
VOICE & THE VIOLIN

Thursday, Feb. 13, 2025 @ 8 p.m.

Carl St.Clair, conductor
Joshua Bell, violin
Larisa Martinez, soprano
Pacific Symphony

- MOZART** Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, K. 492
- MOZART** "L'amerò, sarò costante" from *Il rè pastore*, K. 208
- DVORÁK** *Slavonic Fantasy* in B Minor
Arr. Fritz Kreisler
- MENDELSSOHN** "Ah, ritorna, età dell'oro"
(Cavatina and Cabaletta) from *Infelicey*
- MASSENET** *Méditation* from *Thaïs*
- MASSENET** "Adieu, notre petite table" from *Manon*
- STRAUSS JR.** *Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka*, Op. 214
- STRAUSS JR.** *Voices of Spring*, Op. 410
- INTERMISSION—
- TORROBA** "La Petenera" from *La Marchenera*
- DE SARASATE** *Zigeunerweisen*, Op.20
- CHOPIN** Nocturne, Op. 9, No. 2
- DELIBES** "Les filles de Cadix"
- BERNSTEIN** *West Side Story Suite*
Arr. Czarniecki/Brohn



Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall

PROGRAM NOTES

Joshua Bell and Larisa Martínez:
Voice & the Violin

Like curating a museum exhibition, selecting the music for a concert performance is an act of creation—a work of art in itself. In programming this evening's concert, violinist Joshua Bell and soprano Larisa Martínez hark back to another great American violinist: the Austrian-born Fritz Kreisler, who, like Bell and Martínez, was known for his sweetness of tone, suavity of phrasing, and brilliance as an entertainer.

Bell has chosen Kreisler's arrangement of Dvorák's *Slavonic Fantasy* in B Minor as one of his key selections this evening. It's a beautiful, artful choice that connects the Slavic and Magyar violin traditions that Dvorák and his mentor Brahms loved, which we also hear in Pablo de Sarasate's virtuosic *Zigeunerweisen*. This style of playing, once pigeonholed as "Gypsy Violin," is deeply passionate and energetic. It has only grown in esteem since the 19th Century. In Bell's hands, it captures Kreisler's special style of showmanship, which he and Martínez have sensitively revived for us.

During Kreisler's career, in the mid-20th Century, the works he was best-known for were his

"creampuffs"—a word that has taken on a different meaning nowadays. Many were his own compositions or arrangements; all were utterly delicious, gorgeously melodic, stand-alone works rather than part of longer compositions. They require enormous skill, and are lightweight only in the manner of great pastry: artfully confectioned and richly flavorful to the very last bite.

What better way to start than with Mozart? It all begins with five notes: a quick trill that starts on the first tone of the major scale, tugging us eagerly by the sleeve and pulling us headlong into a joyful overture that starts fast and intense, then gets more so. Welcome to *Le Nozze di Figaro*, "The Marriage of Figaro," Mozart's 1786 opera and the first of his magnificent collaborations with librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. This is the overture that George Bernard Shaw, an eminent music critic as well as a major playwright, praised as the ultimate musical introduction—the one that makes us most eager to hear more. It is followed by the aria "L'amerò, sarò costante" from *Il rè pastore*, or "The Shepherd King," which Mozart composed a decade earlier. Though he was only nineteen, he'd wanted to compose opera for years.

Mozart's father, Leopold, closely monitored and controlled Wolfgang's musical development. In 1764, when the young composer was eight years old, Leopold wrote that he "constantly has an opera



running in his head, which he wants to perform in Salzburg with all sorts of young people." This attraction to opera never left him. In this aria we hear an early example of Mozart's sublime operatic melodies, which combine almost unbearable beauty with deep psychological insight. In this case, the shepherd-king is a "pants part"—a woman cast in a male role for artistic reasons—and we hear him vowing faithfulness to the woman he loves in spite of the obstacles they face.

For Mozart, the commission for *Il rè pastore* was a welcome assignment from an unwelcome source, Archbishop of Salzburg. Mendelssohn, though he had no need to seek commissions—his family was wealthy—welcomed the commission for *Infelice*, which came in the form of a prestigious request from the Philharmonic Society of Music in London for a symphony, an overture, and "a vocal piece"—in this case a cavatina and cabaletta for soprano. The text, by the influential and prolific librettist Metastasio, fondly remembers love and mourns its loss, ending on a note of strength and triumphant resolve. This is vintage Mendelssohn, written for the same occasion that included the premiere of his famous "Italian" Symphony.

Two selections by Jules Massenet are among his most famous and introspective. Though you may not know his opera *Thaïs*, you may know its story, which has taken many forms. Set in medieval Alexandrian Egypt, it is based on a novel by the French writer Anatole France. Updated, it became Somerset Maugham's story and play "Rain," which in turn became the classic Hollywood feature in which the erstwhile Egyptian courtesan *Thaïs* becomes the infamous Sadie Thompson, portrayed by Joan Crawford.

The opera's extended solo *Méditation* is treasured by both violinists and violists. It is a poetic evocation of *Thaïs'* inward journey away from sin and luxury toward a more spiritually rich life. In the poignant aria "Adieu, notre petite table," the young Manon Lescaut is taking the opposite path—leaving her young, penniless lover for a life of ease with a wealthy patron—and saying good-bye to the little table representing the romantic poverty of her past.

For many of us, the music of Johann Strauss II, the "waltz king," is absolutely essential for an auspicious beginning to the year. The term "family business" has rarely been so apt for musicians as it was for Johann Strauss and his two sons, who not only composed hundreds of incomparable waltzes, but engaged in a stimulating rivalry of writing music and performance through the competitive waltz orchestras they managed. The Strauss dynasty elevated a beloved tradition of social dancing to a way of life in Vienna.

Of the three waltz-writing Strausses, the younger Johann was the one with a seemingly magic pen. He is the one generally acknowledged as the waltz king, but *Voices of Spring*—now one of his most popular creations—was slow to catch on. Originally composed

as a vehicle for coloratura soprano, it found its first popularity not in Austria, but in Russia.

One of the marvels of the Strauss waltzes is their expressive names; within the confines of the form, they manage to convey a broad range of moods, all aptly labeled. *Voices of Spring* sounds like its name; instead of the gliding lilt of so many Strauss waltzes, we hear energetic triple rhythms, buoyant and tripping. So what in the world does the name "Tritsch-Tratsch" stand for? Gossip! This polka, jaunty and high-spirited, seems to prod us with flying elbows and barely restrained laughter as we listen. In a more nostalgic, nocturnal mood, we have the singing lines of what is perhaps Frederic Chopin's single most often-heard composition: his Nocturne Op. 9, No. 2. You may not know it by number, but you'll recognize its poetic melody.

Living and listening in a warm climate, it's hard to imagine the allure that the warmth of Spain held for French composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Not that France is exactly polar—it has the Mediterranean, the Riviera, the Camargue—but its classical tradition is of cool understatement and rigorous, disciplined technique. For composers such as Chabrier, Lalo, Bizet, Massenet, and Debussy, Spain represented something irresistibly different: a place of magic and magnetism, of bright sunshine and hot blood where sensuality took precedence over elegance. These composers put all their fascination to musical descriptions of Spain. We hear this in Leo Delibes' concert aria "Les filles de Cadix," not just a depiction but a sizzling fantasy of the girls of the Spanish city of Cadiz. This composition is often associated with *Carmen*, and though it preceded Bizet's opera by about fifteen years, both represented something dangerously alluring: the "Gypsy Girl." If a song can be said to sizzle, this one does. We can fairly see the girls' dark eyes flashing, and from our modern vantage point, we can only make allowances for the cultural stereotyping, sit back, and enjoy the music. For an authentically Spanish voice, we hear "La Petenera" from Federico Torroba's zarzuela *La Marchenera*; zarzuela, a uniquely Spanish form of musical theater, mixes elements of opera, operetta, and dance.

Bell anchors our program with a composer he's strongly associated with, and whose theatrical transcriptions for violin he has championed and plays like nobody else: Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* Suite, adapted by Charles Czarniecki and arranged by Williams David Brohn.

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 ARTISTS

Joshua Bell, violin



With a career spanning nearly four decades, GRAMMY® Award-winning violinist Joshua Bell is among the most celebrated artists of his era. He has performed with virtually every major orchestra worldwide, serving also as Music Director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields since 2011.

In 2024–25, Bell releases two new albums: *Thomas De Hartmann Rediscovered* with Dalia Stasevska and the INSO-Lviv Orchestra, featuring the composer's Violin Concerto (out August 16, 2024, on Pentatone), and an album of Mendelssohn piano trios with Jeremy Denk and Steven Isserlis (out August 30, 2024, on Sony Masterworks). The trio reunites at Wigmore Hall in November 2024 for Fauré chamber music, which they will also record for future release. Bell tours internationally, performing as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

An avid champion of contemporary works, Bell has commissioned and premiered pieces by John Corigliano, Edgar Meyer, Behzad Ranjbaran, and Nicholas Maw, whose Violin Concerto earned him a GRAMMY® Award. In 2023–24, he introduced *The Elements*, a newly commissioned suite by five renowned composers. Beyond his performances, Bell fosters music education through partnerships with Trala, Education Through Music, and Turnaround Arts, among other philanthropic initiatives.

Bell's collaborations span classical and popular genres, with artists including Renée Fleming, Lang Lang, Chick Corea, Regina Spektor, Chris Botti, and Sting. His film contributions range from *The Red Violin*, which helped secure John Corigliano an Academy Award, to *Ladies in Lavender* and *Defiance*. A frequent television presence, Bell has appeared on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, and numerous appearances on the Amazon series *Mozart in the Jungle*. Bell is also featured on six *Live From Lincoln Center* specials, a *PBS Great Performances* episode, *Joshua Bell: West Side Story in Central Park*, and on PBS specials such as *Joshua Bell: At Home With Music*.

Born in Bloomington, Indiana, Bell began playing violin at age four and studied with Josef Gingold at twelve. He made his Carnegie Hall debut at seventeen and signed with London Decca at eighteen. Recognitions include six GRAMMY® nominations, the Avery Fisher Prize, the 2019 Glashütte Original Music Festival Award, and the 2022 Paez Medal of Art. Bell performs on the 1713 "Huberman" Stradivarius, sustaining his legacy as one of the most admired violinists in the world. Management for Joshua Bell is Park Avenue Artists.



Scan for complete bio.

Larisa Martínez, soprano



Larisa Martínez, lauded by *Opera News* for her "smoky soprano," has performed on many of the world's top opera and concert stages, including recent debuts at the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, and the Hollywood Bowl. This season, she tours extensively with violinist

Joshua Bell in the program *Voice and the Violin*, exploring classical repertoire, opera, musical theater, and works by Puerto Rican and Spanish composers. Appearances have included the Brevard Music Center, Saratoga Performing Arts Center, Chautauqua Amphitheater, the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra, and the Ravinia Festival.

Martínez's recent stage roles include Musetta in *La Bohème* (CulturArte); Violetta in *La Traviata* under Eugene Kohn (Wichita Grand Opera); Sophie in *Werther* (CulturArte) with tenor Piotr Beczala; and Maria in *West Side Story* conducted by Lawrence Foster and featuring tenor Michael Fabiano (Festival Napa Valley). In 2019, she made her Kennedy Center recital debut and her Carnegie Hall Stern Auditorium/Perelman Stage debut, performing Mahler's Symphony No. 2 with the Athens Philharmonic. She later appeared with the Grand Rapids Symphony in Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Floresta do Amazonas*.

In 2016, Martínez created the role of Isaura in the world premiere of Mercadante's *Francesca da Rimini* in Italy, conducted by Fabio Luisi and directed by Pier Luigi Pizzi. She also joined President Barack Obama's artistic delegation to Cuba, culminating in the Emmy®-nominated PBS special *Live from Lincoln Center: Seasons of Cuba*. For the last three years, she has toured with tenor Andrea Bocelli, appearing at Madison Square Garden, Hollywood Bowl, and venues throughout the Americas and Europe.

Martínez won the Metropolitan Opera's 2016 National Council Auditions in Puerto Rico, as well as the Angel Ramos Foundation Award and Audience Prize. She was later invited to the Metropolitan Opera Guild's 2018 Annual Gala, honoring Anna Netrebko. That same year, EastWest Sounds Studios featured her vocals in its *Voices of Opera* virtual instrument software.

Alongside studying vocal performance at the Music Conservatory in San Juan, Martínez earned a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences with high honors from the University of Puerto Rico. She then completed her master's at Mannes the New School of Music in New York City. Serving as a board member of the Silk Road Ensemble, she is also an artistic resident with Turnaround Arts, a program that uses the arts to transform schools in need. Deeply committed to music education and her Boricua heritage, Martínez infuses her performances with a passion for cultural representation.



Scan for complete bio.