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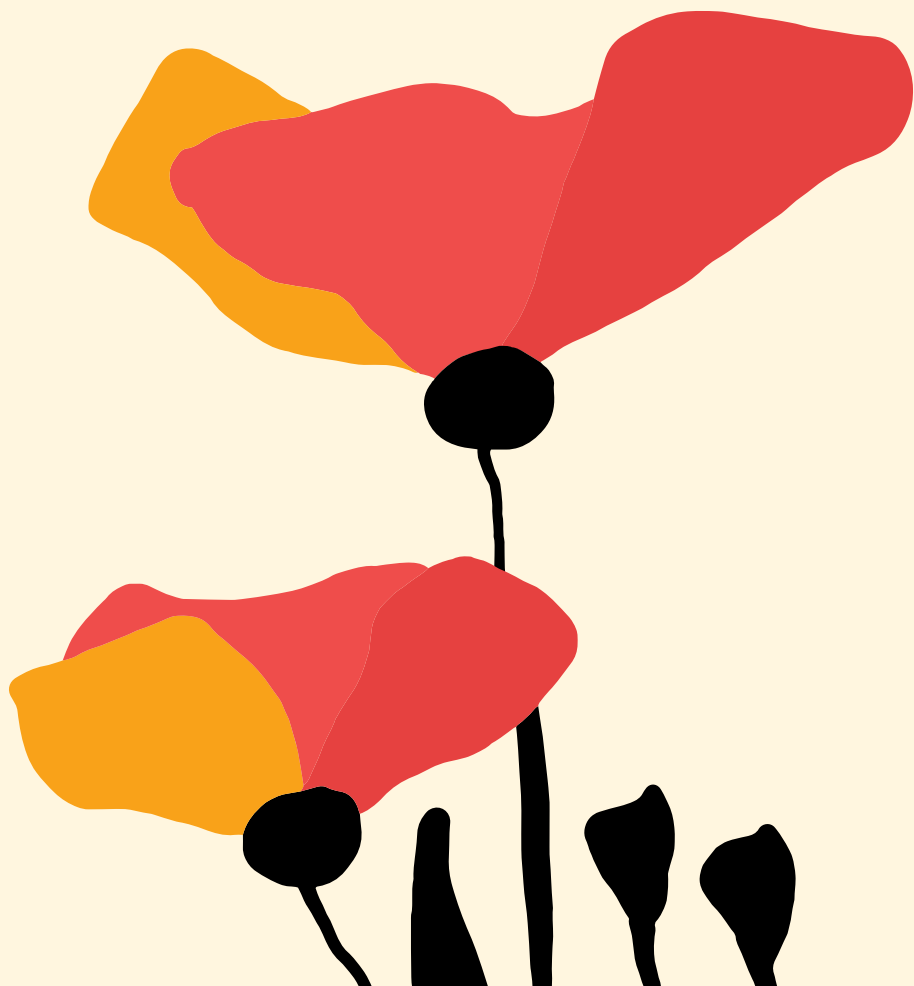
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BERKELEY

MING LUKE, guest conductor

LAQUITA MITCHELL, soprano

JUAN PABLO CONTRERAS | RICHARD STRAUSS

MISSY MAZZOLI | DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH





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Berkeley Symphony 25/26 Season

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Message from the Executive Director

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Welcome to *Worlds Beyond*!

Today's concert celebrates the spirit of exploration that defines both Berkeley and its Symphony—like our namesake city, we embrace imagination and curiosity that carry us toward new possibilities in sound and expression.

We're thrilled to welcome Ming Luke to the podium. As our Director of Education for nearly 20 years, Ming has inspired thousands of young musicians through Berkeley Symphony's *Music in the Schools* program. His commitment to innovation and his devotion to enriching our community embodies everything we value as an orchestra.

Worlds Beyond invites us to imagine what's possible when creativity knows no boundaries. The works you'll hear tonight reach outward — across cultures, across time, and into the unknown — reminding us that music has always been a bridge between people and ideas.

We are particularly excited to share with you this concert's opening piece, *Alma Monarca*. We co-commissioned this piece alongside our sister orchestras ROCO, Chicago Sinfonietta, and the Fresno Philharmonic; we are delighted to present it for you tonight and to welcome composer Juan Pablo Contreras into our audience.

Thank you for joining us on this journey beyond the day-to-day, and for sustaining Berkeley Symphony's role as a vibrant force in our city's cultural life. I hope you enjoy the performance!

Yours truly,



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guest artists following the concert!



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Julia Churchill,

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Emanuela Nikiforova,

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Sarah Elert

Lisa Zadek

Erica Ward

Monika Gruber

Annie Li

Violin II

Dan Flanagan, *Principal*

Mijung Kim, *Assistant Principal*

Stephanie Bibbo

Karsten Windt

Larisa Kopylovsky

Ann Eastman

Viola

Jacob Joseph , *Principal**

Darcy Rindt *Assistant Principal**

Alex Volonts

Lisa Ponton

Paula Karolak

Peter Liepman

Cello

Carol Rice, *Principal*

Stephanie Wu, *Assistant Principal*

Isaac Pastor-Chermak

David Wishnia

Peter Bedrossian

Ken Johnson

Bass

Michel Taddei, *Principal*

Alden Cohen, *Assistant Principal**

David Horn

Flute

Bethanne Walker, *Principal**

Janet Maestre Principal Flute Chair

Lance Suzuki

Sarah Holzman

Oboe

Laura Griffiths, *Principal**

Deborah Shidler Principal Oboe Chair

Bennie Cottone

Clarinet

Roman Fukshansky, *Principal*

Bruce Foster

Bass Clarinet

Bruce Foster

Bassoon

Carla Wilson, *Principal*

Ravinder Sehgal

Contrabassoon

Jarrat Rossini

Horn

Craig Hansen, *Principal**

Tate Wadsworth

Patrick Jankowski

Richard Hall

Tom Reicher, *Assistant Principal*

Trumpet

Charles Ryan, *Principal**

Kale Cumings

Trombone

Chase Waterbury, *Principal**

Kathleen G. Henschel Chair

Craig Bryant

Kurt Patzner

Tuba

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Timpani

Kevin Neuhoﬀ, *Principal*

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Today's Program

Ming Luke *Conductor*

Juan Pablo Contrera *Alma Monarca**

Richard Strauss *Four Last Songs*
Laquita Mitchell *soprano*

Intermission

Missy Mazzoli *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)*

Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony No. 9 in E-flat major, Op. 70
I. Allegro
II. Moderato
III. Presto
IV. Largo
V. Allegretto

**Alma Monarca was co-commissioned by ROCO (lead commissioner),
Berkeley Symphony, Chicago Sinfonietta, and Fresno Philharmonic*

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Program Notes

Juan Pablo Contreras

Born in 1987 in Guadalajara, Mexico; currently resides in Los Angeles

Alma Monarca

Composed: 2024

First performance: November 2, 2024, at The Church of St. John the Divine in Houston, with JoAnn Falletta conducting the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra

Estimated length: 15 minutes

Scored for: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets (second doubling bass clarinet), bassoon, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets (second doubling B-flat trumpet), trombone, timpani, two percussionists, piano, harp, and strings

A composer equally at home in classical and folkloric idioms, Juan Pablo Contreras has become an increasingly prominent voice on U.S. orchestral stages. His music draws on the colors and rhythms of his native Mexico, fusing them with the energy of the concert hall. Berkeley Symphony previously performed his work *Mariachitlán* in April 2023, marking an early connection with the composer. Born in 1987 in Guadalajara, Contreras studied in the U.S. with the late Daniel Catán and now serves on the faculty of USC's Thornton School of Music.

In addition to composing, Contreras founded the Orquesta Latino Mexicana,

an ensemble he founded in 2021 to champion music by Latinx composers. He received the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Music in 2023; the award honors immigrant contributions to the arts in the United States. Contreras became the first Mexico-born composer to sign a recording contract with Universal Music.

Contreras describes *Alma Monarca* (*Monarch Soul*) as a “sonic remembrance” of his family’s celebrations of Día de los Muertos (“Day of the Dead”) in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán—a town on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro in western Mexico, long regarded as the heart of this tradition. It was there that the composer’s grandfather, Eduardo, was born. “When I was young,” he recalls, “my family and I would visit his hometown to take part in the Día de los Muertos festivities.” The work unfolds as a musical journey prompted by strongly etched childhood memories.

In the Composer’s Words

Contreras provides this commentary on the piece: “On the morning of November 1, my family would arrive and explore the town, where the sound of brass bands rehearsing for the evening filled the air. Around noon, we would take a small boat to the nearby island of Janitzio. We’d go to church and then spend the afternoon singing with mariachis and enjoying delicious food.

As midnight drew near, we would gather at the cemetery to visit the graves of our loved ones. The local *Purépechas*,

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an Indigenous group from Michoacán, spoke of a legend that said that when someone died, their soul would transform into a monarch butterfly on *Día de los Muertos*, starting their migration to heaven at midnight on November 2.

My siblings and I would eagerly watch the sky, hoping to catch a glimpse of our great-grandparents' 'monarch souls' fluttering nearby as the clock struck midnight—and we always did! This magical memory, which marked the pinnacle of our *Día de los Muertos* adventure, inspired me to title this work *Alma Monarca*."

Richard Strauss

Born on June 11, 1864, in Munich, Kingdom of Bavaria (then part of the German Confederation); died on September 8, 1949, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Four Last Songs

Composed: 1948

First performance: May 22, 1950, in London, with Kirsten Flagstad as the soloist and Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra

Estimated length: 23 minutes

Scored for: three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, harp, strings, and solo soprano

When he composed *Four Last Songs* in 1948, Richard Strauss was an octogenarian in temporary exile in Switzerland, still reeling from the collapse of the world that had shaped him. The devastation of the Second World War left him profoundly disillusioned; yet in these songs, his final completed works, he sought a kind of counter-spell to despair. They are an act of reconciliation—with life, art, and the woman with whom he had shared both.

Pauline de Ahna, the daughter of a Bavarian general, had been a celebrated soprano whose voice, according to critic Eduard Hanslick, “shone out like a ray of bright, warm sunlight over this battlefield.” She met Strauss in 1887, when he was captivated enough by her singing to become her teacher and accompanist. They married in 1894 and remained together for more than half a century. Their marriage inspired both gossip and admiration—fueled by anecdotes of Pauline’s outbursts—but biographer Michael Kennedy noted that “whatever others thought about their relationship, they themselves were snugly secure.” The *Four Last Songs* are in many ways Strauss’ musical farewell to her.

Strauss composed “Im Abendrot” (“In the Twilight”) to a poem by Joseph von Eichendorff and three others—“Frühling” (“Spring”), “September,” and “Beim Schlafengehen” (“While Going to Sleep”)—to texts by Hermann Hesse, who had recently won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Written in the summer of 1948 and orchestrated the following year, these four meditations on aging and renewal trace a gentle arc from the awakening of spring to the stillness of evening. The published order (Hesse’s

three poems followed by “Im Abendrot”) creates a progression from the perspective of late life—gazing back toward youth’s vitality—to serene acceptance.

Hesse’s verses, with their allegories of nature’s cycles, echo Eichendorff’s Romantic imagery. For Strauss, they offered an escape from postwar desolation and a final chance to inhabit the late-Romantic language he had helped define. The orchestration glows with transparency rather than grandeur. “Frühling” opens in ecstatic remembrance of passion; “September” shimmers with pastoral delicacy before a horn solo bids farewell to the fading season—an homage to Strauss’ father, Franz Strauss, one of the most famous horn players of the 19th century. Franz had served as principal horn of the Munich Court Orchestra and was a staunch conservative who disapproved of Wagner’s music (not to mention of his son’s early modernism).

In “Beim Schlafengehen,” a soaring violin solo precedes the last stanza, mirroring the voice as it floats “in the enchanted circle of the night,” a moment of transcendence that bridges dream and release. And in “Im Abendrot,” the singular “I” becomes a shared “we.” The lovers, weary yet united, contemplate the setting sun and ask quietly, “Is this perhaps—Death?” Strauss responds with a luminous recollection from his early tone poem *Death and Transfiguration*—a private signal that his own artistic journey has come full circle. The long orchestral postlude, with its trilling larks dissolving into silence, becomes a benediction: love and art enduring beyond the confines of life.

What to listen for

Strauss distills a lifetime of craft into simplicity and clarity. The radiant soprano line is cushioned by such orchestral textures that never overwhelm, balancing transparency and warmth. Listen for how the elegiacally beautiful solo passages for horn in “September” and for

violin in “Beim Schlafengehen” serve as emotional mirrors to the human voice. In the lengthy orchestral postlude to “Im Abendrot,” Strauss seems to expand time itself, as a pair of larks rise into the darkening air—their fading motion a final image of release at the threshold of eternity.

Four Last Songs

**Texts in German by Hermann Hesse (1-3)
and Joseph Eichendorff (4)**

Translations by Emily Ezust

1. Frühling

In dämmrigen Grüften
Träumte ich lang
Von deinen Bäumen und blauen Lüften,
Von deinem Duft und Vogelsang.

Nun liegst du erschlossen
In Gleiß und Zier,
Von Licht übergossen
Wie ein Wunder vor mir.

Du kennst mich wieder,
Du lockst mich zart,
Es zittert durch all meine Glieder
Deine selige Gegenwart.

2. September

Der Garten trauert,
Kühl sinkt in die Blumen der Regen.
Der Sommer schauert
Still seinem Ende entgegen.

Golden tropft Blatt um Blatt
Nieder vom hohen Akazienbaum.

1. Spring

In dusky vaults
I have long dreamt
of your trees and blue skies,
of your scents and the songs of birds.

Now you lie revealed
in glistening splendour,
flushed with light,
like a wonder before me.

You know me again,
you beckon tenderly to me;
all of my limbs quiver
from your blissful presence!

2. September

The garden is mourning,
the rain sinks coolly into the flowers.
Summer shudders
as it meets its end.

Leaf upon leaf drops golden
down from the lofty acacia.

Sommer lächelt erstaunt und matt
In den sterbenden Gartentraum.

Lange noch bei den Rosen
Bleibt er stehen, sehnt sich nach Ruh.
Langsam tut er die großen
Müdigewordnen Augen zu.

3. Beim Schlafengehen

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht,
Soll mein sehnliches Verlangen
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.
Hände, laßt von allem Tun,
Stirn vergiß du alles Denken,
Alle meine Sinne nun
Wollen sich in Schlummer senken.
Und die Seele unbewacht
Will in freien Flügen schweben,
Um im Zauberkreis der Nacht
Tief und tausendfach zu leben.

4. Im Abendrot

Wir sind durch Not und Freude
Gegangen Hand in Hand,
Vom Wandern ruhen wir
Nun überm stillen Land.
Rings sich die Thäler neigen,
Es dunkelt schon die Luft,
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen
Nachträumend in den Duft.
Tritt her, und laß sie schwirren,
Bald ist es Schlafenszeit,
Daß wir uns nicht verirren
In dieser Einsamkeit.
O weiter stiller Friede!
So tief im Abendrot,
Wie sind wir wandermüde—
Ist dies etwa der Tod?

Summer smiles, astonished and weak,
in the dying garden dream.

For a while still by the roses
it remains standing, yearning for peace.
Slowly it closes its large
eyes grown weary.

3. While going to sleep

Now that the day has made me so tired,
my dearest longings shall
be accepted kindly by the starry night
like a weary child.
Hands, cease your activity,
head, forget all of your thoughts;
all my senses now
will sink into slumber.
And my soul, unobserved,
will float about on untrammelled wings
in the enchanted circle of the night,
living a thousandfold more deeply.

4. In the twilight

Through adversity and joy
We've gone hand in hand;
We rest now from our wanderings
Upon this quiet land.
Around us slope the valleys,
The skies grow dark;
Two larks alone are just climbing,
As if after a dream, into the scented air.
Come here and let them whirl past,
For it will soon be time to rest;
We do not wish to get lost
In this solitude.
O wide, quiet peace,
So deep in the red dusk...
How weary we are of our travels—
Is this perhaps—Death?

Missy Mazzoli

Born on October 17, 1980, in Lansdale, Pennsylvania; currently resides in Brooklyn, NY

Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)

Composed: 2014; rev. 2016

First performance: April 14, 2014, with John Adams conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic (chamber version); orchestral version was premiered on February 12, 2016, by the Boulder Philharmonic

Estimated length: 9 minutes

Scored for: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons (second doubling harmonicas in A and C), two horns (second doubling harmonica in A), 2 trumpets (second doubling harmonica in C), two trombones (second doubling harmonica in F), tuba, two percussionists (including boombox with sound file), piano (doubling synthesizer: organ sound), and strings

Missy Mazzoli describes *Sinfonia (for Orbiting Spheres)* as “music in the shape of a solar system,” in which the orchestra becomes a set of interlocking orbits. First commissioned and premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the piece established Mazzoli as a distinctive voice in contemporary orchestral writing. Since its premiere, she has emerged as one of the most sought-after composers of her generation across concert hall and opera house, earning *Musical America’s* Composer of the Year title in 2022. Two years later, Mazzoli received the New York Philharmonic’s Marie-Josée Kravis Prize for New Music, which recognizes “extraordinary artistic

endeavor in the field of new music” and includes a major commission for the Philharmonic’s 2026/27 season. She is also at work on a Metropolitan Opera commission based on George Saunders’ *Lincoln in the Bardo*—the 2017 Man Booker Prize-winning experimental novel—scheduled for 2026.

Indeed, Mazzoli is particularly acclaimed as a leading American opera composer. *Opera News* hailed *Breaking the Waves* (2016), her adaptation of the Lars von Trier film created with longtime librettist Royce Vavrek, as “among the best 21st-century American operas yet.” *The Listeners* (2021), her haunting exploration of the power of cults, received its world premiere at the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in 2022, with subsequent productions at Opera Philadelphia (U.S. premiere) and Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Though she grew up in a non-musical family in small-town Pennsylvania, Mazzoli began composing around the age of ten. She later studied with David Lang at the Yale School of Music and with the late Louis Andriessen at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague. Among her most formative influences, she cites Meredith Monk, with whom she worked during her twenties as an assistant.

Mazzoli’s wide-ranging curiosity—spanning theater, literature, visual art, and film—fuels a language uniquely her own. Minimalist and post-minimalist idioms shape music marked by a fascination for striking colors and inventive blends of instrumental sound. The novelist and critic Garth Greenwell has described her work as “of intense drama, pungently gestural.”

Several of Mazzoli’s orchestral works reflect her fascination with Baroque forms and ideas reimaged through a contemporary lens. *Sinfonia (for Orbiting*

Spheres) plays on the double meaning of *sinfonia*—both the Baroque term for an orchestral prelude (whether to an opera, an oratorio, or a suite) and the medieval name for the string instrument now known as the hurdy-gurdy. As Mazzoli explains, the latter produces “constant, wheezing drones that are cranked out under melodies played on an attached keyboard.”

What to listen for

In the opening passage, which unfolds with stately grace, the strings introduce two of the piece’s main gestures: swooping glissandi and a stylized ornamental turn. These ideas overlap in fluid phrases as

the orchestral timbres begin to swirl and shift kaleidoscopically, with a shimmer of harmonicas, quickening percussion, and bright flashes from the brass. The stately music eventually returns in a fade-out, made more alien by the addition of a pre-recorded track.

Expanding on her metaphor of *Sinfonia* as a solar system, Mazzoli characterizes it as “a collection of rococo loops that twist around each other within a larger orbit . . . a piece that churns and roils, that inches close to the listener, only to leap away at breakneck speed, in the process transforming the ensemble into a makeshift hurdy-gurdy, flung recklessly into space.”

Dmitri Shostakovich

Born on September 25, 1906, in Saint Petersburg, Russian Empire; died on August 9, 1975, in Moscow, USSR

Symphony No. 9 in E-flat major, Op. 70

Composed: 1945

First performance: November 3, 1945, in Moscow, with Yevgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra

Estimated length: 26 minutes

Scored for: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle), and strings

In 1942, Dmitri Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony (*Leningrad*) became

a worldwide emblem of defiance against Nazi aggression. That summer, he even appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine—shown in firefighter’s helmet and uniform amid the smoking ruins of his besieged city—hailed as the composer-hero of Leningrad. The work’s vast scale and martial power fixed in the Soviet imagination a model of symphonic grandeur and patriotic triumph.

And so, in the wake of that epic—the *Leningrad*, which seemed to take on the universe—Shostakovich had already dared to question its paradigm of heroic triumphalism with his Eighth Symphony (1943), a grim meditation on loss and devastation. While still in official favor thanks to the success of the Seventh, he announced a forthcoming Ninth Symphony that would celebrate the Red Army’s victory over Hitler.

With his cautious public statements, Shostakovich fed expectations of a vast choral symphony in the manner of

Beethoven's Ninth—an official musical monument to the war that would, in the prescribed language of the day, “honor with reverence the memory of the brave heroes who have died and glorify the heroes of our army for eternity.”

But when the Ninth Symphony was unveiled on November 3, 1945, sharing the bill with Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, the result confounded everyone. Among Shostakovich's shortest symphonies, the Ninth unfolds in five concise movements, scored for a relatively small orchestra that emphasizes bright, transparent—and even comic—textures.

“Whether intimidated by the possibility of ‘immodest analogies’ with Beethoven's Ninth, oppressed by the widespread anticipation of a ‘Victory Symphony,’ or simply dissatisfied with what he had written,” writes biographer Laurel Fay, “Shostakovich dropped work on the announced project.” In its place he produced a new work that abandoned “all pretensions to gravity and majesty.”

Shostakovich himself said only that “a transparent, pellucid, and bright mood predominates.” Audiences initially responded warmly—the final three movements were even encores at the Leningrad premiere. Shostakovich thus escaped the so-called “curse of the Ninth”—which is to say, the superstition, articulated by Schoenberg after Mahler's death, that no composer after Beethoven could get past writing a ninth symphony and live to tell the tale.

But Soviet critics dismissed the Ninth as “grotesque,” trivial, and inappropriate for the times—above all because Shostakovich seemed to evoke “entertainment” music. Ironically, Soviet doctrine betrayed a bias inherited from bourgeois aesthetics: the belief in a strict divide

between popular entertainment and uplifting “serious” art. What unsettled them was that Shostakovich's wit and irony could make even “harmless” music feel subversive.

Curiously, a similar charge had been leveled against Gustav Mahler's Fourth Symphony, which at its 1901 premiere was accused by some critics of mocking the symphonic tradition itself—of allowing irony and parody to intrude upon the genre's perceived loftiness in a manner unworthy of a “serious” composer. Shostakovich admired Mahler deeply as a kindred spirit who understood that irony could carry truth as powerfully as tragedy.

What to listen for

Despite the pressure to produce “heroic” music, Shostakovich crafted one of his most concise and finely balanced symphonies, its score graced by chamber music-like intimacy. The opening Allegro sparkles with Haydnesque wit and classical clarity. An intermezzo in character, the Moderato sings with disarming lyricism, occasionally evoking Tchaikovsky. The whirlwind Presto, a hyper-condensed scherzo, packs bursts of hectic energy and a toccata-like episode for solo trumpet into its brief span.

This leads without pause into the Largo, whose brassy, Wagnerian gravity seems to be questioned by a dark bassoon soliloquy that turns suddenly playful, finding a path directly into the light-hearted finale. With quick-fire exchanges among the winds and hints of the circus airs, Shostakovich closes the Ninth as if laughing in the face of all solemn expectation.

Program notes © 2025 Thomas May

Conductor Ming Luke

photo by Rachel Backer



With the “energy, creativity and charisma not seen since Leonard Bernstein” and “vibrant,” “mind-blowing,” and “spectacular” conducting, Ming Luke is a versatile conductor that has excited audiences around the world. Highlights include conducting the Bolshoi Orchestra in Moscow, performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella* at the Kennedy Center, *Swan Lake* at the Teatro Real in Madrid, his English debut at Sadler’s Wells with Birmingham Royal, conducting Dvorak’s *Requiem* in Dvorak Hall in Prague, recording scores for a Coppola film, multiple Asian cultural programs with the San Francisco Symphony, and over a hundred and fifty performances at the San Francisco War Memorial with San Francisco Ballet. Luke has soloed as a pianist with Pittsburgh Symphony, Sacramento

Philharmonic, and San Francisco Ballet, and he currently serves as Music Director for the Las Cruces Symphony, Merced Symphony, and Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra; Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Nashville Ballet, Education Conductor and Director for Berkeley Symphony; and Principal Guest Conductor for the San Francisco Ballet. Long time critic Allan Ulrich of the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, “Ming Luke delivered the best live theater performance I’ve ever heard of [Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*]” and in 2016 Luke’s *War Requiem* was named best choral performance of 2016 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Luke is proud to cultivate a dynamic career in both symphonic and theatrical conducting, and has conducted hundreds of opera and ballet performances worldwide. He has performed and collaborated with some of the world’s leading singers, including Sylvia McNair, Christian Van Horn, Nicolas Phan, Kiera Duffy, Erie Mills, Kevin Short, and Monica Yunus, to name a few. Sylvia McNair remarked that “Ming is a very talented musician and conductor . . . when Ming was in charge of something, anything, I knew I had no worries.” His recent performances with members of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra at Classical Tahoe were broadcast on PBS. Passionate about collaboration with dance companies and deepening the impact of movement to live music, Luke has collaborated with many of the world’s leading choreographers, including Mark Morris, Christopher Wheeldon, Justin



Peck, Alexei Ratmansky, Cathy Marston, Benjamin Millepied, David Dawson, and more. Luke has guested with Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet, New York City Ballet Orchestra, Cincinnati Ballet, Nashville Symphony/Ballet, San Diego Ballet and others and conducted l'Orchestre Prométhée in Paris as part of San Francisco Ballet's residency with Les Etés de la Danse. Famed dancer Natalia Makarova stated, "Ming has a mixture of pure musicality and a sensitivity to needs of the dancers, which are such rare qualities."

Luke has been recognized nationally for his work with music education and has designed and conducted over 150 education concerts and programs with organizations such as Berkeley

Symphony, Houston Symphony, Sacramento Philharmonic, San Francisco Opera and others. Luke has served on grant panels for the National Endowment of the Arts and the Grants and Cultural Committee of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission. An exciting pops conductor, Luke has created and conducted a variety of pops concerts in many venues, from baseball stadiums, to picnics in the park with over 4,000 people in attendance, traditional concert halls and recording for Major League Baseball.

Ming Luke holds a Master of Fine Arts in Conducting from Carnegie Mellon University and a Bachelor of Music in Music Education and Piano Pedagogy from Westminster Choir College of Rider University.

Get to Know Ming Luke

How did you decide that you wanted to become a conductor?

Conducting is such a collaborative art—it's very fulfilling to connect all the musicians on stage around a single musical idea. I first started out playing piano. It's very gratifying to play full works by yourself, but I wanted to connect with other musicians as well.

Many of our audience members know you from your work with Berkeley Symphony's Music in the Schools program, or from your role as Music Director of the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra. What is special to you about Berkeley as a community?

Berkeley has a rather special view on music, the idea that music really should be for all. That means not only listening to it, but also expressing yourself through music as well. For the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra, that means that anybody can come sing with us, whether they've been singing in the SF Symphony Chorus for 20 years, or have never sung before. For the Music in the Schools Program, it's the idea that students, no matter how long they've been playing their instruments, they're still creating music from their sounds, they have a valid artistic voice.

You have a heart for working with singers—can you speak more about that?

The voice is our oldest instrument, in fact, scientists think that singing predates language. We communicate so much through our voices. Many instrumentalists try to emulate the voice—we convey such a range of color, phrasing, line with our voices.

Laquita Mitchell, our soprano soloist tonight, came to us at your recommendation. How did you get to know her?

I've known Laquita ever since our undergraduate years at Westminster Choir College. She is a consummate musician, equally comfortable with Beethoven and Strauss, Gershwin or gospel. She is somebody that truly embodies music.

In your opinion, what qualities make a good conductor?

First and foremost a conductor needs to be a collaborator and a communicator. It's essential that a conductor be a unifying force on the podium and able to connect to musicians and audiences alike. There's so much powerful and moving music out there—our goal should be to create memorable and transformative experiences for our audiences.

How do you spend your time outside of the concert hall?

I have three daughters that occupy quite a bit of time, whether it's just spending time with them or volunteering for their schools.

What excites you about working with Berkeley Symphony, on this program in particular?

This program is really going to showcase what Berkeley Symphony is capable of, an immense range of musical ideas and textures. From the serene timeless beauty of Strauss' *Four Last Songs*, to the bristling sarcasm of Shostakovich's *Ninth Symphony*, this concert requires a full palate of colors from the musicians, and it'll be wonderful to invite audiences to hear the full capabilities of our players.



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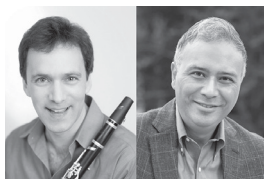


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Laquita Mitchell, *soprano*

Soprano Laquita Mitchell consistently earns acclaim on eminent international opera and concert stages worldwide, having recently been nominated for a GRAMMY® for her contribution as the soprano soloist in the world premiere of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec's *Sanctuary Road* at Carnegie Hall with Oratorio Society of New York. This season, she makes her long-awaited debut as Aida with Dayton Opera. Mitchell also joins California Symphony for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, Charleston Symphony for *Sanctuary Road*, the Bilkent Symphony in Turkey for a concert of American songs, and Austin Symphony to sing Bess in a concert production of *Porgy and Bess*.

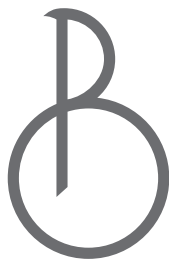
Last season, Mitchell returned to the role of Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro* with New Orleans Opera and Portland Opera and reprised her lauded performance of *Sanctuary Road* with Virginia Opera, Princeton Pro Musica, and the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park. In addition, Mitchell appeared in concert with Saint Thomas Church for Poulenc's *Stabat Mater*, Chattanooga Symphony for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, the Cleveland Orchestra for their community chamber concert series, the Waterbury Symphony for their performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 4, and Bard Summerscape to sing Verveine in Viardot's chamber opera *Le dernier sorcier*.

Previously, Mitchell reprised Julie in *Omar* with UNC Chapel Hill at Carolina Performing Arts—a role she created in the world premiere at the Spoleto Festival USA the previous season—and returned to the role of Josephine Baker in Cipullo's *Josephine with Music of Remembrance*. In concert, Mitchell performed Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* with Detroit Symphony and Lima Symphony, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Madison Symphony and Memphis Symphony, Mahler's Symphony No. 4 with Sarasota Orchestra, *Sanctuary Road* with the Vocal Arts Ensemble of Cincinnati and Chautauqua Symphony, Verdi's *Requiem* with Rhode Island Philharmonic and Buffalo Philharmonic, Tippet's *A Child of Our Time* with Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra, and Dett's *The Ordering of Moses* with the Cincinnati May Festival and the Bach Festival Society of Winter

Park. She sang Brahms' *Requiem* and a Bel Canto Gala with Albany Pro Musica; a Holiday Concert for the Princeton Symphony; Robinetta in On Site Opera's production of Rachel J. Peters' *Lesson Plan*; the title role in Tom Cipullo's *Josephine* for the New Orleans Opera and Opera Colorado, where it was presented alongside *The Promise of Living*, a concert program conceived by Mitchell.

Notable previous engagements include the role of Coretta Scott King in *I Dream* with Opera Grand Rapids, Toledo Opera, and Opera Carolina, Violetta in *La Traviata* with Opera Memphis, New York City Opera, and Edmonton Opera, and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* with Florentine Opera and Portland Opera. Recent concert engagements include the soprano solo in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Berkeley Symphony, Mahler's Symphony No. 2 with Missoula Symphony, and her return to the Philadelphia Orchestra to perform in their Academy Ball alongside Steve Martin, led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

In her compelling debut as Bess in *Porgy and Bess* with San Francisco Opera, *Opera News* said "Laquita Mitchell, in her first outing as Bess, dazzled the SFO audience with her purity of tone and vivid theatrical presence." She has since reprised the role with The Atlanta Opera, The Tanglewood Festival, Madison Symphony, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Toledo Opera, Springfield Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Santa Barbara Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, Sheboygan Symphony Orchestra, Traverse City Symphony, the Margaret Island Open-Air Theatre in Budapest for their summer festival, and as the season opener for the Energa Sopot Classic Festival with the Polish Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra. Additionally, PBS invited Mitchell to perform a solo recital including excerpts from *Porgy and Bess* with pianist Craig Terry for the Television Critics Association Press Tour in Los Angeles in preparation for the broadcast and DVD release of SFO's *Porgy and Bess*.



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In her role debut as Violetta in *La Traviata* with New York City Opera, *The Classical Review* labeled her “extraordinary,” in thanks to her “wide expressive range and big-hearted sound that contains just a hint of sexy smokiness. Her ‘Sempre libera’ was enlivened by a rhythmic clarity that made it seem almost danceable.”

Mitchell is an alumna of the Houston Grand Opera Studio, where she performed a variety of roles including stand-out performances in contemporary operas such as Orquidea in Daniel Catán’s *Salsipuedes* (world premiere), Myrrhine in Mark Adamo’s *Lysistrata* (world premiere), and The Water in Rachel Portman’s *The Little Prince* (world premiere) directed by Francesca Zambello and conducted by Patrick Summers. Mitchell was previously a member of San Francisco Opera’s world-renowned Merola Program. She then joined Wolf Trap Opera in performances as Alice Ford in Salieri’s *Falstaff*, and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*.

A native of New York City, Mitchell was a 2004 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions Grand Prize Winner and was awarded a Sara Tucker Award. She was also the First Prize Winner of the Wiener Kammeroper’s Hans Gabor Belvedere Competition, making her the first American to win this competition in more than twenty years. Additionally, Mitchell was the First Prize Winner of the Houston Grand Opera Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers. Mitchell holds a Master of Music degree and a Professional Studies Certificate from the Manhattan School of Music and completed undergraduate studies at Westminster Choir College.

photo by Angel Velázquez



Juan Pablo Contreras, *composer*

Three-time Latin GRAMMY®-nominated composer and conductor Juan Pablo Contreras (b. 1987, Guadalajara, Mexico) masterfully weaves Western classical and Mexican folk music into an exhilarating soundscape, crafting works with “orchestrations that bring [his] scores to splendid life” (*Los Angeles Times*).

His most popular orchestral piece, *Mariachitlán*, has garnered an impressive 120 performances worldwide, including a notable rendition by the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. Contreras is the founder and conductor of the Orquesta Latino Mexicana, a two-time Latin GRAMMY®-nominated ensemble based in Guadalajara. He is renowned as the first Mexican-born composer to sign a record deal with Universal Music, to serve as Sound Investment

Composer for Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and to win the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise.

Contreras' music has been performed by 60 major orchestras around the world, including Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and National Symphony Orchestra (USA), Extremadura Orchestra (Spain), Jalisco Philharmonic and Minería Symphony Orchestra (Mexico), Córdoba Symphony (Argentina), National Symphony of Colombia, and Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. His works have also been presented in prestigious venues such as Walt Disney Concert Hall, Carnegie Hall, and Hollywood Bowl. Contreras has received commissions from Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, California Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Tucson Symphony, ROCO, Berkeley Symphony, Fresno Philharmonic, Chicago Sinfonietta, Las Vegas Philharmonic, and Richmond Symphony.

He has been honored with numerous awards, including BMI William Schuman Prize, New Music USA's Amplifying Voices, Presser Music Award, Jalisco Orchestral Composition Prize, Brian Israel Prize, Arturo

Márquez Composition Contest, ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award, Dutch Harp Composition Contest, Nicolas Flagello Award, and two grants from Mexico's National Fund for Culture and the Arts. Contreras has also served as Composer-in-Residence with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in Santa Cruz, soundON Festival of Modern Music in San Diego, Cactus Pear Music Festival in San Antonio, and Concerts on the Slope in New York.

He earned degrees in composition from University of Southern California (DMA), Manhattan School of Music (MM), and California Institute of the Arts (BFA). His most influential teachers include Richard Danielpour, Daniel Catán, Nils Vigeland, Andrew Norman, and Donald Crockett. Contreras' music has been recorded on Universal Music Mexico, EMI, Albany Records, Epsa Music, and Urtext Digital Classics. With a deep commitment to championing the music of living composers, Contreras is the first Mexican-born member of New Music USA's Board of Directors. He lives in Los Angeles and currently teaches at the USC Thornton School of Music.



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Missy Mazzoli, *composer*

Recently deemed “one of the more consistently inventive, surprising composers now working in New York” (*NY Times*), “Brooklyn’s post-millennial Mozart” (*Time Out NY*), and praised for her “apocalyptic imagination” (Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*), Missy Mazzoli has had her music performed by the Kronos Quartet, LA Opera, eighth blackbird, the BBC Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, Scottish Opera, Opera Comique, Cincinnati Opera, the Detroit Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, the Minnesota Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Atlanta Symphony, the Sydney Symphony, and many others.

In 2018 she made history when she became one of the two first women (along with composer Jeanine Tesori) to be commissioned by the Metropolitan

Opera. That year she was also nominated for a GRAMMY® in the category of “Best Classical Composition” for her work *Vespers for Violin*, recorded by violinist Olivia De Prato.

Mazzoli served as the Mead Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from July 2018 to April 2021, and from 2012-2015 was Composer-in-Residence with Opera Philadelphia. She is currently on faculty as Composer in Residence with the Bard College Conservatory of Music and was previously on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music.

Her 2018 opera *Proving Up*, created with longtime collaborator librettist Royce Vavrek and based on a short story by Karen Russell, is a surreal commentary on the American dream. It was commissioned and premiered by Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha and Miller Theatre, and was deemed “harrowing . . . a true opera for its time” by the *Washington Post*. Her 2016 opera *Breaking the Waves*, commissioned by Opera Philadelphia and Beth Morrison Projects, was called “one of the best 21st-century American operas yet” by Opera News. *Breaking the Waves* received its European premiere at the 2019 Edinburgh Festival; future performances are planned at LA Opera, Houston Grand Opera, and the Adelaide Festival. Her latest opera, *The Listeners*, premiered in 2022 at the Norwegian National Opera and Opera Philadelphia. In 2016, Missy and composer Ellen Reid founded Luna Lab, a mentorship program for young female composers created in partnership with the Kaufman Music Center. Her works are published by G. Schirmer. missymazzoli.com



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Pre-Concert Talk

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Paul Drescher, *pre-concert talk* host

Paul Drescher is an internationally active composer noted for his ability to integrate diverse musical influences into his own coherent style. He pursues many forms of musical expression including experimental opera/music theater, chamber and orchestral composition, live instrumental electro-acoustic music, musical instrument invention, and scores for theater and

dance. A recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in Composition in 2006, he has received commissions from the Library of Congress, St Paul Chamber Orchestra, Spoleto Festival USA, Kronos Quartet, SF Symphony, SF Ballet, Present Music, Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, Brenda Way/ODC Dance and Chamber Music America. He has had his works performed at the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Festival d'Automne in Paris, the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, and the Minnesota Opera.

Recent works include *Global Moves* (2022) for the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, *Breathing at the Boundaries* (2020) created with Rinde Eckert, Alexander V. Nichols, Michael Palmer and the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company; *Crazy Eights & Fractured Symmetries*, commissioned and premiered by Berkeley Symphony in 2016; *Family Matters* (2014), a duo for TwoSense (cellist Ashley Bathgate and pianist Lisa Moore); and *Two Entwined* (2011), commissioned by pianist Sarah Cahill and premiered at the Spoleto Festival USA.

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About Berkeley Symphony

photo by Louis Bryant Photography



Founded by **Thomas Rarick** in 1971, Berkeley Symphony has become an integral part of the Bay Area classical music scene. The orchestra, known for its blend of classical and contemporary music, has grown into a respected institution that both honors their roots and embraces innovation. Starting in 1978, under the visionary leadership of Music Director **Kent Nagano** (1978-2009), Berkeley Symphony gained an international reputation for their adventurous programming, becoming known for premiering the music of international composers and showcasing young local talents.

Berkeley Symphony continued to make history in the intervening years, welcoming **Joana Carneiro** as their third Music Director in 2009, followed by the dynamic **Joseph Young** in 2018. His tenure, which concluded in 2025, strengthened the symphony's commitment to innovative programming, award-winning educational initiatives led by Education Director **Ming Luke**, and vibrant community engagement programs like Students at the Symphony. Now, looking ahead, Berkeley Symphony is entering an exciting new chapter—one rooted in curiosity, creativity, and a deep connection to community.

Music in the Schools



Crafted in partnership with Berkeley Unified School District, Berkeley Symphony's Music in the Schools (MITS) program provides a comprehensive and inclusive music curriculum to over 4,700 Berkeley public school students each year and is recognized by the League of American Orchestras as one of the country's top music education programs. Ming Luke has served as the Education Director since 2007 and continues to bring joy, laughter, and music to the students in the MITS Program.

Launched in Fall 2022, the Elevate initiative is a series of additional support opportunities to respond to two major transition points where BIPOC student participation and engagement drops more significantly than in other populations: the beginning of fourth grade, when students select instruments in band and orchestra, and high school seniors interested in music as a college path and career.

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