ARNOLD SCHOENBERG  

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), op. 4 (1943 revision)
Orchestra Roster

MICHAEL STERN, Music Director
JASON SEBER, David T. Beals III Associate Conductor

FIRST VIOLINS
Sunho Kim, Acting Concertmaster
Miller Nichols Chair
Stirling Trent, Acting Associate Concertmaster
Chiafei Lin, Acting Assistant Concertmaster
Gregory Sandomirsky ‡, Associate Concertmaster Emeritus
Anne-Marie Brown
Betty Chen
Anthony DeMarco
Susan Goldenberg*
Tomoko Iguchi
Dorris Dai Janssen
Vladimir Rykov
Alex Shum*

SECOND VIOLINS
Tamamo Someya Gibbs, Principal
Kristin Velicer, Acting Associate Principal
Minhye Helena Choi, Acting Assistant Principal
Nancy Beckmann
Mary Garcia Grant
Kevin Hao ‡
Kazato Inouye
Rena Ishii
Stephanie Larsen
Francesca Manheim

VIOLAS
Matthew Sinno, Acting Principal
Jessica Nance, Acting Associate Principal
Duke Lee, Acting Assistant Principal
Kent Brauninger
Sean Brumble
Marvin Gruenbaum
Jenifer Houck
Jesse Yukimura

CELLOS
Mark Gibbs, Principal
Robert A. Kipp Chair
Susie Yang, Associate Principal
Richard Hill Chair
Alexander East, Assistant Principal
Maria Crosby
John Eadie
Lawrence Figg
Rung Lee*
Meredith McCook
Allen Probus

DOUBLE BASSES
Jeffrey Kail, Principal
Evan Halloin, Associate Principal
Brandon Mason ‡
Caleb Quillon
Richard Ryan
Nash Tomey

FLUTES
Michael Gordon, Principal
Marylou and John Dodds Turner Chair
Shannon Finney, Associate Principal
Kayla Burggraf

OBOES
Kristina Fulton, Principal
Shirley Bush Helzberg Chair
Alison Chung, Associate Principal

CLARINET
Raymond Santos, Principal
Bill and Peggy Lyons Chair
Silvio Guitian, Associate Principal
John Klinghammer

BASS CLARINET
John Klinghammer

BASSOONS
Ann Bilderback, Principal
Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Chair
Thomas DeWitt, Associate Principal
Maxwell Pipinich

CONTRABASSOON
Thomas DeWitt

HORN
Alberto Suarez, Principal
Landon and Sarah Rowland Chair
David Sullivan, Associate Principal
Elizabeth Gray
David Gamble
Stephen Multer,
Associate Principal Emeritus

TROMPETS
Julian Kaplan, Principal
James B. and Annabel Nutter Chair
Steven Franklin, Associate Principal
Brian Rood ‡

TUBA
Joe LeFevre, Principal
Frank Byrne Chair

TIMPANI
Timothy Jeppson, Principal
Michael and Susan Newburger Chair

PERCUSSION
Josh Jones*, Principal
David Yoon, Associate Principal

HARP
Katherine Siochi, Principal

LIBRARIANS
Elena Lence Talley, Principal
Fabrice Curtis

* Non-Rotating Musician
^ New Member
‡ On Leave of Absence
ARNOLD SCHOENBERG
Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), op. 4 (1899; revised 1943)
30 minutes

The composer Arnold Schoenberg is perhaps best known for inventing the twelve-tone technique of composition, exchanging the major and minor scales of tonality for a chromatic scale in which no note holds more importance than any other. But his most-performed work was written more than twenty years before the development of the technique and ten years before his decisive break with tonality in the Second String Quartet.

Verklärte Nacht was composed in 1899, when Schoenberg was 25 years old. He was inspired by a poem of the same name by Richard Dehmel, who had been tried for obscenity and blasphemy upon its publication. (Dehmel was acquitted but only on technical grounds). Schoenberg was also smitten at the time with Mathilde Zemlinsky, his composition teacher’s sister. The combination of the composer’s strong feelings for Mathilde and the vividly descriptive language of the poem gave birth to a lush and highly imaginative score. Its passionately expressive harmonic language, reminiscent of Wagner’s opera Tristan und Isolde, married to masterful contrapuntal writing and continuous developing variation in the style of Brahms, united two disparate and even opposing schools of German composition.

Schoenberg’s piece follows the structure of the poem. A man and a woman walk together “through a bare, cold wood.” The woman confesses, through plaintive music in the violins, that she is pregnant by another man, seeking fulfillment in motherhood but now feeling punished by fate having met her true love (“Now life has taken its revenge”). After a brief interlude, the man, represented by the cellos, responds in acceptance and love, telling the woman that they will be satisfied in each other and he will raise the child as his own (their love will verklären, “transfigure,” the child). The lovers embrace as the night is transfigured from a “bare, cold wood” to an “exalted, shining night.”

The composition created controversy even before its premiere. Schoenberg submitted it to the Vienna Music Society for performance; the society rejected it because of the poem’s subject matter and the adventurous harmonies, particularly an inverted ninth chord with the ninth in the bass that the society condemned as “uncategorizable.” Schoenberg later quipped, “Inversions of ninth chords just don’t exist; hence, no performance, either, for how can one perform something that does not exist?” When the piece finally received its premiere in 1902, the audience was scandalized. But the poet Dehmel, who was in attendance, later wrote to Schoenberg saying, “I had intended to follow the motives of my text in your composition, but soon forgot to do so, I was so enthralled by the music.”

Verklärte Nacht was originally written for string sextet (two violins, two violas, two cellos), and thus was one of the earliest examples of program music (music with an extramusical scenario or story) composed for chamber ensemble. Schoenberg orchestrated the music for string orchestra in 1917, and further revised the score in 1943; this has become the most popular version in performance.
ARNOLD SCHOENBERG  
(1874–1951)

Arnold Schoenberg, one of the most revolutionary composers of the early 20th century, came from rather modest beginnings. His father was a shopkeeper who sold shoes, his mother a piano teacher. Schoenberg was largely self-taught in violin, cello and composition. When his father died in 1890, he took a job as a bank clerk along with occasional work orchestrating operettas, while continuing to compose his own music. He married Mathilde Zemlinsky, his composition teacher’s sister, in 1901. His compositions, exhibiting a unique Post-Romantic voice, came to the attention of Richard Strauss, who arranged for him to study at the Stern Conservatory with a stipend, and Gustav Mahler, who adopted him as a protégé and supported him until his own death in 1911.

In the summer of 1908, Mathilde left Schoenberg for an affair with the Austrian painter Richard Gerstl (who committed suicide when Mathilde returned to Schoenberg). During that time, the composer began experimenting with chromatic music that had no reference to a key or tonal center. His Second String Quartet, composed in that year, added a soprano for the third and fourth movements. The fourth movement, Schoenberg later wrote, “begins with an introduction, depicting the departure from earth to another planet … Becoming relieved from gravitation — passing through clouds into thinner and thinner air, forgetting all the troubles of life on earth — that is attempted to be illustrated in this introduction.” One of the musical illustrations of this theme comes through complex chromatic chords completely disconnected from any sense of tonality. The piece does end on a major triad, but it was to be the last major chord he was to write for years.

Other influential works of Schoenberg’s from this period that exhibited a free treatment of notes and chords without a key include the song cycle Das Buch der Hängenden Gärten (The Book of the Hanging Gardens), Five Pieces for Orchestra, and Pierrot Lunaire, which, in addition to atonality, used sprechstimme (speech-singing) to convey the songs of the sad moonstruck clown. Schoenberg wrote of Pierrot, “I sense that I am definitely moving towards a new way of expression. The sounds become a truly animalistic immediate expression of sensual and psychological emotions.”

In 1918 Schoenberg founded the Society for Private Musical Performances with his two most prominent students, Anton Webern and Alban Berg. The Society presented carefully rehearsed performances of contemporary compositions to a private audience “to provide artists and art lovers a true and exact knowledge of modern music.” Any expressions of approval or disapproval, including applause, were prohibited. Over the course of its three-year existence, the Society presented more than 350 performances to its paid members.
Unmoored from tonality, Schoenberg sought a compositional technique that would provide unity and coherence the way tonality had for the past 250 years. In 1921 he announced the development of his “method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another.” This method used a unique sequence of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale for each piece, called a “tone row”; the row can be transposed to different pitches and played upside down and backward (or both), but must always complete the full sequence before beginning again. The first piece Schoenberg completed using this method was his Suite for Piano, op. 25. Webern, Berg and Schoenberg’s other students enthusiastically adopted the method, forming what was later dubbed the “Second Viennese School” (the first comprising Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven). Schoenberg made use of this method for the rest of his life for works as varied as his Fourth String Quartet, the orchestral concertos for piano and violin, and the choral work A Survivor From Warsaw.

Mathilde died in 1923, and the following year Schoenberg married Gertrud Kolisch, the sister of one of his students. In 1925 he was appointed professor at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin, but was dismissed by the Nazi regime in 1933 as a Jew. Schoenberg had converted to Christianity in the Lutheran church in 1898, but felt the pull of his heritage throughout his life. Just prior to emigrating to the United States in 1933, he formally reclaimed membership in Judaism while living in Paris. He taught at the Malkin Conservatory in Boston before settling in Los Angeles, becoming a professor at both UCLA and USC and receiving American citizenship in 1941. His students in Los Angeles included Otto Klemperer, John Cage and Lou Harrison.

While continuing to compose using the twelve-tone method, Schoenberg also wrote several tonal pieces in the 1930s. He turned to Jewish themes in some of his later compositions, including Kol Nidre for chorus and orchestra (1938), A Survivor From Warsaw for narrator, men’s chorus and orchestra (1947) and his unfinished opera Moses und Aron.

The opera was named Moses und Aron rather than Moses und Aaron because Schoenberg had triskaidekaphobia, fear of the number 13, and he realized that the title of the work with two A’s in “Aaron” had a total of 13 letters. He feared he would die in a year that was a multiple of 13. He dreaded his 65th birthday in 1939 so much that a friend asked for a horoscope from a noted astrologer, who declared the year was dangerous for Schoenberg but not fatal. In 1950, a different astrologer wrote to Schoenberg warning that his 76th birthday in September of that year was critical, as the sum of 7 and 6 is 13. This revelation, which had never occurred to the composer, left him stunned and depressed. During his final illness in July 1951, he confided to a friend his fear that he would not survive Friday the 13th of that month; indeed, he died on that date, 15 minutes before midnight. AJH