

~Program Notes~
Berkshire Symphony Orchestra
Student Soloist Gala
March 8, 2024
In Memory of Toby Woods '27, cello

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the memory and spirit of Toby Woods '27, valued member of the Berkshire Symphony, who passed away recently. To honor his enthusiastic energy and contribution to the orchestra, and to mark our devastating loss, his chair will be kept open in our cello section for tonight's concert. We reverently hold this evening's collective musical experience in memory of our friend.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)
Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85 (1919)
IV. Allegro

Much had changed in the nine years since Edward Elgar completed writing his Violin Concerto in B minor in 1910. The horrors of the Great War moved Elgar deeply, so much so that his taste for large orchestral composition, through which famous pieces such as his two symphonies, the Pomp and Circumstance Marches, and the “Enigma” Variations were born, had vanished entirely. The public's appetite for his regal, nostalgic music also steadily diminished in the wake of the grief-filled postwar era, imposing increased financial constraints on the composer. This hardship was compounded by the depression Elgar felt over his recent poor health, particularly his severe tonsillitis, which intensely flared up near the end of the war. It was during the operation to have his tonsils removed that Elgar conceived a new theme, one that acted as a poem of regret rather than triumph, an elegy to the old Europe that was swept away by the First World War. Nine months later, he would incorporate it as the opening theme to a new concerto, his bleak and searching Cello Concerto in E minor.

Elgar started writing his Cello Concerto at Severn House, his home in Hampstead, London, but spent as much time as he could at Brinkwells, a peaceful and isolated rented cottage in Sussex. Advising him throughout the compositional process was professional cellist Felix Salmond, who was “thrilled” and “wildly excited” to introduce a new work by Elgar. The premiere, however, proved to be a disaster. Albert Coates, who was to make his first appearance

as the London Symphony Orchestra's principal conductor for the season, was determined to make an excellent first impression, and so packed the rest of the program with difficult works, including Wagner's "Waldweben" (Forest Murmurs) from *Siegfried*, Borodin's "Heroic" Symphony No. 2 in B minor, and Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*. In order to prepare the orchestra, Coates took scheduled rehearsal time away from the Cello Concerto in order to have more time to prepare the other pieces, leaving Elgar and Salmond with little to work with. "Never, in all probability, has so great an orchestra made so lamentable a public exhibition of itself," wrote one critic after the premiere. Elgar's wife, Alice, wrote in her diary the next day, "still furious ... [I] hope never to speak to that brute Coates again." Soon after the performance, Salmond moved to the United States, refusing to teach or play the concerto for the rest of his life.

Thus, Elgar's ambitious new composition joined a long lineage of cello concertos with uneasy beginnings. One of Haydn's cello concertos was lost for some 200 years, and the other had its authorship disputed for just as long. Schumann's concerto was never performed in his lifetime, and Dvorak's was initially criticized for being overly symphonic, with perceived balance problems between cello and orchestra. Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* was completely rearranged without his permission by Wilhelm Fitzenhagen, the cellist giving the premiere. Eventually, however, the music of all these pieces won through, becoming staples of today's standard cello repertoire.

The Cello Concerto in E minor would be the last major work Elgar would complete. Though he lived for another 15 years, his inspiration was undermined by Alice's passing a few months after the premiere. In his own catalogue of his compositions, he wrote "Finis. RIP" next to the concerto, signaling the end of his artistic life.

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)
“Chi il bel sogno di Doretta,” from *La Rondine* (1916)

Despite being one of Puccini’s less successful operas, *La Rondine* holds one of his most famous arias, “Chi il bel sogno di Doretta.”

During a cocktail party in the salon of her Paris home, Magda de Civry listens to poet Prunier explain his theories on love while her friends mock him. Maintaining that nobody is immune to romance, he begins to sing the first verse of a song about Doretta, who rejected a wealthy king as her suitor because of the value she placed on true love. Not knowing how to finish the song, Magda steps in, singing a second verse about how she fell in love with a student instead.

Text and translation on Page 10

Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)
***Poème* for violin and orchestra, Op. 25 (1896)**

In autumn of 1896, Ernest Chausson and violinist Eugène Ysaÿe holidayed in Sitges, a Spanish town on the Mediterranean coast. During a party hosted by the Catalan painter Santiago Rusiñol, Ysaÿe and Chausson’s wife, a pianist, agreed to an impromptu sight reading of Ernest’s newly composed, not-yet-formally-premiered showpiece *Poème*, a brooding, introspective rhapsody with passionate lyricism and soaring intensity. Although the audience included many of the most prominent Spanish artists of the time, the listeners most moved by their performance were the local townspeople gathered outside, who demanded it to be played again three more times.

This is not to say that the invited audience inside the building, which included Spanish composers Enrique Granados and Isaac Albéniz, was not inspired as well. Albéniz, in particular, was touched in such a way by the performance that he later submitted the score to the music publishing company Breitkopf & Härtel while he stayed in Leipzig, Germany as part of a concert tour. The firm was initially reluctant, citing the supposedly “vague and bizarre” nature of the “extraordinarily difficult” *Poème*, but they eventually began the printing process after Albéniz

agreed to pay the cost of 300 marks out of his own pocket, as well as an extra royalty fee to be sent to Chausson himself.

Surprisingly, Chausson never learned of Albéniz's critical role in the piece's publication. Chausson didn't even need the royalty money, since he had become independently wealthy after inheriting his father's fortune from working as a building contractor during the great renovation of Paris in the 1850s. It seems that Albéniz undertook this task to solely boost Chausson's compositional confidence and to repay him for his support and encouragement when Albéniz was a struggling music student.

Poème was first publicly performed in Nancy, France by Ysaÿe in December of 1896, but it was not fully given the attention it deserved until its Paris debut that April. After the performance, Chausson was overcome by the crowd's sustained applause, something which he had not experienced before in his musical career. The *Poème* would be Chausson's last major work. Tragically, his life was cut short three years later, when at the age of 44, he rode his bicycle downhill outside of his country estate and crashed into a brick wall. The reach and impact of his work is evident through the list of names that attended his funeral, which included visual artists Edgar Degas and Auguste Rodin, writers Henri de Régnier and Pierre Louÿs, and composers Gabriel Fauré, Isaac Albéniz, and Claude Debussy. Debussy later praised the *Poème* in a 1913 interview, praising how it "contain[s] Chausson's best qualities. Its freedom of form never inhibits its sense of harmonious proportions ... Nothing is more touching than the gentle dreaminess of the end, where the music, casting aside all description and anecdote, becomes the very sentiment which inspired its emotion. Such moments as this are very rare in the work of an artist."

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

"Avant de Quitter Ces Lieux," from *Faust* (1859)

Goethe's tragic play *Faust*, written in two parts, would prove to have a major influence on countless musical and literary artists of the 19th and 20th Centuries, such as Berlioz (*The Damnation of Faust*), Liszt (*Faust Symphony*, *Mephisto Waltzes*), Mahler (Part II of *Symphony No. 8*), and Thomas Mann (*Doctor Faustus*). One of the most famous pieces of music based on the work is Gounod's *Faust*, his fourth of twelve operas.

In the beginning of Act Two, students and villagers gather at the city gates to drink beer and wine. Valentin, a soldier, sings “Avant de Quitter Ces Lieux,” as he leaves for war with his friend Wagner, entrusting his younger sister Marguerite to the youthful Siebel.

Text and Translation on Page 11

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Piano Concerto in G Major (1929-31)
I. Allegrement

The 1920s marked the beginning of the Jazz Age, a time when the rhythms, harmonies, and dance styles of jazz began to receive widespread attention and popularity all around America. Spurred by the recent introduction of radio broadcasts, new musical ideas could be shared with a larger audience much quicker and cheaper than what was previously possible with just in-person concerts. When French composer Maurice Ravel spent four months touring the United States in 1928, he threw himself head-first into the culture of the Roaring Twenties, where he quickly became immersed in the sounds of jazz and African American spirituals. What came from this trip was new inspiration for not one but two piano concertos, which Ravel wrote almost concurrently: the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major, M. 82; and the Piano Concerto in G Major, M. 83.

A musical self-portrait of Ravel’s life and a manifesto of his artistic aims and beliefs, the Piano Concerto in G Major is a fusion of numerous cultures from different centuries and continents. Within the first few themes of the first movement, for example, one can already hear the influences of Ravel’s Basque heritage and his Spanish ancestry. Sprinkled throughout are tastes of glittering jazz and impressionist flavor. Providing the backbone of the piece is a clear, translucent Mozartian clarity which keeps the piece playful and free. “The music of a concerto,” Ravel commented, “should, in my opinion, be lighthearted and brilliant ... clearly highlighting the soloist’s virtuosity ... and not aim at profundity or at dramatic efforts. It has been said of certain great classics that their concertos were written not ‘for’ but ‘against’ the piano. I heartily agree.”

Soon after the premiere at the Salle Pleyel in January of 1932, Ravel and pianist Marguerite Long embarked on a European concert tour, performing the concerto in sixteen cities,

starting in Antwerp and including Brussels, Vienna, Bucharest, Prague, London, Warsaw, Berlin, Amsterdam and Budapest. Like the Elgar and the Chausson that the Berkshire Symphony performs tonight, the Piano Concerto in G Major would be Ravel's last major work. In October, he suffered a blow to the head in a taxi accident, which some scholars believe may have exacerbated a pre-existing neurological condition. From that point on, Ravel had difficulty writing, speaking, and coordinating his movements. After lapsing into a coma after an unsuccessful brain surgery, he passed away in December of 1937.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Triple Concerto in C Major, Op. 56 (1803-04)
I. Allegro
II. Largo
III. Rondo alla polacca

As with many composers, Beethoven began his compositional career writing piano and chamber pieces as he worked to hone his own musical style. Before the turn of the century, Beethoven had composed four piano trios, six string quartets, ten piano sonatas, and various other solo and chamber works. Then in 1801 came his Symphony No. 1 in C Major, his first foray into the more expansive orchestral genre, which proved to be a great success. Beethoven then did something that few composers before him had thought of before. Would it be possible to bring the styles and sounds of chamber and symphonic music together – to have a piece that had both the collegial intimacy of a small ensemble and the vast, lavish colors of a full orchestra? From this combination came Beethoven's hybrid chamber-concerto, his brilliant Triple Concerto in C Major, a descendant of the baroque concerti grossi of Corelli and Handel, and the sinfonia concertante of Johann Christian Bach and Mozart.

The Triple Concerto was written to be performed by Archduke Rudolph of Austria, a talented piano student of Beethoven's, who was at the time no more than 16 years old. The trio was rounded out by the professional musicians Carl August Seiler, a gifted violinist who was accepted into King Friedrich Wilhelm II's court orchestra at the age of ten; and Antonín Kraft, believed by most scholars to be the cellist for whom Joseph Haydn wrote his famous Concerto No. 2 in D Major.

Because of the imbalance of experience between his musicians, Beethoven's plan was to create a more reserved piano part that would be backed up by his two other, more mature soloists. This compromise resulted in a shockingly innovative part for the solo cello, the lowest instrument of the trio, who perhaps for the first time is given significant soloistic prominence instead of the supportive role it usually receives in chamber works. This novelty was aided by the exploration of previously uncharted and advanced cello techniques, including playing extensively in the instrument's upper register. In each of the three movements, Beethoven also allows the cellist to announce the main theme before his or her two counterparts.

The extensive scope of the Triple Concerto is reflective of the period of Beethoven's career in which it was written, a time in which he wrote some of his most ambitious and revolutionary music, including the Razumovsky String Quartets, the Piano Sonata No. 21 "Waldstein," and the "Eroica" Symphony No. 3. It is often regarded as a major event in a music organization's season program to perform the Triple Concerto, considering the amount of rehearsal it takes to prepare and the logistical coordination it takes to bring together three star musicians. In the end, the visual effect on stage is striking, as the trio takes up a large amount of space in front of the orchestra. There has never been a great way to arrange the soloists, since, inevitably, they will have trouble seeing each other and the conductor at the same time. What often results is a relay of cues between one musician, to another, to another, to the conductor, and finally to the concertmaster and orchestra. This speaks to perhaps the key message of this piece, the importance of being able to communicate and collaborate with one another directly and respectfully.

Program notes by
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Eugene Drucker, violin

Eugene Drucker is a founding member of the Emerson String Quartet and Music Director of the Bach at New Year's concerts for The Berkshire Bach Society. He has appeared as a solo violinist with the orchestras of Montreal, Brussels, Antwerp, Liege, Hartford, Richmond, Omaha, Jerusalem, and the Rhineland-Palatinate, as well as with the American Symphony Orchestra, the Aspen Chamber Symphony, and the Las Vegas Philharmonic. A graduate of Columbia University and the Juilliard School, he served for two years as concertmaster of the Juilliard Orchestra, which featured him several times as a soloist. He made his New York debut as a Concert Artists Guild winner in the fall of 1976, after having won prizes at the Montreal Competition and the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. He has recorded the complete unaccompanied works of Bach (Parnassus Records), the

complete sonatas and duos of Bartók (Biddulph Recordings), and (with the Emerson Quartet) works ranging from Bach and Haydn to contemporary repertoire, mostly for Deutsche Grammophon. A nine-time Grammy and three-time Gramophone Magazine Award winner, he is visiting professor of chamber music at Stony Brook University.



Sebastian Bäverstam, cello

Internationally renowned cellist Sebastian Bäverstam holds a masterclass featuring the performances of talented Williams cellists.

Dual citizen of Sweden and the USA, Sebastian Bäverstam is a cellist, pianist, and composer as well as a librettist, improviser, and conductor. In his spare time he is passionate about gaming of all kinds including board games, video games, and card games along with archery, physical training, and the outdoors.

Sebastian grew up in Newton, MA, and studied music intensely from a young age. He performed extensively in the Boston area with his family of musicians who called themselves "The Bäverstam Chamber Players." As a teenager, Sebastian focused exclusively on the cello and toured with his youth orchestra under the direction of Benjamin Zander in South America and China, performing Dvorak's cello concerto as well as Strauss's Don Quixote.

Bäverstam attended the New England Conservatory where he studied with cellist Paul Katz. After winning the 2010 Concert Artists Guild competition, he moved to New York to pursue a soloist's career. During this time, Bäverstam made his official debut at Carnegie's Weill recital hall in 2012 where his playing was praised by *The Strad* magazine for its "consummate instrumental mastery".

After several short tours throughout the United States, Sebastian shifted his focus to study composition full time. He studied privately for several years, and then briefly at the Royal Conservatory of Stockholm in 2019. Sebastian has now made his foray into a double career as performer and composer. The premiere for his cello concerto in Boston was described by the *Boston Musical Intelligencer* as "radically new, speaking in its own "never heard before but understood by all" idiom of emotion." Bäverstam recently released a new CD album titled *Settling Old Scores* with his longtime duo partner pianist Constantine Finehouse which can be found on iTunes, Amazon and Spotify.



Jonathan Feldman, piano

Jonathan Feldman is an ensemble player, solo recitalist, and accompanist. He has performed around the world with Nathan Milstein, Itzhak Perlman, Gil Shaham, Midori, Pierre Fournier, Kyung Wha Chung, and Zara Nelsova. He has been a participant in New York Philharmonic Chamber Ensembles concerts throughout the New York area and on orchestra tours of the Far East, South America, Russia, and Europe. He has performed at the Tanglewood Festival, Bridgehampton Music Festival, Music from Angel Fire (New Mexico), Aspen Music Festival, and California's Hidden Valley Music Festival, given master classes throughout the U.S., and has recorded on the Columbia Masterworks, DGG, RCA Red Seal, Titanic, Philo, and Nonesuch labels. Director of the collaborative piano program at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, Calif., Feldman has been on the collaborative piano faculty of New England Conservatory since 2011. He has been on

the faculty at Juilliard since 1989 and was chair of the collaborative piano department from 1992 to 2015. He has a BM degree from Juilliard and studied piano with Irwin Freundlich, Dorothy Taubman, and Rosetta Goodkind.

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

“Chi il bel sogno di Doretta,” from *La Rondine* (1916)

Italian

Chi il bel sogno di Doretta potè indovinar?
Il suo mister come mai, come mai finì?
Ahimè! un giorno uno studente in bocca la baciò
E fu quel bacio
Rivelazione
Fu la passione!
Folle amore!
Folle ebbrezza!
Chi la sottil carezza
D'un bacio così ardente
Mai ridir potrà?
Ah! mio sogno!
Ah! mia vita!
Che importa la ricchezza
Se alfin è rifiorita la felicità!
O sogno d'or
Poter amar così!

English

Who could ever guess Doretta's beautiful dream?
How is it that her mystery never ends?
Ah, me! One day, a student kissed her on the lips
And it was such a kiss
Revelation
It was passion!
Crazy love!
Crazy intoxication!
Who could ever describe
The subtle caress
Of such a flaming kiss?
Ah, my dream!
Ah, my life!
What do riches matter
If happiness flourishes at the end!
O golden dream
To be able to love like this!

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

“Avant de Quitter Ces Lieux,” from *Faust* (1859)

French

O sainte médaille,
Qui me viens de ma sœur,
Au jour de la bataille,
Pour écarter la mort,
Reste là sur mon cœur!

Avant de quitter ces lieux,
Sol natal de mes aïeux,
A toi, seigneur et Roi des cieux,
Ma sœur je confie,
Daigne de tout danger
Toujours, toujours la protéger
Cette sœur si chérie!
Délivré d'une triste pensée,
J'irai chercher la gloire au sein des ennemis,
Le premier, le plus brave au fort de la mêlée,
J'irai combattre pour mon pays.
Et si vers lui, Dieu me rappelle,
Je veillerai sur toi fidèle,
O Marguerite!

Avant de quitter ces lieux,
Sol natal de mes aïeux,
A toi, seigneur et Roi des cieux,
Ma sœur je confie,
O Roi des cieux, jette les yeux,
Protège Marguerite, Roi des cieux!

English

O holy medal,
Which my sister gave me,
On the day of battle
Remain on my heart
To ward off Death!

Before I leave this town,
My forefathers' native place,
To you, Lord and King of Heaven,
Do I entrust my sister,
I beg you to defend her
From every peril,
My beloved sister!
Freed from this harrowing thought,
I shall seek glory in the enemy's ranks,
The first, the bravest, in the thick of the fray,
I shall go and fight for my country.
And if God should call me to his side,
I shall faithfully watch over you,
O Marguerite!

Before I leave this town,
My forefathers' native place,
To you, Lord and King of Heaven,
Do I entrust my sister,
O King of Heaven, hear my prayer
And defend Marguerite, O King of Heaven!