LA MER AND BRAHMS’ VIOLIN CONCERTO

Friday and Saturday, March 25-26, 2022 at 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 27, 2022 at 2:00 p.m.

HELZBERG HALL, KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

MICHAEL STERN, conductor

MIDORI, violin

ANN CLYNE

This Midnight Hour

CLAUD DEBUBSY

La mer

I. De l’aube à midi sur la mer
(From Dawn to Noon on the Sea)
II. Jeux de vagues (Play of the Waves)
III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer
(Dialogue of Wind and Sea)

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, op. 77

I. Allegro non troppo
II. Adagio
III. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

Midori, violin

The 2021/22 season is generously sponsored by SHIRLEY and BARNETT C. HELZBERG, JR.
The Classical Series is sponsored by the MURIEL MCBRiEN KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION

Concert weekend sponsored by MRS. JOHN D. TURNER

Friday’s concert sponsored by RANDY AND MARY ANN ST. CLAIR
RON AND DONNA PATTON

Guest artist Midori sponsored by CHRISTOPHER AND MARSHA HAUFLE RONALD AND BERNIE JEZAK
TOM AND MADELINE JOHNSON
RICHARD DURWOOD

Additional support provided by

The 2021/22 season is generously sponsored by
ANNA CLYNE

This Midnight Hour (2015)
13 minutes
Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, vibraphone, crotale, tam-tam, suspended cymbal and strings.

FROM THE COMPOSER

The opening to This Midnight Hour is inspired by the character and power of the lower strings of L’Orchestre national d’Île de France. From here, it draws inspiration from two poems. Whilst it is not intended to depict a specific narrative, my intention is that it will evoke a visual journey for the listener.

Anna Clyne

THE POEMS

Music;
— a naked woman,
running crazed through the pure night!

Charles Baudelaire

¡La musica;  
— mujer desnuda, 
corriendo loca por la noche pura!

Juan Ramón Jiménez

“Harmonie du soir”

La musique brillante un jour de printemps,

Chaque fleur s’évapore ainsi qu’un encensoir;

Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;

Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu’on afflige;

Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;

Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir!

Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige!

Un coeur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,

Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir;

Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...

Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir!

Charles Baudelaire


Text and translation provided courtesy of Oxford Lieder

CLAUSE DEBUSSY

La mer (The Sea) (1903-05)

23 minutes

Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, orchestra bells, 2 harps and strings.

THE STORY

In 1903, Claude Debussy was enjoying a degree of validation for his unconventional music, having just been named to the Légion d’honneur. In a September letter to conductor André Messager, he declared that he had begun composing La mer, despite working on this musical seascape in Burgundy, far from the ocean. Reflecting on his source of inspiration, he noted, “I have innumerable memories, and those, in my view, are worth more than a reality which, charming as it may be, tends to weigh too heavily on the imagination.” Writing to his publisher, Jacques Durand, Debussy evinced his love of the sea: “[T]he sea is always endless and beautiful … The sea has been very good to me. She has shown me all her moods. You do not know perhaps that I was intended for the fine career of a sailor and only the chances of life led me away from it.”

Debussy’s life was far from placid at the time. His marriage to Rosalie “Lilly” Texier was disintegrating and he was beginning an affair with Emma Bardac, the married mother of one of his piano students. The affair drove Texier to attempt suicide. She survived and the ensuing outrage complicated divorce proceedings. Debussy and Bardac fled to England in 1905 to avoid the public censure, staying in the British resort of Eastbourne where Debussy finished La mer.

Scandal surrounded the October 15, 1905 premiere of the piece in Paris. Debussy attended the performance with Bardac, who was nine months pregnant with their daughter, Claude-Emma. This likely colored the critical response to La mer which was decidedly cool. It would take several years but the work eventually gained public acceptance and has become a staple in the symphonic repertoire.

The era saw a French craze for Japanese art and design and Debussy was similarly affected, hanging a print of Hokusai’s iconic “Under the Wave off Kanagawa” in his studio. Debussy was fanatical about personally selecting cover artwork for his scores and implored his publisher to use a section of Hokusai’s image as the cover for La mer. Durand agreed and the result is striking.

THE MUSIC

A sea of ink has been spilled writing about Debussy’s La mer, all failing to capture his ineluctable evocation of waves, sunlight and sky. The work’s three movements, or “symphonic sketches” as Debussy called them, have vague titles, no doubt frustrating those seeking a specific program in the music but offering wonderful flights of fancy for more free-spirited listeners.

Each movement offers a unique seascape, with iridescent timbres, irregular rhythms and wild tempo changes creating evanescent images. Throughout the work, chords dissolve into one another while overall harmonic changes offer as much in the way of color shifts as providing tonal movement. Brief melodic fragments emerge from the mass of sound but Debussy doesn’t develop a melodic narrative, preferring to focus on tone color as an end in itself.

Program notes by AJ Harbison (AJH) and Eric T. Williams (ETW)
JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, op. 77 (1878)
36 minutes
Solo violin, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.

THE STORY

The composition of Brahms’ Violin Concerto may date to 1878 but its origin extends back 30 years when a youthful Brahms heard the remarkable Hungarian virtuoso Joseph Joachim perform Beethoven’s landmark Violin Concerto. Brahms was enraptured and when the two met five years later, they became lifelong friends. Joachim introduced Brahms to Robert and Clara Schumann, setting in motion Robert’s influential endorsement and Clara’s enduring friendship with Brahms. In addition to performing, Joachim was a skilled composer and had written two violin concerti in the 1850s. Perhaps out of deference to Joachim — and certainly well aware of Beethoven’s looming legacy — Brahms did not undertake composing a violin concerto until the year after writing his second symphony. Most of the concerto was composed while Brahms was on holiday at Pörtschach, an Austrian lakeside resort.

Brahms’ Violin Concerto owes a great deal to Joachim’s input. As a pianist, Brahms was reliant on Joachim’s expert advice concerning violin technique, even if he didn’t always heed the proffered guidance. Despite the increasingly prevalent practice of composers writing cadenzas for concerti instead of allowing performers to improvise or write their own, Brahms left the first movement cadenza up to Joachim and it has become the standard used by most violinists ever since.

Joachim premiered the concerto on January 1, 1879, with Brahms conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Harkening back three decades, the program began with Beethoven’s Violin Concerto. Pairing the two was hardly accidental as both focus on a more integrated approach to musical expression rather than serving as a virtuoso vehicle. The initial reaction to Brahms’ new concerto was lukewarm but Viennese concertgoers responded more enthusiastically when they heard it two weeks later. Over time, the concerto has moved from tepid acceptance to being an adored cornerstone of the repertoire.

THE MUSIC

Brahms’ singular Violin Concerto is a complex work, seemingly unadorned yet virtuosic in its demands. There is extensive interplay between the soloist and orchestra, shared dialogue and extended conversation, quite atypical of “standard” concerti intended to showcase pure virtuosity with the orchestra in a subordinate accompanying role. Conductor Josef Hellmesberger gibed that the work was “a concerto not for, but against the violin.” Yet it is precisely because of this cohesive musical interaction that the work has endured in popularity.

The opening theme is spare and Brahms immediately explores its melodic potential and the interstitial realm between duple and triple meters. The solo violin’s fiery entrance quickly transforms into a lyrical exposition of the thematic material. The musical development feels organic, with Brahms carefully weaving together the movement’s various motifs. The second movement leads off with one of Brahms’ more lascivious melodies played by the oboe. The solo violin takes over and a sense of refinement prevails throughout. Acknowledging the Roma violin tradition in Joachim’s native Hungary, Brahms concludes the concerto with a vivacious romp that never devolves into display for effect.

ETW

- Brahms started piano studies at age 7, no doubt encouraged by his father who was a double bassist with the Hamburg Philharmonic.
- There is considerable academic debate whether Brahms was forced to play piano in Hamburg’s waterfront bars and brothels as a youth because of his family’s poverty. Brahms is alleged to have told stories about the experience but many of the tales have questionable provenance.
- By all reports, Brahms could be cynical, ill-tempered, blunt, tactless, prickly and gruff. “I am only too often reminded that I am a difficult person to get along with. I am growing accustomed to bearing the consequences of this.”
- Brahms came to prominence with the assistance of Robert and Clara Schumann, whom he met in 1853. A composer and influential music critic, Robert wrote an article celebrating Brahms as a genius and heir to Beethoven’s legacy. When Robert was hospitalized in 1854, Brahms helped Clara manage the Schumann household (and its 7 children). Although the ultimate truth of their relationship remains obscure, it is documented that Brahms and Clara were strongly attracted to one another. Robert’s death in 1856 made marriage possible but they chose not. Brahms never married and Clara never remarried. Their relationship deepened over the years and, while not immune to disagreements, they remained devoted to one another for the rest of their lives.
- Cambridge University offered Brahms an honorary doctorate of music but he declined it. The University of Breslau (now University of Wrocław in Poland) conferred an honorary doctorate of music on the curmudgeony composer and suggested that he write a piece in appreciation of the award. The practical joke-loving Brahms responded with Academic Festival Overture, a work he described as a “rollicking potpourri of student’s songs” associated more with drinking than studious endeavors. ETW
**ABOUT MIDORI**

**MIDORI, VIOLIN**

Midori is a visionary artist, activist and educator who explores and builds connections between music and the human experience and breaks with traditional boundaries, which makes her one of the most outstanding violinists of our time. She has performed with many of the world’s most prestigious orchestras and has collaborated with world-renowned musicians including Leonard Bernstein, Yo-Yo Ma, and many others.

As someone deeply committed to furthering humanitarian and educational goals, she has founded several non-profit organizations: the New York City-based Midori & Friends; MUSIC SHARING, based in Japan; Partners in Performance (PiP), which helps to bring chamber music to smaller communities in the U.S.; and the Orchestra Residencies Program (ORP), which supports American youth orchestras. In recognition of her work as an artist and humanitarian, she serves as a United Nations Messenger of Peace, and in 2021, she was named a Kennedy Center Honoree.

She began her 2021-22 season with the Festival Strings Lucerne and will appear with orchestras in Atlanta, New Mexico, Phoenix, Austin, Kansas City and Palm Beach, in U.S. recitals and on tour throughout Europe and Asia. She will perform Detlev Glanert’s Violin Concerto No. 2 with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (World Premiere) and with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra.

The most recent recording in Midori’s diverse discography is Beethoven’s Violin Concerto and two Romances with the Festival Strings Lucerne (2020, Warner Classics).

Midori was born in Osaka in 1971 and began her violin studies with her mother, Setsu Goto, at an early age. In 1982, conductor Zubin Mehta invited the then 11-year-old Midori to perform with the New York Philharmonic in the orchestra’s annual New Year’s Eve concert. Midori holds academic positions at the Curtis Institute of Music and the Peabody Institute. She plays the 1734 Guarnerius del Gesù ex-Huberman and uses four bows – two by Dominique Peccatte, one by François Peccatte and one by Paul Siefried.

**ABOUT EUNICE KEEM**

**EUNICE KEEM, GUEST CONCERTMASTER**

Violinist Eunice Keem has established herself as a dynamic and engaging artist, equally compelling as both soloist and chamber musician. A Chicago native, she attended Carnegie Mellon University for her music studies. After joining the Dallas Symphony Orchestra in September 2011, she began her new position as associate concertmaster in the 2014/15 season.

Keem has been a featured as a soloist with the Dallas Symphony, National Chamber Orchestra, Park Ridge Civic Orchestra, Keweenaw Symphony, Eastern Connecticut Symphony and Evanston Symphony, among others. A winner of numerous competitions, she received top prizes at the Irving M. Klein International Competition, Schadt International Competition, Corpus Christi International Competition and Kingsville International Competition as well as a Paganini prize at the 7th International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, among others.

As a chamber musician, Keem was a member of the Fine Arts Trio, first place winners of the Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition. They also performed on Chicago WFMT’s “Dame Myra Hess Concert Series” and “Live From Studio One.” Several years later, she again received first prize at the Fischoff National Competition, this time with the Orion Piano Trio. She was also a founding member of Carnegie Mellon University’s Starling Quartet, with which she toured Costa Rica, China and the United States, presenting a series of concerts and masterclasses.

Keem has participated in the Grand Teton, Lake George, Colorado and Breckenridge music festivals. She currently serves as adjunct professor of violin at the University of North Texas.