SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS
RENEE AND HENRY SEGERSTROM CONCERT HALL

presents

2015-16 HAL & JEANETTE SEGERSTROM
FAMILY FOUNDATION CLASSICAL SERIES

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

EN SHAO • CONDUCTOR
DAN ZHU • VIOLIN

Li Huanzhi (1919-2000)
Spring Festival Overture

Max Bruch (1838-1920)
Concerto No. 1 in G Minor for Violin
and Orchestra, Op. 26
Prelude: Allegro moderato
Adagio
Finale: Allegro energico
Dan Zhu

INTERMISSION

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)
Symphony No. 9 in E Minor,
“From the New World,” Op. 95
Adagio - Allegro molto
Largo
Molto vivace
Allegro con fuoco

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The Saturday, Nov. 14, performance is being recorded for broadcast
on Sunday, Feb. 21, 2016, at 7 p.m. on Classical KUSC.
of 30 musical selections launched into space on China’s first lunar probe satellite, Chang’s No. 1. The satellite transmitted the overture back to earth from lunar orbit, some 236,000 miles away.

What to Listen For

The Spring Festival Overture is a work of celebration, new beginnings and the propitiation of good luck. In fact, “spring festival” is the English translation for the Chinese term signifying the blowout more familiar to us as “Chinese New Year,” with its colorful parades and spectacular dragons snaking through the streets of Asian-American communities. The actual date, which is based on the Chinese lunar calendar, occurs annually between Jan. 21 and Feb. 20 in our Gregorian system. But the bright energy we hear in Li’s composition outshines the singing of “Auld Lang Syne;” the 15-day Spring Festival, which is observed by roughly one-third of the world’s population, is the occasion of serious merriment that is meant not only to be enjoyed, but also to better one’s chances of a happy life. Many Asian workers plan week-long vacations for the Spring Festival.

The festival is rich in symbolism meant to promote prosperity and good fortune, and listeners of Asian ancestry may well recognize Li’s musical references to centuries-old iconography of the celebration, including traditional dance melodies. The overture exists in versions scored exclusively for Western instruments as well as for Western orchestra plus traditional Chinese instruments.

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings, solo violin
Performance time: 24 minutes

Background

Ax Bruch’s gift for the ardently voiced melody and his feeling for the violin have made him perhaps the least familiar name among composers of the most cherished standard-rep concertos. But among audiences and players alike, his Violin Concerto No. 1 is one of the most successful works in the violin repertory. Why then did Bruch, who wrote more than 200 well-crafted pieces in the German Romantic style, snarl irritably at the success of this one?

The fact is, we can hardly blame him. Though he was esteemed in his own time and earned the lasting gratitude of every violin enthusiast, he never escaped the shadow of this concerto. It has eclipsed all his other compositions and even seemed to hinder his career and financial interests.

Bruch’s violin music admirably embodies every trait desired in the Romantic violin repertory: singing lines, passionate phrasing, extreme dynamics, overarching drama, double and triple stops. If you’ve only heard Bruch on recording, watch the soloist dig into the strings: this is music to play while tossing your hair. And while this composition is by far his most popular, it’s probably unfair to characterize him as a one-hit wonder; after all, he wrote two other fine violin concertos and the beloved Scottish Fantasy.

Born in 1838, Bruch completed the Concerto No. 1 in 1866 and conducted the premiere in that year, revising it with the assistance of the great violinist Joseph Joachim. The revised version, which is the performing edition we know today, was first performed in January 1868 — beginning the concerto’s oddly jinxed history. Though he kept a copy
of the score for himself, Bruch sold the original score and its rights to his publisher, and in the economic turmoil surrounding World War I, it passed in and out of the hands of various buyers, some of whom reneged on payment, until its final sale to the collection of Pierpont Morgan Library. The one element all these transfers had in common was that they did not benefit Bruch in any way.

Even with performances of his first concerto seemingly in every concert hall, Bruch suffered economic privation throughout his life. Small wonder he was embittered by this concerto’s success. “Nothing compares with the laziness, stupidity and dullness of many German violinists,” he wrote to his publisher. “Every fortnight another one comes to me wanting to play the First Concerto; I have now become rude, and tell them: ‘I cannot listen to this concerto any more—did I perhaps write just one? Go away, and play my other concertos, which are just as good, if not better.’”

Happily, modern audiences can listen to it again and again, enjoying its emotional and melodic richness.

What to Listen For

The concerto opens with a prelude marked allegro moderato in a march rhythm that builds a feeling of suspenseful anticipation. Then a melody springs up in the flutes, gradually baiting the entry of the violin soloist. This occurs with a brief cadenza whose repeat leads into the main body of the movement—strongly melodic, deliberate and brooding. The movement forms a perfect arc, ending as it began, with two brief cadenzas.

The second movement, a slow adagio, exerts a powerful emotional pull through long, expressive, ardently voiced melodic lines for the violin soloist. Shifting voices in the orchestra provide a foil for the solo violin’s flowing melody. This passionate movement, soulful and singing, is prime Bruch, and if you manage to keep your eyes open while listening to it, you might notice that the soloist’s eyes are often closed.

The concerto’s finale, marked allegro energico, opens to reveal a quiet melody that simmers with intensity until it bursts into a rapid allegro theme peppered with double-stops. This gives way to a slower, more lyrical third theme that in turn prepares the way for the reprise of the allegro theme. The movement culminates with an orchestra-wide accelerando, concluding the concerto with two emphatic chords.

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, “From the New World”

Background

Take another look at the subtitle for this symphony, printed just above this paragraph. It is “From the New World,” and not—as usually stated—“The New World Symphony.” The difference is not inconsequential, and it is part of this work’s oddly checkered performance history, which combined instant success with lingering disappointment. Contemporary newspaper accounts of the premiere, which took place before Christmas of 1893 at Carnegie Hall, evoke a scene of clamorous tribute that was repeated again and again. “There was no getting out of it,” Dvořák said in describing the ovation to his publisher, “and I had to show myself willy-nilly.” Yet despite its inescapable nickname, this was not an “American” symphony, but rather a symphony “from the New World.” Yes, Dvořák was deeply inspired by American musical sources in composing it. But as a Czech nationalist and visionary music educator, he believed strongly that composers should discover their own musical roots in the cultural sources of their respective homelands. During his stay in New York City from 1892 to 1895 he discovered an abundance of diverse ethnic sources lying fallow in America and a potentially magnificent classical tradition waiting to be born. Not even his passionate advocacy and the public’s euphoric embrace of his ninth symphony could bring acceptance of these ideas—at least, not in Dvořák’s lifetime.

Dvořák was, with Smetana and Janáček, one of the three principal composers of the Czech nationalist movement, and was the one who achieved the greatest international prominence. He had come to New York at the invitation of Jeannette Thurber to serve as director of the National Conservatory of Music. Hearing the richness of what we now call “roots music,” he was baffled by the American intelligentsia’s dismissal of folk music as primitive. In interviews he insisted that the future of American music should be founded on what were called “Negro melodies,” a classification that also included American Indian tunes. “These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition, to be developed in the United States,” he told an interviewer in the New York Herald. “These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them.”

What to Listen For

Drawing upon Indian songs and African-American spirituals, this symphony broadly captures the spirit of both traditions without specifically quoting individual melodies. Listeners everywhere recognize the distinctively American sound in “From the New World” as soon as they hear it. The symphony opens with a portentous adagio that gives way to a quick allegro, with a minor key that seems to communicate the excitement of discovery and unknown frontiers. The emphasis on brasses and woodwinds, as opposed to strings, gives the movement a fresh sound that separates it from European idioms. The Czech nationalist propensity for sketching landscape in music is evident in this movement, but the landscape itself—with
The frenzied scherzo that follows the second movement largo seems much more specific. The Symphony’s artistic adviser Joseph Horowitz relates it to the dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis at Hiawatha’s wedding, and Hiawatha’s pursuit through the forest; wild and percussive, its whirling rhythms match both the American Indian sources Dvořák studied in the U.S. and the driving metrics of Longfellow’s poem, underlined by re-emergent timpani. It can also suggest Hiawatha’s own feelings of grief and expiation. But when Horowitz matches specific lines of Hiawatha’s dance to the music of the scherzo, and hearing their juxtaposition is irresistible, one cannot escape the conclusion that Dvořák wrote the movement as a literal dance for Pau-Puk-Keewis. Even more convincing is Horowitz’s matching of scherzo passages to Hiawatha’s chase through the woods and climactic battle with Pau-Puk-Keewis, though this music — like the rest of the symphony — can be fully enjoyed as abstract expression for its own sake.

The final movement is an allegro that moves from the scherzo’s E minor into a triumphant E major, the first sustained major section in the symphony. Here Dvořák seems to shift his gaze upward from a single, poignant tale to a distant horizon, presenting us with a nation’s destiny. There is a fateful quality to the clarion brasses and thundering percussion as the symphony draws to a close; in it, contemporary listeners heard a musical portrait of a young country that was youthful but vigorous and bold, ready for a place of leadership in the community of nations.

The first of these melodies—to some listeners, at least—is a solo theme for flute in the first movement that may be suggestive of the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” But it is in the largo in the second movement, which has gained acceptance as the song “Goin’ Home,” that we begin to hear it most clearly. Whether it existed in song form before the symphony was written has not been settled beyond doubt; we do know that in gaining knowledge of the African American legacy of folk song in America—including the deeply moving “sorrow songs” combining the themes of death, loss, and physical return to the Creator—Dvořák worked with a remarkable African American named Harry Burleigh, who knew this music firsthand and whose blind grandfather was a former slave. “Goin’ Home” certainly has all the characteristics of these songs. It is likely (but not certain) that while working on the symphony, Dvořák demonstrated the melody for Burleigh, who later executed it as a song with the lyricist William Arms Fisher.

The sadness and the transcendent quality of “Goin’ Home” was perfectly suited to another of Dvořák’s primary sources for the Symphony No. 9, Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha.” In the symphony’s second movement, a quiet largo, this sad theme provides context for the dramatically poignant death of Minnehaha as it unfolds within her father Nokomis’ wigwam with Nokomis on watch and Hiawatha separated from her in the forest. Is the symphony specifically programmatic, a musical retelling of Longfellow’s poem? While the idea of the sorrow song supports this idea in a general way, the idea of the sorrow song supports this idea in a general
In 2015-16, Music Director Carl St.Clair celebrates his 26th 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,” which continues for the fifth season in 2015-16 with Puccini’s Turandot, following the concert-opera productions of La Bohème, Tosca, La Traviata and Carmen in previous seasons; the creation six years ago of a series of multimedia concerts featuring inventive formats called “Music Unwound”; and the highly acclaimed American Composers Festival, which highlights the splendor of the William J. Gillespie Concert Organ in 2015-16 with music by Stephen Paulus, Wayne Oquin and Morten Lauridsen.

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 2015-16 season continues a slate of recordings of works commissioned and performed by the Symphony in recent years, including William Bolcom’s Songs of Lorca and Prometheus and James Newton Howard’s I Would Plant a Tree, plus his Violin Concerto featuring James Ehnes. These join Elliot Goldenthal’s Symphony in G-sharp Minor, released in 2014-15; 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. St.Clair has led the orchestra in other critically acclaimed albums including two piano concertos of Lukas Foss; Danielpour’s An American Requiem and Goldenthal’s Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio with cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Other commissioned composers include Zhou Long, Tobias Picker, Frank Ticheli and Chen Yi, Curt Cacioppo, Stephen Scott, Jim Self (Pacific Symphony’s principal tubist) and Christopher Theofanidis.

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 became the 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 and community engagement programs including Pacific Symphony Youth Ensembles, Heartstrings, Sunday Casual Connections, OC Can You Play With Us?, arts-X-press and Class Act.
Born in Tianjin, China, En Shao started to play the piano and violin at the ages of 4 and 5 respectively and by the age of 18 was working as a composer, pianist and percussionist with a local orchestra. After graduating from the Beijing Central Conservatory, he became second principal conductor of the Chinese Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra, a post he held for five years, and principal guest conductor of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra of China and the National Youth Orchestra of China.

Maestro Shao is currently chief conductor of the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the China National Symphony Orchestra and music director and principal conductor of the Taipei Chinese Orchestra. He was awarded the Lord Rhodes Fellowship at the Royal Northern College of Music when he came to England in 1988, and in the same year he received the first Eduard Van Beinum Foundation Scholarship. As winner of the Sixth Hungarian Television International Conductor’s Competition in 1989, he conducted several performances with the Hungarian Radio Orchestra and the State Symphony Orchestra. In January of 1990, he became associate conductor of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, a post created especially for him. Between 1992-95 he was principal conductor and artistic advisor of the Ulster Orchestra, with whom he made his Proms debut, and has also held the positions of principal guest conductor of the Basque National Orchestra in Spain and music director and principal conductor of the Macau Orchestra.

In the U.K., Maestro Shao has conducted the London Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, Hallé, Bournemouth and BBC Scottish symphony orchestras and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Elsewhere, recent and future engagements include conducting the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra at the Robeco Series in the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Orchestre de Picardie, Orchester Musikkollegium Winterthur, China National Symphony Orchestra, China Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra and Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra. Shao is very committed to developing young talent and regularly guest conducts the Royal Northern College of Music Symphony Orchestra and is Patron of the Edinburgh Youth Orchestra. He is a regular visitor to the United States and Canada, working with the orchestras of Colorado, Phoenix and Vancouver and has undertaken engagements in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

As well as his commitments in Slovenia, China and Taiwan, highlights of recent and future seasons include the Zagreb and Belgrade philharmonic orchestras, the Gävle Symphony Orchestra (Sweden), the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orquesta Filarmónica de Málaga, KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic in Durban, South Africa and a return to the Edinburgh Youth Orchestra for their 50th Anniversary Gala Concert.

Shao has a wide range of interests including Chinese cuisine, contemporary interior design and architecture and jazz. He also takes a particular interest in environmental issues.

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Reserve your free tickets at www.PacificSymphony/OCCanYouPlay
Dan Zhu is widely recognized as one of the finest Chinese musicians on the international stage today, praised as “an artist of affecting humility and beautiful tone production” by The Strad magazine, performing internationally in North America, Europe and Asia. His recent performance with the Boston Symphony at the Tanglewood Festival has been heralded by the critics as “truly brilliant, compelling and polished.” He has appeared with many orchestras under the direction of Maestros Christoph Eschenbach, Zubin Mehta, Philippe Entremont, Jacek Kaspszyk, Gianandrea Noseda, Krzysztof Penderecki, Carl St.Clair, Muhai Tang, Long Yu and Lü Jia, among many others, and has been invited to perform and give master classes at renowned festivals, such as Salzburg, Tanglewood, Kuhmo, Marlboro, Menton, Schleswig-Holstein, Prades-Casals, Ravinia and Spoleto.

Dan Zhu’s latest season highlights include concerto appearances with Zubin Mehta and the Orchestra Maggio Musicale Fiorentino; Camerata Salzburg at the Salzburg Festival; the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington and on tour; the Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra in Germany; and Lincoln Center series in New York. His appearances at the San Siro Stadium during the 2015 Milan Expo and “World Chinese New Year’s Gala 2015” were broadcast worldwide by international media.

He performed the China premiere of Bright Sheng’s Violin Concerto “Let Fly” for the opening concert of the 2014 Beijing International Modern Music Festival; was soloist with the symphony orchestras of Boston, Belgrade, Munich, Paris, Vancouver and more; gave duo recitals with Christoph Eschenbach (Mozart and Beethoven sonatas cycle at the Kennedy Center and at National Center for Performing Arts of Beijing), also with Peter Frankl in the U.S., with Philippe Entremont and Kun Woo Paik in France and with Michel Dalberto in St. Petersburg, Russia; and performed in a chamber series with Lang Lang in Los Angeles. He was artist in residence at the Mehli Mehta Foundation in Mumbai and at the “Intimacy of Creativity” in Hong Kong. His duo recital with Tzimon Barto in Hamburg was highly acclaimed by Die Welt as “distinctive dramaturgy of contrasts, crystalline tones with intensity and sensitivity.”

A native of Beijing, Zhu made his first public appearance at the age of 9, performing Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto with the China Youth Chamber Orchestra. At age 12 he entered the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where he studied with Xiao-zhi Huang. Four years later he was awarded the Alexis Gregory Scholarship to study with Lucie Robert at Mannes College of Music in New York. He made his Carnegie Hall debut with Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto at the age of 18, and won several prestigious international competitions, including Brussels’ Reine Elisabeth, Montréal, Sendai and the China International. His mentors have included Ivry Gitlis, Gerard Poulet and Aaron Rosand.

Zhu has worked with many of the leading composers of our time in performances and recordings, including George Benjamin, Gyorgy Kurtag, Krzysztof Penderecki, the late Gian-Carlo Menotti, Wolfgang Rihm and Xiaogang Ye. His interest in other creative fields has led his music to link several collaborations with the environmental organization Antarctica Forum and architect group Arte-Charpentier.