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

RUNE BERGMANN • CONDUCTOR
GARRICK OHLSSON • PIANO

Mozart & Rachmaninoff

André Previn (b. 1929)  Almost an Overture  WEST COAST PREMIERE

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)  Concerto No. 9 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 271
   Allegro
   Andantino
   Rondo: Presto
   Garrick Ohlsson

INTERMISSION

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)  Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27
   Largo - Allegro moderato
   Allegro molto
   Adagio
   Allegro vivace

The 2017-18 Season Piano Soloists are generously sponsored by The Michelle F. Rohé Distinguished Pianists Fund

Garrick Ohlsson’s appearance is generously sponsored by the Nicholas Family Foundation

The Friday night concert is generously sponsored by Michelle F. Rohé
Almost an Overture

ANDRÉ PREVIN (b. 1929)

WEST COAST PREMIERE

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

Performance time: 9.5 minutes

Background

Tim Mangan, Pacific Symphony’s writer-in-residence, has described André Previn as enjoying an “Indian summer” of creativity. The phrase could not be more apt for Previn, a musical citizen of the world who has brought unseasonal warmth and light to genres ranging from jazz to opera to movie scores. As he approaches his 90th birthday, the beat goes on: Previn’s energetic and good-humored Almost an Overture now receives its West Coast premiere, and preparations are under way for the premiere of his Concerto for Orchestra during the 2020–21 season with the Newport Contemporary Arts Orchestra. Almost an Overture was created to inaugurate that newly formed orchestra, which premiered it in July 2017.

A native of Germany, Previn fled with his family in 1938, settling first in Paris and, two years later, in Los Angeles. At age 11, Previn had Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff as neighbors, and could be counted among the influx of Jewish musicians including Erich Korngold who found refuge from Nazism in Hollywood. Small wonder that his career—young musical prodigies—that continued into the 20th century, typically with violin and piano soloists who were groomed to look even younger than they actually were. But as much as he loved skill on the violin and other instruments, but the piano held a special place for him.

Previn’s ear knows no bounds. As a jazz pianist he is an award-winning veteran of the club circuit and the recording studio rather than a tourist visiting from classical territory. In the pop realm he has worked as a composer/arranger with singers including Dinah Shore, Doris Day and Julie Andrews. As a classical conductor he studied with Pierre Monteux, succeeded Sir John Barbirolli as music director of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, and served as principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. He served as music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic starting in 1985.

In his compositions for the concert hall and the opera house, Previn has shown a special affinity for the soloist-orchestra relationship that is reflected most strongly in his collaborations with violinists Anne-Sophie Mutter, Gil Shaham and Erick Friedman; cellists Yo-Yo Ma and Lynn Harrell; and singers Renée Fleming, Janet Baker, Sylvia McNair and Barbara Bonney.

What to Listen For

Descriptions of Previn’s composing style can sound like references to Leonard Bernstein; it is characterized by exuberant energy, eclectic sourcing, accessibility and a strong sense of theatricality. Though Almost an Overture is a new work, its title and antecedents hint at what might be in store.

First, informality: an overture can be almost anything, so there are no rules to break—just an expectation of dynamism intended to heighten our musical appetites. And since overtures are generally introductions to musical narrative, an “almost” overture is even less formal and is likely to convey a feeling of narrative incident without specifying a particular incident or story.

As the composer of successful operas including A Streetcar Named Desire and Brief Encounter, Previn is skilled in the ways of musical narrative. In Almost an Overture he gives us a musical salutation in the tradition of Shostakovich’s Festive Overture—a cheery musical salutation that dispenses with specific story-based details, replacing them with generalized high spirits and musical inventiveness.

Concerto No. 9 in E-flat Major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 271

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

Instrumentation: 2 oboes; 2 horns; strings; solo piano

Performance time: 32 minutes

Background

Mozart did everything early. As the satirist and music commentator Tom Lehrer quipped at age 40, “By the time Mozart was my age, he’d been dead for five years.” When did young Mozart make the transition from young prodigy to mature genius? Enthusiasts can argue about anything, including this unprovable point. But it’s widely agreed that his Piano Concerto No. 9, the “Jeunehomme,” is a milestone.

Managing his son Wolfgang’s early career as a kind of musical novelty act, Leopold Mozart began the tradition of musikalischen Kinder—young musical prodigies—that continued into the 20th century, typically with violin and piano soloists who were groomed to look even younger than they actually were. But as much as he loved and depended upon his father, Wolfgang was constantly sprinting ahead rather than looking back. As a child he possessed a virtuoso’s skill on the violin and other instruments, but the piano held a special place for him.

By the fall of 1773, when Mozart was 17, his performance tours were over and his musical adulthood was under way. By this time he was probably the greatest pianist of his day and, even as a teenager, one of the most experienced soloists. He knew that piano concertos...
Throughout the first movement, the mood might be described as cozy. But then, in the second movement, Mozart boldly switches to a minor key: C minor, the relative minor of the concerto’s “home” key of E-flat major. Suddenly the concerto expresses a sense of light and shadow. Critics tell us that only five of Mozart’s 27 piano concertos are composed with central movements in the minor; in this case, the mood is elegiac and the sound is songlike. It reaches a level of expressiveness beyond Mozart’s previous concertos.

The fast-paced final movement is in rondo form, allowing a call-and-response pattern between orchestra and soloist. Mozart (and many other composers of concertos) relied on the rondo form, with its escalating repetitions of an initial theme, to showcase the soloist’s virtuosity and build a sense of mounting drama in the final movement. In this case, the increasing tension is dramatically broken twice: at a late cadenza that prefaces the concerto’s vigorous conclusion, and earlier in the movement, when a brief cadenza introduces a courtly minuet. It seems likely that this dance passage is a musical tribute to Victoire Jenamy and her father.

Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27
SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons; 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba; timpani, percussion; strings
Performance time: 60 minutes

Background

Rachmaninoff is famous for the romantic sweep of his melodies, the grandeur of his virtuosity as a pianist and the darkness of his moods. Yes, composers are a temperamental lot, but few have been quite so vulnerable to their own doubts or those of the critics. A harsh judgment in print or less-than-enthusiastic audience reaction was enough to plunge Rachmaninoff into a despairing creative paralysis so bleak, so crippling, that we must now count ourselves fortunate to have the relative handful of compositions that survived his depression.

The beautiful Symphony No. 2 may be the unlikeliest of all these survivors and the key to all the others. The young Rachmaninoff’s potential as a conductor and pianist was not in question, but he was committed to composition above all, and a symphony was a critically important milestone for his career. He first approached the form when he was 22, fashioning an ambitious work in the tradition of forebears he admired, including Tchaikovsky and Borodin. It was ardent, poetic, and a disaster, thanks to a premiere performance that was an utter shambles. Led by the composer and conductor Alexander Glazunov, the symphony’s first public performance was said to be the product of an excess of vodka and a shortage of rehearsal time. Given the time and place—St. Petersburg in still-frigid March 1897—it’s a facile explanation, but appears to be true nonetheless.

The audience’s bafflement and the critics’ hostility resulted in one of the most famous cases of composer’s block in musical history. Imagine Rachmaninoff hearing his symphony mauled bar by bar, a disaster unfolding in slow motion. He would later describe this experience as “the most agonizing hour of my life,” one that plunged him into a mental state that would certainly be diagnosed today as clinical depression. The core of his identity—belief in his calling as a composer—was gone. Initial sketches for another symphony and an opera based on Dante’s tale of Francesca da Rimini were shelved. (Tchaikovsky, whom Rachmaninoff greatly admired, had composed a
In the second movement, expansiveness is shouldered out by the energy and intensity of a sparkling scherzo. This is a movement of contrasts, as the vigor of the scherzo statement is juxtaposed against a sweepingly lyrical melody so characteristic of Rachmaninoff. A reprise of the scherzo theme also brings us the familiar sound of the Dies irae, an eerie plainchant motif that fascinated Rachmaninoff and many other composers. The movement ends with a resounding fortissimo coda in E minor.

No one composed more satisfyingly lingering adagios than Rachmaninoff, who in this symphony’s third movement seems to have enough materials in hand for three or four adagios. It begins with silken violins that give way to a long clarinet statement—both instruments with a human, singing quality—eventually merging into a contrapuntal discourse.

The symphony treats us to a joyful final movement that seems to belie Rachmaninoff’s prevailing melancholy mood. An energetic invitation sweeps through the orchestra, subsiding into a protracted development section that introduces vigorous dance rhythms into the mix. The symphony closes with one of Rachmaninoff’s most convincingly triumphant extended melodies.

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Rachmaninoff’s creative stasis lasted about three years. It ended as famously as it began, with what we might now call an intervention: a group of concerned individuals including an aunt, various cousins and a family friend confronted him in 1900 and persuaded him to consult the physician Nikolai Dahl, who specialized in treating alcoholic patients via hypnotherapy. Dahl treated Rachmaninoff for three years with repetitive hypnotic affirmations that could have come from the mouth of Svengali, the demonic hypnotist who first appeared around the same time (in 1895) in the novel Trilby. “You will work with great facility,” Dahl insisted, and it’s hard to deny that he effected a cure: Rachmaninoff not only resumed composing, but produced his Piano Concerto No. 2, his most popular work, like the sudden onrush of a broken logjam. He dedicated it to Dr. Dahl.

The Symphony No. 2 may represent an even greater triumph. Not only does it stand with the second concerto as one of Rachmaninoff’s most successful and richly inspired works, but it demonstrates the composer’s courage in confronting the form that originally traumatized him: the symphony. By the time he composed it, in 1906 and 1907, his success in his native Russia was such that he sought privacy with his family in Germany, relocating to the music-friendly city of Dresden. He returned to the scene of his initial disaster for the second symphony’s premiere, this time conducting it himself—to critical and public acclaim.

What to Listen For

The sound of Rachmaninoff is distinctive: sensuously romantic, with sweeping melodic lines and luxurious harmonies. But as with the symphonies of one of his models, Tchaikovsky, the richness of melody and the seemingly effortless flow can obscure detailed craftsmanship. It inheres in this symphony from the outset, beginning with a substantial first movement that layers fragments of melody that first stand on their own, but then combine into longer and more layered statements in a highly controlled process of development dominated by lustrous strings.
The 2017-18 season marks Music Director Carl St.Clair's 28th year leading 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. In April 2018, St.Clair will lead Pacific Symphony in its Carnegie Hall debut, as the finale to the Hall's yearlong celebration of pre-eminent composer Philip Glass' 80th birthday. Among St.Clair's many creative endeavors are the highly acclaimed American Composers Festival, which began in 2010; and the opera initiative, "Symphonic Voices," which continues for the seventh season in 2017-18 with Mozart's The Magic Flute, following the concert-opera productions of Aida, Turandot, Carmen, La Traviata, Tosca and La Bohème in previous seasons.


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.
A n energetic and compelling figure on the podium, Norwegian conductor Rune Bergmann (pronounced Rue-na Baig-mahn) is a dynamic, versatile conductor with an extensive classical, romantic, operatic and contemporary repertoire. Considered among today’s most talented young Scandinavian conductors, his elegant interpretations and reputation as an inspiring and profound musician continue to attract the attention of orchestras throughout the world.

The 2017/18 season marks the beginning of Bergmann’s tenure as music director of Canada’s Calgary Philharmonic and his second season as artistic director and chief conductor of Poland’s Szczecin Philharmonic. Bergmann has also been artistic director of Norway’s innovative Fjord Cadenza Festival since its inception in 2010, and he regularly conducts a wide range of distinguished orchestras and opera houses around the world, including such auspices as the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Norwegian National Opera, Mainfranken Theater Würzburg, Philharmonie Südwestfalen and the Wroclaw Philharmonic, as well as the symphony orchestras of Malmö, Helsingborg, Bergen, Kristiansand, Stavanger, Trondheim, Karlskrona, and Odense, and Lisbon’s Orquestra Sinfonica Portuguesa. In North America, he has guested with such orchestras as the Alabama Symphony Orchestra (where he led the world premiere of Grawemeyer Award-winning Serbian composer Djuro Zivkovic’s Psalm XIII), Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Houston Symphony Orchestras, and New Mexico Philharmonic, and the Brevard Music Festival. The 15/16 season saw Bergmann make a joint North American operatic debut at Yale Opera with innovative stage director Claudia Solti.

Upcoming highlights of Bergmann’s 17/18 season include return engagements in Toledo and Grand Rapids, as well as North American debuts with the New Jersey and North Carolina Symphonies, as well as Germany’s Staatskapelle Halle.

A multitalented musician who also plays trumpet, piano and violin/viola, Bergmann studied choral and orchestral conducting under Anders Eby, Jin Wang and Jorma Panula at Sweden’s Royal College of Music. He graduated with high honors from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland, where he studied conducting under chief conductor emeritus of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra/former principal conductor of the Vienna Radio, Finnish Radio, and Danish National symphony orchestras, Leif Segerstam. Honors include the 2010 Kjell Holm Foundation Culture Prize, the 2009 SMP Press culture award, and second prize in Helsingborg’s 2002 Nordic Conducting Competition. Maestro Bergmann’s former posts include deputy-general music director with the Augsburger Philharmoniker and Theater Augsburg in Germany.
Since his triumph as winner of the 1970 Chopin International Piano Competition, pianist Garrick Ohlsson has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although long regarded as one of the world’s leading exponents of the music of Frédéric Chopin, Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire, which ranges over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, Ohlsson has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. To date he has at his command more than 80 concertos, ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century, many commissioned for him. This season that vast repertoire can be sampled in concertos ranging from Rachmaninoff’s popular Third and rarely performed Fourth, to Brahms Nos. 1 and 2, Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg and Copland in cities including Philadelphia, Atlanta, Detroit, Dallas, Miami, Toronto, Vancouver, San Francisco, Liverpool and Madrid ending with a spring U.S. West Coast tour with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic conducted by Yuri Temirkanov. In recital, he can be heard in L.A.’s Walt Disney Concert Hall, New York, New Orleans, Hawaii and Prague.

A frequent guest with orchestras in Australia, Ohlsson has recently visited Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Hobart as well as the New Zealand Symphony in Wellington and Auckland. An avid chamber musician, Ohlsson has collaborated with the Takacs, Cleveland, Emerson, and Tokyo string quartets, among other ensembles. Together with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco-based FOG Trio. Passionate about singing and singers, Ohlsson has appeared in recital with such legendary artists as Magda Olivero, Jessye Norman and Ewa Podles.

Ohlsson can be heard on the Arabesque, RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, Hyperion and Virgin Classics labels. His 10-disc set of the complete Beethoven Sonatas, for Bridge Records, has garnered critical acclaim, including a Grammy for Vol. 3. His recording of Rachmaninoff’s Concerto No. 3, with the Atlanta Symphony and Robert Spano, was released in 2011. In the fall of 2008 the English label Hyperion re-released his 16-disc set of the Complete Works of Chopin followed in 2010 by all the Brahms piano variations, “Goyescas” by Enrique Granados, and music of Charles Tomlinson Griffes. Most recently on that label are Scriabin’s Complete Poèmes, Smetana Czech Dances and études by Debussy, Bartók and Prokofiev. The latest CDs in his ongoing association with Bridge Records are Close Connections, a recital of 20th-century pieces, and two CDs of works by Liszt with Scriabin complete sonatas due for release this season. In recognition of the Chopin bicentenary in 2010, Ohlsson was featured in a documentary The Art of Chopin co-produced by Polish, French, British and Chinese television stations. Most recently, both Brahms concerti and Tchaikovsky’s second piano concerto were released on live performance recordings with the Melbourne and Sydney Symphonies on their own recording labels, and Mr. Ohlsson was featured on Dvořák’s piano concerto in the Czech Philharmonic’s live recordings of the composer’s complete symphonies and concertos, released July of 2014 on the Decca label.

A native of White Plains, N.Y., Ohlsson began his piano studies at the age of 8 at the Westchester Conservatory of Music; at 13 he entered The Juilliard School. His musical development has been influenced in completely different ways by a succession of distinguished teachers, most notably Claudio Arrau, Olga Barabini, Tom Lishman, Sascha Gorodnitzki, Rosina Lhévinne and Irma Wolpe. Although he won First Prizes at the 1966 Busoni Competition in Italy and the 1968 Montréal Piano Competition, it was his 1970 triumph at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, where he won the Gold Medal (and remains the single American to have done so), that brought him worldwide recognition as one of the finest pianists of his generation. Since then he has made nearly a dozen tours of Poland, where he retains immense personal popularity. Ohlsson was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize in 1994 and received the 1998 University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor, Mich. He is also the 2014 recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music. He makes his home in San Francisco.