



Music Director Joseph Young  
Artistic Director René Mandel  
Executive Director Kate Kammeyer  
1919 Addison Street Suite 201, Berkeley, CA 94704

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

PRESS CONTACT: Julie Richter | [julie@julierichter.co](mailto:julie@julierichter.co) | 480.818.8022

## **BERKELEY SYMPHONY PRESENTS**

### ***SYMPHONIC II: CONNECTIONS***

***CONNECTIONS* will feature pianist Lara Downes in a pair of works by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn; and will include *Mariachitlán* by Juan Pablo Contreras and Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations***

**\*\*\*Sunday, April 2, 2023 at 4 p.m.\*\*\***

BERKELEY, CA (March 14, 2023) – **Berkeley Symphony** continues its 51st season with ***Symphonic II: Connections*** on Sunday, April 2, at 4 p.m. at Zellerbach Hall. Led by **Music Director Joseph Young**, ***Connections*** explores friendships old and new, and pays tribute to places and people that inspire connections made through music. Pianist **Lara Downes**, a true champion of long-forgotten and diverse voices, will join Berkeley Symphony to perform a pair of works for piano and orchestra by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, highlighting the lifelong musical partnership and deep friendship between the two. The symphonic concert will also include *Mariachitlán* by Juan Pablo Contreras and Edward Elgar's "Enigma" Variations. Tickets (\$15–90) are available now online at [berkeleysymphony.org](http://berkeleysymphony.org) or by calling the box office at 510.841.2800.

"This concert is about friends – the ones we make, the ones we cherish, the ones we miss," says **Joseph Young, Music Director of Berkeley Symphony**. "When Lara and I first worked together

last year, we became fast friends and immediately looked for opportunities to ‘play’ together. She introduced me to Ellington and Strayhorn’s connection—their close friendship and one could hardly make music without the other. And of course, *Enigma* is Elgar’s ode to his friends. We’re celebrating those connections, both personal and musical, on the corner and in the concert hall, because they are at the heart of our community.”

Duke Ellington once referred to Strayhorn as “My right arm, my left arm, and all the eyes in the back of my head.” Lara Downes will highlight these connections first with Ellington’s “New World A-Comin,” a rhapsody that was first established as a one-movement piano concerto. Downes will then bring “A Lovesome Thing: Billy Strayhorn Suite,” arranged by seven-time Grammy nominated composer Chris Walden to Zellerbach Hall. With Downes, audiences will experience the classical influences and inflections at the heart of Strayhorn’s work. The dynamic suite pays tribute to the decades-long collaboration with Ellington, who was Strayhorn’s mentor and colleague, who co-wrote numerous songs.

Co-commissioners of “A Lovesome Thing: Billy Strayhorn Suite” are Boston Pops, Brevard Music Center, Saratoga Performing Arts Center with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Berkeley Symphony, South Carolina Philharmonic, Toledo Symphony Orchestra, and Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Adds Lara Downes, "It's wonderful to be back in Berkeley, where I studied piano as a child, for this exciting collaboration with Joseph and the Berkeley Symphony. These works by Ellington and Strayhorn explore themes of love, peace, equality and freedom - the possibility of a better world. These are musical voices that are essential to the American canon, expressing a powerful vision of the American promise. I'm thrilled to connect with the Berkeley community to share our own hopes for a new world to come,"

*Connections* will transport audiences to Jalisco, Mexico; the birthplace of Juan Pablo Contreras and the origin of mariachi music. *Mariachitlán* is an energetic homage that highlights traditional mariachi rhythms, accompanied by original melodies. Rounding out the evening of celebrating relationships, Elgar’s theme and fourteen variations are sketches of friends—full of admiration, deep seriousness, and humor. Each variation is a reflection of an individual, immortalizing their connection and friendship.

In addition, audiences will be able to lend their voices to *Connections* with [I Believe](#), a community transformation initiative from Lara Downes. "I Believe" asks young people to share their answers to the question, “What do you believe in?,” contributing their voices to a nationwide “Credo” for our time and a vision for the future. Lara will make a special appearance with her program [I Believe](#) at Longfellow Middle School on **Friday, March 31**. All **Berkeley Unified School District** (BUSD) students will then have the opportunity to attend *Connections* 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>.

Berkeley Symphony will host a special evening of music and dialogue with ***Intermezzo: New World A Comin'*** at Freight and Salvage on Thursday, March 23 at 6:30 p.m.. Lara Downes will be joined in conversation with composers **Jimmy López Bellido** and **Iván Enrique Rodríguez**. Musical interludes will be performed by Downes and Berkeley Symphony musicians, offering an up-close look at the upcoming *Connections* concert. The event is free, but registration is required through <https://bit.ly/IntermezzoRSVP>.

### **ABOUT LARA DOWNES**

Pianist Lara Downes is an iconoclast and trailblazer whose dynamic work as a sought-after performer, a Billboard Chart-topping recording artist, media personality, producer, curator, and arts advocate positions her as a cultural visionary on the national arts scene.

Ms. Downes' creative roadmap seeks inspiration from the legacies of history, family, and collective memory, excavating the broad landscape of American music to create a series of acclaimed performance and recording projects that serve as gathering spaces for her listeners to find common ground and shared experience. Lara's summer 2021 projects include appearances and residencies with the Ravinia, Oregon Bach, Newport, and Brevard festivals, and the release of her upcoming album *New Day Begun*, a musical celebration of heritage, a cry for freedom, a call to action, and a promise to the next generation.

Ms. Downes is the creator and curator of the Rising Sun Music series, producer and host of the NPR Music show *AMPLIFY* with Lara Downes, and Resident Artist for the KDFC/KUSC radio network. She is the inaugural Artist Citizen in Residence for the Manhattan School of Music. Her work has been supported by the Mellon Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Sphinx Organization, and Classical Recording Foundation Award, among others. She is an Artist Ambassador for Headcount, a non-partisan organization that uses the power of music to register voters and promote participation in democracy.

### **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.

###

**CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:**

**Symphonic II: Connections**

Sunday, April 2, 2023 at 4 p.m. at Zellerbach Hall

**Featuring Lara Downes, piano**

**Juan Pablo Contreras:** *Mariachitlán*

**Duke Ellington:** *New World A-Comin*

**Billy Strayhorn arranged by Chris Walden:** "A Lovesome Thing: Billy Strayhorn Suite"  
co-commission

**Edward Elgar:** "Enigma" Variations