SEPT. 23

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PACIFIC SYMPHONY • 11

special concert

SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS
RENÉE AND HENRY SEGERSTROM CONCERT HALL

ORANGE COUNTY’S
Pacific Symphony
CARL ST. CLAIR | MUSIC DIRECTOR

presents

AN EVENING WITH JOSHUA BELL

Performance begins at 8 p.m.

CARL ST. CLAIR • CONDUCTOR
JOSHUA BELL • VIOLIN

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) Symphony No. 9, Op. 95, E Minor
(From the New World)
Adagio – Allegro molto
Largo
Molto vivace
Allegro con fuoco

INTERMISSION

Allegro moderato
Adagio di molto
Allegro; ma non tanto
Joshua Bell

Joshua Bell appears by arrangement with
Park Avenue Artists (www.parkavenueartists.com)
and Primo Artists (primoartists.com).
Mr. Bell records exclusively for Sony Classical.

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Symphony No. 9, "From the New World"
ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba; timpani, percussion; strings
Performance time: 40 minutes

Background
The strange performance history of Dvořák’s popular Ninth Symphony is a mix of instant success and 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 its rocks, crags and rushing waters—is like a musical evocation of the heroic landscapes by the Hudson River School of American painters such as Alfred Bierstadt. These artists were active at the time Dvořák composed the symphony and were well known to him. They successfully integrated the same aesthetic elements he sought to include in the symphony: a dramatic evocation of America’s unique heritage, a sense of its natural beauty, and an epic, virginal wilderness combined with formal execution embodying the refinements of European academic training. Why shouldn’t Dvořák, with a new world of folk music at his command, match the visual vocabulary of the Hudson River School’s towering cliffs and misty rivers with folk and folk-like melodies?

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 Nakomis’ wigwam with Nakomis 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 frenzied scherzo that follows the second movement lags so much more specific. The musicologist 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.

**Violin Concerto in D Minor, Op. 47**

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

*Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones; timpani; strings*

*Performance time: 31 minutes*

**Background**

Sibelius began his musical life determined to achieve greatness as a violinist. “[I]t was a very painful awakening when I had to admit that I had begun my training for the exacting career of an eminent [soloist] too late,” he wrote. He composed his violin concerto in 1903, when he was 38 and his ambitions for a career as a virtuoso were in the past, but his love for the instrument is on every page of the score.

By this time, Sibelius had published some of his most popular works, and his stature was international. But despite his increasing success and productivity, he had trouble paying his bills, and his income could not support the lifestyle he wanted for his family. Health worries, too, nagged at him.

Concertos could be financially rewarding for composers, as Sibelius—who had thought deeply about the realities of a soloist’s career—well knew. When he began drafting his violin concerto, violin and piano virtuosos were still the rock stars of the day, drawing wildly enthusiastic audiences at concert halls. With his concerto, Sibelius provided a showpiece that combined artistic depth with impressive display that could legitimately please both critics and crowds. It is symphonic in scope and provides the characteristic Romantic discourse, pitting the voice of the one against the many—the soloist against the orchestra. Its spectacular cadenza is integral to the development of the first movement, not tacked on to impress the listener.

In composing concertos, it was then (and still is) customary to dedicate the score to the soloist who would premiere the work. But Sibelius’ original choice as dedicatee, Willy Burmester, was not available for the premiere performance that Sibelius arranged in Helsinki. Instead, he secured Victor Novacek, a Czech violinist who had thought deeply about the realities of a soloist’s career—well knew. When he began drafting his violin concerto, ear and throat problems plagued him until their cause—a benign tumor—was finally found and removed in 1908. None of these woes are evident in his innovative concerto, which takes advantage of the violin’s versatility—integrating the solo part with the orchestra rather than isolating it for virtuosic display. Though he was only 40 when he completed it, this work proved to be the only concerto Sibelius ever wrote.

**What to Listen For**

As a major symphonist and the creator of the beloved Finlandia as well as one of the most successful violin concertos in the repertory, Jean Sibelius was the very soul of Finnish classical music. He can hardly be called a “neglected” composer. Yet somehow, in the literature on Sibelius, there is a nagging sense that this great composer has never quite achieved the place in the musical pantheon that his greatness would justify. The reason may be one of the very qualities that his admirers value most: his originality.

Sibelius’ long life spanned a period of astounding change in history and in classical music. Born in the last year of the Civil War and Lincoln’s presidency, he survived until the year that the Soviet Union launched Sputnik and Van Cliburn launched his career. When Sibelius began composing, the Romantic style strongly prevailed in European music, but its aesthetic boundaries were expanding quickly, and the challenge of Richard Wagner was forcing composers to re-think everything.

Surrounded by change, Sibelius never stopped exploring ways to advance his musical style, never compromised his expressiveness, and never sounded like anybody else. Scholars frequently contrast his creativity to that of Camille Saint-Saëns, who at first would seem to have almost nothing in common with the Finnish master. But in a way, that is the point: Saint-Saëns, who was born about a generation before Sibelius (in 1835), also survived well into the 20th century. He was, like Sibelius, a composer of great technical mastery who witnessed enormous changes in the musical world. And for Saint-Saëns, “witness” was the operative word: he looked on
and commented but never changed his style, always continuing to produce music effortlessly and unquestioningly, with—according to some critics—little of the originality that Sibelius demonstrated.

As the concerto opens, a lovely melody, melancholy in mood, takes its place over pulsing strings. The movement blooms in the richness of its accompaniment and in the vigor of the violin’s solo utterance, building to an energized statement in march rhythm. A fiery coda brings it to a close.

The second movement, an andante, brings us the extended, singing lines that have long been traditional in the central movement of violin concertos—perhaps the most romantic pages Sibelius ever wrote. But it is the final movement, marked allegro, ma non tanto (“fast, but not too fast”), that has captured most attention among players and critics. Its supreme difficulty belies the “not too fast” marking as its emphatic, swirling dance rhythm builds in energy and technical demands, combining Sibelius’ Nordic aesthetic with the zest of a Gypsy-inspired finale. It is considered one of the two or three greatest movements in the violin concerto repertory.

This may not sound like the work of a composer who lived past the midpoint of the 20th century, but it has an authentically original sound that is ineffable and timeless—a sound that has been described as smoky or northern. Its strong, distinctive sense of expressiveness, deep and dark-hued, seems to be what musicologists are getting at when they struggle with Sibelius’ uniqueness. His work is unmistakably Nordic, but also highly personal. Hearing it is like a journey northward. No one put it better or more succinctly than Phillip Huscher, the distinguished musicologist and annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra: “Sibelius’ sense of mood and color is keen.” Coming from him, those eight words speak volumes.

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.
With a career spanning more than 30 years as a soloist, chamber musician, recording artist and conductor, Joshua Bell is one of the most celebrated violinists of his era. An exclusive Sony Classical artist, Bell has recorded more than 40 CDs garnering Grammy, Mercury, Gramophone and Echo Klassik awards and is the recipient of the Avery Fisher Prize. Named the Music Director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in 2011, he is the only person to hold this post since Sir Neville Marriner formed the orchestra in 1958.

This fall, in addition to his performance tonight with Pacific Symphony, he joins the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and partakes in the New York Philharmonic’s celebration of Leonard Bernstein’s centennial, performing Bernstein’s Serenade led by Alan Gilbert. A nine-city North American recital tour with pianist Alessio Bax includes Chicago’s Symphony Center and Washington D.C.’s Strathmore Center. He makes appearances with the Vienna Symphony and the Monte Carlo Philharmonic and performs multiple concerts at London’s Wigmore Hall with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. In spring 2018, Bell continues with the Academy in tours covering the United Kingdom, United States and Asia, with highlights in London, New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing and Shanghai. With pianist Sam Haywood, he performs 10 recitals in Europe and America that take them to the Philharmonie de Paris, Zurich Tonhalle and beyond. On February 7, 2018, Bell reunites with longtime collaborator pianist Jeremy Denk for a recital broadcast live from Carnegie Hall. Further season highlights include the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Cristian Măcelaru, Danish National Symphony with Măcelaru, and an all-Beethoven play/direct program with the Orchestre National de Lyon.

Sony Classical just released Joshua Bell–The Classical Collection, a 14-CD set of albums of classical repertoire that displays Bell’s unique range, versatility and breathtaking virtuosity. Also this year, Bell connected with the virtual reality tech audience in an exciting collaboration with Sony. The Joshua Bell VR Experience is a live studio performance of Brahms’ Hungarian Dance No. 1 in full 360-degree VR. The experience, which was awarded a Lumiere Prize, is available for free download for SONY PlayStation VR.

Bell received critical acclaim for his concerto recordings of Sibelius and Goldmark, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and the Grammy Award-winning Nicholas Maw concerto. His Grammy-nominated Gershwin Fantasy premiered a new work for violin and orchestra based on themes from Porgy and Bess. Its success led to a Grammy-nominated Bernstein recording that included the premiere of the West Side Story Suite as well as the composer’s Serenade. Bell appeared on the Grammy-nominated crossover recording Short Trip Home with composer and double bass virtuoso Edgar Meyer, as well as a recording with Meyer of the Bottesini Gran Duo Concertante. He collaborated with Wynton Marsalis on the Grammy-winning spoken-word children’s album Listen to the Storyteller and Béla Fleck’s Grammy Award-winning recording, Perpetual Motion. Highlights of the Sony Classical film soundtracks on which he has performed include The Red Violin, which won the Oscar for Best Original Score, the Classical Brit-nominated Ladies in Lavender and the films Iris and Defiance.

Seeking opportunities to increase violin repertoire, Bell has premiered new works by John Corigliano, Aaron Jay Kernis, Nicholas Maw, Edgar Meyer, Behzad Ranjbaran and Jay Greenberg. He also performs and has recorded his own cadenzas to most of the major violin concertos.

Perhaps the event that helped most to transform Bell’s reputation from “musician’s musician” to household name was his incognito performance in a Washington, D.C. subway station in 2007. Ever adventurous, he had agreed to participate in a Washington Post story by Gene Weingarten, which thoughtfully examined art and context. The story earned Weingarten a Pulitzer Prize and sparked an international firestorm of discussion. The conversation continues to this day, and inspired the 2013 children’s book The Man with the Violin, which recalls the 12-year-old Bell making a mistake at the Stulberg International String competition and the unexpected outcome that transpired when he was given a second chance.

Bell currently serves as a senior lecturer at the Jacobs School of Music at his alma mater, Indiana University, which has also honored him with a Distinguished Alumni Service Award. He has been named an “Indiana Living Legend” and is the recipient of the Indiana Governor’s Arts Award. A dedicated arts advocate, Bell is involved with Education through Music and Turnaround Arts, a partnership between The President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Bell performs on the 1713 Huberman Stradivarius violin and uses a late 18th century French bow by François Tourte.