Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
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98th Season / Subscription Program 2
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Our second concert features the Madison Symphony Orchestra's "power couple:" the husband-wife team of associate conductor Kyle Knox and concertmaster Naha Greenholtz. Mr. Knox has led the orchestra in Overture Hall several times, but here he makes his debut conducting one of our subscription concerts. Ms. Greenholtz is making her sixth appearance as a soloist at these concerts, previously performing the Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto* (2013), Bernstein's *Serenade (after Plato's Symposium)* (2015), Corigliano's *Chaconne from "The Red Violin"* (2016), the Prokofiev *Violin Concerto No. 2*, and the Haydn *Violin Concerto No. 4* (2022). Here she plays a formidable 20th-century work: Shostakovich's challenging *Violin Concerto No. 1*. This program also includes two works never played by the MSO, opening with music from Bernstein's 1944 ballet score *Fancy Free*. After intermission, the orchestra plays a well-known chamber work by Brahms...in a fascinating orchestration by Arnold Schoenberg.

The ballet *Fancy Free*, written as Bernstein was just coming to national prominence, was his first collaboration with choreographer Jerome Robbins, a partnership that would also lead to the phenomenally successful Broadway shows *On The Town* and *West Side Story*.

Leonard Bernstein
Born: August 25, 1918, Lawrence, Massachusetts.
Died: October 14, 1990, New York City, New York.

Three Dance Variations from "Fancy Free"

- **Composed**: 1943-44.
- **Premiere**: April 18, 1944, at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Bernstein extracted the *Three Dance Variations* as a concert piece shortly afterwards.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration**: 7:00.

Background

The ballet tells the story of three sailors on shore leave, and the music heard here comes from a "competition" they stage in a bar, for the attention of two young women.

The prodigiously talented Leonard Bernstein could have had any one of several successful careers: piano soloist, classical composer, conductor, writer, lecturer, or Broadway songwriter. In fact Bernstein chose to do *all* of these things and to do all of them very well! At age 25, he was named assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, and his legendary "big break" came on November 14, 1943, when with just a few hours' notice he substituted for Bruno Walter in a nationally-broadcast concert from Carnegie Hall. Shortly before this famous broadcast, Bernstein was approached by dancer Jerome Robbins. Unlike Bernstein, who was already a star, Robbins was still up-and-coming, but he was every bit as ambitious. He wanted Bernstein to write a score for his *Fancy Free*—his first ballet, to be performed by the Ballet Theater of New York. The two hit it off immediately, and Bernstein immediately began work on the ballet's score.

The original inspiration for the story was a pair of paintings by the New York artist Paul Cadmus, *The Fleet's In!* and *Shore Leave*. These were energetic and popular images of sailors on leave, though the frank sexuality of Cadmus's works was sometimes controversial. The scenario for the ballet involved three sailors on shore leave on a hot summer night. They meet a pair of girls in a bar, and begin to fight over which of them will be the odd man out. They stage a kind of competition, each of them dancing a solo designed to impress the girls, but in the end both girls lose interest and walk off. Though Robbins created the choreography using the vocabulary of Classical Ballet, there are also hints of the dances that were current in ballrooms and bars across America: the Shag, the Lindy Hop, and the Jitterbug. Bernstein's score was every bit as much a blend of the ballet and popular music. *Fancy Free* was a great success, making Robbins a celebrity and increasing Bernstein's fame as a composer. Later in 1944, the pair collaborated again on a full-scale Broadway show, *On the Town*. This show, which expands on the story of *Fancy Free* (though with entirely new music), would be a huge hit, and, in 1949, an Oscar-winning film.

What You'll Hear

The Dance Variations include an energetic *Galop*, an offbeat *Waltz* and a relaxed *Danzon*.

This brief set of three dances comes from the climactic competition scene at the end, as the sailors try to decide which two of them will get to go with the women. This is an early and completely lighthearted version of the kind of aggressive music Bernstein would later write for violent scenes in *On the Waterfront* and *West Side Story*. The *Galop* is frantic and macho, while the *Waltz*, with its oddly dropped beats, is danced by a sailor who has obviously had a bit too much to drink. The final section, *Danzon*, is a Latin-flavored number with hints of the Mambo, a dance that was just starting to become popular in New York City ballrooms.

This concerto was inspired by the great Soviet violinist David Oistrakh (1908-1975), a friend of Shostakovich, and a musician whom the composer deeply admired. He would compose a second violin concerto for Oistrakh in 1967.

Dmitri Shostakovich
Born: September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia.
Died: August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia.

Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 99

- **Composed**: 1947-48.
- **Premiere**: A slightly revised version was premiered by David Oistrakh on October 29, 1955 in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), with the Leningrad Philharmonic, Evgeny Mravinsky conducting.
- **Previous MSO Performance**: 2011, with violinist Midori.
- **Duration**: 35:00.

Background

This was one of several works that Shostakovich composed and suppressed during the repressive regime of Stalin. It remained unperformed for some seven years, finally premiering two years after Stalin's death.

Shostakovich often skirted the edge of official disapproval in Stalinist Russia. Directly after World War II ended, his ninth symphony got him in trouble for failing to deliver the expected glorification of Stalin and the great Soviet victory, and for the next few years—the period in which he wrote the *Violin Concerto No.1*—he was under increasing official suspicion. Shostakovich and several other prominent Soviet composers were officially censured in 1948, in the wake of the "Zhdanov Doctrine," a wide-ranging attempt to mold Soviet culture. Shostakovich was censured for the "formalist" elements of his music—"formalism" being

anything that smacked of Western European modernism or complexity. (In practice, the term seems to have meant just about anything a critic wanting to censure a composer *wanted* it to mean.) Not surprisingly, Shostakovich suppressed some of his more ambitious postwar works—notably the concerto and the fourth string quartet—though he continued to write works in an uncompromisingly modern style in private. His "public" face over the next few years was that of a good Soviet citizen, writing politically "safe" works like film scores and hyper-patriotic cantatas.

Stalin died in 1953 and the political climate for Soviet artists began to thaw relatively quickly. The *Violin Concerto* was one of a few suppressed works that made their appearance when Stalin was still relatively warm in his tomb. It was quite successful at its premiere in Leningrad in 1955, and David Oistrakh—who would tour extensively with the concerto, and make two famous recordings of it—described the solo part as a "pithy 'Shakespearian' role."

The concerto is hardly an overtly "political" work, but there are several elements that point to an autobiographical or political awareness in the piece. Shostakovich may have seen Russian Jews and Jewish music as symbols of resistance to oppression—at least this is what comes through in a discussion of the concerto in his "memoir" *Testimony*. While this book remains controversial in some quarters, the influence of Jewish music, particularly in the scherzo, is clearly there. This is also one of the first appearances of Shostakovich's personal musical motto—the DSCH motive. (This takes a little explanation... In several of his late works, Shostakovich used a four-note motive—D, E-flat, C, B—as a kind of signature. Here he was spelling the German version of his initials: **D**mitri **SCH**ostakowitsch ["sch" would be a single character in the Russian alphabet]. "D" is the pitch D, "S" becomes E-flat for the German abbreviation for that pitch, "C" is the note C, and "H" is the German abbreviation for the pitch B-natural.) There are also references to the of the "Stalin Theme" from his own seventh symphony, and the so-called "Fate" motive of Beethoven's fifth.

What You'll Hear

The concerto is laid out in four movements:
• A lyrical *Nocturne*.
• A fast-paced and aggressive *Scherzo*, that pits the soloist against the orchestra.
• An emotional *Passacaglia*: a set of variations above a repeating bass pattern. This movement ends with an extended solo cadenza that leads directly into the finale.
• A forceful *Burlesca*, filled with witty references to the earlier movements and to other music.

The concerto is built in symphonic form, with four movements, opening with a calm *Nocturne (Adagio)*. This is almost uninterrupted violin melody that grows out of a few ideas heard in the opening. Though the sections in this quiet night music are hazily defined, it moves gradually towards a moment of muted power near the end before subsiding quietly. The *Scherzo (Allegro non troppo)* is a fierce and sometimes satirical contrast, as the violin is placed in opposition to the orchestra throughout, sometimes taking an accompanying role and sometimes playing raucous peasant tunes above a robust, rhythmically uneven background.

The *Passacaglia (Andante)* adopts the old Baroque form, a repeating bass line that serves as the basis for a constantly-developing set of variations. Despite the rather strictly-defined form, this movement contains some of the concerto's most passionate music for the violin, often in gentle counterpoint with solo lines from the orchestra. The bass line eventually fades away, leaving the violin alone for a huge and emotionally intense cadenza, extending over more than a third of the movement, and serving as a bridge into the final *Burlesca (Allegro con brio)*. This wild movement, which includes a few nods to Stravinsky, gives the orchestra some wonderfully quirky music and some real fireworks for the soloist, while working in sly references to the earlier movements.

Brahms completed this work, one of his finest early chamber pieces, in 1861. Schoenberg wrote his orchestral version in 1937 for a commission by Otto Klemperer.

Johannes Brahms
Born: May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany.
Died: April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria.

***Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25* (orchestrated by Arnold Schoenberg)**

- **Composed**: 1861; Schoenberg's orchestral version dates from 1937.
- **Premiere**: May 8, 1938, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Otto Klemperer conducting.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration**: 43:00.

Background

There are many pieces in the orchestral repertoire that are *orchestrations*: works for keyboard or chamber ensemble that were later adapted for orchestra. These works can sometimes have a different impact than the smaller original. (Famous examples include the wonderful Ravel orchestration of Mussorgsky's piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and the full orchestra version of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* we performed at our last concert.) In this case, we have a 19th-century romantic chamber work, orchestrated with a distinctly 20th-century character.

Brahms's Op.25—one of two piano quartets he composed in 1861—was one of the early works with which he first made his reputation as a composer. Though his first symphony was still 16 years in the future, these quartets were "symphonic" in size and scope, if not in instrumentation, particularly the impressive G minor quartet. The work was a success when it was premiered, with Clara Schumann at the piano, in his native Hamburg. A year later Brahms moved to Vienna, where he would remain for most of the rest of his life. With Clara Schumann's strong recommendation proceeding him, he quickly made friends in Viennese musical society. In need of an impressive debut as both a composer and a pianist, Brahms programmed the G minor quartet for his first public performance in Vienna, with members of the famed Hellmesberger Quartet taking the violin, viola, and cello parts. The piece, particularly the Gypsy-style finale, became a favorite in Vienna, and Brahms played it many times over the next few years.

Let's skip ahead over seven decades. In 1933, Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) was comfortably employed as a composition teacher at the Art Academy in Berlin. When the Nazi government announced its intention to remove all Jews from positions of authority, Schoenberg promptly fled to France, and soon afterwards to the USA. He settled first in Boston, but on the advice of doctors, he moved to Los Angeles in 1934 for the sake of the climate. He eventually took a professorship at UCLA, and would spend the rest of his life in Los Angeles. American audiences had little interest in Schoenberg's original compositions but in 1937, he received a commission from fellow refugee Otto Klemperer—then conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic—to orchestrate the Brahms *Piano Quartet*. Schoenberg was delighted: he was a lifetime admirer of Brahms's music, particularly of its intense thematic development. When his arrangement was premiered in 1938, Schoenberg, never one for modesty, described it as Brahms's "fifth symphony." A year later, he described in a letter the attraction of the piece and his intentions in a laconic series of "bullet points:"

> "My reasons: 1. I like the piece. 2. It is seldom played. 3. It is always very badly played, because, the better the pianist, the louder he plays and you hear nothing from the strings. I wanted once to hear everything, and this I achieved.
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> "My intentions: 1. To remain strictly in the style of Brahms and not to go farther than he himself would have gone if he lived today. 2. To watch carefully all the laws to which Brahms obeyed and not to violate them, which are only known to musicians educated in his environment."

What You'll Hear

This work is in four movements:
• A long and rather intense *Allegro* in sonata form.
• A gentle *Intermezzo*.
• A lyrical slow movement that includes a surprisingly martial episode.
• A wild Gypsy-flavored finale.

Schoenberg's arrangement parcels out the busy original piano part and the three string parts to a full orchestra, and a percussion section that includes xylophone and glockenspiel. Despite his implication that there was nothing that Brahms himself would not have written in this "fifth symphony," there is a lot of Schoenberg here—every note, rhythm, and harmony that appears in this version is from the original, but Schoenberg's fingerprints are all over the lavishly-orchestrated finale, and the way that he emphasizes Brahms's more chromatic harmonies.

The lengthy opening movement (*Allegro*) is in sonata form, and explores no fewer than five distinct themes ranging in character from the solemn opening figure to a pair of brighter major-key ideas. These themes are worked out in a vast development section: a musical drama intensified by Schoenberg's imaginative orchestration. After all of this of this drama, the *Intermezzo* is a bit of relief, though Schoenberg highlights the musical uneasiness underneath Brahms's placid themes. Though there are moments of outward tension, most of this movement is gentle and even playful. The third movement (*Andante con moto*) is based upon a broad romantic melody, lushly orchestrated by Schoenberg. There is a march-style episode at the center that Schoenberg turns grandiose with snare drum and brass.

Roma/Gypsy music was all the rage in Vienna in the 1860s, and Brahms's finale (*Rondo alla zingarese* — "Rondo in Gypsy Style") was the most popular part of his G minor quartet. Brahms had learned the style a decade earlier, when he toured

as accompanist to the Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi, and used it brilliantly here. This *Rondo* is based upon a lively main theme (that Schoenberg accentuates with tambourine) alternating with contrasting material. Everything in this movement has the distinctive rhythmic style and passion of Gypsy music, and Schoenberg assigns some particularly tasty bits to the solo violin and clarinet. At the end, everything accelerates to wild conclusion.

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