



2025-26
SEASON
OPENING
WEEKEND

SEPTEMBER

A large, dark, monochromatic aerial photograph of a desert landscape, showing intricate patterns of sand dunes and rocky terrain. The image is framed by a white, semi-circular shape at the bottom left and a white, angular shape on the right side.

**THE
NEXT
MOVEMENT
BEGINS**

performances
MAGAZINE

 **Seegerstrom
Center for the Arts®**

WELCOME TO THE NEXT MOVEMENT

Dear Pacific Symphony Patrons,

Welcome to Opening Night of Pacific Symphony's Hal and Jeanette Segerstrom Foundation Classical Series for the 2025–26 season. This is the start of an electrifying new era in our history. In 2026–27, we will be welcoming our first new Artistic and Music Director in 35 years, Maestro Alexander Shelley. This year, while Maestro Shelley concludes his tenure as Music Director of Canada's National Arts Centre in Ottawa, he will appear four times with Pacific Symphony to tantalize us with his creative programming and imaginative interpretations.

Alexander brings a program of Pacific Symphony's first-ever complete concert performances of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, with its shimmering, choral sunrise and choral conclusion with Pacific Chorale; Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, a sparkling fairy-tale fantasy with brilliant orchestral power; Rimsky-Korsakov's beloved tale of *Scheherazade*, and a stirring celebration of America's 250th anniversary, featuring a new work of Peter Boyer, all highlighting his instinct for pairing well-loved classics with new and exciting voices.

We open the season in gala style with guest conductor Ludovic Morlot's return and the dazzling pianist Alessio Bax in Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 and Sibelius' Symphony No. 1. All through the season, enjoy orchestral favorites that have inspired music lovers for decades: Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* Suite, Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5—all made new by the world-class musicians of Pacific Symphony.

We celebrate women in leadership with guest conductors Tianyi Lu, Anna Rakitina and Valentina Peleggi and a talented roster of soloists performing exciting new concertos, from Gabriela Montero's *Latin Concerto* to Michael Daugherty's *Blue Electra*, inspired by Amelia Earhart.

We also welcome Carl St.Clair back this spring as Music Director Laureate for three classical series programs, including Strauss' *Don Quixote*, Puccini's beloved *Turandot* and a special concert featuring classical superstar Lang Lang, performing Beethoven.

We pinch ourselves often these days because it is hard to believe that we get to hear the brilliant musicians of Pacific Symphony week after week in one of the great concert halls in the country. And we can do that only because of you—through your generous gifts to the Annual Fund, your subscriptions and your volunteer spirit. Subscribers are the bedrock that allows us to plan our seasons with confidence, take artistic risks, and share inspiring music.

If you have not subscribed yet, please do so to enjoy many subscription benefits, and join us season after season for a thrilling musical journey.

Lastly, we are so blessed to enjoy the support of a remarkable family, the Hal and Jeanette Segerstrom Family, for their visionary support of our classical series for over two decades. They are truly the first family of Pacific Symphony.

Cheers to a season of great music, historic milestones, and the pleasure of sharing it together.

With gratitude and excitement,



Arthur Ong
Chairman
Board of Directors



John Forsythe
President and
Chief Executive Office

MUSIC DIRECTOR

Carl St.Clair



For more than 35 years, Carl St.Clair has led Pacific Symphony, making him the longest-tenured American-born conductor of a major American orchestra. In December 2025, during the Symphony's 47th season, he will be honored with the lifetime title of Music Director Laureate. Under his

leadership, Pacific Symphony has grown into the largest-budgeted orchestra founded in the past half-century, recognized nationally for its artistic, innovative programming, and community impact. St.Clair also helped catalyze the vision to build a 2,000-seat Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in 2006, the Symphony's permanent home and one of the nation's finest concert venues.

St.Clair has guided the Symphony through many landmark achievements. In 2018, he led its sold-out Carnegie Hall debut celebrating Philip Glass's 80th birthday, which the *New York Times* praised as proof that Pacific Symphony is "a major ensemble!" That same year, he conducted the orchestra's first tour of China. Earlier, in 2006, he led the Symphony on its European debut, performing in nine cities across three countries, including Vienna, Munich, Cologne, and Lucerne, to capacity audiences and widespread acclaim. He also conducted the orchestra's national PBS debut on *Great Performances* with Peter Boyer's *Ellis Island: The Dream of America*. His artistic initiatives include the long-running American Composers Festival and *Symphonic Voices*, the orchestra's acclaimed opera-in-concert series.

A champion of new music, St.Clair has commissioned and premiered dozens of works. Recent highlights include the 2024–25 premieres of Viet Cuong's *Marine Layer* and Adolphus Hailstork's *Piano Concerto No. 3* ("The Way Things Are"). In 2024, Pacific Symphony released the world-premiere recording of Sir James MacMillan's *Fiat Lux*. Other notable commissions include works by Philip Glass, Michael Daugherty, William Bolcom, Richard Danielpour, John Wineglass, and Elliot Goldenthal. His discography also includes collaborations with Yo-Yo Ma, Lukas Foss, and others.

Internationally, he was appointed Music Director of the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra in 2025 and holds honorary posts with the National Symphony of Costa Rica and Germany's Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal. Earlier positions include General Music Director of Berlin's Komische Oper and of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle in Weimar.

Equally committed to education, St.Clair has overseen the development of one of the country's most comprehensive orchestra-based education networks, reaching more than 50,000 participants annually. Pacific Symphony's award-winning Class Act program, arts-X-press, Youth Ensembles, Heartstrings, and Symphony on the Go bring music to schools and communities across Southern California. He has also taught at Chapman University, the University of Texas, Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, and the USC Thornton School of Music, where he has served for more than three decades as Artistic Leader and Principal Conductor of orchestral programs.

ARTISTIC AND MUSIC DIRECTOR DESIGNATE

Alexander Shelley



One of the foremost conductors of his generation, Alexander Shelley is "a natural communicator, both on and off the podium" (*The Daily Telegraph*), performing regularly across six continents with the world's finest orchestras and soloists. In 2024 he was appointed to become Pacific

Symphony's third artistic leader, taking the title of Artistic and Music Director, beginning in the 2026–27 season. Shelley is serving as Artistic and Music Director Designate during the 2025–26 season, which marks Pacific Symphony's 47th season.

Shelley concludes his 11-year tenure as Music Director of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) in Ottawa, Canada at the end of the 2025–26 season. He continues as the Principal Associate Conductor of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, a position he has held since 2015. In 2023, Shelley was named Artistic and Music Director at Artis–Naples, in Florida, leading the Naples Philharmonic and overseeing the entire multidisciplinary organization. He was the youngest-ever Chief Conductor of Germany's Nürnberger Symphoniker, a position he held for eight seasons, until 2017.

Shelley has collaborated with Lang Lang, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Renée Fleming, and Thomas Hampson, among other renowned artists, and with some of the finest orchestras of Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australasia, including Leipzig's Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Deutsche Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Helsinki, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Malaysian, Oslo, Rotterdam and Stockholm philharmonic orchestras, and the Sao Paulo, Houston, Montreal, Toronto, Munich, Singapore, Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand symphony orchestras.

Shelley is known for the integrity of his interpretations and for his creative programming, having led among other things, 40 major world premieres, highly praised cycles of Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms symphonies, operas, ballets and innovative multimedia productions.

Shelley is equally at home leading symphonic, opera and ballet repertoire, as well as multi-genre projects. His operatic credentials include leading productions at the Royal Danish Opera, Opera Lyra/National Arts Centre, Canadian Opera Company/ National Arts Centre, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Opéra National de Montpellier, and Opera North (Leeds).

Born in London to celebrated concert pianists Howard Shelley and Hilary Macnamara, Shelley began playing the piano as a toddler and later learned to play the cello. He gained widespread attention when he was unanimously awarded first prize at the 2005 Leeds Conductors Competition, where he was praised as "the most exciting and gifted young conductor to have taken this highly prestigious award."

PACIFIC SYMPHONY

The Next Movement

Pacific Symphony, led by Music Director Carl St.Clair for the last 35 years, has been the resident orchestra of the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall since 2006.

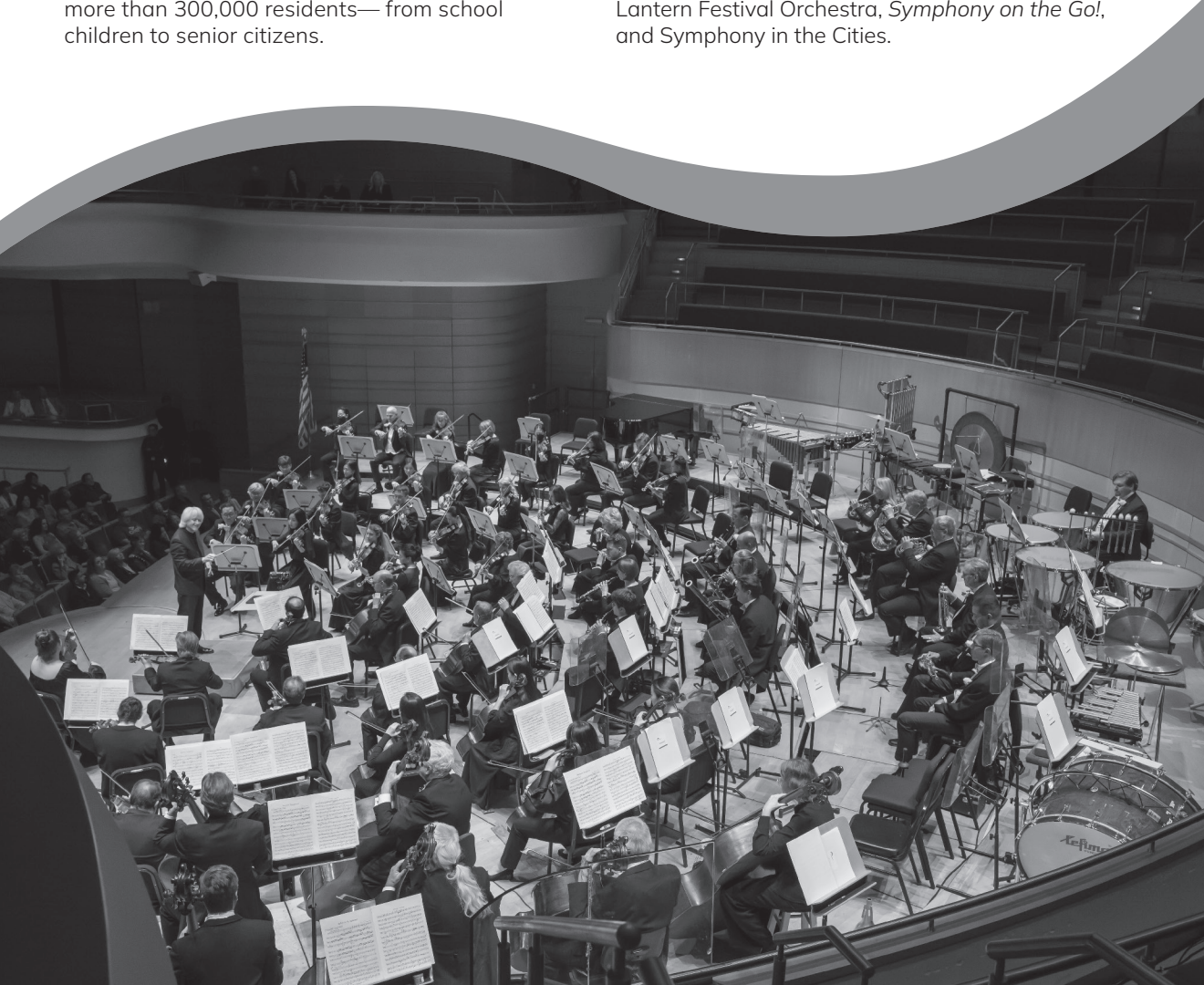
Currently celebrating its 47th anniversary season, the Symphony is the largest orchestra formed in the U.S. in the last 50 years and is recognized as an outstanding ensemble making strides on both the national and international scene, as well as in its own community of Orange County.

In April 2018, Pacific Symphony made its debut at Carnegie Hall as one of two orchestras invited to perform during a yearlong celebration of composer Philip Glass' 80th birthday, and the following month the orchestra toured China. The orchestra made its national PBS debut in June 2018 on *Great Performances* with Peter Boyer's *Ellis Island: The Dream of America*, conducted by St.Clair. Presenting more than 100 concerts and events a year and a rich array of education and community engagement programs, the Symphony reaches more than 300,000 residents— from school children to senior citizens.

In both 2005 and 2010, the Symphony received the prestigious ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. Also in 2010, a study by the League of American Orchestras, *Fearless Journeys*, included the Symphony as one of the country's five most innovative orchestras. The Symphony's award-winning education and community engagement programs benefit from the vision of St.Clair and are designed to integrate the orchestra and its music into the community in ways that stimulate all ages.

The Symphony's Class Act program has been honored as one of nine exemplary orchestra education programs by the National Endowment for the Arts and the League of American Orchestras. The list of instrumental training initiatives includes Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra, Pacific Symphony Youth Wind Ensemble, Pacific Symphony Santiago Strings, and Pacific Symphony Youth Concert Band.

The Symphony also spreads the joy of music through arts-X-press, Class Act, Heartstrings, Lantern Festival Orchestra, *Symphony on the Go!*, and Symphony in the Cities.



MEET THE ORCHESTRA

Carl St.Clair / Music Director

William J. Gillespie Music Director Chair

Alexander Shelley / Artistic and Music Director Designate

Phillip N. and Mary A. Lyons Artistic and Music Director Designate Chair

Enrico Lopez-Yañez / Principal Pops Conductor

Hal and Jeanette Segerstrom Family Foundation Principal Pops Conductor Chair

Richard Kaufman / Principal Pops Conductor Laureate

Pola Benke / Assistant Conductor

Mary E. Moore Family Assistant Conductor Chair

FIRST VIOLIN

Dennis Kim

Concertmaster

Eleanor and Michael Gordon Chair

Yoomin Seo

Associate Concertmaster

Judy and Wes Whitmore Chair

Jeanne Skrocki

Assistant Concertmaster

Arlene and Seymour Grubman Chair

Michael Siess

Christine Frank

Ayako Sugaya

Ann Shiau Tenney

Joanna Lee

Robert Schumitzky

Agnes Gottschewski

Dana Freeman

Julie Ahn

Paul Manaster

SECOND VIOLIN

Madalyn Parnas Möller*

Elizabeth and John Stahr Chair

Jennise Hwang**

Yen Ping Lai

Yu-Tong Sharp

Ako Kojian

Linda Owen

Sooah Kim

MarlaJoy Weisshaar

Alice Miller-Wrate

Shelly Shi

VIOLA

Meredith Crawford*

Leona Aronoff-Sadacca Chair

Victor de Almeida

Carolyn Riley

John Acevedo

Hanbyul Jang

Julia Staudhammer

Joseph Wen-Xiang Zhang

Cheryl Gates

Phillip Triggs

CELLO

Warren Hagerty*

Catherine and James Emmi Chair

Ben Lash**

Robert Vos

Lázló Mezö

Ian McKinnell

M. Andrew Honea

Rudolph Stein

Emma Lee

BASS

Richard Cassarino*

Douglas Basye**

Christian Kollgaard

David Parmeter

Andrew Chilcote

David Black

Andrew Bumatay

Constance Deeter

FLUTE

Benjamin Smolen*

Valerie and Hans Imhof Chair

Sharon O'Connor

Cynthia Ellis

PICCOLO

Cynthia Ellis

OBOE

Jessica Pearlman Fields**

Suzanne R. Chonette Chair

Ted Sugata

ENGLISH HORN

Lelie Resnick

CLARINET

Vacant*

The Hanson Family Foundation Chair

David Chang

Charlie and Ling Zhang Chair

BASS CLARINET

Joshua Ranz

BASSOON

Rose Corrigan*

Ruth Ann and John Evans Chair

Elliott Moreau

Andrew Klein

Allen Savedoff

CONTRABASSOON

Allen Savedoff

FRENCH HORN

Keith Popejoy*

Adedeji Ogunfolu

Kaylet Torrez**

Henry Bond

TRUMPET

Barry Perkins*

Susie and Steve Perry Chair

Tony Ellis

TROMBONE

Vacant*

David Stetson

TUBA

Vacant*

TIMPANI

Vacant

PERCUSSION

Robert A. Slack*

HARP

Michelle Temple

The Sungaila Family Chair

* Principal

** Assistant Principal

+ On Leave

The musicians of Pacific Symphony are members of the American Federation of Musicians, Local 7.



2025-26 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom
Family Foundation Classical Series

OPENING WEEKEND: RACHMANINOFF & SIBELIUS

Preview Talk at 7 p.m.
KUSC midday host Alan Chapman
Thursday, September 18, 2025 @ 8 p.m.
Friday, September 19, 2025 @ 8 p.m.
Saturday, September 20 2025 @ 8 p.m.

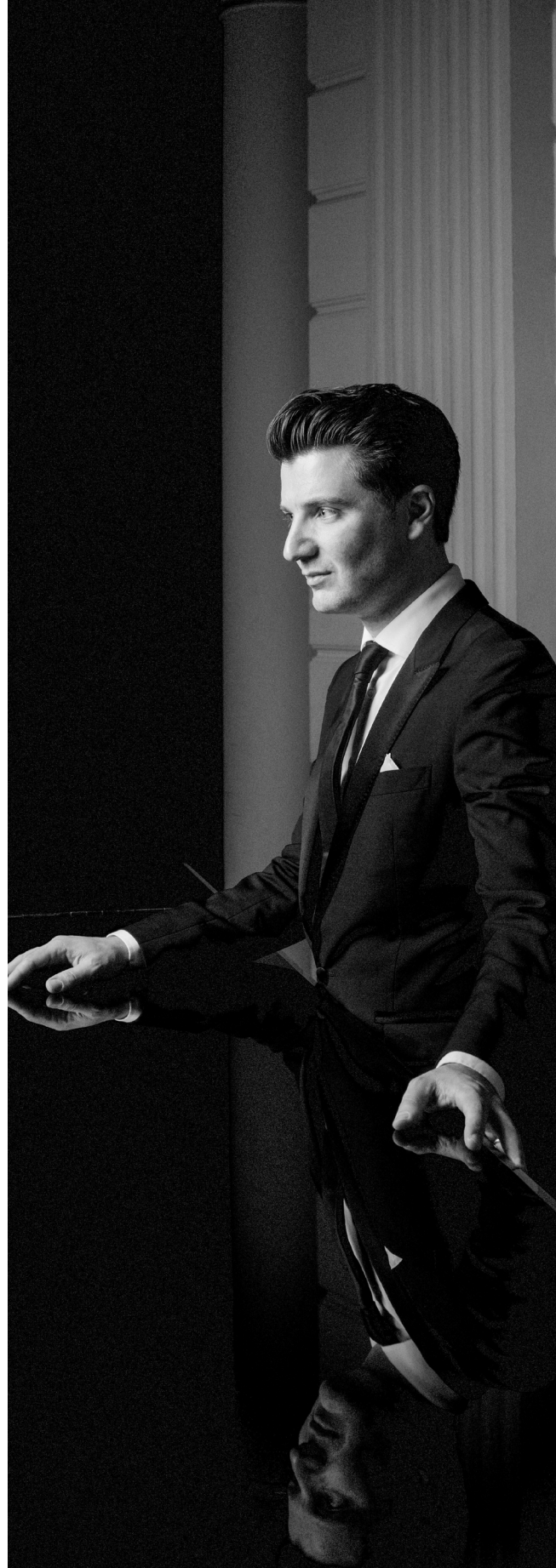
Ludovic Morlot, conductor
Alessio Bax, piano

RACHMANINOFF Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18
Moderato
Adagio sostenuto
Allegro scherzando
Alessio Bax, piano

—INTERMISSION—

SIBELIUS Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39
Andante, ma non troppo - Allegro energico
Andante, ma non troppo lento
Scherzo: Allegro
Finale (quasi una fantasia)

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



ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Ludovic Morlot, conductor



Ludovic Morlot is Music Director of the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra. He was Music Director of Seattle Symphony from 2011-2019, where he earned the orchestra five Grammy Awards, and now conducts several weeks every season as Conductor Emeritus. He was Associate Artist

of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra from 2019-2024. He was Artistic Director and a founding member of the National Youth Orchestra of China from 2017-2021 and Chief Conductor of La Monnaie from 2012-2014.

In 2025-26 Morlot takes the Barcelona Symphony to the Bonn Beethovensaal, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie and Tonhalle Düsseldorf. Following the successful launch of their second Ravel CD last spring which coincided with the 150th anniversary of Ravel's birth, they continue their acclaimed Ravel CD cycle and champion the best of the Catalan composers on the orchestra's own label. He returns to the BBC Philharmonic for three projects including Stravinsky *Sacre du Printemps* at the Aviva Factory, John Adams' *Harmonielehre* in the Blackpool Tower Ballroom and Cassandra Miller's *Viola Concerto* at Bridgewater Hall.

Guesting this season includes Gothenburg Symphony (debut) and the BBC Scottish, Bournemouth, Aalborg, South Netherlands, and Pacific symphonies and the Naples and Seoul Philharmonic orchestras. He returns to the Seattle Opera for their new production of *Carmen* after a great success with *Rheingold*, *Die Walküre* and *Samson et Dalila* in the past three years.

Trained as a violinist, he studied conducting at the Pierre Monteux School (USA) with Charles Bruck and Michael Jinbo. He continued his education in London at the Royal Academy and then at the Royal College as recipient of the Norman del Mar Conducting Fellowship. Ludovic is Affiliate Professor at the University of Washington School of Music in Seattle and a Visiting Artist at the Colburn School in Los Angeles. He sat on the jury of the Leeds International Piano Competition (2021) and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in 2014 in recognition of his significant contribution to music.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alessio Bax, piano



Combining exceptional lyricism and insight with consummate technique, Alessio Bax is without a doubt "among the most remarkable young pianists now before the public" (*Gramophone*). He catapulted to prominence with First Prize wins at both the 2000 Leeds International Piano Competition

and the 1997 Hamamatsu International Piano Competition and is now a familiar face on five continents as a recitalist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist. He has appeared with over 150 orchestras, including the New York, London, Royal, and St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestras, the Boston, Baltimore, Dallas, Cincinnati, Seattle, Sydney, and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras, and the Tokyo and NHK Symphony in Japan, collaborating with such eminent conductors as Marin Alsop, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Andrew Davis, Hannu Lintu, Fabio Luisi, Sir Simon Rattle, Ruth Reinhardt, Yuri Temirkanov, and Jaap van Zweden.

As a renowned chamber musician, he recently collaborated with Lisa Batiashvili, Joshua Bell, Ian Bostridge, Lucille Chung, James Ehnes, Vilde Frang, Steven Isserlis, Daishin Kashimoto, François Leleux, Sergei Nakariakov, Emmanuel Pahud, Lawrence Power, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Paul Watkins, and Tabea Zimmermann, among many others.

Since 2017, he has been the Artistic Director of the Incontro in Terra di Siena Festival, a Summer Music Festival in the Val d'Orcia region of Tuscany. He appears regularly in festivals such as Seattle, Bravo Vail, Salon-de-Provence, Le Pont in Japan, Great Lakes, Verbier, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, Aspen and Tanglewood.

In 2009, he was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and four years later he received both the Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award and the Lincoln Center Award for Emerging Artists.

Bax's most recent album releases are *Forgotten Dances and Debussy & Ravel for Two* with Lucille Chung. His celebrated Signum Classics discography also includes *Italian Inspirations; Beethoven's Hammerklavier and Moonlight Sonatas* (a Gramophone Editor's Choice); *Beethoven's Emperor Concerto; Bax & Chung*, a duo disc with Lucille Chung; *Alessio Bax plays Mozart*, recorded with London's Southbank Sinfonia; *Alessio Bax: Scriabin & Mussorgsky* (named "Recording of the Month... and quite possibly...of the year" by *MusicWeb International*); *Alessio Bax plays Brahms* (a Gramophone Critics' Choice); *Bach Transcribed*; and *Rachmaninov: Preludes & Melodies* (an *American Record Guide* Critics' Choice). Recorded for Warner Classics, his *Baroque Reflections* album was also a Gramophone Editor's Choice. He performed Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata* for Daniel Barenboim in the PBS-TV documentary *Barenboim on Beethoven: Masterclass*, available on DVD from EMI.

At the age of 14, Bax graduated with top honors from the conservatory of Bari, his hometown in Italy, and after further studies in Europe, he moved to the United States in 1994. He has been on the piano faculty of Boston's New England Conservatory since the fall of 2019 and serves as co-artistic director of the Joaquín Achúcarro Foundation for emerging pianists.

Bax lives in New York City with pianist Lucille Chung and their daughter, Mila.

PROGRAM NOTES

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Born: Apr. 1, 1873 in Semyonovo, Russia

Died: Mar. 28, 1943 in Beverly Hills

Concerto No. 2 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 18



Composed: June 1900 - April 1901

Premiered: Nov. 9, 1901 in Moscow, with Rachmaninoff as soloist and his cousin Alexander Siloti conducting.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Sept. 9, 2023, at the FivePoint Amphitheatre in Irvine, with Carl St.Clair conducting and Claire

Huangci as soloist.

Instrumentation: Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, strings, and solo piano.

Approximate duration: 33 minutes.

Though he was born before the last quarter of the nineteenth century began, Rachmaninoff was essentially a figure of the twentieth century. Still, we can call him the last of the Russian Romantics; his sound was rooted in the 1800s and in the Russian nationalist composers dating back to Glinka and Tchaikovsky. He was also one of the greatest pianists of his day, and perhaps one of the greatest ever. With superlative technique and hands of enormous reach, he was ideally suited to perform works of power and Romantic sweep. Trained as a pianist as well as a composer in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, Rachmaninoff focused on the piano in both composition and performance. Of his three concertos, the Second is both the most popular and the most admired among critics. This is the composition that made his reputation. By now, fans and musicians have affectionately named his concertos "Rocky 1, 2, and 3," but it was *Rocky 2* that first acquired its nickname. And, appropriately, it takes a heavyweight talent to go the distance with it.

The concerto's success was hard-won. Composed between the autumn of 1900 and the spring of 1901, it followed by three years the dismal reception of Rachmaninoff's First Symphony, which proved a setback to his musical ambitions. Long troubled by clinical depression, the well-born Rachmaninoff benefited from excellent medical care and the support of friends and colleagues, who encouraged him to rededicate himself to piano composition. It was good advice, enabling him to work free from a creative stasis. In fact, while many concertos are dedicated to the soloists who premiered them, this one is dedicated to Rachmaninoff's physician, Nikolai Dahl.

With his impressive technique, Rachmaninoff was ideally suited to perform his own piano works, and did so on concert tours in the United States and elsewhere. Listening to his concertos, we sense the perfect match between his gifts as a soloist and his style as a composer: these are compositions of dynamic extremes and singing melodies that require both power and

speed. The aural effects are spectacular, requiring a huge note span, blinding dexterity, the ability to delineate multiple voices, and the control to shade subtle gradations in tempos and dynamics. Through all of that, Rachmaninoff requires the pianist to spin a silken cocoon of sound that is voluptuous and quintessentially Romantic.

In the first movement, marked *Moderato* and written in C minor, an opening of intense foreboding builds through a series of powerful, chiming chords by the soloist. As the tension builds to a breaking point, the piano breaks into a sweeping main theme that is taken up in the violins, but that quickly engulfs the entire orchestra. From this moment on—indeed, from the initial sounds of the piano's lone voice in the concerto's introduction—this is a hugely scaled musical statement that balances sweeping, melancholy phrases with melodies that express the sweetness and pain of romantic yearning. When a rolling theme emerges, its march tempo gives it the quality of an inexorable machine, with only the solo piano to challenge it.

Slow chords in the strings open the second movement, an *Adagio* that moves from C minor into E major. While the piano delineates a theme through fleet, poetic arpeggios, the overall mood remains melancholy, with a short exchange between orchestra and piano developing the movement's motifs. Yet this tinge of sadness does not overwhelm, perhaps balanced by the sense of romance and melodic richness. The concerto's songful quality, which gave rise to two Frank Sinatra tunes based on the first movement alone ("I Think of You" and "Ever and Forever"), takes full flight in the lush, gorgeous third movement, marked *Allegro scherzando*. This movement is built around a melody that could be the distilled essence of romance, and that forms the basis of the song "Full Moon and Empty Arms." It has been excerpted in dozens of movies to convey the exquisite pleasure of love anticipated and the exquisite pain of love unfulfilled. It can also be said to have saved Rachmaninoff's life: when he composed it and discussed it with colleagues, it secured his more optimistic outlook on his composing prospects. This is the theme that turned *Brief Encounter* into a three-handkerchief weep; "delicious" is one of the words Marilyn Monroe uses to describe it in *The Seven Year Itch*. "Every time I hear it, I go to pieces!" she exclaims.

The concerto ends in a flourish of virtuosity and optimism that may well reflect the composer's rising optimism during its composition, when he was buoyed by colleagues' encouragement. The last movement, an *Allegro*, opens with an introduction that moves away from the previous movement's E major, where the music was lush but the emotions lingered in an atmosphere of twilight moodiness. To close, it transitions from C minor to C major with ever-increasing tension and energy. The final thematic statements are resolved in C major, in a loud and ecstatic finale.

Jean Sibelius

Born: Dec. 8, 1865 in Hämeenlinna, Finland

Died: Sep. 20, 1957 in Järvenpää, Finland

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Op. 39



Composed: 1898-1899

Premiered: Apr. 26, 1899 with Sibelius conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: This is a Pacific Symphony premiere.

Instrumentation: Two flutes including piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

Approximate duration: 38 minutes.

When the long-lived Sibelius was born in 1865, Beethoven—the composer in whose shadow all future symphonies would be written—was a living memory in the world of music. His Symphony No. 9 was completed in 1824, and to the composers who followed him it represented either the opening of infinite possibilities or the ultimate statement for the symphonic form. A handful of composers—Brahms, Bruckner, Mahler, and Sibelius among them—faced the challenge of writing symphonies that rise to the level of Beethoven’s formal standards and carry them forward. Of these, Sibelius and Mahler seemed to represent polar opposites in their ideas about the symphony, and even had a chance to discuss the subject with each other, acknowledging their different aims—Mahler’s as expansive and philosophical as the world, the heavens, life, and death; Sibelius’ a more detailed projection of the human imagination and the physical world.

Sibelius’ reluctance to approach the symphonic form—he was thirty-four when he completed his First Symphony in 1899—is often compared to Brahms’. But while Brahms was haunted by the shadow of Beethoven and was unnerved by the public’s impatience for his “Beethoven’s Tenth,” Sibelius’ situation was quite different. He was composing confidently at this point in his life, having experienced success with tone poems like *Finlandia* that established his distinctive, dark-hued voice and

deft handling of narrative structures. But his teenage obsession with the violin continued to bedevil him. Eventually it came into balance, enabling him to compose a great violin concerto as well as great symphonies.

Surprisingly, considering his antipathy to Russian politics and culture, Tchaikovsky was the strongest single influence on Sibelius’ First. He listened repeatedly to Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* Symphony while composing it, and is known to have told his wife that in Tchaikovsky—who expressed deeply personal feelings in his symphonies—he heard much of himself. In fact, it has been suggested that Sibelius’ Second Symphony is a narrative account of Finland’s oppression as a duchy controlled by Tsar Nicholas II of Russia and its emergence as a free nation.

We hear Tchaikovsky’s influence throughout Sibelius’ First. The symphony announces itself as something unique and different with its offbeat opening, an austere introduction for solo clarinet and timpani. In all four movements we hear long-lined melodies that are fragmented and recombined in development sections—à la Tchaikovsky. One critic compared the central movements—an *Andante* and *Scherzo*—to a musical playing field on which reprised themes battle it out. The final movement, marked quasi *una fantasia*, reprises themes from the opening movement in dramatic fashion until, in its final bars, the symphony concludes with a few anticlimactic pizzicato notes. Suggestive? Portentous? Humorous? Don’t discount that last possibility—this symphony is rich in humor.

A strong, distinctive sense of expressiveness, deep and dark-hued, seems to be what musicologists are getting at when they struggle with Sibelius’ uniqueness. His work is unmistakably Nordic, but also highly personal. Hearing it is like a journey northward. No one put it better or more succinctly than Phillip Huscher, the distinguished musicologist and annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra: “Sibelius’ sense of mood and color is keen.” Coming from him, those eight words speak volumes.

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

