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BERKELEY SYMPHONY PRESENTS

SYMPHONIC III: ENDURING STORIES

***ENDURING STORIES* pays homage to strong, resilient women
with works by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Carlos Simon,
and a world premiere by Xi Wang**

*****Sunday, June 4, 2023 at 4 p.m.*****

BERKELEY, CA (May 11, 2023) – **Berkeley Symphony** will close its 2022–23 season with ***Symphonic III: Enduring Stories*** on **Sunday, June 4, at 4 p.m.** at **Zellerbach Hall**. Led by **Music Director Joseph Young**, ***Enduring Stories*** will weave together three powerful works that each celebrate the strength and resilience of women. The performance will feature the world premiere of *Lotus Prayer* by Chinese-born composer **Xi Wang**, *Portrait of a Queen* by GRAMMY Award–nominated **Carlos Simon**, and **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov**’s lush masterpiece *Scheherazade*. Tickets (\$15–90) are available now online at berkeleysymphony.org or by calling the box office at 510.841.2800.

“*Enduring Stories* is a celebration of three powerful pieces that elevate the musical portraits of trailblazing women,” says **Joseph Young, Music Director of Berkeley Symphony**. “Carlos Simon’s *Portrait of a Queen* tells the stories of strong Black women, and it is these ‘queens’ that inspired me to bring together the *Enduring Stories* program. I couldn’t do anything without the strong women in my life, so I am happy we are able to close the season by highlighting these works.”

Enduring Stories will open with the world premiere of Xi Wang's *Lotus Prayer*, made possible through the **League of American Orchestras' Women Composers Commissions**, generously supported by the **Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation**. Since arriving in the USA from her native China in 2003, Xi Wang has been blazing a trail with her musical endeavors. Bold and dramatic, the music of Xi Wang is rooted in a storytelling instinct that conveys a compellingly autobiographical impulse. Her unique fusion of Asian and Western instruments and techniques with theatrical and choreographic elements has captivated audiences around the world. *Lotus Prayer* offers a musical depiction of the symbolic connotations of the lotus in both Asian culture and Buddhism.

The concert will continue with Carlos Simon's *Portrait of a Queen*, which combines spoken word and music to tell the evolution of Black America from the vantage point of a strong, female narrator, performed by Bay Area actress **Leontyne Mbele-Mbong**. As a celebration of the vital roles women play in African American communities, one figurative character represents strength, courage and selflessness. This "queen" will transform from her journey as a leader in Africa to a slave on an American plantation, to a disenfranchised citizen subject to Jim Crow laws and finally to the strong matriarch found in many churches presently. Dramatic spoken word, written by Courtney D. Ware, poetically explains the thoughts and feelings of her character, while a musical portrait is revealed of her. *Portrait of a Queen* will also include ASL interpretation of the narration.

As a grand finale, the performance will conclude 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 the lead character changed her life and the lives of those around her.

As an effort to welcome more young audiences to its performances, Berkeley Symphony invites all **Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD)** students to attend *Enduring Stories* through **Students at the Symphony**. Made possible by a generous donation from **Ama Torrance**, the program provides free tickets to students for concerts throughout the 2022/23 season. To register, visit <http://bit.ly/3r6GshP>.

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.

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