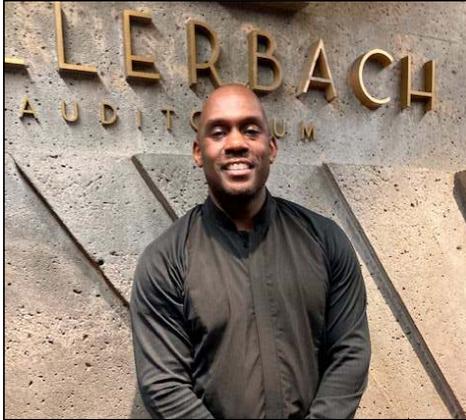




The Musical Gourmet

Stream of consciousness & magnificence at Zellerbach

Berkeley Symphony finally gets its season-opening concert



After the Berkeley Symphony concert, conductor Joseph Young chatted with the enthusiastic audience.

By Joseph Gold

The mood was festive in Zellerbach Hall this past Sunday afternoon. A large and enthusiastic audience cheered the Berkeley Symphony as it embarks on its Golden Jubilee season, exactly two years to the day since its last concert in Zellerbach.

The good fortune was to have Joseph Young as conductor.

The repertoire was chosen carefully and, as such, could only happen in Berkeley. Considering it as a stream of consciousness concert, it made me wonder: what if James Joyce were a composer or a music director? First he would need to be from Berkeley. He would certainly let his imagination run wild. Music turns on the imagination like a veritable stream of consciousness when one thought becomes many History and the present blend into a panoramic canvas. Then, all of that would be needed to become a word picture.

A few words of explanation from the composers Mark Grey and Derek Skye began the con-

cert. The stage and the auditorium were darkened. As the program began, so did the stream of consciousness; somewhat akin to walking in the cosmos unfettered and James Joyce as composer and music director.

First came Mark Grey's *Soundscape #1*. With the stage darkened and voices of protest emanating as the center of attention, it conjured up a terrifying experience of being an innocent bystander during one of the violent political-social demonstrations near Zellerbach in the '60s. The stream of consciousness moved on seamlessly to Morton Gould's *Protest*. Not realizing the context of the programming, I was impressed by the Symphony's brass and woodwind sections. Their resonance was truly impressive.

The program moved on seamlessly to *Soundscape #2*, also by Mark Grey. Once again the feeling of terrible trepidation returned.

And then the music moved on to composer Derek Skye's *As Water, Freedom*, commissioned

by Berkeley Symphony. The suite of four pieces was as seamless as it was meaningful.

With a brief word of introduction by conductor Joseph Young, the orchestra launched into Finlandia, the masterwork of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius written in 1899. An entire chapter could be written about the importance of this composition. The orchestra played it heroically. Perhaps the soft sections should have been played softer, but my thoughts were directed to Sibelius himself. While I did not know this stupendous genius personally, I have been a friend of his granddaughter for many years. The stories she told me about being with grandfather Sibelius became even more vivid. I vowed to be a grandfather like he was.

After intermission the concert resumed with *Lollapalooza* by Berkeley composer John Adams who enjoys enthusiastic popularity. Once again, the stream of consciousness resumed and I was reminded of the great American composer Charles Ives.

As an orchestra, the Berkeley Symphony is at the top of its game. It is quite obvious that the conductor, Joseph Young, is an inspiring influence, and it is fortuitous that Berkeley Symphony was able to engage him as their music director in 2019.

The orchestra's most inspiring playing came at the end with Igor Stravinsky's evocative *Firebird* suite. Of particular note were beautiful solos played by oboist Bennie Cottone and bassoonist Rufus Olivier. And once again, the stream of consciousness overcame reality. I remembered what friends who played with the San Francisco Symphony told me about working with Stravinsky. I also remembered the super-human artistry of violinist Jascha Heifetz playing the *Berceuse* from the *Firebird*. How I wished the first violin section knew this recording. But then I thought of the beautiful playing of Cottone and Olivier.

Joseph Young united everything into a beautiful stream of consciousness.

The totality of the program unified so many things. It grappled with the socio-political questions of fate. Needless to say, all who were involved relished the implied connections and reaped the rewards.

Epilogue

The entire scene was painted on a vast musical canvas, reminding me of something I read so many years ago. It was a description of Ivan the Terrible in an opera by Rimsky-Korsakov.

On the stage and in the orchestra, there had been a steady diminuendo. The waiting multitude stood hushed and still... The tones muted to a murmur. The audience waited. Centuries dropped away, and we became part of the scene. The suspense was oppressive. With a superhuman effort, the body of the decrepit Czar Ivan the Terrible straightened, and inch by inch the slack reins taken up. Finally, with a majestic deliberation, the eyelids opened wide and the personification of power and ruthless evil looked straight at his people, both on the stage and in the audience.

At first low and indefinite, the tones acquired depth and quality. Vitality and eloquence from the dim past was made convincing and compelling. It was surely one of those portraits that hang in the gallery of memory untarnished by the passing of time.



Oboist Bennie Cottone (left) and bassoonist Rufus Olivier contributed exquisite solos in Berkeley Symphony's concert on Sunday afternoon, February 6.



Welcome to the Piedmont Center for the Arts

All public events at Piedmont Center for the Arts require photo ID and valid proof of vaccination, including booster shot, as well as proper masking while inside.

Sunday, February 13, 3 p.m.

In the Tradition Piano Trio

Bill Jackman, *piano*; Rich Trevor, *bass*; Anthony Pegram, *drums*, make up an old-school piano trio that aims to keep alive the tradition of the classic jazz piano trio. This Valentine's Day concert in a monthly series to benefit PCA, entitled *In the Spirit of Love*, will include a selection of jazz, Latin, swing, and ballads that will warm your hearts. CDs of the Trio will be available for donations. Tickets are \$20 at the door, or in advance at <https://bpt.me/5316993>.

Saturday, February 19, 12 noon – 2 p.m.

William Blackwell art exhibit

William Blackwell, a prominent architect who once created and published a unique world map centered on the Bay Area, was also a furniture maker and artist, and a Piedmont resident since 1980 until he recently passed away. Bill's interest in color and symmetry led to his creation of large geometric paintings exhibited around the Bay Area. A selection of his works will be on display at the Center the weekend of February 19-20, with gallery hours from noon until 2 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday.

Saturday, March 5, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Robert Brokl, artist

Local artist Robert Brokl presents a new landscape-themed exhibition of his paintings in a variety of media entitled *What I've Been Up To*, a visual diary of recent travels from the austere, spare deserts of Death Valley and Anza Borrego and the flora and fauna that survive temperature extremes, to the high country of the Southern Sierras and the redwoods of the Mendocino Coast. Exhibition will be open Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., March 5–20, with an Artist's Reception on March 13 at 2 p.m.

Saturday, March 5, 2022, 7 p.m.

Adrian West Trio

The Oakland-based **Adrian West Trio** performs original acoustic rock songs that could be described as *Paul Simon meets Dave Matthews*, with vocal harmonies, acoustic guitar, upright bass and percussion. Ever the realist, Adrian takes peculiar delight in setting serious topics to joyful music. The Trio features Adrian West – *vocals & acoustic guitar*; Amy Obenski, *vocals & percussion*, and Jodi Durst, *upright bass*. For more information, including videos and songs, see: www.adrianwest.com.

Sunday, March 6, 2022, 4 p.m.

Berkeley Symphony Chamber Music Concert

Berkeley Symphony musicians return to Piedmont for the 9th year of Chamber Music Concerts on Sunday afternoons. This concert features an all-star string quartet enhanced by two flutes with the music of Brian Nabors and Antonin Dvořák. The concert also includes a recent composition by the quartet's violinist, Darcy Rindt. Tickets are available at www.berkeleysymphony.org, or by calling the Symphony Box Office, 841-2800, ext. 1.

Support the programming of Piedmont Center for the Arts by donating generously to the Tip Jar at these events.

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