

GENEVA CONCERTS



presents

Symphor!a

THE ORCHESTRA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

Lawrence Loh, conductor

Tai Murray, violin

Friday 24 September 2021 • 7:30 p.m.
Smith Opera House

Geneva Concerts Next Event
Friday, October 29, 7:30 PM



Stepping is a dance that uses the body as an instrument, combining footsteps, claps, and spoken words to produce complex rhythms. Step Afrika! blends the percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities together with traditional African dances, then adds in an array of contemporary dance and art forms into a cohesive, compelling artistic experience.

C. Brian Williams, the founder and executive director of Step Afrika!, attended Howard University where he learned how to step. Later he visited South Africa, and saw a young boy dancing a style that looked very similar to stepping. Recognizing the connection, Brian wanted to find a way for Africans and Americans to share their dances, music, and culture. In 1994, he founded Step Afrika! as the first professional company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Step Afrika! ranks as one of the top ten African American dance companies in the United States.

In addition to their evening performance at the Smith Opera House, the group will offer two school assemblies at Geneva High School. The dancers will introduce the concepts of teamwork, discipline and commitment which are the ties between stepping, college life and academic achievement. The performers incorporate world traditions and will demonstrate through the lively South African gumboot dance. Students will learn basic step choreography and discover how dance brings people and cultures together.

Step Afrika! will also be offering an afternoon master class/workshop for the Dance Department at Hobart & William Smith Colleges.

Symphor!a

THE ORCHESTRA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

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Tai Murray, violin

ROSSINI

Overture to *Semiramide*

TCHAIKOVSKY

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.35

Allegro maestoso

Andante

Presto

Tai Murray, violin

INTERMISSION

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op.67

Allegro con brio

Andante con moto

Scherzo allegro

Allegro



This concert is made possible with generous financial support from the Williams Family Foundation and from FairGame, providing support to arts and cultural organizations for regional projects as determined by the NYS Gaming Commission.

Lawrence Loh

Lawrence Loh, Music Director of Symphoria, was named Music Director of the West Virginia Symphony commencing in the 2017-18 season. Mr. Loh concluded his 12-year tenure as Music Director of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic in 2017. Mr. Loh had a decade-plus association with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra where he currently leads annual pops and other select programs.



Having a particular affinity for pops programming, Mr. Loh has been engaged for repeat performances with Chris Botti, Idina Menzel, Ann Hampton Callaway, the Texas Tenors and more. He has assisted John Williams on multiple occasions and conducted numerous sold-out John Williams tribute concerts. He is particularly adept at conducting concerts synchronizing live orchestral music with film, and he has led *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, *Pixar in Concert*, *Disney in Concert*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Singin' in the Rain*, among other concert productions.

Mr. Loh is active as a guest conductor, both in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to annual concerts in Pittsburgh and Dallas, his recent engagements include the Boston Pops (Tanglewood); Detroit Symphony; San Diego Symphony; Seattle Symphony; Buffalo Philharmonic; and the Cathedral Choral Society at the Washington National Cathedral. In the summer of 2016, he made his debut at Tanglewood, conducting Shostakovich's 5th Symphony with the Boston University Tanglewood Institute Young Artists Orchestra, and returned in 2017 to conduct the Boston Pops.

Mr. Loh received his Artist Diploma in Orchestral Conducting from Yale, his Masters in Choral Conducting from Indiana University, and his BA and Certificate of Management Studies from the University of Rochester. Lawrence Loh was born in southern California of Korean parentage and raised in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He and his wife Jennifer have a son, Charlie, and a daughter, Hilary.

Tai Murray

Described as “superb” by *The New York Times*, violinist **Tai Murray** has established herself as a musical voice of a generation. “Technically flawless... vivacious and scintillating... It is without doubt that Murray’s style of playing is more mature than that of many seasoned players... “ (*Muso Magazine*)

Appreciated for her elegance and effortless ability, Murray creates a special bond with listeners through her personal phrasing and subtle sweetness. Her programming reveals musical intelligence. Winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2004, Tai Murray was named a BBC New Generation Artist (2008 through 2010). As a chamber musician, she was a member of Lincoln Center’s Chamber Music Society II (2004-2006). In 2012 she received the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, which the Sphinx Organization awards to outstanding classical Black and Latinx musicians.

She has performed as guest soloist on the main stages world-wide, performing with leading ensembles such as the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Symphony Orchestra, and all of the BBC Symphony Orchestras. She is also a dedicated advocate of contemporary works written for the violin.

Tai Murray’s critically acclaimed debut recording for Harmonia Mundi of Ysaye’s six sonatas for solo violin was released in February 2012. Her second recording with works by American composers of the 20th Century was released by the Berlin-based label eaSonus, and her third disc with the Bernstein Serenade on the French label Mirare.



Tai Murray joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music in 2021. She plays a violin by Tomaso Balestrieri fecit Mantua ca. 1765, on generous loan from a private collection.

Program Notes

ROSSINI: *Semiramide Overture*

Rossini is best remembered for his comic operas, especially *The Barber of Seville* and *La Cenerentola (Cinderella)*, but he was equally adept when it came to less lighthearted fare. And there are few 19th-century operas less lighthearted than *Semiramide*, based on a tragedy by Voltaire that hinges on political treachery and its consequent vengeance, fueled by incest and murders within the family circle.

The overture, less gory than the opera it prefaces, stands with the *William Tell Overture* as Rossini's longest. It's one of his most colorful, too: from the ominous drum rolls and mournful horn quartet that introduce the work, on to the rousing ending, it's crammed with brilliant orchestral effects and musical surprises. As for that ending, it's a prime example (the second in this piece) of what's known as the "Rossini Crescendo." A crescendo, in its simplest form, is an increase in volume; but in Rossini's hands, it's cannily combined with repetition of musical units (usually, but not always, in groups of three), increases in the number of instruments (often boosting the tension by adding instruments at higher pitch), mounting rhythmic pressure, and sudden returns to near silence in order to allow another dramatic build. The result here is breathtaking.

Peter J. Rabinowitz

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35*

Tchaikovsky's violin concerto was written in 1878 during a time of growing success as a composer, after having lived in Moscow for slightly over a decade. During that time, he had composed four of his six symphonies, his first piano concerto, and other important works. However, composition of the violin concerto is associated with one of the most controversial and unfortunate episodes in Tchaikovsky's life--his ill-fated marriage to Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova. It was a hurried affair, with neither party's motives exactly clear even today, after endless sifting of the evidence. It lasted only two months, but they never divorced. Thereafter, Tchaikovsky underwent a long-term re-orientation in his artistic output.

After returning from recuperation in Switzerland from the marriage, Tchaikovsky set to work on the concerto, collaborating with a young

violinist, Iosif Kotek, who had been a student of his at the Moscow Conservatory. It was completed swiftly, but the première was delayed, owing to the difficulty of finding a violinist who was either willing--or able-- to perform it. It finally received its first public performance in Vienna in 1881. The ensuing review by the famous Viennese critic, Eduard Hanslick (you may remember his difficulties with Richard Wagner) has gone down in journalistic history. Among his comments were that in the work “the violin . . . is beaten black and blue;” that the finale has the “brutal and wretched jollity of a Russian holiday” with “savage vulgar faces . . . curses . . . and vodka.” “Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto gives us for the first time the hideous notion that there can be music that stinks in the ear.”

Today, of course, we all know better. It is one of the most difficult of violin concertos, and Tchaikovsky’s inimitable melodic gift is omnipresent. It is a masterpiece, even though it never achieves the traditional balanced give and take expected between orchestra and soloist. Its effervescence, bravura, and appealing melodies have earned it a lasting place in the repertoire.

The first movement begins softly in the orchestra, with a clear theme—although it’s not the main one—followed shortly by intimations of the real main theme. All of this doesn’t last long, for Tchaikovsky, unlike many of his peers, doesn’t believe in a long introduction before the soloist enters. In this case, after a few meditative bars, the solo violin plunges right into what is clearly the main theme. Tchaikovsky’s themes are always clear, aren’t they? There is, of course, a second theme, too, but the main point here is that the orchestra’s role is subordinate to the soloist, who carries the tunes throughout. Clearly apparent, as well, is the virtuosity necessary to bring off the violin part, which is a combination of the famed Tchaikovsky lyricism and a fiery intensity of challenging melodic figurations. The cadenza before the recapitulation is Tchaikovsky’s and a more formidable one would be hard to cite. For those who revel in violin pyrotechnics,

this is your *métier*! The driving gallop to the end of the movement is the pure Tchaikovsky familiar to all who know his other orchestra works.

The woodwind section intones a little organ-like chorale to introduce the entry of the soloist in the slow movement. The mood here is not one of tragedy or deep reflection, but seemingly one of a kind of pastoral rhapsody, and that would be altogether appropriate, considering the beauty of the Swiss countryside in which it was conceived. An aura of improvisation pervades this relatively brief interlude, with ample opportunities for some exchanges between the soloist and the woodwinds. The woodwinds end the movement, as they began it, and without a break, we're plunged immediately into the last movement. After a few cadenza-like moments wherein the soloist toys with the main theme, it's off to the races. But it's not an unalloyed dash to the end, for the composer wisely intersperses quiet moments that only enhance the return of the dizzying pyrotechnics. So back and forth we go, always driven by the *élan* and panache of Tchaikovsky's inimitable skill at stirring up a climatic finish.

Wm. E. Runyan
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BEETHOVEN: *Symphony No. 5*

Rossini was also an admirer of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), whose *Symphony No. 5* (1808) concludes the concert. Yet it's hard to imagine two composers who are more different. Rossini was a crowd-pleaser and a gourmet (he is quoted as saying “I know of no more admirable occupation than eating”); he was a fast worker who, at the height of his powers as Europe's most successful opera composer, suddenly retired from the opera house before the age of forty. Beethoven was famously irascible, especially as his deafness developed, and known for living in conditions Rossini called “extremely dirty and in frightful disorder”; he wrote slowly and—especially at the end of his life—he aimed many of his greatest works at connoisseurs. Yet two centuries later, Beethoven is the one with the stronger grip on general audiences, having emerged as *the* exemplar of Western art

music. And no work is more exemplary than the ever popular Fifth.

That well-deserved popularity comes with a downside, though, for it tends to obscure the music's ground-breaking spirit. Take, for instance, the opening theme: It's as recognizable a theme as any in the classical repertoire, and thus apt to pass you by. But how did it sound in 1808? Beethoven had already experimented, in his Fourth, with an unconventional opening, in that case an introduction that lasted so long that people were apt to wonder whether it was an introduction at all. In the Fifth, Beethoven does the opposite, starting immediately with a theme so short that you're apt to wonder whether it's a theme at all.

That's just the beginning of the Fifth's radicality. There's structural innovation as well. Today's listeners are familiar with symphonies where the movements are thematically and formally linked—even symphonies in a single movement. But in 1808, for listeners accustomed to symphonies where the movements are independent of each other, the thematic and rhythmic connections between the movements in the Fifth (most obviously, the familiar “Da-Da-Da-DUM” rhythm) were striking. So was the way the third bleeds into the finale with a hair-raising transition. As conductor Larry Loh puts it, the Fifth moves in a “long arc from the beginning of the first movement to the end of the finale.”

Then, too, the blast of trombones that ushers in the finale—the first symphonic appearance of trombones in the standard repertoire—must have been a jolt. Add in the equally unprecedented piccolo and contrabassoon, and the movement is probably the loudest symphonic music the early listeners had ever heard. And had they ever confronted a work with the continuous rhythmic energy of this one?

Thus, those of you have never heard the piece before—or have not heard it for years—are perhaps in the best position to appreciate its power. For the rest of you, it's probably worth trying to forget everything you know about the Fifth and just let it carry you along.

Peter J. Rabinowitz

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