

2024-25 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom
Family Foundation Classical Series

KOH PLAYS MENDELSSOHN

Thursday, Mar. 20, 2025 @ 8 p.m.

Friday, Mar. 21, 2025 @ 8 p.m.

Saturday, Mar. 22, 2025 @ 8 p.m.

Paolo Bortolameolli, conductor

Jennifer Koh, violin

Pacific Symphony

MENDELSSOHN Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61

MENDELSSOHN Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64
I. Allegro molto appassionato
II. Andante
III. Allegretto non troppo -
Allegro molto vivace
Jennifer Koh, violin

—INTERMISSION—

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93
I. Moderato
II. Allegro
III. Allegretto
IV. Andante - Allegro

This concert is being recorded for broadcast
on Jul. 20, 2025 on Classical California KUSC.



PROGRAM NOTES

Felix Mendelssohn

Scherzo from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 61

Born: Feb. 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany

Died: Nov. 4, 1847 in Leipzig, Germany

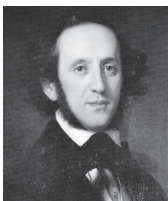
Composed: 1842

Premiered: Oct. 14, 1843 at Potsdam, Prussia (now Germany)

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Apr. 19, 2008, as part of a Family Musical Mornings concert with Michael Hall conducting

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

Approximate duration: 5 minutes



Like Mozart, Mendelssohn demonstrated his genius from earliest childhood. Both had musically talented sisters and parents who were ambitious for their success. But as the scion of a wealthy Jewish family and the grandson of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, the young Felix

was not viewed as someone whose talents were to be exploited for financial gain, as Leopold Mozart sought to do with Amadeus. Instead, Felix's father Abraham moved his family to Berlin, where their residence became a salon that attracted the most prominent intellectuals of the day.

Mozart and Mendelssohn composed masterpieces at an age when most of us are worrying about prom dates; Mendelssohn was 17 when he completed his overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1826. It received its premiere at a private performance at Mendelssohn's home and its first public performance the following year. Some 16 years later, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the culture-loving King of Prussia, invited Mendelssohn to compose incidental music for the entire play. This commission gave us not only the 12 movements and finale to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but also incidental music for Racine's *Athalie* and Sophocles' *Oedipus*.

The Scherzo is one of the suite's 12 sections, and it is tempting to describe it as one of the most popular, but in truth they are all public favorites. "Not the least of the several remarkable aspects of this material is that Mendelssohn was able to pick up where he had left off... after a hiatus of some 16 years," says musicologist Richard Freed. But it is fair to call the Scherzo, which creates a trippingly light sound by making heavy demands on the winds and strings, one of the most virtuosic.

Mendelssohn went on to achieve a statesmanlike position in European culture, directing one of the continent's most important orchestras (the Leipzig Gewandhaus) and spurring revivals of interest in the music of Mozart and J.S. Bach. Most of all, he composed more than his share of indestructible all-time hits of the classical repertoire. In addition to his incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there's his gorgeous violin concerto, one of the three or four most beloved staples of the violin repertoire, also on this program and outlined below. It is universally regarded as one of the greatest of all violin concertos.

Felix Mendelssohn

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64

Born: Feb. 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany

Died: Nov. 4, 1847 in Leipzig, Germany

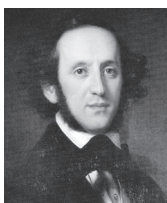
Composed: 1838-1844

Premiered: Mar. 13, 1845 with Ferdinand David, its dedicatee, as soloist, and Niels Gade conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Nov. 13, 2021 with Rachel Barton-Pine as soloist and Teddy Abrams conducting

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings, and solo violin

Approximate duration: 26 minutes



The concerto's singing melodies traverse an arc from poetic sadness to sheer joy. Once we hear these tunes, they are ours forever. Or do they possess us, as they seem to have possessed Mendelssohn? "I would like to write a violin concerto for you next winter," he told his longtime friend,

the violinist Ferdinand David, concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, in 1838. "One in E minor runs through my head, the beginning of which gives me no peace." That beginning is the concerto's dazzling opening, which plunges into a sweetly melancholy statement in the solo violin without the drama-building introduction that precedes the soloist's entrance in most romantic concertos.

This songlike opening statement quickly gives way to a bravura display of notes that swirl downward until the opening theme is restated in the orchestra. From then on, the concerto packs in abundantly virtuosic writing. The movement contains an adventurous, complex development through highly chromatic modulations, introducing a second melody that answers the concerto's initially melancholy E minor statement with a tranquil, glowing G Major theme. On the way back to the opening E minor theme, Mendelssohn leads the soloist through an innovative cadenza that is fully notated (no improvising allowed). Of this movement's beautiful features that were modern for their day, note especially the "ricocheting" bow, which oscillates over the strings to voice arpeggios at bullet-speed while the E minor melody is played by the full orchestra. In passages such as this one, the soloist serves as accompanist—but the playing is spectacular.

As the excitement of the opening allegro movement subsides, the bassoon continues to sustain its note—a B—as the rest of the orchestra is silent. Moving up a tone to middle C, the bassoon leads us without pause into the concerto's middle movement, a serene andante in C Major. The movement's lyrical beauty, which opens from E minor into C Major before incorporating a darker middle section in A minor, incorporates fleet passagework for the soloist.

But for many listeners, it serves mainly as a transitional movement between the concerto's sweetly melancholy opening and its joyful closing movement, an effervescent vivace in E Major that sounds like a merry chase through sunny fields. A boisterous coda concludes the concerto.

Speaking on the occasion of his 75th birthday in 1906, the great violinist Joseph Joachim aptly described the world's affection for the Mendelssohn violin concerto: "The Germans have four violin concertos. The greatest, most uncompromising is Beethoven's. The one by Brahms vies with it in seriousness. The richest, the most seductive, was written by Max Bruch. But the most inward, the heart's jewel, is Mendelssohn's."

Dmitri Shostakovich

Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Op. 93

Born: Sep. 25, 1906 in St. Petersburg, Russian Empire

Died: Aug. 9, 1975 in Moscow, Russia

Composed: 1953

Premiered: Dec. 17, 1953 with Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: May 5, 2018, with Carl St.Clair conducting

Instrumentation: three flutes including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, three clarinets including bass clarinet and e-flat clarinet, three bassoons including contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings

Approximate duration: 57 minutes



Dmitri Shostakovich was only 19 when he astounded his instructors at conservatory with his Symphony No. 1, which showed a maturity and sophistication that was far beyond student work. Soon it was heard and acclaimed internationally. From then on, he was composing with

confident boldness in classical music's most ambitious forms, symphonies and operas—a young Soviet composer with growing prestige both within the Soviet state and outside it. His reputation only grew with the premiere of his remarkable 1934 opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which scored an immediate success.

But Joseph Stalin was having none of it. In January 1936, shortly after he attended a performance of *Lady Macbeth*, a scathing condemnation of its musical style appeared in *Pravda*, and the larger message was clear: In Stalin's Soviet Union, where every public expression of art was deemed an instrumentality of the state, Shostakovich had gone from celebrity to pariah. If Shostakovich, his art, and his family were to survive, there was only one option: "rehabilitation." But would that mean compromising his aesthetic principles?

Tabling his powerful fourth symphony, he penned his fifth expressly to please his proctors in the Politburo. Bureaucrats interpreted the symphony as an apology and heard the "constructive" music they wanted to hear, and Shostakovich was reprieved—at least for a while.

Shostakovich's purported memoir *Testimony*, which was clandestinely brought to the U.S. and published in English, offers an exegesis of his style in symphonies from the fifth onward. Though the authenticity of *Testimony* is still in question, its startling assertions about Shostakovich's symphonies 5 through 15 are now widely accepted: that in this music, with its passionate utterances about suffering and tyranny, the Russian people heard the composer's condemnation of their government's reign of terror and oppression. According to Shostakovich, the Russian people understood the musical subtext that eluded their rulers. As his post-Stalin career progressed, he would increasingly rely on the listening public's ability to hear deeply.

The dates of the Symphony No. 10's composition are not clear—most of the work was probably completed in 1951, but some of the thematic ideas might be much earlier. It premiered in 1953, the year of Stalin's death, and has famously been described 48 minutes of tragedy, despair, terror, and violence culminating in two minutes of triumph. Almost half of the music is in its painstakingly crafted opening movement, marked *moderato*, depicting life in the grip of Stalin's iron fist. Shostakovich's musicality is beautiful to hear, yet it seems to evoke dreariness without end. Why didn't politburo censors hear this as condemnation? One possible reason is the long tradition in Russian music of showcasing the people's heroic endurance in the face of prolonged hardship. In this symphony, as in Tchaikovsky's winter scenes and in the Russian "national opera" *Boris Godunov*, the people are the hero.

In the symphony's two interior movements, comprised largely of marches and waltzes (as is often the case in Tchaikovsky's symphonies), we hear Shostakovich's unique facility with musical irony: he prods us to hear beneath the surface of the melody. In the final movement, a cryptic bassoon solo gives rise to a thrilling climax. Shostakovich often relies upon the brasses for his most dramatic moments, as he does here—asserting the ultimate victory of humanity over tyranny.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com

ABOUT THE GUEST CONDUCTOR

Paolo Bortolameolli, guest conductor



Chilean-Italian conductor Paolo Bortolameolli is a dynamic force on the podium, a gifted lecturer, and an advocate for the arts. Between 2022 and 2024, he made notable debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San

Francisco Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and Hong Kong Philharmonic, while also returning to the Hollywood Bowl, Kansas City Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Orquesta Filarmónica de Buenos Aires, and Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Colombia. He has collaborated with ensembles worldwide, including the Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar, Polish National Radio Symphony, Houston Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, and Gulbenkian Orchestra.

Bortolameolli is equally at home in opera, having conducted *Tosca* at the Opéra de Paris, *Die Zauberflöte* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona, and Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* at Detroit Opera. His performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 with Deutsche Oper Berlin and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional Juvenil marked the Chilean premiere of the monumental work.

A longtime collaborator with the LA Phil, he has led performances at both Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. Passionately committed to new music, he has championed the works of Miguel Fariás, Gabriela Ortiz, and Jorge Peña Hen. In 2022, his commission of Fariás' *Estallido* premiered with the LA Phil.

Bortolameolli serves as music director of the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional Juvenil in Chile and Sinfónica Azteca in Mexico, principal guest conductor of Filarmónica de Santiago (Opera Nacional de Chile), and associate conductor of the LA Phil. As artistic director of Sinfónica Azteca, he leads an annual educational residency through Fundación Azteca. His acclaimed project *Ponle Pausa*, a groundbreaking approach to music education using short-form videos and social media, has received wide recognition.

A sought-after speaker, Bortolameolli was a guest lecturer for TED in New York in 2018. In 2020, he published his first book, *Rubato: Procesos musicales y una playlist personal*.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jennifer Koh, violin



Jennifer Koh is a violinist recognized for her commanding performances, dazzling virtuosity, and technical assurance. A forward-thinking artist, she explores a broad repertoire while advocating for equity and inclusivity in classical music. She

has commissioned and premiered more than 100 works, expanding the contemporary violin repertoire.

This season, Koh begins her role as artistic director of the Fortas Chamber Music Concerts at the Kennedy Center, where she will perform *Two X Four*, a project she created to honor her mentors. She also continues her long-standing collaboration with composer Missy Mazzoli, performing an all-Mazzoli program of violin and duo works.

Koh's *New American Concerto* series explores the violin concerto as a vehicle for addressing societal issues. This season, she premieres Nina C. Young's *Violin Concerto Traces* with the LA Chamber Orchestra and continues performances of Missy Mazzoli's *Violin Concerto Procession* with multiple symphonies. Other commissions include works by Tyshawn Sorey, Courtney Bryan, Lisa Bielawa, Christopher Cerrone, and Vijay Iyer.

A passionate advocate for new music, Koh launched *Alone Together*, a GRAMMY® Award-winning commissioning project developed in response to the financial hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic. She has recorded over a dozen albums with Cedille Records, including *Bach & Beyond* and *Limitless*.

Koh regularly performs a wide range of concertos, from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* to contemporary works by Esa-Pekka Salonen and Kaija Saariaho. She has performed with the Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, BBC Symphony, and Philharmonia Orchestra, among others.

Koh is also an educator and curator. She has been on faculty at Mannes School of Music since 2018 and has held residencies at institutions including Brown, Cornell, and Oberlin. She is the founder and artistic director of ARCO Collaborative, a nonprofit dedicated to inclusivity in classical music.

Born in Chicago to Korean parents, Koh made her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 11. She holds degrees from Oberlin College and the Curtis Institute, where she studied with Jaime Laredo and Felix Galimir.

