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Choral Director

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Facing off Across Sunset Boulevard
Saturday, May 5, 2018, 7:30 pm / Sunday, May 6, 2018, 2:00 pm
Mandeville Auditorium, UCSD

Sameer Patel conducting

ARNOLD SCHONBERG  
Five Pieces for Orchestra, Opus 16
Premonnitions
Yesteryears
Colors
Perpetia
The Obligatory Recitative

OLIVIER MESSIAEN  
Un sourire

HANNAH LASH  
Eating Flowers

INTERMISSION

TORU TAKEMITSU  
A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden

IGOR STRAVINSKY  
Symphony in Three Movements
Quarter note = 160
Andante
Interlude: L'istesso tempo; Con moto

We gratefully acknowledge our underwriters for this concert
Steve & Janet Shields

Supporting UCSD’s Educational Mission

Having begun independently, the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus became an affiliate of UC San Diego’s Music Department in 1967. Since that time, it has played a significant and continuous role in supporting the educational missions of the Department and the University. Faculty careers have been enhanced by the opportunity the LJS&C presents as a venue for large-scale compositions; likewise, the quality of education of graduate students has been greatly enhanced by this collaboration with LJS&C. As an adjunct to the Music Department, the LJS&C has matured to become an impressive regional ensemble and, simultaneously, remained a major local community asset.

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• LJS&C offers student performers and composers exposure on each season. For the 2017-18 season alone, 11 student and 4 faculty performers and composers are featured.

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— Cecil Lytle, UCSD Professor of Music/Provost Emeritus

Students can make music an integral and impactful part of their lives on campus, and many continue in LJS&C as alumni.

Cover illustration of Steven Schick by Jay Wolf Schlossberg-Cohen

Unauthorized photography and audio/video recording are prohibited during this performance. No texting or cell phone use of any kind allowed.
Samir Patel
conductor

Internationally recognized for his versatile musicianship and passionate communication, Sameer Patel is one of America’s most exciting young conductors. A recipient of 2016 and 2017 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Awards, Patel is currently in his third season as the Associate Conductor of the San Diego Symphony. He is also the Associate Conductor of the Sun Valley Summer Symphony, whose distinguished musicians come from many of North America’s finest orchestras.

Patel’s work as a conductor has taken him across North America, South America, and Europe. In the 2017–2018 season, he makes his highly anticipated subscription debut conducting two programs with the San Diego Symphony. He also leads operatic works with the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera, conducts modern masterpieces of the 20th and 21st centuries with the La Jolla Symphony and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, shares the podium with legendary film composer John Williams, and closes Symphony New Hampshire’s season with Beethoven’s 9th Symphony. He also conducts works by Adam Schoenberg, Ellen Reid, Hannah Lash, Derrick Spiva Jr., George Walker, Tan Dun, Derek Bermel, and Mason Bates.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Patel furthered his studies with some of the greatest conductors of our time, including Gianandrea Noseda, Daniele Gatti, the late Kurt Masur, Bernard Haitink, David Zinman, and Neeme and Paavo Järvi. He is an enthusiastic advocate for music education and enjoys teaching and learning from the many students he works with at summer music festivals, school music programs, and youth orchestras across the country. Born and raised in Michigan, Sameer makes his home in San Diego with his wife, Shannon, and their infant son, Devan.

“So, Sameer, what do you want to conduct?”

This is how my conversation with Steve Schick began over coffee back in December 2016. I took a deep breath, summoning the courage to say the two words that have sent marketing executives, orchestra managers, and audiences into a fit of anxiety for the past 100 years: “Arnold Schoenberg.”

He didn’t flinch. So I took it a step further.

“And I’d really love to perform some of the composers I’ve always admired but have never had the opportunity to conduct... Messiaen, Takemitsu....”

“Well, that sounds great,” Steve said.

This is one of the many reasons why I love Steve. Not only is he an incredible artist, but he’s also a generous colleague who has taught me so much. And there was indeed an underlying lesson in that simple affirmation, one I’ve heard from him on countless occasions: that you should never underestimate your audience. This sense of imagination and courage is something I’ve enjoyed whenever I’ve attended a La Jolla Symphony and Chorus performance, and it’s why I knew disclosing my aspirations wouldn’t fall on deaf ears.

Over the next several weeks Steve and I shot several emails back and forth, carefully crafting the program you’re experiencing today. It’s bookended with the music of two mavells, Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky, who set the musical world ablaze with their distinct musical language. While Schoenberg’s music from fin-de-siecle Vienna calls forth the expressivity and angst of Europe before the outbreak of World War One, Stravinsky’s music from the 1940s has a distinctly cosmopolitan flavor, with a melting pot of influences from jazz and rumba to Hollywood and the horrors of the world at war around him.

Schoenberg and Stravinsky’s influence continued deep into the future, with the other three composers on this program continuing this exploration of sonority and color. In closing, I want to thank Steve, Diane Salisbury, and the curious and passionate musicians of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus for the opportunity to delve into this music together.

Five Pieces for Orchestra, Opus 16

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

Born September 13, 1974, Vienna

Died July 13, 1951, Los Angeles

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Schoenberg moved away from traditional tonality and toward a new harmonic language based on what he called “the emancipation of dissonance,” in which no single note (or key) would be granted more importance than another. His Five Pieces for Orchestra, composed in the summer of 1909, is his first atonal work for orchestra: the five movements have no key signatures, nor any implied “home” keys. These five brief movements may be thought of as “mood” pieces—each generates a particular atmosphere, which Schoenberg suggests with slightly coy titles for the movements. Throughout, the emphasis is on instrumental color; melodies tend to be fragmentary, with the line leaping from section to section and acquiring different colors as it proceeds. Taking note of the fragmented melodic line, the importance of individual voices, and the changing colors of this music, one critic has suggested that they require “an orchestra of soloists.”

The evocative (but somewhat cryptic) titles for the movements may be taken as suggestions only—Schoenberg did not intend this as program music. The violent Pneumonitis contrasts two brief motifs: a quick figure for lower strings heard immediately and a swirling clarinet figure. These two theme-fragments are manipulated in many different ways over a powerful ostinato from the strings. By contrast, Yesteryears seems gentle, even nostalgic. It is based on the solo cello’s opening figure, which is then transformed as it passes through the orchestra. Schoenberg called the third movement Colors and told his students that this almost static music depicts the concentric rings made by tossing stones into a still lake. This movement, which he later retitled Summer Morning by a Lake, consists of one chord that repeats constantly, changing colors and taking on a continually-evolving character as it proceeds. In the score, Schoenberg directs the conductor: “The change of chords in this piece has to be executed with the greatest subtlety, avoiding accenntuation of entering instruments, so that only the difference in color becomes noticeable.” This movement is one of the earliest examples of Klängefarbenmelodie (“tone color melody”), in which shifting instrumental color becomes as important as shifting pitch; it is a concept that Schoenberg’s student Anton Webern would explore much more fully in his music. Schoenberg marked the fourth movement Pergolesi, a term from Greek drama suggesting a sudden reversal of fortune, and this movement, the briefest of the five, is based on sharp contrasts. Schoenberg called the last movement The Obligatory-Recitative, but no one has the slightest idea what that means. It is in a three-beat meter that seems to evoke the rhythms of Viennese dances, but the music—and its manipulation of thematic fragments—swings violently around that waltz-rhythm.

The Five Pieces for Orchestra exists in several versions: Schoenberg’s original version of 1909 for huge orchestra, his re-scoring for chamber orchestra made in 1939 for a performance at his Society for Private Performances in Vienna, and a revision of the original version for normal-sized symphony orchestra, made in 1949 while he was living in Los Angeles. At these concerts, Schoenberg’s original version of 1909 is performed.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger
Un sourire

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

December 10, 1908, Avignon

Died April 28, 1992, Paris

In the fall of 1989 conductor Marek Janowksi asked Olivier Messiaen to compose a short work that would be performed at the two-hundredth anniversary of Mozart's death, still two years in the future. Messiaen was attracted to the idea and set to work immediately. He first came up with the title Un sourire ("A Smiling") then had the entire work in draft by the end of October 1989. Janowksi played the premiere of Un sourire on the bicentenary of Mozart's death, December 5, 1991.

Shortly after that premiere, Messiaen outlined his intentions in Un sourire: "I love and admire Mozart. I didn't try, in my homage to him, which would have been idiotic. I said to myself: Mozart always had many enemies. He was hungry, cold, almost all his children died; his wife was ill, he knew only tragedy… And he always smiled in his music and in his life. So I too tried to smile, and I composed Un sourire, a little piece lasting nine minutes, without pretentiousness, which I hope…smiles!"

Messiaen may overstate the bleakness of Mozart’s life, but he was quite correct to sense that Mozart’s music was not a reflection of his emotional life. Mozart would have agreed completely with T.S. Eliot’s observation that “[Art] is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personal emotions, but a transfiguration of them from personality.” Messiaen understood this as well, and his tribute to Mozart is not dramatic, nor is it gloomy. It is dark. Instead, Messiaen does in fact “smile”—this gentle music honors Mozart by reflecting that aspect of his music.

Un sourire alternates two different kinds of music: the luminous beginning, scored for muted strings (often with a solo wind instrument), and a more raucous, energetic music that reflects Messiaen’s lifelong love of birdsong. Both sections of Un sourire are full of glittering sounds accentuated by the four percussion instruments: tubular bells, suspended cymbal, xylophone, and xylophone (with an extended range). Un sourire moves smoothly between these quite different modes of expression and finally fades peacefully away.

Eating Flowers

HANNAH LASH

Born November 22, 1981, Alfred, New York

In 1977 Toru Takemitsu received a commission from the San Francisco Symphony for a new work. At age 47, Takemitsu had not written for orchestra since his Green of 1967, and the piece he composed for San Francisco reflects the growing complexity of his music over the intervening ten years. A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden grew—as did so many other of his works—out of his dreams, in this case two quite different dreams.

Both dreams were visual. In the first, Takemitsu had a vision of a flock of white birds, led by a single black bird, descending and alighting in a five-sided garden. The second dream was inspired by the composer’s having seen a photo of Marcel Duchamps, taken by Man Ray in 1919, that showed a star-shaped patch shaved out of the back of the artist’s head. From these two very different dreams, both shaped by the number five, A Flock began to emerge.

There were a number of further influences. One of them was Takemitsu’s deep response to Japanese gardens: “I love gardens. They do not reject people. There one can walk freely, pause to view the entire garden, or gaze at a single tree, plant, rock, and sand snow: changes, constant changes.” Beyond this, the number five is felt in many ways in A Flock: a five-sided garden was part of the original inspiration for this music, it is constructed in five brief sections, and it is built on five-note sections of the main motif—introduced by the oboe and representing the so-called ‘Flock’—descends into the harmonious tone-field called the ‘Pentagonal Garden,’ created mainly on the strings.” He said of its title: “You view a Japanese garden this way—circuiting through it. It’s not a linear experience at all. It is circular…one always comes back. I write music by placing objects in my musical garden, just the way objects are placed in a Japanese garden…” from gardens I’ve learnt the Japanese sense of timing and color.”

Takemitsu scores A Flocks Descends into the Pentagonal Garden for a very large orchestra and then uses a few instruments with great economy. At moments, only a few instruments are playing, while at others he employs all his forces in music that can rise to a surprising level of dissonance, given the “topics” of the piece. Throughout, the tempo is quite slow, as if one is wandering through a Japanese garden and sometimes stopping to explore—there are silences here that can go on for some moments, and at one point Takemitsu writes “Senza tempo”: this music exists outside set meter and time. At several places, individual musicians within sections are given the freedom to repeat certain passages on their own and at their own tempo. This music does not go anywhere, and musical “progress” in the Western sense was not Takemitsu’s intention. A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden wanders, it explores, it pauses, it contemplates, and finally it dissolves into silence.
We expect a symphony written near the end of a major war to make a statement about the time from which it springs, and there were a large number of symphonies composed around the end of World War II that registered some reaction to that tumultuous time. Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony and Copland's Third were hailed because they captured the spirit of that moment so successfully (at least for the victors); Shostakovich's Ninth got into trouble precisely because it did not. The relation of Stravinsky's Symphony in Three Movements to World War II is more complicated. He finished the work in 1941, after America's entry into the war, and composed music that would eventually find its way into the symphony across the span of the war. He finished the Symphony in Three Movements as the war came shuddering to its close: the opening movement is quite severe—indeed it was the overturned arrogance of the Germans when their [war] machine failed. The exposition of the fugue and the end of the Symphony are associated in my plot with the rise of the Allies, and the final, rather too commercial D-flat sixth chord—instead of the expected C—in some way tokens my extra exuberance in the Allied triumph. This discussion of the inspiration of specific events—and of an underlying "plot"—would seem to make the Symphony in Three Movements program music, but at this point Stravinsky drew back, saying coolly that this music "does and does not 'express my feelings' [about the war]" and finally insisting: "the Symphony is not programmatic. Composers combine notes. That is all."

Certainly the symphony did not take shape in one unified arc, and—in retrospect—it is hard to see this composition seems somewhat haphazard. The earliest section to be composed had been at first planned as an orchestral part for piano; Stravinsky set this aside, but it would later reappear in the first movement of the symphony. The following year, novelist Franz Werfel invited Stravinsky to compose music for a movie based on that writer's Song of Bernadette. Stravinsky abandoned that project as well, but music he sketched for the "Apparition of the Virgin" sequence in that film forms a part for piano; Stravinsky returned to these movements in the spring of 1945—as the Allies triumphed in Europe—and composed the finale of what had now become a symphony, trying in the process to fuse the solo parts for piano and harp in the finale. Some have questioned whether the resulting work is a symphony at all, suggesting that it lacks the organic relation of parts and the harmonic evolution that characterizes true symphonic writing. Stravinsky himself was aware of this, conceding that "perhaps Three Symphonic Movements would be a more exact title."

A brief survey of that symphonic landscape: the opening movement—often associated with "scorched-earth tactics in China," while its second theme-group was inspired by scenes of "the Chinese people scratching and digging in their fields." The fugue in the first movement is based on an even sharper topical reference, said Stravinsky: "The immobility at the beginning of this fugue is coming from me, was the overturned arrogance of the Germans when their [war] machine failed. The exposition of the fugue and the end of the Symphony are associated in my plot with the rise of the Allies, and the final, rather too commercial D-flat sixth chord—instead of the expected C—in some way tokens my extra exuberance in the Allied triumph. This discussion of the inspiration of specific events—and of an underlying "plot"—would seem to make the Symphony in Three Movements program music, but at this point Stravinsky drew back, saying coolly that this music "does and does not 'express my feelings' [about the war]" and finally insisting: "the Symphony is not programmatic. Composers combine notes. That is all."
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