ENDURING STORIES

WANG | SIMON | RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

JUNE 4, 2023 / 4PM
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Welcome to our final symphonic concert of the 22/23 Season, *Enduring Stories*. There was no better way to close the chapter on our season, *Find your Frequency*, than with a concert that celebrates the strength and resilience of women.

We open with the world premiere of Xi Wang’s *Lotus Prayer*, a beautiful work that offers a musical depiction of the symbolic connotations of the lotus in both Asian culture and Buddhism. Xi Wang pulls from autobiographical influences and her unique fusion of Asian and Western instruments and techniques with storytelling and theatrics have captivated audiences around the world.

Central to today’s program is Carlos Simon’s *Portrait of a Queen*. Combining spoken word and music, it tells the evolution of Black America from the vantage point of a strong, female narrator, performed by Bay Area actress Leontyne Mbele-Mbong. The stories told in *Portrait of a Queen* made me reflect on the strong women in my own life and compelled me to bring together these *Enduring Stories*.

We’ll end today’s performance with the vivid, imaginative orchestration of Rimsky-Korsakov’s lush masterpiece *Scheherazade*. The piece draws from the Middle Eastern collection of tales, *One Thousand One Nights*, in which Scheherazade fights for her life and the lives of those around her by telling amazing stories.

We hope these inspire you. Thank you for Finding Your Frequency with Berkeley Symphony. See you next season!

—Joseph Young

June 4, 2023
The Orchestra

**Violin I**
Nigel Armstrong, *Concertmaster*
Isabella Amador, *Associate Concertmaster*
Sarah Elert, *Assistant Concertmaster*
Lyly Li
Candace Sanderson
Michelle Maruyama
Katie Allen
Erica Ward
Annie Li
Ernest Yen
Fred Chang
Bert Thunstrum

**Violin II**
Mijung Kim, *Principal*
Stephanie Bibbo, *Assistant Principal*
Julia Churchill
David Cheng
Karsten Windt
Larisa Kopylovsky
Lylia Guion
Ann Eastman
Athena Giuliani
Charles Zhou

**Cello**
Stephanie Wu, *Principal*
Chloe Mendola, *Assistant Principal*
Isaac Pastor-Chermak
David Wishnia
Shain Carrasco
Peter Bedrossian
Margaret Moores
Jason Anderson
Nicholas Carlin

**Bass**
Michel Taddei, *Principal*
Alden Cohen, *Assistant Principal*
Dave Horn
Michael Minor
Yuchen Liu

**Flute/Piccolo**
Alice Lenaghan, *Principal*
Laurie Seibold
Sarah Holzman

**Oboe**
Brooks Fisher, *Principal*  
*Deborah Shidler, Principal Oboe Chair*
Bennie Cottone

**Clarinet**
Roman Fukshansky, *Principal*

**Bass Clarinet**
Bruce Foster

**Bassoon**
Carla Wilson, *Principal*
Ravinder Sehgal
We welcome our new friends and partners, the YWCA Berkeley/Oakland, to our concert today and want to recognize and thank them for their wonderful contributions to this community for almost 135 years! Our program today is dedicated to the history and stories of strong, trailblazing women. We are so fortunate to have the YWCA Berkeley/Oakland in our community to support and empower women through programs, training and providing resources to fulfill their mission of eliminating racism, developing leadership, promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

The YWCA’s vision is to “Support full access and engagement for girls and women of color in our communities. When we center and follow the leadership of girls and women of color, and uplift the legislative priorities and solutions to problems from the most impacted, we can meaningfully engage in the fight for access, equity, and collective liberation.

Our use of “girls” and “women” is inclusive of all cis and trans women, non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender queer, and female-identified folks.”
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Today’s Program

Joseph Young  Conductor

Xi Wang  Lotus Prayer  
World Premiere made possible through The Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation Orchestral Commissions Program for women composers: an initiative of the League of American Orchestras, in partnership with American Composers Orchestra (ACO)

Carlos Simon  Portrait of a Queen  
Leontyne Mbele-Mbong narrator

Intermission

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov  Scheherazade, Op. 35  
The Sea and Sinbad's Ship  
The Story of the Kalendar Prince  
The Young Prince and the Young Princess  
Festival at Baghdad. The Sea.  
The Ship Breaks against a Cliff  
Surmounted by a Bronze Horseman

Today’s concert is being recorded for broadcast on KALW 91.7 FM at a later date.

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Xi Wang

Born in 1978 in Nanchang, China; currently resides in Dallas, Texas

Lotus Prayer

Composed: 2019

First performance: Berkeley Symphony is performing the world premiere of Lotus Prayer.

Duration: c. 10 minutes

Scored for 2 flutes (1st doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, piano, timpani, 2 percussionists, and strings.

Bold and dramatic, the music of Xi Wang is rooted in a storytelling instinct that conveys a compellingly autobiographical impulse. “Composing for me is a journey to tell my own life story,” she says, “a mirror of what I have gone through emotionally, intellectually, spiritually. It’s a musical novel of my life.”

Xi points out that she’s spent about half of her life in her native China, the second half in the United States, where she came in 2001, without connections, to pursue graduate studies in composition at the University of Missouri in Kansas City under Chen Yi, completing her doctorate at Cornell. Currently, Xi teaches composition at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

“I think there’s a deep blending in my music of where I come from and where I have studied and now live,” she says.

Coming of age in the post-Cultural Revolution era, Xi had the opportunity to study music that had been denied her parents—before she was born, they had been sent to the countryside as heavy laborers—and they encouraged their daughter when her talent was discovered at an early age. Xi started piano lessons at five and was sent to Shanghai Conservatory as a ten-year-old. The next year, she began composing.

But it wasn’t until she had left her homeland, Xi says, that she gained a deeper appreciation of Chinese culture and her roots: “Sometimes you don’t see the shape of the mountain until you are distant from it and then look back. I came to the US because I wanted to learn about Western symphonic repertoire and the history and background of European and American music. But in recent years, I’m finding that my music is becoming more Chinese in a way.”

Xi has likewise been drawing more and more on ideas and imagery from Buddhism, although she does not think of herself as religious. The lotus is a ubiquitous symbol in Asian culture. A prominent image in Chinese poetry and legend, the lotus carries particularly profound associations as a sacred symbol in Buddhism. The Buddha himself as well as bodhisattvas are often portrayed achieving a state of enlightenment while seated on an open lotus. Lotus Prayer offers a musical depiction of the symbolic connotations of this iconography. Xi prefaces her score with this quotation from the Buddha: “As a lotus flower is born in water, grows in water, and rises...
Today’s pre-concert talk will be hosted by Caen Thomason-Redus, Vice President of Inclusion and Learning at the League of American Orchestras. Caen leads discussion with composers Xi Wang and Carlos Simon on today’s program with an in depth look at their works including the world premiere of Xi Wang’s Lotus Prayer which is made possible through the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation Orchestral Commissions Program for women composers and is an initiative of the League of American Orchestras.

Caen Thomason-Redus is grateful to spend his time making a difference in the world through music. That journey has taken him through orchestras, presenters, universities, and now the League, where he leads Inclusion and Learning. Immediately prior to joining the League, Caen oversaw Community and Learning at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Caen was named one of Musical America’s Top 30 Arts Administrators and he is a recipient of the Sphinx Organization’s MPower Artist Grant. He earned degrees in flute performance from Rice University and the University of Redlands, with additional studies at the University of Michigan and the Universität Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria. He and his wife love living in Michigan and attending all of their three children’s concerts.

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June 4, 2023
out of water to stand above it unsoiled, so I, born in the world, raised in the world, having overcome the world, live unsoiled by the world.”

“I found that saying resonates deeply,” says Xi. “While the lotus itself is very beautiful and pure, it grows out of mud, out of the water. In the world, we have so many conflicts, struggles, pain, all kinds of emotions. Where is inner peace? We have the awareness that you can grow out of the mud and let the blossom open. Inner peace and beauty really come from inside.”

Although Xi completed Lotus Prayer in 2019, its premiere has been delayed until now because of the pandemic. Her subsequent orchestral work, YEAR 2020, reflects a drastic change of tack, reflecting the turbulence of the first year of COVID as well as the protests against racial injustice; the composer’s mother had meanwhile been diagnosed with lung cancer. With Ensō, a work premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra last December, Xi says she sought to regain the balance she had found in Lotus Prayer. She once again took up a Buddhist theme—the ensō is a hand-drawn calligraphic circle representing enlightenment and the void—and developed the language of Lotus Prayer on a grander scale.

What to listen for

Lotus Prayer starts slowly, its rich harmonies expressing a recognition of the serene beauty of the world. Low brass and strings suggest the early morning prayer chant of monks, while the winds play a freely floating melody on top. The middle section represents the situation of being in the world of conflicts and struggles, but these eventually dissolve and the serene state depicted in the opening is again attained.

Carlos Simon

Born in Washington, D.C., on April 13, 1986, where he currently resides

Portrait of a Queen

Composed: 2017

First performance: May 23, 2017, with George Manahan conducting the American Composers Orchestra at Symphony Space in New York City

Duration: c. 18 minutes

Scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, 2 trombones, timpani, 2 percussionists, piano, and strings, along with a narrator.

The present season has been an especially active one for Carlos Simon. The month of May alone saw no fewer than three premieres—including the Minnesota Orchestra’s world premiere of breath, a choral-orchestral tribute to the memory of George Floyd. Simon’s music will also be featured later this week at the 2023 Ojai Festival, which is curated by Rhiannon Giddens. Simon is just completing the second year of a composer residency at the Kennedy Center, where the National Symphony Orchestra recently gave the world premiere of Songs of Separation, a song cycle to poetry of Rūmī written for mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges. The Boston Symphony Orchestra meanwhile premiered Simon’s Four Black American Dances in February and will introduce it to European audiences during the orchestra’s summer tour.

Simon was raised by a family that made music together as an expression of worship. His father founded an
African-American Pentecostal church in Atlanta, where Carlos grew up, and enlisted the talents of family members to sing and play. Simon likes to compare his goal as a composer to what his father, part of a multigenerational line of preachers, has been able to accomplish through his career as a preacher. As he puts it: “Music is my pulpit. That’s where I preach.” Indeed, Simon’s closeness to his family has been a continuing source of inspiration. The dedication of Portrait of a Queen pays homage to his mother and grandmother: “As my mother, Lisa Simon, and grandmother, Bertha Simon, have wholeheartedly displayed the portrait of a ‘Queen’ by their unselfish and loving character, this piece is solely dedicated to them.”

Simon’s “rap opera” album Requiem for the Enslaved (2022) demonstrates his passion for topics relating to social justice. Nominated for Best Contemporary Classical Composition in the 2023 GRAMMY Awards, it addresses the history of the exploitation of enslaved people during the early years of Georgetown University, where Simon is currently a professor. Unflinching confrontations with the United States’ legacy of racism are a recurring theme in Simon’s work. He also draws inspiration from the work of such visual artists as Bill Traylor (Between Worlds) and Romare Bearden (The Block). Next February, the Oakland Symphony will premiere Here I Stand: Paul Robeson, Simon’s opera on the legendary singer, actor, and civil rights activist to a libretto by Dan Harder.

Portrait of a Queen originated as a commission from the American Composers Orchestra and served to complete the composer’s doctorate, conferred by the University of Michigan’s School of Music, where Simon studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. Gabriela Lena Frank—whose new opera about Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera is being staged this month by San Francisco Opera—has also been a mentor to the composer, who was awarded the Sphinx Medal of Excellence in 2021. With a text by the composer’s friend Courtney D. Ware, who also wrote the words for his song Nightfall (...while
you were dreaming... (2014), Portrait of a Queen “traces the evolution of the experience of Black people in America through the lens of the Black woman,” Simon explains. As part of his process of composing Portrait, he immersed himself in research into the structure of the African American community in US society and was struck by the vital role of women as caregivers and sources of strength.

The narrator represents a composite of such powerful women through the generations, beginning with the matriarch in West Africa and showing her manifestations in America. “It was imperative that the story of Queen be told from her perspective, in her voice, with her words,” writes Ware. “Although Queen represents Black womanhood in America and in Africa, she is not one dimensional. Her story is a mixture of pain and struggle, hope and triumph.”

What to listen for

Portrait unfolds in four sections that are connected without interruption, though each section depicts a distinctive era. The opening Prologue conveys an idyllic setting in Africa and develops a Ghanaian song while evoking the complex rhythmic layerings of a West African drum ensemble. In “A Crown Forgotten,” Simon accentuates the rhythmic stress of the word “freedom” to allude to the spiritual “Oh, Freedom.” Musical gestures in the woodwinds and lower strings vividly suggest the hellish agony of long centuries of enslavement.

“Jim Crow” is cast as a powerful scherzo, its “aggressive, unsettling tone” marked by “call and response, extended use of the blues scale, and syncopated rhythms,” notes Simon, with references to Gospel music to allude to the protests of the Civil Rights era, culminating in the narrator’s impassioned declaration: “THEIR LIVES MATTER!” In the concluding section, titled “Church,” Simon introduces the melody from a favorite hymn of his mother and grandmother and acknowledges the intercession of “our ancestors” with lyrical strains. Prerecorded voices from a Black Pentecostal church become part of the texture as the work fades into silence.
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Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov
Born on in Tikhvin, near the Russian city of Novgorod, on March 18, 1844; died in Saint Petersburg on June 21, 1908

Scheherazade, Op. 35
Composed: 1888
First performance: October 28, 1888, in Saint Petersburg, with Rimsky-Korsakov conducting
Duration: c. 46 minutes
Scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes and English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

With Scheherazade, the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov has enthralled generations of listeners thanks to his musical portrait of another strong archetypal woman. Countless film composers have brazenly “borrowed” from Rimsky-Korsakov’s dazzling orchestral technique.

As a young man who traveled to distant places while serving as an officer in the Imperial Russian Navy, Rimsky absorbed some of the impressions that would fuel his imagination to later write works like Scheherazade and his fairy-tale operas. He felt increasingly pulled into a life of music and found a mentor in Mily Balakirev, the composer and guru to a group of trailblazing composers in the 19th century who set out to define an authentically Russian style of music. When another member of Balakirev’s group, Alexander Borodin, died in 1887, Rimsky became deeply invested in a new project to preserve his legacy. He edited and completed a performing edition of Borodin’s unfinished operatic magnum opus, Prince Igor.

While immersed in Borodin’s epic depiction of medieval Russia and the culture of the Polovtsian invaders, Rimsky became all the more attracted to “Orientalist” topics, completing his orchestral suite Scheherazade in 1888 and conducting its world premiere that November in Saint Petersburg. The composer drew inspiration from One Thousand and One Nights (also known as Arabian Nights), an anthology of Middle Eastern and South Asian folk tales compiled in Arabic. This jewel of Islamic culture began being circulated in Europe in Antoine Galland’s French translation in the early 18th century.

Rimsky’s treatment takes the form of a quasi-symphony in four movements, which he called a symphonic suite. He used the framework of Arabian Nights as the scenario for his own piece, describing it as follows: “The Sultan Shahriar, convinced of the deceitfulness and infidelity of all women, had sworn an oath to put each of his wives to death after their first night. But the Sultan Scheherazade saved her life by the expedient of arousing the Sultan’s interest in a series of tales she recounted over a period of 1,001 nights . . . Driven by curiosity, the Sultan postponed the execution of his wife from day to day, and eventually renounced his bloody plan.”

Rimsky initially allowed his score to be published with references to general scenarios from the Nights (rather than specific tales) but later changed
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his mind, clarifying that these had been intended merely as hints “to direct the listener’s fancy but slightly on the path which my own fancy had traveled.” The composer added that he only wanted his listeners to “carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders and not merely four pieces played one after another and composed on the basis of themes common to all four movements.” These hints read: “The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship” (I), “The Kalendar Prince” (II), “The Young Prince and the Young Princess” (III), and “Festival at Baghdad. The Sea. The Ship Breaks against a Cliff Surmounted by a Bronze Horseman” (IV).

Since *Scheherazade* impresses as a showcase for a virtuoso orchestra, we can also think of it as a concerto for orchestra (with aspects of a violin concerto). Rimsky declared proudly: “My orchestration had reached a considerable degree of virtuosity and bright sonority without Wagner’s influence, within the limits of the usual makeup of Glinka’s orchestra.”

### What to listen for

Rimsky from the outset establishes a clear contrast between the cruel Sultan and the skilled narrator who is running the show (whatever the Sultan may think). Aggressively brassy fanfares conjure his unyielding nature, while Scheherazade herself, prefaced by a dreamy sequence of chords, is figured by a sweetly melancholic solo violin. This contrast is a recurring thematic device throughout the piece and serves to tie the movements together.

Following an unforgottably thrilling portrait of the sea to evoke the tale of Sinbad, the second movement uses the principle of variations to tell a story. Romance is the focus of the lyrical third movement. The widely varied *pianissimo*, including a vigorous dance element, overflows with textbook examples of Rimsky’s well-deserved reputation as an expert orchestrator. (He was Stravinsky’s mentor.) Earlier themes are woven into the texture until Rimsky makes it clear that it is Scheherazade and her art that have won the day.

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Music Director Joseph Young

American conductor Joseph Young balances a vibrant guest conducting career with leadership roles as 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.

His commitment to amplifying voices, both historic and contemporary, has resulted in electrifying programs featuring works by Juan Pablo Contreras, Brian Raphael Nabors, Florence Price, and Carlos Simon, alongside established greats including Adams, Brahms, Dvořák, and Prokofiev.

Joseph’s 2022/23 season features major debuts, including the L.A. Phil at the Hollywood Bowl; at Washington National Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra, both at the Kennedy Center; and at Carnegie Hall leading the National Youth Orchestra.

Recent engagements include his San Francisco Symphony debut; inaugurating the Mzansi National Philharmonic Orchestra (Johannesburg); and the world premiere of William Menefield and Sheila Williams’ Fierce with the Cincinnati Opera. He has appeared with the Seattle Symphony, Detroit Symphony, New World Symphony Orchestra, Spoleto Festival Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música (Portugal), and the Orquesta Sinfónica y Coro de RTVE (Spain), among others in the U.S. and Europe.

Earlier in his career, Joseph served as the Assistant Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony, Music Director of the Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra, and Resident Conductor of the Phoenix Symphony. He also served as the League of American Orchestras Conducting Fellow with the Buffalo Philharmonic and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Joseph holds an Artist’s Diploma from the Peabody Conservatory, studying with Gustav Meier and Markand Thakar. Mentors include Jorma Panula, Robert Spano, and Marin Alsop, with whom he maintains an artistic partnership. Now a mentor himself, Joseph shapes the future of classical music through his dynamic engagements with major symphony orchestras, his steadfast commitment to teaching in classrooms and concert halls, and his service on the board of New Music USA.
Poulet is like a cafe set up at your grandmother’s house - after she’s taken a few cooking courses and gotten hip to vegetarian food, etc.

-S.F. Chronicle
Xi Wang, *composer*

Chinese-born composer Xi Wang has been considered as one of the most talented and active composers of her generation. Her original concert music has been performed worldwide by notable orchestras and ensembles such as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, Shanghai Philharmonic, Voices of Change, among others.

Xi Wang is the recipient the Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts award, Meet the Composer, New Music USA, American Music Center, MacDowell Colony residency, as well as seven prizes from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). Xi Wang has been nominated for the Grawemeyer Award, BBVA Frontiers of Knowledge Award, Stoeger Prize from Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Civitella Ranieri Fellowship, and Berlin Prize from the American Academy in Berlin.

Xi Wang has received commissions from the Philadelphia Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, Albany Symphony, League of American Orchestras, World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles, Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society, Voices of Change, among others.

Xi Wang’s music education started at the age of five, She received her B.M. from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, M.M. from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and D.M.A. from Cornell University. Currently, she is an Associate Professor at the Meadow School of Arts of Southern Methodist University, where she received the Rotunda Award for Outstanding Teaching.

Carlos Simon, *composer*

Atlanta-born Carlos Simon is a GRAMMY-nominated multi-genre composer and performer who is a passionate advocate for diversity in music. As winner of the Sphinx Medal of Excellence 2021 and Composer-in-Residence at the Kennedy Center, Carlos is a unique...
voice and sought-after cultural ambassador for new music.

Carlos Simon frequently writes for the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera, with the 2022/23 season seeing premieres with Boston Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Brooklyn Art Song Society and Minnesota Orchestra. These follow recent other commissions from the likes of New York Philharmonic and Los Angeles Philharmonic, and performances from Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and American Ballet Theatre.

Acting as music director and keyboardist for GRAMMY-Award winner Jennifer Holliday, Simon has performed with the Boston Pops Symphony, Jackson Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony. He has also toured internationally with GRAMMY-nominated soul artist Angie Stone and performed throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.

A “young composer on the rise, with an ear for social justice” (NPR), Simon’s latest album, Requiem for the Enslaved, is a multi-genre musical tribute to commemorate the stories of the 272 enslaved men, women, and children sold in 1838 by Georgetown University, and was nominated for a 2023 GRAMMY award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Released by Decca in June 2022, this work sees Simon infuse his original compositions with African American spirituals and familiar Catholic liturgical melodies, performed by Hub New Music Ensemble, Marco Pavé, and MK Zulu.

Simon earned his doctorate degree at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. He has also received degrees from Georgia State University and Morehouse College. He has served as a member of the music faculty at Spelman College and Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia and now serves as Assistant Professor at Georgetown University.

Leontyne Mbele-Mbong, narrator

Leontyne Mbele-Mbong was last seen with Berkeley Symphony at the Bruns Amphitheater during the 2021/22 season as a collaborator from CalShakes. She is about to appear in Hurricane Diane at the Aurora where she has also appeared in Cyrano, Bull in a China Shop, Temple and Breakfast with Mugabe. Recent shows: Fefu and her Friends at A.C.T., Lear at CalShakes. Other favorites: title role in Medea (TBA Award), and Cleopatra in Antony & Cleopatra (TBA Award Finalist) with African-American Shakespeare Company; The Half-Life of Marie Curie (TheatreSquared, Fayetteville, AK); Watch on the Rhine (Berkeley Rep/ Guthrie Theatre), Top Girls, The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, Fences; Andromache, Candide, Richard III (3 times), Twelfth Night, and Intimate Apparel (Mayme; ARTY Award, best supporting actress). www.leontynembele-mbong.com
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 performing, premiering, and commissioning new music that reflects the culturally diverse people and the heady creative climate of its home city.

In the 2019-2020 season, Berkeley Symphony entered a new era under the leadership of Joseph Young, the Orchestra’s fourth Music Director in its 50-year history, following a highly successful February 2019 debut that was acclaimed by critics and audiences alike. In addition to building on the Orchestra’s artistic innovation, creativity and adventurous programming, Maestro Young is committed to amplifying the voices of underrepresented composers and artists as well as continuing to tell diverse stories that reflect the local Berkeley community.
Founded in 1993 and run in partnership with Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD), Berkeley Symphony’s Music in the Schools program provides a comprehensive, age-appropriate music curriculum to over 4,600 Berkeley public elementary 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 many 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.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Berkeley Symphony partnered with the Berkeley Public Library to launch Reading Is Instrumental—a free online video series for children which combines storytelling with music. Reading Is Instrumental is co-produced with the Berkeley Public Library Foundation and has received over 32,000 views since it was launched.

We thank all who contribute to the MITS program, including those giving up to $500 annually and those whose gifts have been received since press time. Recognition levels exclude fundraising event auction item purchases and purchases of base-level tickets to fundraising events. While every attempt has been made to assure accuracy in our list of supporters, omissions and misspellings may occur. Please call 510.841.2800 to report errors. We appreciate the opportunity to correct our records.
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When the Berkeley Promenade Orchestra played its first concert in 1971, no one could have predicted the trajectory that would follow. Since these humble beginnings more than 50 years ago, Berkeley Symphony has touched countless lives with inspiring concerts full of adventurous programming and a passionate commitment to music education in our public schools. As we look to Berkeley Symphony’s future, we are challenging ourselves to make symphonic music more accessible to the Berkeley community, and to create new opportunities for a greater diversity of composers, musicians, and guest artists who would not otherwise be heard.

Please join us in stewarding the future of Berkeley cultural life by making a donation. Your generous support will help set the stage for the next 50 years of live performances and educational programs that engage the intellect, spark curiosity, and delight the spirit.
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