Opening Night Celebration

ROCKPORT FESTIVAL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Violins: Christina Bouey, Daniel Ching, Jason Issokson, Jonathan Ong, Dorothy Ro, Barry Shiffman, Sandy Yamamoto

Violas: Colin Brookes, Hezekiah Leung, Abigail Rojansky

Cellos: Jonathan Dormand, Grace Ho, Desmond Hoebig

Bass: Kebra-Seyoun Charles

SERENADE FOR STRINGS, OP. 20 (1892)
Edward Elgar (1857-1934)
Allegro piacevole
Larghetto
Allegretto

POSTCARDS FROM THE SKY (1996)
Marjan Mozetich (b. 1948)
Unfolding Sky
Weeping Clouds
A Messenger

:: INTERMISSION ::

STRING QUARTET IN D MINOR, D. 810
(DEATH AND THE MAIDEN) (1824)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828), arr. Gustav Mahler
Allegro
Andante con moto
Scherzo - Allegro molto
Presto

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Please join Rockport Music for an Opening Night Reception following the concert in the third floor reception hall.
"I like 'em; the first things I ever did," Elgar said of three pieces for string orchestra he wrote in 1888. Four years later, he reworked the pieces into the attractive, gentle Serenade for Strings. It was the earliest of his works to become widely known and remains the earliest of his music in today’s repertoire. Its success was not accidental. Elgar was a violinist of some skill and brought an insider’s knowledge to the notes he put down on paper. When he wrote concertos for violin and cello as well as a sonata for violin, they were amongst the most personal and idiomatic of his works. Even after these later successes, beginning with the Enigma Variations in 1899, the Serenade was to remain Elgar’s favorite work. He conducted it in his last recording sessions the year before he died.

The opening movement is bound together by the bouncy rhythmic figure heard at the beginning on the violas. Over it, Elgar builds beautifully arching melodies underpinned by a distinctive melancholy. The slow movement is a noble elegy and the heart of the Serenade. Perfectly realized in shape, it anticipates the Nimrod movement in the Enigma Variations and the slow movements of the symphonies. The finale eloquently brings back themes from the opening movement.

POSTCARDS FROM THE SKY
Marjan Mozetich (b. Gorizia, Italy, January 7, 1948)
Composed 1996; 13 minutes

It’s called the ‘driveway experience’ among radio people – the magic touch that some music has to keep a driver captive in their car long after they have arrived at their destination. Writing such music is a gift that Canadian composer Marjan Mozetich was celebrated for when people used to write letters (or postcards) to the station or light up the switchboard (when stations had human operators) calling in to ask: ‘What was that piece?’ Times change, but Mozetich, who has taught, guided, and mentored composition students at Queen’s University, Canada for almost three decades, continues to forge a singularly strong link between composer, performer and audience. With more than 70 works in many instrumental and vocal combinations, as well as for theater, film and dance, Mozetich has long been among the most played living classical composers in Canada. His initial instincts were towards the avant-garde and a more intellectually-driven approach to composition. Then, an about-turn in the early 1980s raised eyebrows, infuriated a few, but generally delighted audiences. His aim, he has said since then, is: ‘to write music that expresses beauty, sensuousness and emotion.’

Mozetich’s three-movement Postcards from the Sky for string orchestra was commissioned by the Canada Council. It premiered in April 1994 by the Thirteen Strings of Ottawa and was conducted by Paul Andreas Mahr. This often achingly beautiful music offers short, postcard-length reflections on the sky as a metaphor for life. The first movement, Unfolding Sky, reveals a short, falling theme, and a rising arpeggio theme in the bass, both heard over continuously pulsing strings, while opening up to reveal more and more of themselves, eventually bursting into sunlight. In Weeping Clouds, a related, falling theme is slowed down and elongated into an elegy, accompanied by pizzicato falling rain. Only at the end does the melody take an upward trajectory, offering solace.

A Messenger presents a yearning theme over a stepwise, descending bass line, supported by a shimmering texture of rocking strings. The beauty of this enigmatic musical message, Mozetich says, briefly reflects on the infinite beyond our worldly concerns.

STRING QUARTET IN D MINOR, D. 810 (DEATH AND THE MAIDEN)
Franz Schubert (b. Vienna, Austria, January 31, 1797; d. Vienna, November 19, 1828)
Composed 1824; 40 minutes

The powerful image of Death as a friend whose hand gently and unrelentingly approaches, caresses and claims a maiden goes back to at least medieval times. Schubert found the image in the poem Der Tod und das Mädchen (Death and the Maiden) by the German poet and essayist Matthias Claudius (1740–1815). He set this to music as a song in 1817. Its haunting piano accompaniment contains an insistent long-short-short rhythm whose ominous onward tread becomes a rhythmic death motif to which Schubert sets only music sung by Death itself. Seven years later, the rhythmic motif became the emotional heartbeat of the slow movement of a new string quartet. But the evocative rhythm also underlines the other movements of his dark and urgent quartet, giving it a unity of purpose and design that is unmatched.

That said, by no stretch of the imagination could the quartet itself claim to be about Death. There’s much in it about life, too. The opening movement is virtually without theme. Its fierce opening triplets encourage melodies to appear. But they are not the long lyrical lines we customarily associate with Schubert. Both the scale of the music and its sonorities are orchestral. The themes confront one another. The quiet, bittersweet closing of the slow movement contrasts sharply with the driving syncopations of the Scherzo. This powerful, tightly constructed movement had its origins in an unlikely source: a G-sharp minor dance for keyboard (D. 790). To the dance, Schubert added the rhythm associated with Death. It reflects Schubert’s interest in cyclical unity within the quartet rather than any preoccupation with stretching the image of Death into another movement. The finale returns to motives from the first movement and its saltarello-like rhythm propels the music forward with tremendous energy and brilliance. The minor key prevails not only through the five variations of the slow movement but throughout the entire work.

It was probably a shared fascination with youth, beauty and both the terror of death and its comfort as a release from the troubles of the world that drew Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) to Schubert’s Quartet. His arrangement adds tone, color and weight to the original by adding a line for double basses, by occasionally dividing the violins or doubling cellos with violas, and by making striking use of muted strings in the slow movement. The resulting richness of the orchestration adds to the bittersweet quality of Schubert’s quartet writing. It also adds an undeniable element of surprise to those familiar with Schubert’s string quartet – though present-day listeners will perhaps be less shocked than were the German critics when Mahler first conducted the slow movement to a half-empty hall in Hamburg in 1894. Because of criticism that he was depriving what was then regarded as Schubert’s ‘divine’ music its natural intimacy, Mahler never gave a full performance of his arrangement. However, he did noteate his score with his full performance intentions and even began work on arranging some of the other Schubert quartets.

These arrangements were known to have existed for many years. But they were, for all intents and purposes, lost. However, as recently as the early 1980s, Mahler’s daughter Anna was looking through some of her father’s scores and came across a bound volume of Schubert’s string quartets. Some fastidious pencil markings caught her attention and caused her to seek advice from Mahler experts David Matthews and Donald Mitchell. That advice confirmed the rediscovery, and Mahler’s arrangement was published in 1984.
DEATH AND THE MAIDEN

The Maiden: 
Pass me by! Oh, pass me by!
Away, cruel man of bones!
I am still young, go, please leave me,
And do not touch me.

Death: 
Give me your hand, you lovely, tender creature.
I am a friend, and come not to punish.
Be of good courage! I am not cruel,
Softly shall you sleep in my arms!

— Matthias Claudius (1740–1815)

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

CHRISTINA BOUEY, violin

Canadian violinist Christina Bouey has won numerous awards, including First Prize at the Schoenfeld International String Competition and Grand Prize at the Fischoff Competition. She is a founding member of the Ulysses Quartet and she is currently concertmaster of the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra. Bouey received her master’s degree from Manhattan School of Music and her Bachelor’s from The Boston Conservatory. She plays the 1728 “Artot” Stradivarius on generous loan from the Juilliard School.

COLIN BROOKES, viola

A founding member of the award-winning Ulysses Quartet, Colin Brookes has taught in the Pre-College Division of the Juilliard School and the undergraduate programs of Yale University and SUNY Stony Brook. He performs regularly with The Knights, A Far Cry and other acclaimed ensembles. Colin holds an undergraduate degree from the Juilliard School and a Master’s degree and Artist Diploma from Yale University. He currently plays a 1799 Grancino viola along with an Ouchard bow from the Juilliard School.

GRACE HO, cello

Taiwanese-American cellist Grace Ho is a founding member of the Ulysses Quartet, which recently served as the Graduate String Quartet in Residence at the Juilliard School and was First Prize winner in the 2018 Schoenfeld International String Competition, as well as the 2016 Fischoff Competition. Ms. Ho received her master’s and doctoral degrees from the Manhattan School of Music and her bachelor’s degree from the University of North Texas.

KEBRA-SEYOUN CHARLES, double bass

Double bassist Kebra-Seyoun Charles received their Bachelor’s degree from the New England Conservatory of Music and is currently pursuing their Master’s degree at The Juilliard School. They are a recipient of the prestigious Jerome L. Greene and Morse Teaching Artist Fellowships. Exhibiting versatility, Kebra-Seyoun has also played in the Slugs’ Salon installation at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, a piece created by famed jazz musician and composer Jason Moran.

HEZEKIAH LEUNG, violin

Violist Hezekiah Leung is a founding member of the Ulysses Quartet, where he has served as a violinist for six seasons. As part of the Argus Quartet, he has served in the Fellowship Quartet in Residence at Yale and Graduate Resident Quartet at Juilliard.

JASON ISSOKSON, violin

Jason Issokson is a member of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Rolston Quartet, which was first prize winner of the 2016 Banff International String Quartet Competition. Additionally, he was a founding member of the Argus Quartet, where he served as a violinist for six seasons. As part of the Argus Quartet, he has served in the Fellowship Quartet in Residence at Yale and Graduate Resident Quartet at Juilliard.

DESMOND HOEBIG, cello

Professor of cello at Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, Desmond Hoebig has had a distinguished career as a solo, orchestral and chamber musician. He won first prize at the 1984 Munich International Competition and the grand prize at the 1980 Canadian Music Competition. Mr. Hoebig has been a soloist with many prominent orchestras in North America, and has been a member of both the Orford String Quartet and the Hoenig-Moroz Trio. Previously, Mr. Hoebig was principal cello with the Cleveland, Houston and Cincinnati orchestras.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BARRY SHIFFMAN, violin

Please see full biography on page 5.

VERONA STRING QUARTET

Jonathan Ong, violin | Dorothy Ro, violin
Abigail Rojansky, viola | Jonathan Dormand, cello

After receiving Chamber Music America’s coveted 2020 Cleveland Quartet Award, the Verona Quartet has now firmly established itself amongst the most distinguished ensembles on the chamber music scene today. The Quartet serves on the faculty of Oberlin College as the Quartet-in-Residence, in addition to holding residences at the Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance, Indiana University Summer String Academy and North Carolina’s Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle.

SANDY YAMAMOTO, violin

Violinist Sandy Yamamoto is currently an Associate Professor of Practice in Violin Performance at the University of Texas at Austin and was the recipient of the 2016 Butler School of Music Teaching Excellence Award. While a member of the Miró Quartet, she won numerous awards, including First Prize at the Banff International String Quartet Competition. Additionally, she often performs with the East Coast Chamber Orchestra, River Oaks Chamber Orchestra and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Classical Cabarets

Rockport Music brings the ever-popular cabarets back to the Festival with informal one-hour performances in the third-floor reception hall with café-style seating.

Tickets:
$30 seated
$12 standing

June 23 :: 9:45 PM
French Cabaret

July 8 :: 9:45 PM
Cabaret: Romani Music

August 12 :: 9:45 PM
Cabaret: Bach to Baker