2014-15 HAL & JEANETTE SEGERSTROM FAMILY FOUNDATION CLASSICAL SERIES

Performance begins at 8 p.m. Preview talk with Alan Chapman begins at 7 p.m.

JOHN NELSON • CONDUCTOR | BARRY DOUGLAS • PIANO

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)
Overture to Oberon, J. 306

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 73, Emperor
Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso
Rondo: Allegro

Barry Douglas

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Symphony No. 2 in C Major, Op. 61
Sostenuto assai - Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Adagio expressivo
Allegro molto vivace

The Friday, May 8, concert is generously sponsored by the Pacific Symphony League.
The Saturday, May 9, concert is generously sponsored by Sakura and William Wang.

The Saturday, May 9, performance is being recorded for broadcast on Sunday, July 19, at 7 p.m. on Classical KUSC.
Overture to Oberon

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, timpani, strings
Performance time: 9 minutes

Background

Born in 1786 in Eutin, Germany, the opera composer Carl Maria von Weber was—with his compatriot Giacomo Meyerbeer—a leader in the development of the aptly termed “grand opera” form. These epically scaled, spectacular music-dramas were the most elegantly grandiose entertainments of their day.

Weber was a musical child whose father, with a backward glance to Leopold Mozart’s successful exploitation of the young Amadeus, sent his son to study with instructors including Michael Haydn. It was under Haydn’s tutelage that Weber published his first composition, a suite of six fugues, at age 12. But for the most part, Weber was a self-invented man who led a short, rollicking life. The evidence of his intellectual brilliance is impressive: He wrote music journalism, did early research on European folk music, and learned the highly technical skill of lithographic printing so he could engrave his own works.

Through his early teenage years, Weber was precociously writing operas that seemed stage-worthy until they were produced. Despite their failure, these operas continued to hone his craft, and widening professional connections resulted in his appointment as music director at Breslau while he was still in his late teens. Out of his depth but still learning, he resigned his Breslau post in favor of a position as music director to Duke Eugen of Wurttemberg. The turning point came in 1807, when Weber—by now only 21—earned prominence in an influential circle of leaders in the emerging Romantic movement in the arts and music. Here he met Meyerbeer and was recognized for his excellence as a pianist and guitarist.

Though Weber’s passionate nature never cooled, from this time onward it was tempered by a sense of realism and professional discipline. He was happily married and was the most passionate advocate for a German national operatic style, working feverishly for the cause both as a composer and as the director of German opera in Dresden. (A rival company produced Italian operas.)

Weber’s continued representation in the opera house and concert hall rests upon three important operas that he composed during the years before his premature death at age 39: Der Freischütz, Euryanthe, and Oberon. Dating from 1821, the first of these—Der Freischütz—is considered the first great Romantic German opera. The third, Oberon, was commissioned by Covent Garden for production in 1826. Against doctor’s orders, Weber travelled to London to help bring it to the stage, even learning English for this purpose. The opera’s premiere was a tremendous success, but Weber paid a terrible price: Shortly before the scheduled date of his return trip to Germany, he was found dead in the lavish guest quarters provided to him by his host, Sir George Smart.

Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra, “Emperor”

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings, solo piano
Performance time: 38 minutes

Background

Who put the “bomp” in the “bomp bah bomp bah bomp?”

Who put the Emperor Napoleon in Beethoven’s “Emperor” Concerto?

Without question, Beethoven felt passionately about the philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment, and most especially about human freedom. For better or worse, we associate much of his music with Napoleon, whose challenge to the established order in Europe inspired hope—but ultimately disillusionment—in the composer. But whether or not we can justify a connection between them, Beethoven’s “Emperor” Concerto will forever be linked to Napoleon. As author Andrew Schartmann notes in his Myth and Misinterpretation in Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto, it is clear that Napoleon was the emperor listeners had in mind when the Fifth became associated with that highly charged word. Whether this nickname is appropriate is another matter. “There is no question that the popular title originated from extra-musical associations not sanctioned by the composer,” says Schartmann, who calls the term misleading. “It can only be hoped that performer[s] do not base their interpretations on these unfounded anecdotes,” he says.

Perhaps. But the anecdotes are inescapable, and there are good reasons why they seem tied to the notion of the common man versus an imperial ideal. Beethoven was among the many thinkers who first believed that as liberator of Europe from monarchies, Napoleon was a champion of human freedom who betrayed this noble cause by arrogating the power and privileges of monarchy to himself. The composer famously intended to dedicate his “Eroica” Symphony—which, like the “Emperor” Concerto, bears a key of E-flat—to Napoleon, but furiously “undedicated” it in manuscript.

There are also good reasons why the concerto form is especially well suited to Beethoven’s philosophical concerns. Its most basic formal constraint—the one (soloist) versus the many (orchestra)—provides an ideal framework for exploring the individual’s relationship with society. As with his symphonies, Beethoven’s piano concertos pushed the scope and heft of the form as he worked his way through musical
NOTES

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

ideas. Beethoven greatly admired Mozart’s piano concertos, with their constant sense of spontaneity and delight, but did not pursue these qualities in his own concertos. Instead, they get progressively weightier, until in the fifth we hear some of the noblest music ever written. For all its beauty, “delight” is not the prevailing effect; as we listen, we have the impression that all of human dignity is at stake.

The concerto’s number, though known to all, is rarely mentioned. It is simply “the Emperor Concerto,” a nickname that was probably supplied by Beethoven’s friend and publisher Johann Cramer. No other piano concerto is more beloved, and none more powerfully combines nobility of expression with sublime beauty. Beethoven completed it in 1811, about one year before his Symphony No. 7.

For lovers of the pianist’s art, the “Emperor” Concerto is perhaps the cornerstone of fandom. Including it in one’s personal repertory is almost mandatory for most top-flight pianists, regardless of specialty; for fans, deciding one’s preferences in the “Emperor” Concerto goes beyond an evening’s interpretation, to larger questions of performance style and aesthetic philosophy. Friendly debates over these matters have led to fistfights and worse. In recent decades we can trace these passions back to the friendly rivalry between Artur Rubenstein and Vladimir Horowitz, brilliant pianists whose long and influential careers represented polar opposites in playing style. Rubenstein, one of the 20th century’s greatest interpreters of Chopin, waited until quite late in his career to tackle the “Emperor” Concerto, astonishing his admirers when he recorded it. His approach is characteristically restrained and poetic, in marked contrast to the power and dazzle of the Horowitz version. What’s more, Rubenstein’s comments—that it had taken him until late in life to discover the truth of the concerto buried under generations of misinterpretation and virtuosic display—were taken by many as a dig at Horowitz.

This partisanship has produced a glorious legacy of performance. In the latter half of the 20th century, pianists including Claudio Arrau and Rudolf Serkin emphasized statesmanlike restraint and overall architecture in the “Emperor,” while others including Emil Gilels and Sviatoslav Richter thrilled with their fleetness and overpowering technique. This abundance has left today’s interpreters and listeners to enjoy one of Beethoven’s greatest creations any way we like—clearly a case of artistic freedom in the service of human freedom.

What to Listen For

For all the philosophical meanings that many listeners hear in Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 5, its appeal is mainly a matter of sheer, abstract beauty, expressed through melodies that combine simplicity and grandeur. Their development seems profound yet personal, partly because Beethoven’s development sections often delineate only the accompanying line in the orchestra or the piano, leaving us to imagine the melody on our own. This draws us into the composition as few concertos do—one reason why the “Emperor” has achieved such rare popularity with its adoring public.

The “Emperor” Concerto bears the hallmarks that have grown familiar through the canon of Beethoven piano concertos: the fast-slow-fast arrangement of movements, the adherence to sonata form, the final rondo with its repeated melodic statements by the soloist. But its consistently noble character is unique. Beethoven’s rededication of the “Eroica” Symphony (he ripped Napoleon’s name out of the autograph score) shows what he thought of emperors, but the “Emperor” Concerto seems aptly named for its elevated expression, which never flags.

Rather than climbing to altitude, the concerto’s opening seems already to have arrived at a great height, announcing itself through repeated, solemn chords with the gilded quality of a royal fanfare. After an introduction, the splendid opening theme has a sense of firmness, strongly rooted in the concerto’s tonic key of F flat. It is balanced by a second theme that is no less noble but far softer, almost whispering its presence until the two themes reconcile. After this high-flying but worldly opening, the second-movement adagio seems to ascend still further, perhaps heavenward, stopping time with a sweet but melancholy meditation. After the end of a series of trills, listen for the second phrase of the poetic main theme: in his book The Rest Is Noise, the music critic Alex Ross identifies this as a source for Leonard Bernstein’s song “Somewhere” from the musical West Side Story. This kind of borrowing seems especially appropriate when it draws from Beethoven, who often quoted his own arrangements of common songs and folk melodies in his compositions. Today, Beethoven’s compositions—not the songs themselves—are remembered.

In the final movement, the main theme is really just an arpeggio reassembled. But with each dazzling iteration, Beethoven disassembles it still further, requiring the listener to take part in the performance through active listening—just as variations on a theme may require listeners to bushwhack their way back to the original theme. As in the concerto’s opening, the main theme of the final movement has the structure and imposing character of a fanfare. Beethoven performed his other concertos publicly, but by 1811 his increasing deafness prevented him from doing so. In listening, we can hear why: this concerto requires extreme virtuosity from the soloist. Entrances are precise and unforgiving, and some passages that have a free, cadenza-like quality are actually prescribed in detail.

The premiere of the “Emperor” Concerto was played by pianist Friedrich Schneider in Leipzig.
Though he drafted the symphony in about a month, he worked on its orchestration from February 1846 until May of that year, continuing with final revisions until three weeks before its premiere in October under Felix Mendelssohn’s direction.

What to Listen For

In the brooding opening of this symphony we can hear the “dark days” Schumann described to Otten. But in its melodies and bright flashes from the orchestra’s brasses throughout the work, we also hear energy and a sense of possibility. Schumann follows the first movement with a scherzo rather than a slow movement, surprising our expectations and keeping the sense of positive energy.

While the beauty and dignity of the symphony’s slow movement have made it a favorite among critics, the final movement—unconventional in its proportions—remains a subject of debate. To some listeners, including this one, it demonstrates that Schumann retained the courage to innovate and experiment in spite of his frightful illness.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and Louisiana Philharmonic, and editor-in-chief for The Santa Fe Opera.
In 2014-15, Music Director Carl St.Clair celebrates his landmark 25th anniversary season with Pacific Symphony. He is one of the longest tenured conductors of the major American orchestras. St.Clair’s lengthy history solidifies the strong relationship he has forged with the musicians and the community. His continuing role also lends stability to the organization and continuity to his vision for the Symphony’s future. Few orchestras can claim such rapid artistic development as Pacific Symphony—the largest orchestra formed in the United States in the last 50 years—due in large part to St.Clair’s leadership.

During his tenure, St.Clair has become widely recognized for his musically distinguished performances, his commitment to building outstanding educational programs and his innovative approaches to programming. Among his creative endeavors are: the vocal initiative, “Symphonic Voices,” inaugurated in 2011-12 with the concert-opera production of La Bohème, followed by Tosca in 2012-13, La Traviata in 2013-14 and Carmen in 2014-15; the creation five years ago of a series of multimedia concerts featuring inventive formats called “Music Unwound”; and the highly acclaimed American Composers Festival, which celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2014-15 with a program of music by André Previn.

St.Clair’s commitment to the development and performance of new works by composers is evident in the wealth of commissions and recordings by the Symphony. The 2014-15 season continues a recent slate of recordings that has included three newly released CDs by today’s leading composers: Richard Danielpour’s Toward a Season of Peace, released in 2013-14, Philip Glass’ The Passion of Ramakrishna, and Michael Daugherty’s Mount Rushmore and The Gospel According to Sister Aimee, both released in 2012-13. Two more are due for release over the next few years, including William Bolcom's Songs of Lorca and Prometheus; and James Newton Howard's I Would Plant a Tree. St.Clair has led the orchestra in other critically acclaimed albums including two piano concertos of Lukas Foss; Danielpour’s An American Requiem and Elliot Goldenthal’s Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio; and with cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Other composers commissioned by the Symphony include Goldenthal in a world premiere in 2013-14, as well as earlier works by Bolcom, Zhou Long, Tobias Picker, Frank Ticheli and Chen Yi, Curt Cacioppo, Stephen Scott, Jim Self (Pacific Symphony’s principal tubist) and Christopher Theofandis.

In 2006-07, St.Clair led the orchestra’s historic move into its home in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall at Segerstrom Center for the Arts. The move came on the heels of the landmark 2005-06 season that included St.Clair leading the Symphony on its first European tour—nine cities in three countries playing before capacity houses and receiving extraordinary responses and reviews.

From 2008-10, St.Clair was general music director for the Komische Oper in Berlin, where he led successful new productions such as La Traviata (directed by Hans Neuenfels). He also served as general music director and chief conductor of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle (GNTS) in Weimar, Germany, where he led Wagner’s Ring Cycle to critical acclaim. He was the first non-European to hold his position at the GNTS; the role also gave him the distinction of simultaneously leading one of the newest orchestras in America and one of the oldest in Europe.

In 2014, St.Clair assumed the position as music director of the National Symphony Orchestra in Costa Rica. His international career also has him conducting abroad several months a year, and he has appeared with orchestras throughout the world. He was the principal guest conductor of the Radio Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart from 1998-2004, where he completed a three-year recording project of the Villa–Lobos symphonies. He has also appeared with orchestras in Israel, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and South America, and summer festivals worldwide.

In North America, St.Clair has led the Boston Symphony Orchestra (where he served as assistant conductor for several years), New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and the San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, Indianapolis, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver symphonies, among many.

A strong advocate of music education for all ages, St.Clair has been essential to the creation and implementation of the Symphony’s education programs including Pacific Symphony Youth Ensembles, Sunday Casual Connections, OC Can You Play With Us, arts-x-press and Class Act.
On the Record: Pacific Symphony on Disc

BY PETER LEEFEVRE

If you were looking for a simple way to define Pacific Symphony’s Carl St.Clair era, you could do worse than to look at the Symphony’s catalog of recordings over the past 25 years. While the orchestra continues to hold high the banner for the Western canon, it is resoundingly American, commissioning and recording a huge number of substantial and influential works by our nation’s leading composers.

These recordings do more than display St.Clair’s commitment to the voices of our age. They serve as calling cards for the symphony’s high standards and stylistic mastery.

“The recordings have allowed us to travel,” says St.Clair. “to be out there in the eyes and minds of other people outside of our own Orange County audience. I would couple our recordings with the one European tour and the KUSC broadcasts as incredibly important in spreading the good word about the Symphony nationally and internationally. Without them, we’re the tree falling in our own forest.”

Not only do they spread the word, they create awareness and excitement among others who can contribute to the Symphony’s continued excellence. Respect for the artistic product—the level of the orchestra’s skill and its creative and interesting projects—translates into an elite talent pool for orchestral openings, and the highest rank of guest artists.

The release schedule has accelerated dramatically over the past few years, prompted by several commissions and the favorable acoustics of the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall.

“Within a three-season period, we’ve recorded Glass’ Passion of Ramakrishna, Daugherty’s Mount Rushmore, Danielpour’s Season of Peace and in November we’re releasing Bolcom’s Prometheus,” he says. “Those are four CDs released in a relatively short period of the orchestra’s life that represent four major additions to the choral-orchestral repertoire. So we would have released four CDs with seven major commissioned works by the best American composers on the scene today. This is a very distinctive mark that the Symphony has made in this endeavor; all commissioned by us and recorded live and before our audience.

“The first five or so CDs were done in recording sessions. The more recent ones have been live recordings, and this is the biggest change in the recording industry. The cost of having separate sessions outside the performance has gotten to be so expensive, it’s so hard to afford them, that the recent recordings are all live. We perform the works in concert three times, record the three, and the releases are edited versions of all three of those performances. That’s the biggest difference. That’s also the case for most orchestras, and that’s the future of recording for Pacific Symphony.”

Besides the costs, there are other differences between the two approaches, at least for those creating the music.

“It’s interesting, I don’t know that you could tell the difference, but there is an ambient energy when you’re recording live,” he says. “When there’s a session in a studio, there’s no audience, no hall, no people, so we can do shorter snippets. ‘Let’s do these three measures again.’ If a single chord is out of tune, or someone came in too early or late, you can re-record that if it’s spliceable. But that gets a little sterile, and a little too antiseptic. I’m happy with the way it works, and the quality of the artistic result.”

The future holds a May release of Goldenthal’s Symphony in G-Sharp Minor, and a not-too-distant recording of James Newton Howard, whose relationship with Pacific Symphony has deepened since Howard’s first foray into the classical world.

“In 2009, I commissioned James Newton Howard to write a piece for us, I Would Plant a Tree, and we recorded it with the idea that we were coupling it with the Violin concerto we’re playing this season. Those will be combined to release a CD of the first non-film works by Howard. Our discography is pretty amazing when you hear it.”
Internationally renowned for his interpretation of the large romantic repertoire, including the great works of Berlioz, John Nelson has conducted most of the world’s top orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia and Cleveland orchestras and the New York Philharmonic. Nelson’s varied repertoire has also taken him to many of the world’s major opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera, the Chicago Lyric, Opéra National de Paris and the Netherlands Opera.

Central to Nelson’s work is the interpretation of the great sacred choral literature. He is presently conducting a series of live DVD performances of this repertoire including Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Haydn’s Die Schöpfung with the Netherlands Radio Kammerphilharmonie and Bach’s St. Matthew Passion with the Orchestre de chambre de Paris. He is the recipient of numerous awards including a Grammy for his recording of Handel’s Semele on the Deutsche Grammophon label and a Diapason d’Or de l’Année for Berlioz’s Béatrice et Bénédict on Erato.

Born in Costa Rica, Nelson studied at The Juilliard School, where he won the Irving Berlin prize in conducting. He has held the title of music director of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Caramoor Music Festival in New York. From 1998 to 2008 he was music director of the Orchestre de chambre de Paris. He has also been principal guest conductor of the Orchestre National de Lyon and artistic adviser to the Nashville and Louisville Orchestras.

Nelson made his professional opera debut at the New York City Opera in Bizet’s Carmen and his Metropolitan Opera debut stepping in at short notice to replace an indisposed Rafael Kubelik in Berlioz’s Les Troyens. It was this occasion that catapulted him into the limelight and led to his European debut at Grand Théâtre de Genève for Les Troyens and his French debut at the Berlioz Festival, Lyon for a production of Béatrice et Bénédict.

Barry Douglas has established a major international career since winning the gold medal at the 1986 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition, Moscow. As artistic director of Camerata Ireland and the Clandeboye Festival, he continues to celebrate his Irish heritage while also maintaining a busy international touring schedule.

Highlights of the 2014-15 season include the season opening concerts with the BBC Scottish Symphony and performances with the Orchestre National de France, Israel Symphony (performing Penderecki’s concerto under the composer’s baton), Staatskapelle Halle, and the Ulster and Sapporo Symphony orchestras. He has previously given concerts with the London Symphony, Russian National, Cincinnati Symphony, Singapore Symphony, Berlin Radio Symphony, Seattle Symphony and Melbourne Symphony orchestras alongside the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Hong Kong Philharmonic orchestras, among others. Douglas regularly plays in recitals throughout the world, with upcoming performances in the UK (including London’s Wigmore Hall), Mexico, Malta, the U.S., Russia, Japan and Italy.

Douglas is an exclusive Chandos recording artist and is currently recording the complete works for solo piano of Brahms, the first two albums of which have received much critical praise. The third was released in October 2014 and the fourth in May 2015. International Record Review wrote that “this is indeed Brahms playing of the utmost integrity and authority... this cycle looks set to become a benchmark version.” September 2014 saw the release of Celtic Reflections—an exploration of Irish folk music through 18 of Douglas’ own arrangements—from ancient melodies to pieces by contemporary songwriters.

In 1999 Douglas founded the chamber orchestra Camerata Ireland to celebrate and nurture the very best of young musicians from both Northern and the Republic of Ireland. Douglas regularly tours with Camerata Ireland throughout the world and has plans to visit China with the orchestra in the 2014-15 season. Highlights of the past season were Camerata Ireland’s debut at the BBC Proms in London and a world premiere of a new cantata commissioned by The Honourable The Irish Society, “At Sixes and Sevens,” alongside the London Symphony Orchestra to celebrate Derry-Londonderry becoming City of Culture 2013.

Douglas received the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2002 New Year’s Honors List for services to music.