

OCT 12 Thu
7:30pm | Baker Hall

SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY

RAFAEL PAYARE, CONDUCTOR



**ZOELLNER
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LEHIGH UNIVERSITY



2023.2024
SEASON

Zoellner Arts Center receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



— PROGRAM —

Carlos Simon

Wake Up: A Concerto for Orchestra

Antonín Dvořák

Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104

Allegro

Adagio ma non troppo

Finale: Allegro moderato

Alisa Weilerstein, cello

- INTERMISSION -

Dmitri Shostakovich

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47

Moderato

Allegretto

Largo

Allegro non troppo

— NOTES —

WAKE UP: A CONCERTO FOR ORCHESTRA

Lead commission by San Diego Symphony

CARLOS SIMON

Born 1986, Washington, D.C.

A note from the composer:

This concerto for orchestra is inspired by the poem, Awake, Asleep, written by the Nepali poet, Rajendra Bhandari. In this profound poetic offering, Bhandari warns of the danger of being obliviously asleep in a social world, but yet how collective wakefulness provides “a bountiful harvest of thoughts.” My goal in writing this work was not only to wake a sleeping hall with the sound of the orchestra, but to leave those who hear the piece with the question: Am I asleep? For these reasons, I chose to compose a two-note rhythmic motif that acts as a “wake up call” throughout the composition - as if the orchestra is speaking to the hall and the audience, “WAKE UP!”

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Wake Up: A Concert for Orchestra was commissioned by San Diego Symphony Orchestra, Rafael Payare, Music Director (lead commissioner) and the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C., Gianandrea Noseda, Music Director

CELLO CONCERTO IN B MINOR, OP. 104

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born September 8, 1841, Mühlhausen, Bohemia

Died May 1, 1904, Prague

It can be difficult with such frequently performed and much-loved pieces as this concerto and symphony to disentangle what our ears are actually hearing from the stories we've been told about them.

Certainly, the stories about Dvořák's cello concerto are touching enough: how he wrote it in New York City, as his last American composition before returning to his beloved homeland of Bohemia; how he quoted in the second movement from one of his own songs, reported afterwards to be a favorite of his much-loved and faraway sister-in-law Josefina, whom he knew at the time (from a letter she had written him) to be gravely ill...

*Leave me alone! Do not banish the peace
In my breast with your loud words!*

and then, after the painful news of Josefina's death and his subsequent return with his family to Bohemia, how he added a second reminiscence of the same song, an afterthought, right towards the end of the concerto...

*Leave me alone with my dreams,
Do not disturb the rapture in my heart!*

But then there's the somewhat different tale of how, after first seeing the score, Dvořák's friend and mentor Johannes Brahms is supposed to have remarked:

Had I known such a violoncello concerto as that could be written, I would have tried to compose one myself.

Of these anecdotes, it's perhaps Brahms's comment that is most interesting, because it raises the question: Why is it difficult to write a cello concerto?

One obvious answer is that it's always tricky to balance the low-slung and gorgeous but vulnerable sound of this wonderful solo instrument against the power of a symphony orchestra in full cry. How do you not drown the soloist?

Dvořák's solution is stunning and virtuosic. Much of the time, when the soloist is playing, he keeps the orchestra out of the way, to give the cello line a feeling of lightness, clarity, and air.

And yet not always; there are striking passages where a large part of the orchestra is indeed playing at the same time as the soloist and you can still hear every note of the cello part. Partly, he does this by the extremely careful 'voicing' of the orchestral instruments, placing them at a critical distance above and below the soloist so as to leave an acoustic space in the middle of the texture, to ensure that the sound of the solo cello reaches our ears through the weave of other voices swirling around it.

There are also moments when certain instruments _ especially the horns _ do indeed play in exactly the same register as the soloist, but there is still no loss of clarity with the solo line. To achieve this, Dvořák uses various tricks, such as asking for extreme quietness from the orchestral musicians; we feel their haunting presence, but they do not distract us from what the soloist is doing.

How a composer sets about writing music - how they come up with ideas and write them down, and the various technical means they use to achieve exactly what they want - is not only a fascinating subject in itself, but can reveal a lot about what we, the listeners, actually hear in the finished music in the concert hall.

For instance, Brahms, whose music is often loosely thought to be similar to Dvořák's, tended to start initial work from the deep bass of the music, fixing that aspect first, rather as did the Baroque composers (Bach and Handel) whom he so much admired. For him, the beautiful surface - the motifs, melodies, and details - came later. The Czech composer Dvořák, by contrast, nearly always worked **outwards from a central line of melody**, filling in the rest of the music afterwards. In Dvořák's sketches, the first thing you notice is how hard he had to work to nail his famously beautiful tunes before he could begin what for him was the central process of composing: creating a single melodic line running from beginning to end (he used to tell his American students that his great model in this regard was Schubert, whom he admired passionately as one of the greatest melodists of all time).

Dvořák evidently felt deeply about melody; without that, the rest could not exist. In the first movement of this concerto, he started by having several attempts at the second melody - that ravishing horn tune - before he got it right. Only once it was there could he launch into a rough and vigorous sketch of the whole movement, a one-voice line of unfolding chains of melodies, each leading into the next, and usually written on a single staff, starting in the opening bar and (in a few short days of work) racing to the end, like a bird taking a single flight high across the sky.

You can hear this characteristic Dvořákian melodic voice - its sinewy power and graphic spontaneity - everywhere in this concerto. Each of the three movements gives the impression of an unfurling arc of song, now with the soloist, now passed from orchestral instrument to orchestral instrument. Almost everything else in the music Dvořák added later (even if he had it in his head from the beginning), like an artist adding color and detail to the original swift gestures of a pencil line. From this comes the peculiar attractive directness and freshness of his music.

As well as being a composer, Dvořák was also an excellent violist and he understood in detail the inner nature of stringed instruments. In particular, any string player who has performed his music will know from their fingers and their ears that he was especially fascinated by the coloristic differences between keys (tonalities) that draw power and resonance from the warmly vibrating open strings of the instruments (C, G, D, A and so on) and those that journey to places where the open strings are no longer able to vibrate sympathetically in this way. In such distant keys, the music takes on a strange almost otherworldly quality, paler, less embodied, and this was a sound Dvořák loved.

There is a fine example of this in the first movement of this concerto. At the very opening our ears are seized by a stirring, heroic and dramatic melody, powerfully resonant. Everything is bedded warmly and securely in the middle of the orchestra, colored with vibrations. But, when the same idea reappears later in the middle of the movement (about 6 minutes in), it is deliberately placed in a faraway key with almost no access to the same overtones as before, and the effect is completely different. What had been strong and dramatic, now sounds fragile and intimate, like meeting someone we once knew very well, but this time as a ghost or in a dream.

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN D MINOR, OP. 47

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg

Died August 9, 1975, Moscow

The legacy of stories around Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is, by the standards of any work of art, heavy and also horrifying.

As has often been recounted, the piece was written at the height

of the Stalinist Terror of the later 1930s. At that period, Soviet citizens were being arrested in the hundreds of thousands, and either shot or sent into the vast system of labor camps (where they were as likely to die as to survive). On top of this general terror, a year before he embarked on this symphony, Shostakovich had been subjected to a specific terror of his own: a vicious, public, and humiliating campaign of personal criticism in the Soviet press, as a result of which he was shunned by colleagues, lost much of his livelihood, and his music was removed from public performance. In the nightmarish atmosphere of that time, his future - along with everyone else's - looked bleak and highly dangerous.

It was out of this darkness that he wrote this symphony, and - astonishingly - its first performance was perhaps the greatest triumph of his career. As the impassioned thunder of the final notes of the last movement died away, the Leningrad audience got to their feet in a spontaneous demonstration of awe and admiration, and applauded without ceasing for around half an hour. The occasion had the feeling of a political demonstration at a time when pretty much all political resistance was impossible.

What are we to make of such a response? A number of Soviet commentators of the time clung to a fig-leaf provided in an article published in a newspaper shortly after that first performance (under the composer's name, though likely not written by him), in which he tells of his 'pleasure' on hearing that someone had described:

...the Fifth Symphony [as] the practical creative answer of a Soviet artist to just criticism...

Following that article, the piece was soon being routinely described as 'life-affirming', 'optimistic', and 'triumphant': in other words, as an obedient and politically correct 'Soviet' symphony in praise of the Soviet system.

But in a tyranny of that kind - or in any regime where there is no debate, no freedom of speech and no nuance - propagandistic language immediately and inevitably takes on a feeling of irony and ambiguity; that's unavoidable. And on top of that, it's obvious and remarkable that the symphony's first audience clearly did not hear this symphony (and particularly not its supposedly 'triumphant' ending) as propagandistic in this way at all. As one member of the audience wrote in her private diary immediately afterwards:

*He has given them an answer...
and what an answer!*

And so it was that the battle – a political battle – for the meaning and soul of this powerful piece of music began almost from the first moment that it came into existence.

But then, more recently, something else happened: about 30 years ago, a Russian researcher and scholar, who'd been a personal friend of Shostakovich's, took a closer look at the original sketches of the symphony and discovered, from the composer's annotations, a whole other layer of private meaning hidden in this already familiar music, that no one had known about and which had nothing to do with its already fraught political meanings.

In 1934, the youthful and newly married composer had fallen in love (supposedly briefly) with a young woman called Elena Konstantinovskaya, a specialist in the Spanish language. Two years later, Konstantinovskaya was sent to Spain as part of a Stalinist film-unit covering the events of the Spanish Civil War, where she found herself working as a translator for, among others, the gifted documentary film-maker Roman Karmen (Stalin's equivalent to Hitler's Leni Riefenstahl). Shortly thereafter, news reached Shostakovich back in Leningrad from Spain that Elena had married Karmen, and was now, as it were, Mrs. Karmen.

Shostakovich's extraordinary response was to fill his symphony with quotations (quantities of them) from Bizet's *Carmen*. And some are really startlingly audible, although for decades no one – musicians, music-historians or audience – seemed to notice.

Take the huge second melody in the first movement, where the first violins soar into the sky over a throbbing accompaniment, almost in a hushed flamenco-style, from the rest of the orchestral strings and harp. This melody is nothing less – as the sketches make clear – than an outrageous extension of the famous and flirtatious refrain from *Carmen's Act 1 Habanera*:

L'amour! L'amour! L'amour! L'amour!

Or, to take another example, the violently menacing 'Stalinist' march that begins Shostakovich's final movement opens with a 4-note hook (a motif actually found all over the symphony), which, when seen from the point of view of Bizet's opera, turns out to be a quotation from the third theme in the same *Habanera*:

L'amour est enfant de Bohême,

Il n'a jamais, jamais connu de loi...

And when we turn to the notorious end of the symphony, we find something else again: the supposedly ambivalent ‘triumphant’/enraged final measures with their violently repeated high octave A’s turn out not only to be suspiciously like a slowed-down version of Bizet’s equally violent and ambiguous *Toreador March* but also, as the sketches reveal, a direct reference to Elena Konstantinovskaya, in a way that has nothing to do with Bizet.

The composer’s pet name for Elena was, we learn, ‘Lyalya’ (with a stress on the first syllable). The note A in Russian notation is pronounced ‘Lya’. The not-so-hidden words of the ending of the symphony therefore turn out to be:

Lyalya! Lyalya! Lyalya! Lyalya!

If it seems shocking to put side by side such tragic public and political stories - a major part of 20th century history - with an utterly different story so private and personal that we may actually feel embarrassed reading about it, then perhaps at least the dissonance between such contradictory layers of non-musical (or only half-musical) significance might serve to remind us that the truth of musical meaning is never something fixed. It is always in movement, shifting, constantly alive, depending on how, where, and when this piece is being played, and how attentively we listen to it.

-Program notes by Gerard McBurney

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Rafael Payare,
Music Director

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Deborah Pate and John
Forrest Chair

Wesley Precourt
Associate Concertmaster

Jisun Yang
Assistant Concertmaster

Alexander Palamidis
Principal Second Violin

Nick Grant
Principal Associate
Concertmaster Emeritus

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Yeung
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Second Violin

Ai Nihira Awata

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John Lee

Richard Levine

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Nathan Walhout

Xian Zhuo

Benjamin
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Michael Wais

Margaret Johnston**+

Michael Martin***

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Principal

Sarah Tuck

Lily Josefsberg

Piccolo

Lily Josefsberg

Oboes

Sarah Skuster
Principal

Rodion Belousov

Andrea Overturf+

English Horn

Andrea Overturf+
Dr. William and Evelyn
Lamden English Horn Chair

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Principal

Max Opferkuch

Frank Renk

Bass Clarinet

Frank Renk+

Bassoons

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Principal

Ryan Simmons

Leyla Zamora

Contrabassoon

Leyla Zamora

Horns

Benjamin Jaber
Principal

Darby Hinshaw
Assistant Principal & Utility

John Degnan

Tricia Skye

Douglas Hall

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Principal

Jonah Levy*

Ray Nowak

Timothy Saeger***

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Principal

Logan Chopyk+

Kyle Mendiguchia

Bruce Chrisp***

Bass Trombone

Kyle Mendiguchia

Tuba

Aaron McCalla
Principal

Harp

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+ Not performing in this program

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Rafael Payare

With his innate musicianship, charismatic energy, gift for communication and irresistibly joyous spirit, Venezuelan conductor Rafael Payare is “electrifying in front of an orchestra” (Los Angeles Times). Payare conducted the San Diego Symphony (SDS) for the first time in January 2018 and was subsequently announced as the orchestra’s music director designate one month later, before assuming the role of music director in January 2019.

Now in the fifth season of his transformative tenure as music director of the San Diego Symphony, Payare conducts the SDS’s first appearance in a decade at Carnegie Hall. In November, he joins his music director colleagues in leading the first California Festival, a statewide project celebrating compelling new music of the past five years with 117 works by 110 different composers being performed by more than 100 participating organizations; conducts the orchestra’s first Tijuana concert in more than 20 years at Centro Cultural Tijuana’s annual Día de los Muertos Festival; and will lead the 2024 grand reopening of the Jacobs

Music Center, the San Diego Symphony’s newly renovated indoor home. With San Diego Symphony, Payare released his first recording, Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 11, on the Platoon Music label; inaugurated the symphony’s iconic new outdoor venue and public park, The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park, and has led performances of multiple commissions and premieres.

Alisa Weilerstein

Alisa Weilerstein is one of the foremost cellists of our time. Known for her consummate artistry, emotional investment and rare interpretive depth, she was recognized with a MacArthur “genius grant” Fellowship in 2011. Today her career is truly global in scope, taking her to the most prestigious international venues for solo recitals, chamber concerts and concerto collaborations with all the preeminent conductors and orchestras worldwide. “Weilerstein is a throwback to an earlier age of classical performers: not content merely to serve as a vessel for the composer’s wishes, she inhabits a piece fully and turns it to her own ends,” marvels *The New York Times*. “Weilerstein’s cello is her id. She doesn’t give the impression that making music involves will at all. She and the cello seem simply to be one and the same,” agrees *The Los Angeles Times*. As the UK’s *Telegraph* put it, “Weilerstein is truly a phenomenon.”

Carlos Simon

Carlos Simon is a multi-faceted and highly sought-after GRAMMY-nominated composer and curator. The current Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Simon's work spans genres, taking great inspiration from liturgical texts, prose, poetry, and art.

The 2023/24 season sees premiere performances with San Diego Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, The Washington Chorus, and LA Master Chorale, following recent other commissions from the likes of Minnesota Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Washington National Opera, and New York Philharmonic.

"If Simon has inherited anything from his lineage, it appears to be a desire to build bridges between worlds, and use music to illuminate them." - *The Washington Post*

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The San Diego Symphony, led by Music Director Rafael Payare, is comprised of 82 full-time musicians who represent and celebrate the San Diego region through dynamic and passionate music-making. One of the largest and most significant cultural organizations in California, the San Diego Symphony creates shared experiences centered on the stories of our place and time, for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. The San Diego Symphony performs for more than 250,000 people annually at its concerts throughout Southern California, reaches more than 65,000 participants through its community engagement and education programs, serves as the orchestra for the San Diego Opera, and participates collaboratively with arts and cultural activities in Baja California, Mexico, as part of its ongoing binational work.

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