and their dog, Monkey. He performs on a violin made by Andreas Postacchini c. 1840. ■

PRAISED BY THE KANSAS CITY STAR FOR HIS “SWEET, SENSUOUS

tone and a sophisticated feel for long-breathed lines,” Principal Cellist Mark Tsuyoshi Gibbs holds the Robert A. Kipp chair in the Kansas City Symphony. Prior to this appointment in 1999, Gibbs earned both bachelor’s and master’s degrees from



Northwestern University, where he was a student of Hans Jorgen Jensen. At Northwestern, Gibbs was named principal cellist of the Northwestern University Symphony Orchestra and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. He also worked closely with Jensen as a teaching assistant. Gibbs’ numerous awards include the Northwestern University Civic Scholar String Fellowship, the Union League of Chicago Civic and Arts Foundation Prize, first place in the Northwestern University School of Music Concerto Competition, first prize in the Music Teachers National Association Collegiate Artist National Competition, and grand

prize in the American String Teachers Association National Solo Competition. He has appeared many times as a soloist with the Kansas City Symphony, including twice on Classical Series opening-night concerts as well as on the Symphony’s 2015 all-Saint-Saëns disc from Reference Recordings, which earned a Grammy® Award nomination. He is proud to be known as a “Fine Kansan Cellist” (Audiophilia Online Magazine) and resides in Overland Park with his wife, Kansas City Symphony Principal Second Violinist Tamamo Someya Gibbs, and their daughters. ■

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