

**JOSEPH YOUNG AND BERKELEY SYMPHONY PRESENT MARY KOUYOUMDJIAN WORLD PREMIERE WITH THE SAN FRANCISCO GIRLS CHORUS AND BRYCE DESSNER BAY AREA PREMIERE FEATURING DEBUT SOLOIST MEZZO-SOPRANO KELLEY O'CONNOR
FEBRUARY 6**



Berkeley, CA – January 7, 2020 – Music Director Joseph Young and Berkeley Symphony continue the 2019-2020 season on **Thursday, February 6 at 8:00 p.m.** with the World Premiere string orchestra version of Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Become Who I Am* featuring the San Francisco Girls Chorus and the Bay Area premiere of Bryce Dessner's song cycle *Voy a Dormir* featuring mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor in her debut appearance. Concluding an evening of music that explores the

finding of one's voice is Brahms's Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68, a work that took the composer almost twenty years to complete. The previously announced world premiere commission by Chinese composer Xi Wang has been rescheduled for the 2021-2022 season.

Originally written for chorus, string quartet and audio playback, Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Become Who I Am* will be performed for the first time in an expanded version for string orchestra. The work explores the theme of gender inequality through a series of interviews with members of the Brooklyn Youth Chorus with the responses serving as the basis of the libretto and a pre-recorded backing track. Led by Artistic Director Valérie Sainte-Agathe, GRAMMY Award-winning San Francisco Girls Chorus make their debut with the Orchestra for this work. Praised by *Gramophone Magazine* as a "remarkable tapestry of teenage voices," SFGC has commissioned more than three dozen works during its 41 year history by leading composers such as Philip Glass, Richard Danielpour, Aaron Jay Kernis, Gabriel Kahane, Augusta Read Thomas, Lisa Bielawa, and Chen Yi, firmly establishing itself as a champion of music of our time.



Described by the *Los Angeles Times* as "the kind of composer who personifies what might be next for classical music," Bryce Dessner continues to expand an impressive catalogue of works that includes commissions by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet and Eighth Blackbird, as well as the 2016 Golden Globe nominated score for the motion picture blockbuster *The Revenant*. Based on texts from the poetry of Argentinian feminist Alfonsina Storni, *Voy a Dormir* received its world premiere in February 2018 by the Orchestra of St. Luke and Kelley O'Connor, for whom the work was written. Bryce Dessner said, "Kelley and I worked collaboratively on choosing the poems and were both deeply moved by the beauty and power of Storni's words as well as the story of her life in which she struggled through difficult economic circumstances as a single mother and later breast cancer." The song cycle traces the arc of four late poems that concludes with *Voy a Dormir* (I am going to sleep), written before her death by suicide in 1938.

This concert marks a return to the Bay Area for GRAMMY Award-winning Kelley O'Connor following



appearances with the San Francisco Symphony and Cal Performances. Regarding her June 2016 performance in Mahler's Symphony No. 2 with the San Francisco Symphony, the *San Francisco Chronicle* praised her "ravishingly velvet vocal tone" and stated "Not since the late Lorraine Hunt Lieberson's recorded performance with the orchestra in 2002 has this music been rendered with such physical presence or shimmery grace." Among her other 2019-2020 highlights, Kelley O'Connor recently performed the Neruda Songs with the Philadelphia Orchestra and will

appear with the Houston Symphony for John Adams' *El Niño* as well as a return to the San Francisco Symphony for MTT's final concerts as Music Director.

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

Berkeley Symphony

Symphonic II: You Have a Voice

Thursday, February 6, 2020, 8:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley, CA

Joseph Young, conductor

Kelley O'Connor, mezzo soprano

San Francisco Girls Chorus

Bryce Dessner: *Voy a Dormir* (World Premiere String Orchestra version)

Mary Kouyoumdjian: *Become Who I Am* (Bay Area Premiere)

Johannes Brahms: Symphony No. 1 in C minor

Single tickets for the concert are \$15 to \$96. For more information or to purchase tickets, call (510) 841-2800 x1 or visit www.berkeleysymphony.org.

ABOUT JOSEPH YOUNG

Praised for his suavely adventurous programming, Joseph Young is increasingly recognized as "one of the most gifted conductors of his generation." Joseph is Music Director of the Berkeley Symphony, Artistic Director of Ensembles for the Peabody Conservatory, and Resident Conductor of the National Youth Orchestra–USA at Carnegie Hall. In recent years, he has made appearances with the Saint Louis Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Colorado Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, Bamberger Symphoniker, New World Symphony Orchestra, Spoleto Festival Orchestra, Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, and the Orquestra Sinfonica y Coro de RTVE (Madrid); among others in the U.S. and Europe.

In his most recent role Joseph served as the Assistant Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony where he conducted more than 50 concerts per season. Mr. Young also served as the Music Director of the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, where he was the driving force behind the ensemble's artistic growth. Previous

appointments have included Resident Conductor of the Phoenix Symphony, and the League of American Orchestras Conducting Fellow with Buffalo Philharmonic and Baltimore Symphony.

Joseph is a recipient of the 2015 Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Award for young conductors, an award he also won in 2008, and 2014. In 2013, Joseph was a Semi-finalist in the Gustav Mahler International Conducting Competition (Bamberg, Germany). In 2011, he was one out of six conductors featured in the League of American Orchestras' prestigious Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview.

Joseph completed graduate studies with Gustav Meier and Markand Thakar at the Peabody Conservatory in 2009, earning an artist's diploma in conducting. He has been mentored by many world-renowned conductors including Jorma Panula, Robert Spano and Marin Alsop whom he continues to maintain a close relationship.

ABOUT BERKELEY SYMPHONY

Berkeley Symphony is unique among Bay Area and American orchestras for its commitment to innovation, community, and excellence. Founded in 1971 in the intellectual and artistic nexus of Berkeley, California, the Orchestra is committed to premiering and commissioning new music and champions women composers, sustained by the supportive musical environment of Berkeley, the East Bay, and the San Francisco Bay Area. From the outset, the people behind Berkeley Symphony's culture and programming were attuned to the culturally diverse people and the heady creative climate of their home city.

Thomas Rarick, a protégé of the great English maestro Sir Adrian Boult, founded the orchestra in 1971 as the Berkeley Promenade Orchestra. Reflecting the spirit of the times, musicians performed in street dress and at unusual locations such as the University Art Museum. When Kent Nagano became the music director of the orchestra in 1978, he charted a new course by offering innovative programming that included rarely performed 20th-century works and numerous premieres. The renamed Berkeley Symphony Orchestra gained an international reputation for its adventurous programming, and became known for premiering the music of international composers and showcasing young local talents. Berkeley Symphony entered a new era in January 2009 when Joana Carneiro became the Orchestra's third Music Director in its 40-year history. In 2016, Berkeley Symphony and composer Anna Clyne were awarded a Music Alive grant for a three-year composer residency, designed to immerse Clyne and the Symphony in the creation of new work, collaboration with other Berkeley arts institutions, music education, community outreach and multidisciplinary activities. Joseph Young succeeds Music Director Emerita Joana Carneiro in the 2019-2020 season after Maestro Carneiro announced her intent to step down as Berkeley Symphony's Music Director at the end of the 2017-18 season following nine seasons at its artistic helm.

PHOTO CREDITS

Berkeley Symphony / Dave Weiland
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