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Website and program design: John Gilbert; Program Notes: Dale DeBakcsy; Member Profiles: Joyce Vollmer; Editing/Proofreading: Yvette Malamud Ozer; Publicity: Bonnie Bogue, Joyce Vollmer, Erin DeBakcsy, John Gilbert, Yvette Malamud Ozer; Recording: Keith Sklower; Concerto Contest: Erin DeBakcsy, Bonnie Bogue, Joyce Vollmer, Sandy Roadcap; Concert Setup: Karl Severeid, Rich Trevor.

THIRD SEASON CONCERT

Sunday, January 30, 2022, 3:00 PM

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church

114 Montecito Avenue, Oakland

Double Concerto for Violin and Cello in A Minor, Op.102

Johannes Brahms

1833-1897

Allegro

Andante

Vivace non troppo

Valery Breshears, violin soloist

Starla Breshears, cello soloist

Khuner Young Artist Concerto Competition Winners

🌀 *Intermission* 🌀

La Mer

Claude Debussy

1862-1918

De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From dawn to noon on the sea) - Très lent

Jeux de vagues (Play of the waves) - Allegro

Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialog of the wind and the sea) - Animé et tumultueux

NEXT CONCERT

Our next concert will be on **Sunday, March 27, 2022.**

We will perform Carl Nielsen's *Symphony No. 5*.

Our Women's Composer Series continues with

Lili Boulanger's *D'un matin de printemps*.

The second winner of the Khuner Young Artist Concerto Competition

Francis Chua will perform

Boris Papandopulo's *Concerto for Xylophone and String Orchestra*.

Check our website for information and details of our 2021-22 Season:

www.PrometheusSymphony.org

Please do not use photography or video with flashes or blinking lights during the concert.

Please also remember to silence cell phones and other electronic devices.

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Eric Hansen

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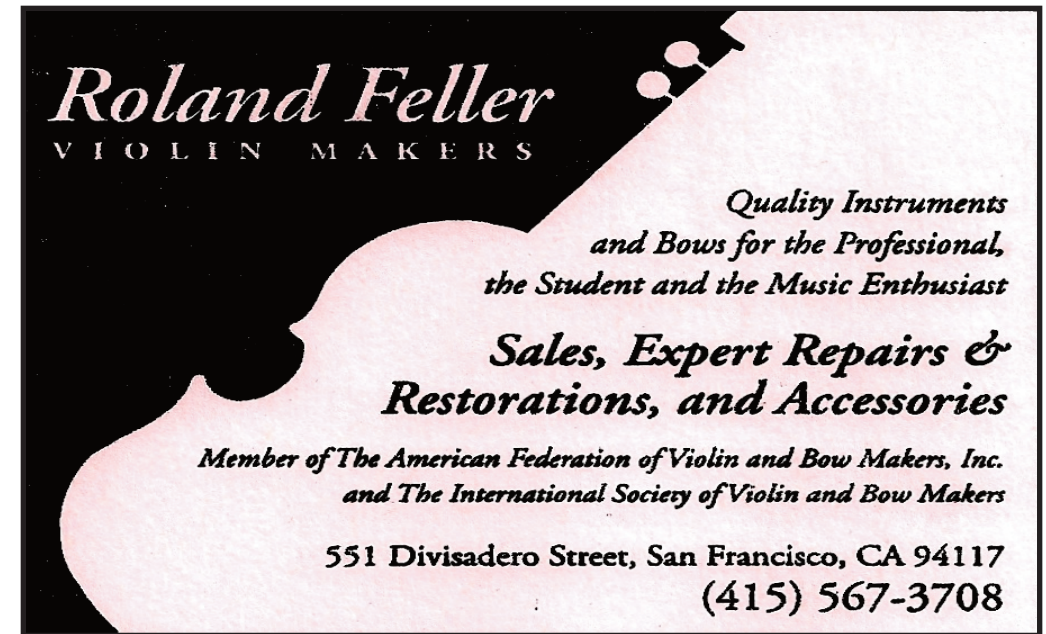
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PROGRAM NOTES

Johannes Brahms: Double Concerto for Violin and Viola, Op. 102 (1887)



The last great orchestral work of Johannes Brahms was born of a beautiful and bittersweet impulse: the desire to reconnect with an estranged friend. In 1887, Brahms had been absent for several years from the life of one of his greatest musical confidantes and inspirations, Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (1831–1907). For three decades, Joachim had been Brahms’s most dedicated musical advocate, instrumental mentor, and trusted friend, a relationship that held firm until 1884, when Joachim divorced his wife. Brahms took the side of the embattled Amalie, defending her against Joachim’s jealous charges of adultery, thereby chilling the relationship between the two musical giants.

The *Double Concerto* was inspired from a concerto request by cellist Robert Hausmann. Brahms seized upon the opportunity to reunite with Joachim by expanding this commission into a violin-cello double concerto. Though the two greats of nineteenth century Romanticism did not rediscover their old intimacy in the process of preparing the new piece, they did find that they could work and create music together again.

Hausmann and Joachim premiered the work publicly on October 18, 1887, and though the public were happy to see Joachim and Brahms reunited, the critics of the era had little kind to say about the concerto. In the post-Wagnerian soundscape of Richard Strauss, Anton Bruckner, and the up-and-coming Claude Debussy, Brahms’s “Act of Reconciliation” with its harkening back to the high tide of early Romanticism could hardly create much excitement. And to those raised on the pyrotechnical brilliance of Liszt (who had just passed away in 1886), Brahms’s controlled balance of soloists and orchestra seemed too restrained and calculated.

After its cool reception, Brahms burned the draft of a second double concerto he had been composing, despairing about what he took to be the dimming of his creative powers. In the years after its premiere the *Double Concerto* was politely applauded out of respect for Brahms, but rarely out of love for the piece. Fortunately, in the last century we have learned to approach and appreciate the piece on its own terms. This is Brahms tapping into the best instincts of Mozart, crafting a concerto where the solo instruments talk to each other, now warmly, now competitively, while enmeshed in the larger fabric of a rich orchestral counterweight.

In a letter to Clara Schumann, Brahms described the “fun” he was having, composing the various “pranks” for the violin and cello repartee, which are words he rarely employed when talking about his own compositions. And while the first movement’s grand strides and warm exchanges between the soloists seem well in the world of Brahms at his height, the third movement is electrically alive with precisely this novel sense of fun. This tribute to an old friend, set in a Hungarian style with moments of majesty interspersed with musical jokes and hijinks, sprang from the pen of the man who shepherded Romantic music through its brightest and most challenging years and who, in the decade left to him, would never write for an orchestra again.

~ Dale DeBakcsy

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Claude Debussy: La Mer, L. 109 (1903-1905)



If ever a composer and a subject were meant for each other, it was Claude Debussy and the ocean. Debussy's rich sonic imagination, harnessed to the multitudinous dynamics of the shifting sea, created the musical vocabulary we employ to this day to describe water, in all its force and grace. Those sounds moved us past the arpeggiated ripples of Wagner's Rhine and the melancholic pedal points of Chopin's raindrops into a depiction of water as a primal force: the ocean wrestling with sky and sun in hundreds of motions and counter-motions played out through the orchestra, laying down, definitively, our conception of how the sea sounds, not so much to our own ears, but to those of eternity.

Debussy often professed that, if had a choice at a second career, he would have been a mariner. While few jobs seem less suited to an artistically inclined, poetry-mad young man like Debussy than that of a nineteenth century sailor, that yearning expresses something in Debussy that allowed for the profound evocations of *La Mer*. Inspired by depictions of the sea in the woodblocks of the great Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), which froze towering ocean waves in great pillars of foam, light, and darkness, *La Mer* sets out to represent the sea in its many and ever-shifting forms.

Calling his new three movement piece a set of “Symphonic Sketches” to avoid the conventionalities and expectations of both the classical Germanic symphony and the equally Germanic tone poem, Debussy nonetheless set out his movements in a recognizably symphonic format, with a weighty first movement and rondo third bracketing a spritely scherzo center.

While traditional in structure, *La Mer* was nonetheless so perplexing in content that its original audience didn't entirely know what to make of it. The constant rhythmic changes (which our orchestra players love keeping track of—just ask them!), the novel textures and instrumentations that pay their respects to the new harmonic freedoms unlocked by Wagner, the pentatonic flavorings, the impressionistic dappling (though Debussy would have resisted the term strongly), were all too new for an audience that came expecting naval bombast.

Within a decade, however, the piece was recognized as a masterpiece of composition and tonal soundscape. The first movement, “From Dawn to Noon on the Sea,” has become so embedded in our consciousness as the musical depiction of light spreading out over a vast expanse of water that it is hard to imagine it ever being otherwise. The echoing of two harps, sounding through the haze of the strings and the looping motions of the winds, construct an eerie pre-dawn world, all building towards perhaps the most famous musical climax in Western music that doesn't involve a soprano dying.

The second movement, “Play of the Waves,” is a perfect wash of musical ideas rising and then crashing back down again, where new ideas are born, partially completed, and then discarded in order to make way for the next thought: a wonderful articulation of the ceaseless variety and vivacity of nature in its experimentation and boundless spirit.

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Khuner Young Artist Concerto Competition—Our 32nd !

An array of amazingly talented young musicians turned out for the **Khuner Young Artist Concerto Competition** auditions last October, when we reopened our venerable competition for its 32nd season.

We are amazed and truly honored to acknowledge **Valery Breshears** (age 12) and **Starla Breshears** (her 13-year-old sister), who won the Competition for their stunning rendition of Brahms' *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello* that you're hearing today. Read about them and how much they've accomplished at such a young age in their biographical sketches in this program.

This year the depth of talent in the auditioners prompted us to name another winner—something we usually do not do. Francis Chua will play the dazzling *Concerto for Xylophone and String Orchestra* at our March 27th Concert. Percussion players are rare among our competitors, so this will be an exceptional experience for our orchestra and the audience.

Prometheus Symphony thanks all of the dedicated parents who do so much to enable their gifted young artists to realize their dreams and participate in events such as our Competition, for musicians age 18 and younger. We acknowledge the teachers and organizations that create the very rich music environment in the Bay Area, that allows these young talents to blossom and succeed. We are delighted that our Competition gives the winners the rare opportunity to work with a full orchestra and perform before a live and appreciative audience. The auditions themselves are a critical part of the education of all the aspiring young musicians. We look forward to the next season's auditions, which will be announced on the Concerto Competition page of our website, www.PrometheusSymphony.org.

Music Directors of the Prometheus Symphony Orchestra

- Eric Hansen • 1997–Present
- George Thomson • 1992–1997
- Jonathan Khuner • 1980–1992
- Karla Lemon • 1980-1982 (Associate Conductor)
- Sally Kell • 1976–1980
- Roy Bogas • Fall, 1976
- Randy Hunt • 1964–1976 (Orchestra Founder)

The third movement, “Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea,” brings us into the heart of an oceanic tempest. Much ink has been spilled as to which instruments, at which time, represent which of the two great natural forces - here arrayed against each other, but for our money it's easy to wander so far into those interpretive jungles as to miss the pure majesty of what is actually happening. This is nature wrestling with itself, a clash of titans brought to our ears through one of humanity's most observant and imaginative minds.

~ Dale DeBakcsy

ARTIST PROFILE

Valery and Starla Breshears, violin and cello soloists



Valery, age 12, is in the 7th grade at the Oakland School for the Arts. She began violin lessons at age 2 with David Mallory. By the age of 5 Valery started studying at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Pre-college Division under William Barbini, and currently studies with Zhao Wei. Additionally Valery is coached by her accompanist, Ayke Agus. Valery has soloed eight times with six different orchestras since the age of six. She has won numerous solo competitions, including winner Parnassus-San Francisco Conservatory of Music Concerto Competition, Fremont Symphony Nafisa Taghioff Award, winner Livermore-Amador Symphony Concerto Competition, 1st Place U.S. International Music Competition, 1st Place ASTA-San Francisco Competition, 1st Place ASTA-Sacramento Competition, 1st Place CAPMT-Sacramento Competition, 1st Place DVC-HNU Strings Competition, 1st Place Classical Masters Competition, and a winner of the 2021 Pacific Musical Society & Foundation Competition. Valery has appeared on NPR's From the Top and is a recipient of the 2021 Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist Award. Valery is Concertmaster of the SFCM Pre-College String Orchestra.

Starla, age 13, is in the 8th grade at the Oakland School for the Arts. She began cello lessons at age 3 with Yoshie Muratani. By the age of 6 Starla started studying at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Pre-college Division under Jean-Michel Fonteneau. Additionally Starla is coached by her accompanist, Ayke Agus, and by cellist, Christine Walevska. Starla has soloed with seven different orchestras since the age of six. She has won numerous solo competitions, including winner Parnassus-San Francisco Conservatory of Music Concerto Competition, 1st Place ASTA State Competition, winner Palo Alto Philharmonic Concerto Movement Competition, 1st Place U.S. International Music Competition, 1st Place U.S. Open Music Competition, 1st Place Livermore-Amador Symphony Concerto Competition, 1st Place CAPMT-Sacramento Competition, 1st Place DVS-HNU Strings Competition, and a winner of the 2021 Pacific Musical Society & Foundation Competition. Starla is Principal Cello of the SFCM Pre College String Orchestra.



ABOUT OUR MUSIC DIRECTOR

Eric Hansen is currently Music Director and Conductor of the Prometheus Symphony Orchestra, a position he has held since 1997. A Bay Area native born into a musical family, Mr. Hansen has performed professionally (violin & trumpet) since the age of 15. At age 16 he was soloist with the San Francisco Symphony, playing the Violin Concerto in G minor by Max Bruch. His father, Robert Hansen was a member and conductor of the Golden Gate Park Band over a period of 50 years, and his mother, Geraldine, taught piano to generations of students.



Music study continued at UC Berkeley, where he served as concertmaster of the University Symphony Orchestra, and studied conducting with Michael Senturia. Upon graduation he received the prestigious Eisner prize for Outstanding Music Graduate. Mr. Hansen received his Master's in Instrumental Conducting at the University of Michigan as a teaching fellow, studying under Gustav Meier. Additional conducting study with Daniel Lewis, Dennis deCoteau, Herbert Blomstedt, and Jon Robertson followed.

With a particular interest in new music and composition, he has worked with, and conducted works by, such composers as Christopher Rouse, Gian Carlo Menotti, Peter Maxwell Davies, Gregory Ballard, Robert Hughes, Ross Bauer, Frank LaRocca, Douglas Johnson, and Ron McFarland. Mr. Hansen has premiered new works with the Oakland Ballet, the Berkeley Contemporary Chamber Players, Composers, Inc., the Empyrean Ensemble, and New Music at Berkeley. He has conducted the California Symphony Orchestra, the Pacific Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, the Kensington Symphony Orchestra, the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, the Redding Symphony, the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Redlands Symphony.

Enjoying work in a wide variety of musical styles, Mr. Hansen has also been the conductor for the Grammy Award-winning jazz singer, Ms. Diane Schuur. He has recorded with the Skywalker Symphony at Lucas Recording Studios as well as at Phantasy Studios and the Record Plant. In addition, he has been a guest conductor at the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival in Alaska, inaugurating a Klezmer Ensemble, for which he also composed and arranged the music.

Mr. Hansen has appeared as a conductor and clinician with numerous pre-professional and educational ensembles throughout the United States and Europe. In 2000 he toured Prague, Vienna, and Budapest as conductor with the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra, leading the group to win the prestigious "City of Vienna" prize for chamber orchestra. Other performances include the California All-State Honor String Orchestra, the California Orchestra Directors Association All-State Honor Orchestra, and the Utah All-State Honor Orchestra. He has conducted the UC Berkeley Symphony, the San Francisco Conservatory Orchestra, the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra, the San Domenico Chamber Orchestra, the Oakland Youth Orchestra, and the Young People's Symphony Orchestra.

A passionate music educator, he was a Music Lecturer at California State University East Bay for 23 years as well as lecturer on violin and viola at the University of California, Berkeley, and guest lecturer at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Mr. Hansen continues to teach violin, viola, trumpet, and conducting privately from his Bay Area studio.

Happy New Year from Prometheus Symphony Orchestra

We welcome our audience and many friends to the second half of our 57th Season, whether you are listening in person or watching our live-streamed performance. We are producing a great season and hold every hope that the pandemic allows us to open our doors to a full audience for our March concert. Check our website, www.PrometheusSymphony.org to see what is planned for the rest of this season.

Our January concert is always thrilling because we present the winners of our **Khuner Young Artist Concerto Competition**. Find out about our stupendous duo-winners, Valery and Starla Breshears, elsewhere in this program. They may be only 12 and 13 years old, but they are already stars. Brahms would love them!

Learn about the Concerto Competition in a separate message in this program. Mark your calendars for the fourth concert of the season on Sunday, March 27 when we will feature another remarkable Competition winner, Francis Chua, playing the dazzling *Concerto for Xylophone and String Orchestra*. See website to find out about admission and other details dictated by this challenging time. Better yet, **sign up for email notices by using the "Mailing List" tab** on any page of the website.

What keeps us thriving? The resilience of our orchestra members and the momentum of 57 years of music making has carried Prometheus through crippling challenges that we never imagined. Our orchestra actually increased its membership when we reopened rehearsals this past fall. Our wonderful **Music Director Eric Hansen** and the devoted Board of Directors (all playing members) have spent countless hours in zoom meetings and on emails figuring how to keep Prometheus going. With the stringent safety protocols of vaccinations and masks, ventilation and distancing, we've focused on learning some of the most difficult music in orchestral repertoire for this concert. If you want to distract yourself from worrying, just learn to play Debussy's *La Mer*. Devilishly challenging but so rewarding. Every rehearsal leaves us exhilarated.

Who are we? Since 1965, Prometheus has drawn on the wealth of amateur and semi-professional musicians in the Bay Area. Read the inspiring story of our first 50 years on the History page of our website. Whether former professionals or life-long amateur musicians, our members share a passion for great symphonic music. It is the members of our all-volunteer ensemble who perform the myriad of duties required to produce a five-concert season (we have no staff).

Thanks to YOU! Prometheus Symphony is thriving in this trying time with the leadership of our Music Director Eric Hansen and the generosity of our loyal contributors, including our orchestra members. Special thanks to the Alameda County Arts Commission, for financial support for us and other arts groups, and to the Governor's Office of Business and Development. That support enables us to offer free concerts for the whole community. Instead of charging admission, we welcome donations of any size. You can contribute by using the **DONATE** button on our website. Or mail checks or cash in the envelope in your program. Or drop something in the Contributions Box. Donations are tax-deductible (you'll get an acknowledgement), and we'll acknowledge you in programs.

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