

THE ST · OLAF ORCHESTRA

STEVEN AMUNDSON · CONDUCTOR

WITH SENIOR SOLOISTS:

LAUREN SHIVELY, *SOPRANO*

ANNA BAKK, *VIOLIN*

AILEEN HAN, *PIANO*

DAN LARSON, *TUBA*

ANA ASHBY, *SOPRANO*

SAMUEL BACKMAN, *ORGAN*



SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2010
3:30 P.M.
BOE MEMORIAL CHAPEL

PROGRAM

Overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Otto Nicolai (1810-1849)

Although he was primarily a composer of vocal music, Otto Nicolai also championed performances of the Austro-German Classical repertoire, founding the Vienna Philharmonic Concerts in 1842. Nicolai was born in 1810 in Königsberg. His mother was sickly and unable to care for him and his father was overbearing, so he was taken in by Carl Friedrich Zelter, who took it upon himself to ensure that the boy received a quality musical education. Nicolai studied and worked for a time in Italy before returning to Vienna to conduct the Hofopera at the Kärntnertor. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is one of Nicolai's most successful and enduring works. It was composed in 1846 and represents his diverse background; the work is a synthesis of the Neapolitan operatic and Austro-German symphonic traditions. Ulrich Konrad wrote in the *New Grove Dictionary* that: "The fusion of the learned German tradition with Italian facility, the ideal that he himself repeatedly formulated in letters and some remarkable essays, resulted in a masterpiece of memorable and appealing music."

The libretto for the opera is based on the play by William Shakespeare. The overture opens with music from the last scene of the opera. Fairies can be heard darting about the darkened forest. The *allegro* section of the overture comprises music from Falstaff's many failed attempts at seducing Frau Fluth and Frau Reich and the various hijinks the two women put him up to throughout the opera.

"L'année, en vain chasse l'année" from *L'enfant prodigue*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Lauren Shively, soprano

Claude Debussy composed the cantata *L'Enfant Prodigue* in 1884, and it later won the prestigious Prix de Rome. The text for the cantata is based on the Biblical story of the prodigal son, who left his flourishing family farm in order to make a life of his own elsewhere, eventually returning to a lavish homecoming.

The recitative and aria opens with Lia mourning and weeping for her son long after his departure. As the piece continues, Lia reflects happily on times when her son was still home: the yearly harvest and times of good company. Suddenly, she recalls the anger and grief spawned by the departure of her son and again questions why he has left her, each repetition of the phrase growing in intensity.

Violin Concerto, op. 14

II. Andante

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Anna Bakk, violin

American composer Samuel Barber's reputation for lyrical and expressive writing led to the commission of a Violin Concerto for his Curtis Institute classmate, Iso Briselli, in 1940. However, Briselli ultimately refused to premiere the concerto because of the extremely difficult last movement, composed to spite the young violinist, who found the first two movements not challenging enough. The concerto was finally premiered in February of 1941 in Philadelphia, with Eugene Ormandy conducting and Albert Spalding as the violin soloist.

The second movement is a perfect example of the gorgeous lyricism, surprising dissonances, and haunting vocal-like themes that comprise the majority of Barber's works. The movement begins with a soaring oboe solo, and thematic statements continue in the celli, violins, and French horn. The solo violin enters two minutes later with a contrasting rhapsodic melody. The first section ends with a brief violin cadenza, highlighted by large dissonant leaps. This cadenza leads into the main theme, where the solo violin plays the same tune that the oboe introduced earlier. The movement continues to escalate in dynamic and intensity, and the listener is left wondering if the movement will end in major or minor. The violin plays one final dramatic cadenza before the final soft resolution in E major.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, op. 18

I. Moderato

Sergey Vasilyevich Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Aileen Han, piano

What I try to do, when writing down my music, is to make it say simply and directly what is in my heart when I am composing. Whether there is love, or bitterness, or sadness or religion, these feelings become a part of my music and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious.

—Sergey Rachmaninov

The failure of Rachmaninov's First Symphony in the spring of 1897 plunged the as of yet invincible young composer from the height of accomplishment to the depths of utter depression. With his compositional skills under criticism and the strain of isolation and self-doubt bearing upon him, Rachmaninov fell into a deep gloom and writer's block that lasted for three years. It was not until undergoing hypnotic therapy and conversation with psychotherapist and amateur musician Nikolai Dahl that Rachmaninov was able to regain his self-confidence, allowing him to begin work on his Second Piano Concerto in the summer of 1900. Embodying the darkness, pain, and redemption of his recovery, Rachmaninov dedicated the concerto to Dr. Dahl. The Second Concerto would go on to be one of the most famous piano concerti ever written, and its composer one of the most beloved and masterful Russian Romantic composers and musicians.

The first movement unfolds with a series of slow, ponderous chords evocative of the tolling of Russian cathedral bells. The tension escalates to a climax and the music bursts into torrential piano accompaniment carried by the orchestra's swooping presentation of the main theme. Not until the second theme does the piano finally emerge as a soloist above the orchestra. All throughout this movement, the piano plays with the orchestra more collaboratively than soloistically to create a vast and heartrending landscape of shifting darkness and tenderness. It is

a subtle and tightly knit movement demonstrating Rachmaninov's magnificent ability to combine haunting melodies and lush orchestration with sparkling pianistic effects and musical honesty.

—BRIEF INTERMISSION—

The Legend of Heimdall

Elizabeth Raum (b. 1945)

II. The Tale of the Bard

Dan Larson, tuba

Elizabeth Raum is a Canadian composer and oboist. She graduated from the Eastman School of Music in 1966 with a degree in oboe performance and has held principal positions in several major Canadian orchestras. In 1984 she received her master of music in composition from the University of Regina and has since had a continuous flow of commissions. She composes for everything from string and wind instruments to multimedia theater, choral ensemble, and electroacoustics in a sophisticated, Neo-Romantic style. In her program notes, Raum writes:

The Legend of Heimdall is a tone poem in three movements for solo tuba and orchestra. It was conceived with a particular story in mind, and the imagery evoked by the music serves to describe the story with leitmotifs depicting characters and events. Heimdall was the ancient Norse god who kept watch over Asgard, the city of the gods. When he sensed danger, he would sound the alarm with his Gjallarhorn.

The second movement has the tuba in the role of the bard telling the tale of Heimdall. The music is chant-like as the bard captivates the listening villagers with his recitation. He is interrupted by a folk fiddler who entertains the people with a festive tune. The solo is joined by the string section, the music growing in intensity until the bard intercedes and returns us to the story of Heimdall.

“Ain’t it a Pretty Night” from *Susannah*

Carlisle Floyd (b. 1926)

Ana Ashby, soprano

Carlisle Floyd is most known for his operas, which are uniquely beautiful in part because of their reliance on Floyd's own libretti. Written in the verismo tradition, these libretti depict the subjects of everyday life in realistic detail instead of portraying historical or mythical themes. In each operatic score, Floyd includes directions for facial expression and other indications of specific emotions for his characters. *Susannah*, premiered in 1955, was his third opera and an immediate success. It won Floyd a New York Music Critics' Circle Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship and many other awards, and was chosen to represent American opera at the Brussels World Fair in 1958.

The libretto for *Susannah* is set in New Hope Valley, Tennessee, in the tradition of Americana settings that characterized much of Floyd's work. It is based on the story in the biblical Apocrypha about Susanna and the Elders. In it, Susannah Polk, a pretty 19-year-old, has come under harsh scrutiny from some community members because of the Elders' admiration for her and her beauty. In “Ain’t it a Pretty Night,” Susannah is imagining what it would be like to leave small-town America and become something great. Her naiveté and bravery are touching,

emphasized by thick orchestral textures and two striking emotional climaxes. Again and again she returns to the refrain, “Ain’t it a pretty night?” reflective of the beauty of her surroundings and her attachment to the world around her.

Concerto in E minor for Organ, op. 31

Marcel Dupré (1886-1971)

III. Vivace

Samuel Backman, organ

Marcel Dupré was a French composer and organist of the early 20th century who was best known as an unparalleled improviser. He had a superb memory and was the first person to play the entire oeuvre of Bach’s organ works by memory. A renowned innovator of organ pedagogy and performance technique, Dupré was often criticized for the steep technical demands of his organ works. In fact, C. M. Widor, Dupré’s teacher, once described his early *Trois Préludes et Fugues*, opus 7, as unplayable.

The Concerto in E minor, premiered in 1934, was dedicated to the composer’s wife. Though Dupré was by no means an avant-garde composer, this piece employs a very chromatic harmonic language that challenges the bounds of tonality. The scherzo-like final movement is in the form of a rondo, which provides a classical contrast to the edgy tonal language.

***Les Préludes*, Symphonic Poem No. 3**

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Known as one of the finest virtuoso pianists of all time, Franz Liszt was an equally accomplished composer and conductor. As a Radical Romantic and the founder of the New German School, he frequently wrote programmatic music and pushed the boundaries of tonality, defying the Conservative reliance on more reserved absolute music. Liszt was highly influential on younger composers; his impact is evident in the music of Richard Wagner (his son-in-law), Richard Strauss, and Jean Sibelius, among others. Liszt was the first to use the term “Symphonic Poem” to refer to the one-movement programmatic works that are associated with the Radical Romantics. His most well-known Symphonic Poem, *Les Préludes*, was composed in 1848 and premiered in 1854 in Weimar with the composer conducting.

Liszt was strongly influenced by various literary traditions. *Les Préludes* was originally composed as an overture to a choral setting of Joseph Autran’s *The Four Elements*. After its composition, Liszt became familiar with Alphonse de Lamartine’s writing and decided to turn away from *The Four Elements* and instead associate Lamartine’s *Poetic Meditations* with his new piece. In the first publication of the score, Liszt included the following epitaph:

What is life but a series of preludes to that unknown song whose first solemn note is sounded by Death? Love is the enchanted dawn of every life, but what person is there whose first delights of happiness are not dissipated by some storm, a storm whose fatal blast dispels his youthful illusions, destroying his altar as though by a stroke of lightning? And what wounded soul, after the cruel storm, does not attempt to assuage its memories in the pleasant solitude of rural life? Nevertheless, man does not long allow himself the sweet quiet offered in Nature’s bosom. When the trumpet sounds the alarm, he hurries to take up his post, no matter what struggle summons him, in order that in battle he may regain full confidence in himself and his powers.

A three-note motive — a descending minor second followed by an ascending fourth — provides the basis for each of the major themes in the piece. These themes form four main sections

derived from the Lamartine poem: The first is reflective of “Spring and Love,” the second of the “Tempests of Life,” the third the “Consolations of Nature,” and the last, “Struggle and Victory.” The final section ends in pure, heavenly, C major triumph, complete with a plagal (“Amen”) cadence. The work is truly a *tour de force* for the entire ensemble, showing off the virtuosity and lyricism of each section while simultaneously employing the rich harmonies and colors one associates with Liszt’s style.

Program notes for the soloists’ selections were written by each of the senior soloists.

Notes for the Nicolai and Liszt selections were written by Isaac Chaput, ’10.

SENIOR SOLOISTS



Top Row: Anna Bakk, Aileen Han, Dan Larson

Bottom Row: Samuel Backman, Lauren Shively, Ana Ashby

Ana Ashby is a music major from East Lansing, Michigan. She’s been a member of the Manitou Singers, St. Olaf Cantorei and, for two years, the St. Olaf Choir. Ana has treasured her ability to delve into many different subjects in her time at Olaf, most notably history and religion. She is also a graduate of the Great Conversation program. Ana works as a Peer Advisor in the Center for Experiential Learning. Performing as an Andrew Carter Festival Soloist and as the Countess in *The Marriage of Figaro* rank at the top of the list among many fantastic music experiences at

St. Olaf. She's enjoyed four wonderful years of studying voice with James McKeel and is so grateful to him for helping to foster her growth as a singer and person. After graduation, Ana hopes to pursue singing and acting in the Twin Cities while studying voice and languages before applying to graduate school for opera within the next three years.

Samuel Backman, from the studio of John Ferguson, is a church music and organ performance major from the beautiful farmlands of Trempealeau County, Wisconsin. He did not come to St. Olaf with the intention of pursuing study in organ performance; however, upon discovering the college's thriving organ program, Sam soon discerned that it was his ideal vocation. While at St. Olaf, he sang in the Viking Chorus and the St. Olaf Cantorei, he accompanied the St. Olaf Choir on their trip to the United Kingdom, and even managed to work on the Grounds Crew in the summer. Upon departure from the beautiful heights of Manitou Hill, Sam will pursue a master's degree in organ performance at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

Anna Bakk, from Medina, Minnesota, will graduate from St. Olaf with a bachelor of music degree in violin performance. She has thoroughly enjoyed her time at St. Olaf. She will especially miss the St. Olaf Orchestra, and doesn't think she'll ever perform in an orchestra that plays with more joy and passion! While on the Hill, Anna has loved studying violin with Ray Shows, playing for countless recitals, performing chamber music, teaching violin lessons, doing jam sessions, leading worship for Thursday Night Bible Study, and being way too loud in the music library. This summer, Anna is looking forward to studying and performing at the Brevard Music Center. After that, she plans to move back to the Twin Cities for a year to freelance, expand her private teaching studio, apply to music graduate schools, and spend quality time with her family and friends.

Aileen Han is a biology major from Pella, Iowa, with a passion for the ivories — piano keys and teeth, that is. This August, she plans to enter dental school at the University of Iowa. The opportunity to pursue science and music brought her to St. Olaf, and she has been blessed with many opportunities to do just that. Aileen traveled with nine other students as part of the 2008 St. Olaf Piano Tour, is a proud member of the St. Olaf Cantorei, and has collaborated with many student instrumentalists and the Philharmonia Orchestra. She has been inducted into the Beta Beta Beta National Biological Honor Society and serves as an enthusiastic officer of Education of the St. Olaf Pre-Dental Club. She would like to thank Dr. Kathryn Ananda-Owens, the entire St. Olaf piano faculty, Dr. Ted Johnson, and her loving family for all their support and encouragement.

Dan Larson, from the studio of Paul Niemisto, is a music and chemistry major from Minnetonka, Minnesota. He started playing tuba in 5th grade, and he still enjoys performing for friends and family at home or at church. As a sophomore, Dan was the first tuba player ever to win the Schubert Club Solo Competition for college and graduate level woodwinds and brass. He was also lucky enough to be featured as a tour soloist for the St. Olaf Orchestra as a junior. He plans to work for a year before pursuing medical school while always keeping his music active. When not studying or playing music, Dan enjoys baseball, biking, fishing, camping, and puzzling with his Rubik's cubes.

Lauren Shively, from the voice studio of Margaret Eaves-Smith, is a voice performance and church music major from Kirkland, Washington. Lauren has had the privilege of singing with Manitou Singers, Early Music Singers, and the St. Olaf Choir, and has also been a member of Manitou Handbell Choir throughout her time at St. Olaf. She has been a tutor for ear training and theory, and has also enjoyed teaching voice lessons in her spare time. Lauren will continue her studies next year at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, in order to pursue her masters of music in church music with voice performance emphasis. Lauren cannot wait to someday settle down in a small town as a church musician and a voice teacher.