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Berkeley Symphony 19/20 Season

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Message from the Music Director

A little over three months ago, I made my first appearance as the new Music Director of Berkeley Symphony. Thanks to you, our dedicated audience, as well as the fabulous members of the Orchestra, staff, board and volunteers, it was a truly magical evening. It is with great excitement and pride that I return to Berkeley to continue on this new journey together.

For tonight’s performance, I wanted to explore the theme of finding one’s voice, something that is perhaps even more essential today than it ever has been. For centuries, music has served as a powerful vessel for self-expression that has the potential to elevate a single voice, idea, or commentary and impact change. One such voice will be heard in the Bay Area premiere of Voy a Dormir by Bryce Dessner, through the texts of 20th century Argentinian poet and feminist Alfonsina Storni which will be performed by my dear friend and highly sought-after mezzo-soprano, Kelley O’Connor. We are also thrilled to welcome one of the Bay Area’s most illustrious organizations, the GRAMMY® Award-winning San Francisco Girls Chorus, for the World Premiere string orchestra version of Mary Kouyoumdjian’s powerful Become Who I Am, a work that honors the anniversary of the 19th Amendment and Voting Rights Act. Finally, we will conclude the evening with Brahms’ epic Symphony No. 1, a celebrated masterwork and cornerstone of the repertoire, but one that took the composer almost twenty years to complete as he sought his own voice. —Joseph Young

Message from the Board President

Although February is already upon us, I wanted to take a moment to wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year on behalf of everyone here at Berkeley Symphony. We are delighted to welcome you back for our first performance of 2020. Tonight’s concert marks the return of Music Director Joseph Young following a highly successful and critically acclaimed opening night debut last October. I’m sure you will agree that it was a fitting way to conclude a decade of some of the finest artistry in our history and provide a taste of what is to come under the leadership of Maestro Young.

As we prepare to unveil our 50th anniversary season in the coming months, we enter a period of reflection on the past and optimism for a bright future ahead. The many accomplishments and milestones throughout our history have only been possible through the unwavering support of our devoted community for which we are eternally grateful. With one of the finest conductors of our generation at the helm, we look ahead with great excitement to many more years of adventurous music-making together. Thank you for joining us for this evening’s performance. I look forward to connecting with many of you tonight and throughout the rest of our 2019-2020 season. —S. Shariq Yosufzai
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Bass
Michel Taddei, Principal
Robert Ashley, Assistant Principal
Alden Cohen
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Symphonic II: You Have a Voice
Brahms | Dessner

Joseph Young  Conductor

Thursday, February 6 at 8:00 p.m.  Zellerbach Hall, U.C. Berkeley

Bryce Dessner  Voy a Dormir
Yo en fondo del mar
Dulce Tortura
Faro en la Noche
Voy a Dormir

Kelley O’Connor  mezzo-soprano

Mary Kouyoumdjian  Become Who I Am
(world premiere of orchestra version)

San Francisco Girls Chorus
Valérie Sainte-Agathe, Artistic Director

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms  Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68
I. Un poco sostenuto—Allegro
II. Andante sostenuto
III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso
IV. Adagio—Più andante—Allegro non troppo, ma con brio—Più allegro

The previously announced world premiere commission by Chinese composer Xi Wang has been rescheduled for the 2021-2022 season.

Tonight’s concert will be broadcast on KALW 91.7 FM on February 17, 2020, at 9:00 p.m.

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**Program Notes**

**Bryce Dessner**
Born on April 23, 1976, in Cincinnati, Ohio; currently resides in Paris

**Voy a Dormir**
Composed: 2018
First performance: February 15, 2018
Duration: c. 21 minutes
Scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, percussion, piano, harp, and strings.

- Bryce Dessner straddles the worlds of indie rock and contemporary classical as guitarist with the band The National and a much-in-demand composer for leading ensembles and films.
- Dessner wrote his orchestral song cycle *Voy a Dormir* (“I’m Going to Sleep”) for mezzo-soprano Kelley O’Connor based on four poems by Argentina’s pioneering Modernist poet and feminist Alfonsina Storni.

*Soy a Dormir* (“I’m Going to Sleep”), was co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall, the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. The texts are by Alfonsina Storni (1892-1938), an Argentine poet born to Swiss-Italian parents. This pioneering feminist and Modernist poet supported her family as a single mother through teaching and journalism and was also involved in theater.

Storni had a Google Doodle dedicated to her in 2018 to mark her 126th birthday (May 29), which described her as “a prolific Argentine writer and top literary journalist who was dedicated to women’s rights and gender equality.”

In 1935, Storni sought treatment for breast cancer. The cancer returned three years later, and Storni committed suicide, drowning herself in the sea at La Perla Beach. Despite heavy criticism from Argentina’s male-dominated literary scene, Storni’s poem collection *Lenguidez* (“Languor”) garnered the country’s second National Literature Prize in 1920.

**What to listen for**

Dessner has stated that he and mezzo-soprano Kelley O’Connor, to whom he dedicated the score, were “deeply moved by the beauty and power of Storni’s words as well as the story of her life.” The cycle comprises the following four poems from the poet’s oeuvre: “Yo en el fondo del Mar” (“Me at the Bottom of the Sea”), “Dulce Tortura” (“Sweet Torture”), “Faro en la Noche” (“Lighthouse in the Night”), and “Voy a Dormir” (“I’m Going to Sleep”).

Powerful water imagery frames the cycle, culminating in the very last poem—and source of the cycle’s title—that the 46-year-old Storni published in *La Nación* before her death. That circumstance has led many to read it as a public suicide note.
I. Yo en el fondo del mar

En el fondo del mar
hay una casa de cristal.
A una avenida
de madréporas
da.
Un gran pez de oro,
a las cinco,
me viene a saludar.
Me trae
un rojo ramo
de flores de coral.
Duermo en una cama
un poco más azul
que el mar.
Un pulpo
me hace guiños
a través del cristal.
En el bosque verde
que me circunda
— din don... din dan —
se balancean y cantan
las sirenas
de nácar verdemar.
Y sobre mi cabeza
arden, en el crepúsculo,
las erizadas puntas del mar.

II. Dulce Tortura

Polvo de oro en tus manos fue mi
melancolía;
Sobre tus manos largas desparramé
mi vida;
Mis dulzuras quedaron a tus manos
prendidas;
Ahora soy un ánfora de perfumes vacía.
Cuánta dulce tortura quietamente suf-
rida,
Cuando, picado el alma de tristeza
sombría,

Me at the bottom of the sea

At the bottom of the sea
there is a crystal house.
It flows
to an avenue
of stony coral.
Around five o’clock
a great golden fish
comes to greet me.
To me it brings a red
bouquet of coral
flowers.
I sleep in a bed
a little bit bluer
than the sea.
Through the crystal
a squid
winks at me.
In the green wood
that surrounds me
“din, don,” “din, dan” ... 
sing and dance
the blue-green sirens
of mother-of-pearl.
And over my head,
burning in the sunset,
the spiny bristles of the sea.

Sweet Torture

My melancholy was gold dust in your
hands;
On your long hands I scattered
my life;
My sweetnesses remained clutched in
your hands;
Now I am a vial of perfume, emptied.
How much sweet torture quietly suf-
f ered,
When, my soul wrested with shadowy
sadness,
Sabedora de engaños, me pasada los días
¡Besando las dos manos que me ajaban la vida!

III. Faro en la Noche

Esfera negra el cielo
y disco negro el mar.
Abre en la costa, el faro,
su abanico solar.
A quién busca en la noche
que gira sin cesar?
Si en el pecho me busca
el corazón mortal.
Mire la roca negra
donde clavado está.
Un cuervo pica siempre,
pero no sangra ya.

IV. Voy a Dormir

Dientes de flores, cofia de rocío,
manos de hierbas, tú, nodriza fina,
tenme prestas las sábanas terrosas
y el edredón de musgos encardados.
Voy a dormir, nodriza mía, acuéstame,
ponme una lámpara a la cabecera;
una constelación; la que te guste;
todas son buenas; bájala un poquito.
Déjame sola: oyes romper los brotes...
te acuna un pie celeste desde arriba
y un pájaro te traza unos compases
para que olvides...Gracias. Ah, un encargo:
si él llama nuevamente por teléfono
le dices que no insista, que he salido.

She who knows the tricks, I passed the days
kissing the two hands that stifled my life.

Lighthouse in the Night

The sky a black sphere,
the sea a black disk.
The lighthouse opens
its solar fan on the coast.
Spinning endlessly at night,
whom is it searching for
when the mortal heart
looks for me in the chest?
Look at the black rock
where it is nailed down.
A crow digs endlessly
but no longer bleeds.

I’m Going to Sleep

Teeth of petals, bonnet of dew,
handfuls of herbs, oh sweet nursemaid,
turn the earthly sheets down for me
and prepare my quilt of carded moss.
I’m going to sleep, my nursemaid—lay me down;
put a lamp on the nightstand for me,
or a constellation, whichever you like—both
are fine; turn the lights down a bit.
Now leave me alone and hear the buds break...as you’re rocked by a heavenly foot
from above, and a bird zigzags you a path
so that you can forget...Thank you.
Oh, a favor: if he calls again tell him not to insist,
for I have gone away...
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Mary Kouyoumdjian
Born in 1983 and currently resides in Brooklyn, N.Y.

**Become Who I Am**
(world premiere of orchestra version)

Composed: 2015
First performance: October 17, 2015, at St. Ann’s Warehouse in Brooklyn
Duration: 10 minutes
Scored for soprano and alto chorus, string quartet, and audio playback

• Mary Kouyoumdjian is a first-generation Armenian-American composer who addresses such topics as the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust in multimedia works that blend traditional elements with experimental soundscapes.

• Combining material recorded from interviews with a chorus of sopranos and altos and string quartet, *Become Who I Am* takes up the issue of gender inequality in the workplace.

From the individual voice of the poet as pioneering feminist—Alfonsina Storni died just 18 years after the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified—we move on to the collective voice of the San Francisco Girls Chorus as they express the ongoing quest “to become who I am” in Mary Kouyoumdjian’s work of the same title.

As Kouyoumdjian puts it: “There are many factors that can contribute to gender inequality in the workplace, from historical views to culturally imposed biases. I’m particularly interested in the idea that an individual’s level of confidence in their identity and abilities—or lack of confidence—can affect how they deal with gender barriers.”

**What to listen for**

Kouyoumdjian recorded interviews with members of the Brooklyn Youth Chorus (their ages ranging from 13 to 17). In these interviews, she asked the volunteers “to share what they were passionate about, when they felt most confident and/or insecure, [as well as] to respond to a series of gender inequality statistics and to brainstorm solutions to the disparity in numbers.” Their responses supplied material for the libretto written by Kouyoumdjian, sung in real time, and for the piece’s prerecorded layer.

The composer notes that the words in the prerecorded backing track should be “clearly audible and comprehensible” as well as cohesive with the performers. The string quartet players should be individually amplified, while the chorus should be “lightly amplified in the case that additional reverb is needed and to best control the mix.”

In *Become Who I Am*, as in other works, Kouyoumdjian is especially drawn to the kind of interactive storytelling in which, as she remarks, the narrative “comes from the people who have actually experienced these stories themselves.”
Libretto and Transcription for Kouyoumdjian’s
Become Who I Am

**Bold** text denotes text sung by the chorus.

*Regular text denotes the transcription of the track.*

I am fourteen, and I am a female.
Um, I’m seventeen years old, and I’m female.
My age is sixteen, and um, I’m female.
I’m sixteen years old, and I’m a female.
I’m fifteen years old, and I’m a male.
And I’m sixteen years old...
I’m almost fifteen. I’m fourteen. My birthday’s in two weeks, and I’m female.
...and I’m a girl., etc.
Well just like, well there’s no other way to say fe- like it’s fema-, it just sounds so like...
Didn’t you take the SAT today? It says “gender.”
Female just sounds so like... “The female” like “earthworm” as in... It just sounds so scientific. Ok, anyway...

Fourteen, female.
Fifteen, female.
Seventeen, female.
Sixteen, female.
Fifteen, female.
Fourteen, female.
Sixteen, female. Fifteen, male.

Thirteen, female.
Fourteen, female.
Fifteen, female.
Sixteen female, etc.

I guess I’m most passionate about
Asian culture and Asian studies.
I very much enjoy biology. Um, and sciences, particularly like microbiology.
I like science. Like earth science.
Um, I guess what I’m most passionate about is either visual art or Japanese.
Yeah, I want to be a singer.
I’m most passionate about writing. I love writing.
I love to write music and sing. I also do art.
Definitely music.
Yeah, sing.
It’s a cross between music and art.
I guess I’m passionate about music, but I also really like literature and languages.
The subject that I’m most passionate about is humanities and the study of civilizations and anthropology.
I feel like my whole life I’ve been preparing to be a performer.
Um, music, but I also really like education and science of the voice, and physics.
I’m most passionate about music in general, I think.
Well an obstacle in my way is that I have no idea what I want to be when I grow up, and I don’t think that that’s a bad thing, but you know I
I think I feel very confident when I’m singing.

I feel special. I get a lot of attention when I’m singing.

Singing a song in a musical or a production that I got a big part in.

And I just feel so confident, because I have the whole chorus behind me, and I know that no matter what happens, they have my back.

...When I have the whole chorus behind me.

Singing makes me feel really alive, and I’m so glad that I have it as an outlet really, because I don’t really have much for outlets.

When I think I’ve like put a lot of work into something, and I can like hear myself getting better.

I hear myself get better.

This sounds so cliché: I feel like everything has a purpose. Like when I’m painting, I feel really calm and happy. The whole world just kind of stops.

When I’m thinking about my own talents, I can get a little hard on myself. And I do get insecure, but it’s like, as soon as I open my mouth and I start singing, I’m usually actually really surprised and really happy.

Just being able to express myself in a way that I’m proud of, and in like the way that I speak, you know makes me feel like good and just mature.

Well sometimes when I think about the future it makes me feel a little scared, because those subjects don’t really feel like I could make a feasible career out of them.

You feel like people are judging you. It doesn’t feel very good. You feel like you have to hold yourself back, and you can’t be like who you want to be.

I’m most insecure when I’m around people that I don’t know or people who don’t understand me, or how I work, or you know, my humor. I guess I feel insecure when I’m put-
ting out my artwork, when I’m putting it into the hands of someone else, and seeing how their eyes see it.

Probably when I’m like really proud of something, because it’s hard to sort of share that. If you’ve come to terms with what it is to you, you kind of want other people to have that same response.

Your best isn’t good enough. You can always do better.

I think maybe like talking one-on-one with some teachers at some points. Like my throat gets tight.

I’m the most insecure when I don’t know what I’m doing.

If I leave the house like not having had the time to pick out an outfit, do my hair, do my makeup.

When I go to school, and I have no makeup on.

When I am at school comparing myself to guys with better bodies than I have.

If you’re a guy, you know: “He’s a great singer, that’s great.” But I think if you’re a girl it can be: “Oh well she’s a great singer, but she’s not that pretty.”

There always is competition anywhere you go. You’re kind of silently competing. It’s there. It’s like the big elephant in the room, but no one actually wants to talk about it.

If someone were to be not a kind person. If they’re trying to break you, tell you that you’re bad at something.

Girls stereotypically dumb themselves down.

My GPA isn’t good enough.

I’m always comparing myself to the people who are doing better than I am.

How am I doing compared to people who have been successful?

There’s that side of me that’s like scared to get up in front of people and sing because of rejection. But like, when I’m with like my little cousins and parents and stuff, I’m really not scared about anything, because I know that those are like people who are going to like, stick with me no matter what happens, and tell me that my performance was amazing no matter what happens.

I want to just become who I am.

**When they see me.**

**I’m not good enough compared to people better than me.**

I want to become who I am.

[On average, women are paid 78% of what men are paid for the same exact job.

Only half of the world’s working age women are in the labor force, compared to 77% of working age men.

Of the world’s largest 1,000 companies, there are only 48 women CEO’s.

In U.S. orchestras, only 12% of their programming consists of works by women.

In the top twenty music schools, only 15% of composition faculty are women.

In music, of the top 150 conductors, only five of them are women.]
They’re upsetting!
They make me angry!
I’m not surprised!
I don’t agree!
They sadden me...

Something inside me just doesn’t understand the idea that like women are not equal to men.

**Something inside me doesn’t understand.**

It’s incredible how far women have come, but there still is so much more work to be done.

The mindset of girls just needs to be rewired, and put into terms that you don’t need to apologize for like not doing anything. We can do it. I actually think a woman should do whatever she wants.

It doesn’t matter what gender or race or gender we like.

We’re all human.

If I ever have children, I’ll teach them from a very young age that women are equal to men and should have the same opportunities.

I mean part of me wants to like tell really young children, before they get to the age where this like separation happens, to like just go for it.

Just go for it. I don’t know what else to say.

I think part of it might be that the employers just want to hire men. But part of it might be that only men are applying for the jobs.

I think that if people try to get things to change, we’ll eventually get there.

Be more like men. Be more persistent. If it’s what you want, why do you give up? If it’s what you really really want, nothing should stop you.

‘Cause you have to take matters into your own hands as a woman. You can’t really change the way that the people are thinking like now, you have to change the future generations that are like gonna come after us.

Things maybe won’t be so different unless we make them different.

In terms of how much talent you have? I don’t think it has any relation to your gender.

Fourteen, female.
Fifteen, female.
Seventeen, female.
Sixteen, female.
Fifteen, female.
Fourteen, female.
Sixteen, female. Fifteen, male.
Thirteen, female.
Fourteen, female.
Fifteen, female.
Sixteen, female.
Seventeen, female.
Fourteen, female.
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**Johannes Brahms**

Born on May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany; died on April 3, 1897, in Vienna

**Symphony No. 1**
**in C minor, Op. 68**

Composed: 1874-76

First performance: November 4, 1876, in Karlsruhe, with Felix Otto Dessoff conducting

Estimated length: 45-50 minutes

*Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings*

- The Brahms First reasserts the untapped potential of the symphony genre in the aftermath of Beethoven’s seemingly unsurpassable legacy
- Brahms had to fight a sense of “impostor syndrome” to complete his First Symphony—in part, a consequence of the hero worship of Beethoven that had taken root
- Just as in Beethoven’s Ninth, the finale of Brahms’ First is the longest movement, the center of gravity—but its power comes from a wordless narrative, using instruments alone

The concept of individual musical “genius” became entangled in the concept of history that took root in the 19th century—and that persis-
tently affects contemporary thinking about the canon, the repertoire, and the figures who have been enshrined in the pantheon of Western classical music.

This idea of individual genius held special appeal for the Romantics, in keeping with their drive to “transcend” material forces—including social reality and the reality of time itself.

Yet the genius model showed an obvious negative side insofar as it inhibited creativity. Even Johannes Brahms, who bought into this way of thinking about Beethoven wholeheartedly, suffered a version of the “impostor syndrome” that seems an inevitable result. The story of his First Symphony is the story of facing that negativity and overcoming it—an achievement that required a special “genius” of its own.

Beethoven himself had postponed unveiling his First Symphony until after he had a chance to make his name in other genres. The legacy of Haydn (still very much alive) was a formidable standard. Brahms’ first sketches for his symphonic debut go back to his 20s (in the 1850s). The finished work received its premiere in the fall of 1876—just months after the world premiere of Wagner’s complete *Ring* cycle, another achievement long in the making. Even then, Brahms insisted on trying out the new score several more times before agreeing to submit it to his publisher.

Wagner declared that Beethoven had led the symphony to a dead end
by creating, with the choral Ninth Symphony, something that could not be surpassed by instrumental music alone. Brahms made his breakthrough in the genre by reasserting the expressive (and philosophical) power of the purely instrumental symphony. His First Symphony recycles the classical forms not as a dry, abstract homage but as a flexible vehicle for the heightened emotional content of a new era.

In the first movement, for example, the timpani’s ominous pounding lays out track for harmonies that stretch and tear in opposite directions—all part of an extended slow introduction to a movement and a symphony that out-Beethovens Beethoven in its pursuit of thematic economy and unity. This kind of compositional method brings to mind Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony in particular (which Brahms actually cites—listen for the way he exploits the “Fate” motto). The Fifth served Brahms as a key model, in terms of both musical process and emotional trajectory.

**What to listen for**

A formidably tragic tone is established at the outset. Brahms hammers away at tight, concise motivic ideas that he continually varies. At the end of the first movement, a sudden calm descends, unexpected and unresolved.

The two middle movements, written later than the first and last, offer a respite from the high drama surrounding them. The Andante blooms with the composer’s most lyrical writing and nuanced harmonic coloration. Brahms replaces the Beethovenian scherzo with something more relaxed, in the form of a sunlit, pastoral interlude.

All of this prepares the way for the First Symphony’s center of gravity, which lies in the final movement, the longest of the four. In parallel with the first movement, he introduces it with slow, anticipatory music of great dramatic suggestiveness. Brahms carefully stages the breakthrough moment when horns call out in a simple C major tune. (He once explained that he had heard a shepherd play this while traveling in Switzerland.) The change of soundscape is merely the first of a series of breakthroughs in the finale. It leads the way to a noble chorale in the strings that, ever since the first performance, has not failed to bring to mind Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

Which is the point—Brahms here turns away from what Beethoven did at the corresponding moment in the Ninth. Just where we might have expected the human voice to emerge, Brahms proves that the instrumental symphony is not dead. The final pages resound, accordingly, with an exuberant epiphany: everything has not been said.

*Program notes*  
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Music Director Joseph Young

Praised for his suavely adventurous programing, Joseph Young is increasingly recognized as “one of the most gifted conductors of his generation.” Joseph is Music Director of 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 Orquesta Sinfónica 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 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 the 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 with whom he continues to maintain a close relationship.
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**Bryce Dessner, composer**

Bryce Dessner is one of the most sought-after composers of his generation, with a rapidly expanding catalog of works commissioned by leading ensembles. Known to many as a guitarist with The National, he is also active as a curator—a vital force in the flourishing realm of new creative music.

His orchestral, chamber, and vocal compositions have been commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Metropolitan Museum of Art (for the New York Philharmonic), Kronos Quartet, BAM Next Wave Festival, Barbican Centre, Edinburgh International Festival, Sydney Festival, eighth blackbird, Sō Percussion, New York City Ballet, and many others. He has worked with some of the world’s most creative and respected musicians and visual artists, including Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Johnny Greenwood, Justin Peck, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Matthew Ritchie, among others. His work ‘Murder Ballads,’ featured on eighth blackbird’s album Filament—an album he also produced and performs on—won the 2016 GRAMMY® Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance. In the fall of 2015 Dessner was tapped, along with Ryuichi Sakamoto and Alva Noto, to compose music for Oscar Award-winning director Alejandro Iñárritu’s film, The Revenant, which received a 2016 Golden Globes nomination for Best Original Score and a 2017 GRAMMY® Awards nomination in the Best Score Soundtrack For Visual Media category.

*Aheym,* commissioned in 2009 by Kronos Quartet, was a breakthrough score. It made its debut before an audience of thousands in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, not far from Dessner’s home. Since then, the ensemble has played the intense, anguished piece hundreds of times; it served as the centerpiece of a 2013 Kronos disc devoted to Dessner’s music on the Anti-label. *St. Carolyn by the Sea* followed in 2014 on Deutsche Grammophon, featuring the lyrical title work and two other Dessner compositions performed by the Copenhagen Philharmonic under Andre de Ridder. May 2015 marked the release on Brassland of Music for Wood and Strings, an album-length work performed by Sō Percussion on custom-built “Chord Sticks” that lend a shimmering, hammer dulcimer-like quality.

Other recent notable projects include Quilting, a 17-minute score co-commis-
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sioned with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, premiered in May 2015 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Gustavo Dudamel, and The Most Incredible Thing, a ballet created by Dessner, Justin Peck and Marcel Dzama, premiered in February 2016 by the New York City Ballet.


Mary Kouyoumdjian, composer

Mary Kouyoumdjian is a composer with projects ranging from concert works to multimedia collaborations and film scores. As a first generation Armenian-American and having come from a family directly affected by the Lebanese Civil War and Armenian Genocide, she uses a sonic palette that draws on her heritage, interest in music as documentary, and background in experimental composition to progressively blend the old with the new.

Kouyoumdjian has received commissions for such organizations as the NY Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alarm Will Sound, International Contemporary Ensemble [ICE], Brooklyn Youth Chorus, the American Composers Forum/JFund, Roomful of Teeth, WQXR, REDSHIFT, Experiments in Opera, the Nouveau Classical Project, Music of Remembrance, Friction Quartet, Ensemble Oktoplus, and the Los Angeles New Music Ensemble. Her documentary work was recently presented by the 2016 New York Philharmonic Biennial and has also been performed internationally at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, New York’s Museum of Modern Art, the Barbican Centre, Cabrillo Festival, Millennium Park, Big Ears Festival, 21C Music Festival, and Cal Performances. Her residencies include those with Alarm Will Sound/The Mizzou International Composers Festival, Roulette/The Jerome Foundation, Montalvo Arts Center, and Exploring the Metropolis. Her music has been described as “eloquently scripted” and “emotionally wracking” by The New York Times and as “the most harrowing moments on stage at any New York performance” by New York Music Daily. In her work as a composer, orchestrator, and music editor for film, she has collaborated on a diverse array of motion pictures including orchestrating on the soundtracks to The Place Beyond the Pines (Focus Features) and Demonic (Dimension Films).

Currently pursuing her Composition D.M.A. as a Teaching Fellow at Columbia University, Kouyoumdjian studies primarily with Zosha Di Castri, Georg Friedrich Haas, Fred Lerdahl, and George Lewis. She holds an M.A.
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Highlights of the 2019-20 season include Peter Lieberson’s Neruda Songs with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Stéphane Denève, John Adams’ El Niño with David Robertson leading the Houston Symphony, Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis with Krzysztof Urbański and the Indianapolis Symphony, and Korngold’s Abschiedslieder with Donald Runnicles and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. Mahler’s Eighth Symphony brings Kelley O’Connor together with Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony and with the San Francisco Symphony for Michael Tilson Thomas’ final concerts as Music Director.

John Adams wrote The Gospel According to the Other Mary for Kelley O’Connor and she has performed the work under the batons of John Adams, Gustavo Dudamel, Grant Gershon, Gianandrea Noseda, Sir Simon Rattle, and David Robertson. She has sung the composer’s El Niño with Vladimir Jurowski and the London Philharmonic Orchestra and continues to be the eminent living interpreter of Lieberson’s Neruda Songs having sung performances with Christoph Eschenbach and the National Symphony Orchestra, Bernard Haitink and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Robert Spano and the Minnesota Orchestra,

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and David Zinman and the Berliner Philharmoniker and the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich among many others.

Sought after by many of the most heralded composers of the modern day, Kelley O’Connor has given the world premieres of Joby Talbot’s *A Sheen of Dew on Flowers* with the Britten Sinfonia and Bryce Dessner’s *Voy a Dormir* with Robert Spano leading the Orchestra of St. Luke’s at Carnegie Hall.

Recent performances include Mahler’s Third Symphony with Andrés Orozco-Estrada and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and *Das Lied von der Erde* with Louis Langrée and the Detroit Symphony, Wagner’s *Wesendonck Lieder* with Matthias Pintscher and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Bernstein’s *Songfest* for her Boston Symphony Orchestra debut under Bramwell Tovey and “Jeremiah” Symphony with Franz Welser-Möst and the Cleveland Orchestra.

For her debut with the Atlanta Symphony in Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar*, Kelley O’Connor joined Robert Spano for performances and a GRAMMY® Award-winning Deutsche Grammophon recording. Her discography also includes Mahler’s Third Symphony with Jaap van Zweden and the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Lieberson’s *Neruda Songs* and Michael Kurth’s *Everything Lasts Forever* with Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony, Adams’ *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Franz Welser-Möst and the Cleveland Orchestra.
Stunning range, flexibility, drama, and power are among the hallmarks of the 41-year-old San Francisco Girls Chorus’ Premier Ensemble, recognized as one of the world’s leading youth vocal ensembles. Led by Artistic Director Valérie Sainte-Agathe, the Premier Ensemble has achieved an incomparable sound that underscores the unique clarity and force of impeccably trained treble voices.

Recent concert highlights include a July 2019 tour to England and France that featured six performances in London, Windsor, Cambridge, and Paris; appearances on all three days of the 2019 KRONOS FESTIVAL; multiple performances of Stravinsky’s Persephone with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony in September 2018; debut performances in February 2018 at Carnegie Hall alongside Philip Glass; June 2018 performances of Purcell’s Dido and Aeneas with Voices of Music for the Berkeley Festival & Exhibition; an April 2017 debut performance at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts with The Knights for SHIFT: A Festival of American Orchestras. SFGC has also traveled the world as a musical ambassador for San Francisco, with tours to the Nordic countries, Germany, Japan, China, South Korea, and Cuba, and performed for the 2009 inauguration of President Barack Obama.

Praised by Gramophone Magazine as a “remarkable tapestry of teenage voices,” SFGC has been a champion of the music of our time since its founding, having commissioned more than three dozen works by leading composers including Philip Glass, Richard Danielpour, Aaron Jay Kernis, Gabriel Kahane, Augusta Read Thomas, and Chen Yi. In February 2018, SFGC released its most recent album, Final Answer, on Philip
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Glass’ Orange Mountain Music label. The album features Kronos Quartet, includes works by nine living composers, among them Philip Glass, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Lisa Bielawa, John Zorn, and Gabriel Kahane. The Premier Ensemble has been recipient of numerous music industry awards, including five GRAMMY® Awards, four ASCAP/Chorus America Awards for Adventurous Programming, and the Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence from Chorus America.

In addition to its Premier Ensemble, SFGC is renowned as a regional center for choral music education and performance for girls and young women ages 4-18. Hundreds of singers from 46 Bay Area cities participate in this internationally-recognized seven-level Chorus School, hailed as “a model in the country for training girls’ voices” by the California Arts Council.

Valérie Sainte-Agathe, Artistic Director, has conducted the San Francisco Girls Chorus since 2013, including in performances with renowned artists such as Jon Nakamatsu, Deborah Voigt, Laurie Rubin, Philip Glass, Aaron Jay Kernis, Gustavo Dudamel, and Michael Tilson Thomas. A strong believer in musical collaborations, she has performed with the New Century Chamber Orchestra, Kronos Quartet, Magik*Magik Orchestra and Tenet Ensemble. In February 2018 she made her Carnegie Hall debut with the Philip Glass Ensemble, conducting with Michael Riesman in Glass’ Music with Changing Parts. She also conducted The Photographer by Philip Glass in October 2017. In June 2016, she conducted the Chorus alongside The Knights Orchestra and Brooklyn Youth Chorus for the New York Philharmonic’s NY PHIL BIEN-NIAL festival at Lincoln Center. She also collaborated with The Knights for the SHIFT A Festival of American Orchestras at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. After five years in the United States, her first recording as SFGC’s Music Director, Final Answer, was released on Orange Mountain Music in February 2018. Between 2014 and 2016, she was assistant conductor for Lisa Bielawa’s made-for-TV opera, Vireo. During the 2018-2019 season, she served as Artist in Residence for KRONOS FESTIVAL 2019 and performed with DJ Spooky conducting a multi-media, virtual reality piece entitled Quantopia: The Evolution of the Internet. She also served as Choir Master with Taylor Mac, recipient of MacArthur Foundation’s “Genius Grant,” for the “Holiday Sauce” production at the Curran Theater.

Ms. Sainte-Agathe served as Music Director for the Young Singers program of the Montpellier National Symphony and Opera in France from 1998-2011. In this capacity, she trained young singers for opera and symphony concerts and productions. She participated in eight recordings with the Montpellier National Orchestra and The Radio France Festival. She is a recipient of Victoires de la Musique, and a two-time recipient of the Orphée d’Or award—for Honegger’s Jeanne d’Arc au bûcher and d’Indy’s L’Etranger. Ms. Sainte-Agathe studied at the Montpellier Conservatory in piano performance. She received her bachelor’s degree in conducting and a Master in Management from Université Paul Valery in Montpellier.
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René Mandel is currently Artistic Director of Berkeley Symphony, having previously served as Executive Director, Orchestra Manager, and principal second violin in the Orchestra. From 2009 to 2011, Mandel held the position of Director of Artistic Operations and Executive Producer at the Montréal Symphony Orchestra under Music Director Kent Nagano. In addition to his administrative duties, he remains active as a violinist throughout the Bay Area.

Mandel was born in Los Angeles, where he began his violin studies with Manuel Compinsky. At age 14, he performed as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, conducted by Calvin Simmons. He attended Indiana University, studying with Josef Gingold, after which he studied with Stuart Canin at UC Santa Barbara, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in music. At age 20, Mandel became a member of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Gerard Schwartz, later becoming the ensemble’s principal second violin under Music Director Iona Brown.

Mandel was a founding member of the New Century Chamber Orchestra and was its principal second violin from 1993 to 2000. He later served on NCCO’s board and was co-chair of the music director search, which brought Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg to the organization. In addition to the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Mandel has been a soloist with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra, the New Century Chamber Orchestra, and the Knoxville Symphony. As an orchestral violinist, he has performed and toured with the San Francisco Symphony and the LA Philharmonic. An active chamber musician, Mandel has performed extensively throughout the United States and Europe. In addition to his performing career, Mandel was involved in the motion picture and television recording industry for more than 25 years.
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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 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.

After an extensive search, Joana Carneiro was selected in January 2009 to be 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. Maestra Carneiro announced her intent to step down as Music Director at the end of the 2017-18 season after nine seasons at the Orchestra’s artistic helm.

Berkeley Symphony’s 2019-20 season ushers in a new era with the appointment of Joseph Young as the Orchestra’s Music Director, following his highly successful and critically acclaimed debut appearance as guest conductor in January 2019.
Music in the Schools

Founded in 1993 and run in partnership with the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD), Berkeley Symphony’s Music in the Schools program provides comprehensive, age-appropriate music curricula to over 4,600 Berkeley public school students each year. Recognized by the League of American Orchestras as one of the country’s top music education programs, Music in the Schools (MITS) helps students fulfill the California Performing Arts Content Standards and provides new ways of approaching other subjects in the core curriculum. MITS programming is under the leadership of Education Director Ming Luke and is 100% free of charge for students and their families.

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Family Concert II
April 18, 2020, 10:30 a.m.
in collaboration with the San Francisco Girls Chorus

Led by Ming Luke, these popular Saturday morning performances engage the entire family in a fun and interactive experience, guaranteed to spark a life-long interest in and passion for music. From toddlers to grandparents, there are always lots of heads bopping and toes tapping! This concert will feature a performance with the San Francisco Girls Chorus.

Join us after the performance for an instrument petting zoo with musicians from the orchestra. From strings to percussion, there’s a lot of fun to be had with Berkeley Symphony.

Free Admission — Donations Welcome

Longfellow Middle School, 1500 Derby Street, Berkeley
October 13, 2019: Berkeley Symphony Live on the Plaza gave several aspiring conductors the chance to join Joseph on the podium.

October 24, 2019: Music Director Joseph Young with Robert C. Brackins II, Oakland Symphony Music Director Michael Morgan, and guest artist Conrad Tao on opening night.
October 24, 2019: Joseph Young’s debut was truly a night to remember as we welcomed returning audience favorite Conrad Tao as guest soloist.
LEGACY GIVING helps to ensure that Berkeley Symphony’s music and education programs will continue to delight and inspire for generations to come. We are deeply grateful to those who have made bequests to Berkeley Symphony as part of their estate planning. If you are interested in supporting our long-term future, please contact Jim Tibbs at 510.841.2800 x305 or jtibbs@berkeleysymphony.org.

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