



PROGRAM

GABRIELA ORTIZ **"Luz Eólica" from *Altar del Viento***
("Aeolian Light" from *Altar of the Wind*)
Pacific Symphony Premiere
Benjamin Smolen, flute

TCHAIKOVSKY **Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat Minor, Op.23**
I. *Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso*
II. *Andantino semplice*
III. *Allegro con fuoco*
Claire Huangci, piano

- INTERMISSION -

BRAHMS **Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98**
I. *Allegro non troppo*
II. *Andante moderato*
III. *Allegro giocoso*
IV. *Allegro energico e passionato*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



The young American pianist Claire Huangci, winner of the first prize and the Mozart prize at the 2018 Geza Anda Competition, continuously captivates audiences with her "radiant virtuosity, artistic sensitivity, keen interactive sense and subtle

auditory dramaturgy" (*Salzburger Nachrichten*). With an irrepressible curiosity and penchant for unusual repertoire, she proves her versatility with a wide range in repertoire spanning from Bach and Scarlatti, to Bernstein, Gulda, and Corigliano.

In solo recitals and with international orchestras, Huangci has appeared in some of the most prestigious halls such as Carnegie Hall, Suntory Hall Tokyo, NCPA Beijing, Paris Philharmonie, Munich Gasteig, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Salzburg Festspielhaus, and the Budapest Franc Liszt Akademie. She is a welcome guest in renowned festivals including Lucerne Festival, Verbier Festival, Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival, and Klavier Festival Ruhr. Mozarteumorchester Salzburg, Stuttgart

2022-23 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom
Family Foundation Classical Series

TCHAIKOVSKY'S PIANO CONCERTO

Preview Talk with Alan Chapman @ 7 p.m.
Thursday, Oct. 20 @ 8 p.m.
Friday, Oct. 21 @ 8 p.m.
Saturday, Oct. 22 @ 8 p.m.

Carl St.Clair, conductor
Claire Huangci, piano
Benjamin Smolen, flute
Pacific Symphony

The Thursday performance
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The 2022-23 season piano soloists are generously
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Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall

Radio Symphony Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zurich, ORF Radio Orchester Vienna, Vancouver Symphony, and China Philharmonic Orchestra, together with Sir Roger Norrington, Howard Griffiths, Eva Ollikainen, Mario Venzago, Cornelius Meister, and Elim Chan are among her esteemed musical partners.

For an intense start of the 2020-21 season, Huangci paid homage to Beethoven's anniversary with a compelling interpretation of his Pastorale symphony arranged for solo piano by Franz Liszt, with concerts at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr and Rheingau Musik Festival, where her recital was recorded for T-Mobile's streaming platform MagentaMusik 360. After appearances as a piano duo with Alexei Volodin at the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie and the release of an album with her Trio Machiavelli, a major highlight was her Fall 2020 recital tour at the main halls of Berlin Philharmonie, and Hamburg Elbphilharmonie. Later in the season, a debut in the *Great Performers Series* at New York's Lincoln Center and orchestra engagements with the Deutsche Radiophilharmonie Saarbrücken, Museumsorchester Frankfurt, Basel Chamber Orchestra, and the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra. She also directed concertos of Mozart and Chopin from the keyboard with the Nordic Chamber Orchestra.

Huangci began her international career at the age of nine with concert performances and competition successes. After studying with Eleanor Sokoloff and Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, she moved to Germany in 2007 for further studies with Arie Vardi at the Hannover Musikhochschule, completing them with honors in 2016. Early in her artistic career, she stood out as an expressive interpreter of Chopin, winning first prizes at the Chopin competitions in Darmstadt and Miami in 2009 and 2010. She was also the youngest participant to receive second prize at the International ARD Music Competition in 2011.

After recording her debut CD with solo works of Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev and her prizewinning double album of Scarlatti sonatas (German Record Critics' Award and Gramophone Editor's Choice), she released highly acclaimed recordings of Chopin's Nocturnes in 2017 and in 2018 of Rachmaninoff's complete Préludes: Following recordings of Beethoven's violin concerto in the piano version and Fantasy for piano and orchestra by Schubert / Kabalewski with the RSO Vienna, her first orchestral album with the Deutsche Radiophilharmonie Saarbrücken under Shiyoon Sung was released in Fall 2019. In summer of 2020, her first chamber music album was released with Trio Machiavelli, whose interpretations of Ravel trio and Chausson piano quartet proved "a wholly exhilarating debut (...) splendidly transparent, and always expressive." (*BR Klassik*).



Benjamin Smolen was appointed principal flutist of Pacific Symphony in September 2011, where he occupies the Valerie and Hans Imhof Chair. He has won top prizes at the Haynes International Flute Competition, James Pappoutsakis Memorial

Flute Competition, National Flute Association Young Artist Competition, and New York Flute Club Young Artist Competition.

He has given solo performances in Russia, Japan, Belgium, and France and as concerto soloist with Pacific Symphony, Princeton University Orchestra, Charlotte Civic and Youth Orchestras, and Gardner Webb Symphony Orchestra. Smolen's performances have been featured on NPR (*Performance Today* and *From the Top*), WGBH-Boston, WDAV-Charlotte, French National Radio, and the Naxos and Mode record labels. Additionally, he can be heard on the soundtracks for movies such as *Monsters University*, *Planes*, *A Million Ways to Die in the West*, *Night at the Museum*, and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

He recently released his debut album, *Bach to Beaser*, with guitarist Jerome Mouffe. Smolen studied at Princeton University, the Moscow Conservatory, the New England Conservatory, and the University of Michigan. His primary teachers include Paula Robison, Michael Parloff, and Aleksandr Golyshev. He is a William S. Haynes Artist and performs on a handmade, custom-crafted Haynes 14-karat gold flute.

PROGRAM NOTES

Gabriela Ortiz

"Luz Eólica" from *Altar del Viento* ("Aeolian Light" from *Altar of the Wind*)

Born: 1964, Mexico City

Composed: 2015

Premiered: Nov. 29, 2015, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: This is a Pacific Symphony premiere

Instrumentation: solo flute, 2 clarinets, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 1 trombone, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings

Estimated duration: Approx. 5 minutes



"Luz Eólica" is the first movement of a dynamic four-movement work for flute and orchestra by the remarkable Mexican composer Gabriela Ortiz. The Latin GRAMMY®-nominated Ortiz is one of the foremost composers in Mexico today, and one of the most vibrant musicians emerging on the international scene.

Ortiz's musical language is an expressive synthesis of tradition and the avant-garde combining high art, folk music, and jazz in ways that sometimes startle and always dazzle the ear. In words as well as music, Ortiz is a champion of her Latin American heritage, and a distinctively Latin rhythmic pulse energizes her compositions.

Ortiz's orchestral works explore compelling themes in startling ways; her music follows ideas wherever they lead rather than following a formal compositional architecture of statement, development, and recapitulation. For example, the sounds of healthy and dying underwater life inspired her 2020 composition *Arrecife* for chamber orchestra, inviting listeners to think about ecocide and environmental conservation as part of the esthetic experience. Perhaps, in *Altar del Viento*, she asks even more of us. The suite is symphonic in scale, and the first movement's title references light—the source of illumination, understanding, and truth—and the Aeolian harp, a metaphor for the breath of artistic inspiration. Ortiz explores the very nature of artistic creativity—in living and experiencing art, as well as in creating it—in this music.

Ortiz has written music for dance, theater, and cinema, and has actively collaborated with poets, playwrights, and historians. Although she is based in Mexico, her music is commissioned and performed all over the world, including by prestigious ensembles including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, The National Orchestra of Bretagne, The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Gustavo Dudamel and Esa-Pekka Salonen, Louis Langrée, Paolo Bartolomeo, Maria Dueñas, Zoltan Kocsis, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Kroumata and Amadinda Percussion Ensembles, Kronos Quartet, Dawn Upshaw, Sarah Leonard, Steve Schick, Cuarteto Latinoamericano, Pierre Amoyal, Southwest Chamber Music, Tambuco Percussion Quartet, The Hungarian Philharmonic Orchestra, The Malmö Symphony Orchestra, Simon Bolivar Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony, and The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Ortiz has been honored with the National Prize for Arts and Literature, Mexico's most important award for writers and artists; The Mexican Academy of Arts; The Bellagio Center Residency Program; Civitella Ranieri Artistic Residency; John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship; the Fulbright Fellowship; Capital Prize (First Prize of the Silvestre Revueltas National Chamber Music Competition); the First Prize at the Alicia Urreta Composition Competition; Banff Center for the Arts Residency; the Inroads Commission, a program of Arts International with funds from the Ford Foundation; the Rockefeller Foundation; and the Mozart Medal Award.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat Minor

Born: May 7, 1840, Votkinsk, Russia

Died: Nov. 6, 1893, St. Petersburg

Composed: Nov. 1874 to Feb. 1875

Premiered: Oct. 25, 1875, Boston, MA

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: Sept. 4, 2022.

FivePoint Amphitheatre, Irvine,

Carl St.Clair conducting

Instrumentation: solo piano, 2 flutes,

2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4

French horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings

Estimated duration: Approx. 32 minutes



Trained as a pianist as well as a composer, Tchaikovsky was born into the great age of virtuosic concerto composition—the Romantic era of classical music—and his spectacular Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra is one of the staples of the genre. Concertos had been written for centuries, but Beethoven (b. 1770) had raised the stakes; by 1875, when Tchaikovsky was 35 and was composing his Piano Concerto No. 1, pianos and piano concerts had grown in size and spectacle. Composers followed Beethoven's lead, relishing the chance to create large-scaled, serious concertos showcasing the soloist's technical skills and the composer's flair for musical theatricality. More than just popular hits, these concertos also expressed a basic principle of the Romantic age: the individual's struggle against massed opposition, the one versus the many. But they were also vehicles for charismatic showmanship and elevated the soloist to a sort of cult-virtuoso status. Often seemingly unplayable, they helped make Paganini and Liszt into Western culture's defining musical superstars.

Playing the seemingly unplayable made the legendary violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782 - 1840) a cult figure with rumored satanic connections that were taken seriously by his adoring public—how else could he play the impossible? Oddly, “unplayable” also turns out to be a fateful word in the performance history of concertos by the hapless Tchaikovsky, who lacked both luck and self-confidence. The concerto literature is rife with works that are now popular, their greatness undisputed, that were condemned by critics and soloists back in the day; most often, they were described as having been written “against the instrument” or as technically unplayable. Were soloists hedging their bets? It's hard to know; playing the unplayable was, after all, their calling card. Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and the Violin Concerto in D both suffered this characterization, and both are now among the most beloved concertos in the standard repertoire.

When it came to the violin, Tchaikovsky was on less-than-familiar ground, and he proceeded with nervous caution after being inspired by Edouard Lalo's exuberant five-movement concerto. (Tchaikovsky's work with violinists in crafting the score didn't help ease its way into the world.) But Tchaikovsky was a respected pianist, and though he lacked the encyclopedic technique of Russia's foremost soloists, he could be confident of his knowledge of the instrument. For it he created a concerto in which towering grandeur and poetic utterance are abundant and unmistakable—earmarks of a hit concerto. The melodies are gorgeously lyrical and are well suited to the instrument's expressive capabilities. So why did Tchaikovsky's friend and possibly the intended dedicatee for the score, the great pianist Nikolai Rubinstein, diss it as artistically crude and, yes, unplayable? Musicologists are still speculating about the reasons, though after its quick success with the public, critics, and other pianists, Rubinstein changed his mind and praised it effusively.

We can hear a characteristically Romantic spirit of heroic rebellion in this concerto. It bursts upon us with an opening that is explosive and iconic: a moment of brassy orchestral fanfare introducing thunderous piano chords grouped in threes. They are played in unison with both hands as they move in bold, multi-octave leaps up the keyboard.

We all have this stunningly dramatic, oft-quoted opening in our heads. But listen anew and notice Tchaikovsky's remarkable musical

calculation here: The piano soloist grabs the primary role, even entering alone. But once the orchestra enters, it has the melody. Those chords, so full of life and confidence, actually *accompany* the orchestra's statement. They can be heard as a heroic response to the melodic lifeline. Once it has been introduced, the piano takes up the melody in a manner that is vigorous but more moderated and less tumultuous, setting up a pattern of alternating grandeur and lyricism that prevails throughout this concerto.

As 21st-century listeners, we are the beneficiaries of this concerto's unusual performance history and the landmark interpretation of the great American pianist Van Cliburn (1934 – 2013). When Cliburn won the first International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow in 1958 (as a tall, rangy, young-looking 23-year-old), the Cold War was at its height; Sputnik had been launched the previous year, and the space race and nuclear arms race were at full tilt. His victory came with this concerto, and it had an impact we can scarcely imagine now. He received a tickertape parade down Broadway and instantly became an American hero. But the response was even more dramatic in Moscow, where weeping listeners rushed the stage and mobbed him. Why?

In a sense, the answer goes back to the concerto's duality—the alternation of heroic and poetic sound that Tchaikovsky deftly gives us, mixing powerful chords and parallel octaves with rippling passages of rapid fingerwork that require flawless legato. Yes, superbly trained Soviet-era pianists combined accuracy and power. But where was the passionate individuality of their predecessors? Under the Soviet system, such highly personalized expressiveness was shunned. But in Cliburn's performance, the judges heard this kind of interpretive artistry combined with superb technique, and the conclusion was undeniable; listeners heard a cherished part of their national patrimony being restored to them by the unlikely of artists.

Johannes Brahms Symphony No. 4 in E Minor

Born: May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany
Died: April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria
Composed: Summers of 1884 and 1885
Premiered: Oct. 25, 1885, Meiningen, Germany

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Sept. 28, 2013. Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa, Carl St.Clair conducting
Instrumentation: 2 flutes including piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 3 bassoons including contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion, and strings

Estimated duration: Approx. 39 minutes

Contemporary reports and later accounts by music historians give us oddly contradictory impressions of Brahms. In viewing his photographic portraits chronologically, we see the handsome, sensitive young composer and pianist turn into a great bear of a man, ursine and shaggy. Plenty of quotations demonstrate how gruff he could be in talking about his own music and others'. And yet, underneath it all, he seems to have remained easily bruised—always the fretful composer who worked and reworked his first symphony for 14 years or more



while the music world waited impatiently for the opus that might prove to be "Beethoven's Tenth." "You have no idea what it's like to hear the footsteps of a giant like that behind you," he said. He finally felt ready to present his first symphony to the public when he was 43, yet its eventual success—which seemed to fulfill music-lovers' hopes for a worthy successor to Beethoven—made Brahms even more nervous about writing a second.

Indeed, the writing of symphonies seems to have pushed all of Brahms' buttons; for the sake of his nerves and to escape the pressure of expectations, he sought the solitude of country life for this kind of work when possible. In the case of the Fourth, he went to Muerzzuschlag, a quaint resort town in the Styrian region of Austria—a place of trout fishing, hiking and mountain climbing where the inner workings of sonata allegro form would be the last thing on most people's minds. The year was 1885, and Brahms was 52: old enough to be thinking about his musical legacy. In his fourth symphony, many listeners hear his farewell to the symphonic form.

In talking about the Fourth, he was up to his old obfuscatory tricks. He described the symphony as "a few entr'actes and polkas that I happened to have lying around" rather like a fashionista who's asked about her new dress and replies "what, this old thing?" (The reference to "entr'actes and polkas" is especially ironic coming from the brilliant technician whose mastery of flowing, integrated development is unexcelled among composers.) But his attitude can't have been so relaxed or good-humored when, in a trial run-through with his friend Ignaz Bruell, he played a two-piano reduction for a group of close friends. These included the critics Eduard Hanslick and Max Kalbeck, the conductor Hans Richter, and Theodor Billroth, a surgeon and accomplished amateur musician. Their reception was glacial and their comments, with the benefit of hindsight, seem baffling. The next day, Kalbeck, a loyal supporter, suggested that the final movement's form was inappropriate for a symphony; it is now considered one of the strongest elements in a symphony full of strengths. This movement encompasses the greatest emotional range of all Brahms' symphonic finales, and it was greeted with tumultuous applause at most early performances.

Based on a Bach chorale, the finale answers an opening movement that is noble yet austere by comparison. The second movement is marked *andante moderato*, a walking tempo. Launched with a beautiful horn theme, it is suffused with a feeling of fond remembrance. The gait is relaxed, yet Brahms' contemporaries correctly sensed a note of valediction in the music: His friend and former pupil Elisabeth von Herzogenberg compared it to a walk through an idealized landscape with a glowing sunset in the distance, and the young Richard Strauss was reminded of a moonlit funeral march. (Strauss himself would later excel at the musical evocation of moonlight.) As for the third movement, a joyful allegro giocoso, we defer to the famous phrase of the late Olin Downes: "Brahms as Old Bear's Paws." Here, Brahms not only hews to the traditional scherzo form for a symphonic third movement, but executes it with an exuberance rare in his music—including an uncharacteristically liberal use of glittering percussion.

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.