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For Immediate Release

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Joana Carneiro and Berkeley Symphony Present Works by Widmann, Barber, and Brahms

BERKELEY, CA – February 25, 2010... On **Thursday, April 1, at 8 PM** at UC Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall, **Joana Carneiro** concludes her inaugural season as Music Director with Berkeley Symphony. A concert overture by the young German composer **Jörg Widmann** is followed by soprano **Jessica Rivera** in her second performance of the season, singing **Samuel Barber's** *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*. The program concludes with the Symphony No. 1 by the German master **Johannes Brahms**.

Jörg Widmann's *Con brio*, which was premiered in 2008 by the Bavarian Radio Symphony, is an orchestral overture composed with a knowing wink towards Beethoven's Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. The marking "con brio" ("with fire") is interpreted not only as a tempo notation but also as an intimation of Widmann's concepts of musical deconstructionism. However, this overture is not merely a patchwork of Beethoven excerpts; rather, it is an original tracing of Beethoven's work through Widmann's own voice. As with his previous works, melodies and phrases in *Con brio* avoid smooth transitions in favor of bold, precise cuts and sudden changes. Only the instrumentation was copied from Beethoven's piece, which shows a marked reduction from Widmann's previous large-scale orchestral works. He saw it as a special challenge to do justice to Beethoven with this orchestration.

The thirty-six year old German composer and clarinetist has received numerous prizes for his compositions, most recently the Elise L. Stoeger Prize for significant contributions to the field of chamber music. He is currently the Daniel R. Lewis Young Composer Fellow with the Cleveland Orchestra. Widmann will be featured in the dual roles of composer and clarinet soloist on **Thursday, May 20, 2010, at 8 PM** at First Congregational Church of Berkeley. Conductor Laureate **Kent Nagano** will lead **Berkeley Akademie** in a performance of Widmann's *Versuch über die Fuge* (Attempt at a Fugue), as well as a performance of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major with Widmann as soloist.

Samuel Barber's *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*, which was premiered in 1948 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, is a piece for soprano and orchestra set to a poem by James Agee. Barber liked the prose style, which lent itself well to fragments for musical setting, but more than that he was struck by Agee's images of childhood, which were so similar to his own. Barber dedicated the work to his father, whose impending death at the time of composition intensified the strong childhood memories that had been stirred up by Agee's poem.

The work, which Barber described as a “lyrical rhapsody,” flows in one connected movement through three distinct tempo changes, beginning slowly, becoming agitated in the central section, and returning to the opening tempo. The rhythms are extremely free in order to follow the text in a declamatory style; meter changes are particularly abundant in the central section. Barber admirably captured certain images such as the languid rocking on the porch, the honking of an automobile, and the moaning, electric sparking, and halting of a streetcar. Influences including Debussy, Copland, and occasional blues touches are all enfolded into Barber’s personal, natural response to Agee’s prose poetry.

Hailed by the *New York Times* as a “vocally luminous young soprano,” featured soloist and returning resident artist **Jessica Rivera** is quickly establishing herself as one of the most creatively inspired vocal artists of her generation. The intelligence, dimension, and spirituality that she infuses in her performances on the international concert and opera stages have garnered Ms. Rivera unique artistic collaborations with many of today’s most celebrated composers and conductors.

Rivera gave the world premiere of John Adams’ newest opera, *A Flowering Tree*, singing the role of Kumudha, last season, in a production directed by Peter Sellars, as part of the New Crowned Hope Festival in Vienna, Austria. *A Flowering Tree* offered the artist her debut with the Berliner Philharmoniker and Sir Simon Rattle, and she gave additional performances, under the composer’s baton, with the San Francisco Symphony and with the London Symphony Orchestra. She performs *A Flowering Tree* with Joana Carneiro and the Gulbenkian Orchestra and Chorus at the Cité de la Musique in Paris in March 2010. Rivera previously performed with Berkeley Symphony on Thursday, February 11, at Zellerbach Hall, singing Esa-Pekka Salonen’s *Five Images After Sappho*.

The program concludes with **Johannes Brahms’s** Symphony No. 1. This symphony, which was premiered in 1876, was composed over the course of at least fourteen years. “I shall never write a symphony,” Brahms said to his conductor-friend Hermann Levi. “You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like *him* behind us.” By “him” Brahms of course meant Beethoven. As a young man Brahms had destroyed many attempted symphonies because they were not yet up to his high standards. He was forty-three by the time he completed the symphony and was in his maturity as a composer. His sixty-seven published works did include orchestral compositions (serenades, variations, and concertos), just not a symphony. His waiting for the right time paid off: Brahms is one of the few composers whose first symphony is as good as his last.

Much of the anguish and turmoil in the first movement may have had to do with Brahms’s conflicted feelings for Clara Schumann, which had been particularly intense during 1855 when some of the movement was sketched. After the weight of the first movement, the Andante sostenuto enters like a breath of fresh air with a lovely opening melody in a distant new key. The third movement is a type of relaxed scherzo alternative that Brahms favored in many of his four-movement works. Brahms gave added weight to the end of his Symphony by prefacing the finale with a dramatic slow introduction. The famous “liberating” horn theme in C major is followed by an equally arresting solemn, hymn-like phrase for trombone choir and bassoons. Beethoven’s influence on Brahms is particularly evident in the celebrated main theme of the exposition, which is similar to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony finale. Brahms’s symphonic edifice is crowned by a substantial coda in which the gathering momentum is interrupted by the majestic reappearance of the trombone hymn, which then touches off the jubilant drive to the close.

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

BERKELEY SYMPHONY CONCERT

Thursday, April 1, 2010, 8 PM

Joana Carneiro, Conductor

Jörg Widmann *Con brio*
Samuel Barber *Knoxville, Summer of 1915* with Jessica Rivera, soprano
Johannes Brahms Symphony No. 1

Concert Venue: UC Berkeley Zellerbach Hall

Tickets: \$20, \$40, and \$60

Call 510-841-2800 or visit www.berkeleysymphony.org

Pre-Concert Talk, 7:10 PM: With Joana Carneiro

UPCOMING BERKELEY AKADEMIE CONCERT

Thursday, May 20, 2010, 8 PM

Kent Nagano, Artistic Director

Ludwig van Beethoven Quintet in E-flat Major for Piano and Winds, Op. 16
Jörg Widmann *Versuch über die Fuge* (Attempt at a Fugue)
Wolfgang Mozart Clarinet Concerto in A Major, K. 622 with Jörg Widmann, clarinet

Concert Venue: First Congregational Church of Berkeley, 2345 Channing Way, Berkeley

Tickets: \$20, \$40, and \$60

Call 510-841-2800 or visit www.berkeleysymphony.org

FOR PSAs

On Thursday, April 1 at 8 p.m. at UC Berkeley's Zellerbach Hall, Joana Carneiro conducts the Berkeley Symphony in music by Jörg Widmann, Samuel Barber's *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*, featuring soprano Jessica Rivera, and Brahms's Symphony No. 1. For tickets, call 510-841-2800, or visit www.berkeleysymphony.org.