



Alexander Shelley

2023-24 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom
Family Foundation Classical Series

NEW WORLD SYMPHONY

Thursday, Nov. 30, 2023 @ 8 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 1, 2023 @ 8 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023 @ 8 p.m.

Alexander Shelley, guest conductor
David Fray, piano
Pacific Symphony

The 2023-24 season piano soloists are generously
sponsored by **The Michelle F. Rohé Fund**

OFFICIAL
TV STATION



OFFICIAL
RADIO STATION



**This concert is being recorded for broadcast on
Feb 25, 2024 on Classical California KUSC.**

*Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall & Lobby*

PROGRAM

SOFIA GUBAIDULINA *Fairytale Poem*

CHOPIN Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor,
Op. 21
Maestoso
Larghetto
Allegro vivace
David Fray

-INTERMISSION-

DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95
("From the New World")
Adagio-Allegro molto
Largo
Molto vivace
Allegro con fuoco



PROGRAM NOTES

Sofia Gubaidulina

Fairy tale Poem

Born: October 24, 1931 in Chistopol, Russia

Composed: 1971

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: This is a Pacific Symphony premiere

Instrumentation: three flutes, four clarinets including bass clarinet, percussion, harp, piano, and strings



It's difficult for us to imagine the dire significance of Sofia Gubaidulina's meeting with Dmitri Shostakovich in 1959 in Soviet Russia, where the Kremlin's disapproval of a piece of music could put its composer in mortal peril. Born in 1931, Gubaidulina was, like Shostakovich, censured by the Kremlin while still in her 20s. Authorities warned her to change her music's "mistaken path" to conform to government standards. Earlier, when Stalin condemned Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, the composer was 29—about the same age as Gubaidulina when he met with her two decades later.

Shostakovich reportedly told her, "My wish for you is that you should continue along your mistaken path." Though Stalin had died six years before they met, Shostakovich still risked purge or exile with each new composition. His advice was a call for bravery in facing a danger that was real, grave, and avoidable—if only Gubaidulina would compromise her artistic freedom. She wouldn't.

In fact, Gubaidulina had long guarded her covertly rebellious spirit. Early in life she discovered Western classical music and religious mysticism—both officially restricted subjects—and connected them in her musical studies at the government-run Children's Music School. At the Kazan Conservatory, where contemporary Western music was banned, she and her friends found ways to study it in secret. "We knew Ives, Cage, we actually knew everything on the sly," she recalled later.

When international interest in Gubaidulina's work surged in the 1980s, the Kremlin still faulted her as lacking the very qualities we hear most strongly in her *Fairy tale Poem*: esthetic beauty, accessibility, optimism, and a socially beneficial sense of purpose. She is bold in exploring the outer reaches of instrumental ranges, but the sound remains shimmering and luminous.

This tone poem is based on a tender allegory by Miloš Macourek, *The Little Piece of Chalk*, about a

piece of chalk condemned to render only numbers and boring shapes on a blackboard until, as Gubaidulina notes, a child finally takes it "out into the daylight and begins to draw castles, gardens with pavilions and the sea with the sun on the pavement." Like her tone poem, the chalk simply dissolves into beauty.

Frédéric Chopin

Piano Concerto No.2

Born: Mar. 1, 1810 in Żelazowa Wola, Poland

Died: Oct. 17, 1849 in Paris, France

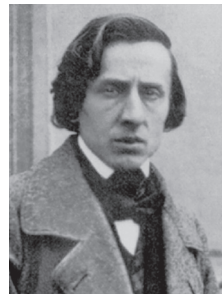
Composed: 1829

Premiered: Mar. 17, 1830 in Warsaw, Poland, the composer as soloist

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Apr. 29, 2017

with Jean-Marie Zeitouni conducting

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, one trombone, timpani, and strings and solo piano



Born in 1810, Chopin was seven when his first piano teacher notated and published one of his improvisations; his next teacher taught him to notate music himself. His first rondo for solo piano was published in 1825. Five years later, Chopin unveiled his fabulously beautiful piano concerto in F minor, now known as No. 2. With its success in Warsaw, Chopin gained a place as a national hero of Poland. His concerto now known as No. 1, in E minor, was actually composed later, though in that same year. From then on Chopin was not just famous but a national hero, a figure whose brilliance and standing in music history remain central to Polish national identity. He arrived in Paris at age 21 with a goblet of Polish soil in his effects.

No other great classical composer is identified so closely with a single instrument; every work that Chopin composed features the piano, and the concertos are his largest-scale works that engage the orchestra. But he preferred to write and play unaccompanied works, and even during his lifetime, some listeners noted that Chopin's handling of musical materials lacked the novelty and complexity expected in the orchestration of large-scale compositions. These quibbles miss the point: Chopin was unparalleled in his ability to make the piano sing in a way that more closely resembled the heartfelt melodies of *bel canto* operas than other

PROGRAM NOTES

piano compositions. His piano concertos set up a predictable exchange between solo and accompanying lines rather than a dialogue between equals. But this creates a closer identification between the listener and the pianist that makes the solo voice all the more thrilling.

Besides, the charge of minimally engaging the orchestra hardly stands up to this concerto's introduction, which follows the rules of orchestration and structure Chopin learned in his years studying composition in Warsaw. Almost three minutes long, it seems highly formal and almost Beethovenian, building suspense and duly introducing thematic material in the orchestra before the piano plays a note. But once the piano enters, it is clearly dominant, and suddenly the melodies that sounded merely felicitous in the orchestra have the expressive sweetness of Chopin. In the lush *largo* we hear Chopin at his most romantic—music inspired, as he confessed to a friend, by his unspoken longing for a singer named Constantia Gladkowska. The high-energy finale of this concerto, like that of his first, incorporates Chopin's beloved Polish dance rhythms—in this case, a *mazurka*.

Antonin Dvořák

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, "From the New World"

Born: Sept. 8, 1841 in Nelahozeves (near Prague)

Died: May 1, 1904 in Prague

Composed: Jan. – May 1893

Premiered: Dec. 16, 1893 by the New York Philharmonic Society (precursor to the New York Philharmonic) at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Anton Seidl

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Sept. 4, 2022 at FivePoint Amphitheatre with Carl St.Clair conducting

Instrumentation: two flutes including piccolo, two oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings

Despite its inescapable nickname, this was not an "American" symphony, but rather a symphony "from the New World." During his stay in New York City from 1892 to 1895, Dvořák discovered an abundance of diverse ethnic sources lying fallow in America and a potentially magnificent classical tradition waiting to be born. Drawing upon American Indian songs and African-

American spirituals, this symphony broadly captures the spirit of America's musical roots, capturing both traditions without specifically quoting individual melodies.

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. To some listeners, a solo theme for flute in the first movement is 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 the American spirit most clearly. It's not certain whether this melody existed in song form before the symphony was written, but 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 Harry Burleigh, a remarkable composer who knew this music firsthand and whose blind grandfather was a former slave.

The frenzied *scherzo* that follows the second movement *largo* seems much more specific. Musicologist Joseph Horowitz relates it to the dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis at Hiawatha's wedding and her pursuit through the forest in Longfellow's "Hiawatha"; 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.

The final movement is an *allegro* that moves from the *scherzo*'s E minor into a triumphant E major. Here Dvořák seems to shift his gaze from a single, poignant tale to a distant horizon. 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.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com



ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR



Alexander Shelley is “a natural communicator, both on and off the podium” (*The Daily Telegraph*), regularly performing across six continents with the world’s finest orchestras and soloists. A passionate and articulate advocate for the role of music in society,

he has spearheaded multiple award-winning and ground-breaking projects unlocking creativity in the next generation and bringing symphonic music to new audiences.

In Sept. 2015, Shelley succeeded Pinchas Zukerman as Music Director of Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra, the youngest in its history. The ensemble has since been praised as “an orchestra transformed ... hungry, bold, and unleashed” (*Ottawa Citizen*) and his programming credited for turning the orchestra “almost overnight ... into one of the more audacious orchestras in North America” (*Maclean’s Magazine*). Together, they have undertaken major tours of Canada and Europe, have commissioned ground-breaking projects such as “Life Reflected,” “Encount3rs,” and “UnDisrupted” and released multiple JUNO award-winning albums. In Jan. 2015, Alexander also assumed the role of Principal Associate Conductor of London’s Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with whom he curates an annual series of concerts at Cadogan Hall and tours both nationally and internationally.

Having moved from London to Germany in his late teens to study cello and subsequently conducting, Alexander was 29 when he began his tenure as the youngest ever Chief Conductor of the Nürnberger Symphoniker, a position he held from Sept. 2009 until Aug. 2017. The partnership was hailed by press and audience alike as a golden era for the orchestra, transforming the ensemble’s playing, education work, and international reputation, including tours to Italy, Belgium, China, and a re-invitation to the Musikverein in Vienna.

Shelley regularly gives informed and passionate pre- and post-concert talks, as well as numerous interviews and podcasts on the role of classical music in society. He has a wealth of experience conducting and presenting major open-air events—in Nuremberg alone he has, over the course of nine years, hosted more than half a million people at the annual Klassik Open Air concerts—Europe’s largest classical music event.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



David Fray has been described by the press as the “perfect example of a thinking musician” (*Die Welt*). Acclaimed for his interpretations of music from Bach to Boulez, David Fray performs in the world’s major venues as a recitalist, soloist and

chamber musician. He has collaborated with leading orchestras under distinguished conductors such as Marin Alsop, Semyon Bychkov, Andrey Boreyko, Christoph Eschenbach, Daniele Gatti, Paavo Järvi, Kurt Masur, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Michael Sanderling, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and Jaap van Zweden. Orchestral appearances in Europe have included the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, London Philharmonic, Dresden Philharmonic, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Salzburg Mozarteum, Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala, Orchestre de Paris, and Orchestre National de France. David Fray made his U.S. debut in 2009 with the Cleveland Orchestra followed by performances with the Boston Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, and Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has given recitals at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Park Avenue Armory in New York, Chicago’s Orchestra Hall, and appears regularly at the Vienna Konzerthaus, Mozarteum Salzburg, London’s Wigmore Hall, Théâtre des Champs Élysées, and many other of the world’s major venues. Fray continues to perform in Hamburg Ballet’s John Neumeier work “for the time of coronavirus” entitled *Ghost Light*, with an all-Schubert score, for which he won the Opus Klassik’s 2020 Award for “Innovative Concert of the Year.”

In 2021, Fray founded and presented the first edition of a new Festival L’Offrande Musicale, which takes place annually in his native region of Hautes-Pyrénées in southwestern France. One of the central causes of the musical Festival is the support of people with disabilities.

In addition to the previously mentioned Opus Klassik Award for Innovative Concert of the Year, Fray holds the German Echo Klassik Prize for Instrumentalist of the Year and the Young Talent Award from the Ruhr Piano Festival. In 2008, he was named “Newcomer of the Year” by the *BBC Music Magazine*.