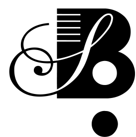


06 | 07 Season

Berkeley Symphony Orchestra

Program Notes

George Thomson, Guest Conductor

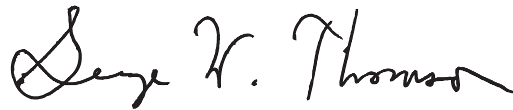
January 13, 2007

Stravinsky
Sibelius
Locke
Wilson

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley

BERKELEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

2006–07 SEASON



KENT NAGANO, MUSIC DIRECTOR

GEORGE THOMSON, CONDUCTOR

JAMES A. KLEINMANN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

8:00 pm, Saturday, January 13, 2007

Zellerbach Hall

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Concertino for Twelve Instruments

JEAN SIBELIUS

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Minor, Op. 47

I. Allegro moderato
II. Adagio di molto
III. Allegro, ma non tanto

Margot Schwartz, *violin*

— INTERMISSION —

MATTHEW LOCKE

Curtain Tune from *The Tempest*

OLLY WILSON

***Hold On:* Symphony No. 3**

(West Coast Premiere)

I. [quarter note = ca. 88]
II. Largo
III. Allegro

Season Sponsors

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Program Notes

Concertino for Twelve Instruments

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)

Igor Fyodorovich Stravinsky was born in Oranienbaum (now Lomonosov) in Russia on June 17, 1882. He died in New York City on April 6, 1971. The original version of the Concertino was scored for string quartet. It was commissioned by the Flonzaley Quartet, a Swiss ensemble (which would eventually give the premiere of the work). Stravinsky wrote the work in Carantec (Brittany) and Garches (a suburb of Paris) during the summer of 1920; he completed it on September 24. Its first performance took place on November 23 in New York City, with publication following in 1923 by Wilhelm Hansen of Copenhagen. Stravinsky (now resident in Los Angeles) revisited the work in April 1952, rescoring it for 12 instruments. The new version received its premiere on November 11, 1952, by the Los Angeles Chamber Symphony Orchestra with the composer conducting. Once again, Hansen was the publisher (1953). The revised version of the work is scored for flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, tenor trombone, bass trombone, obligato violin, and obligato cello. Duration ca. 6:00.

When World War I broke out in 1914, Igor Stravinsky was in Switzerland, where his family had spent part of each year since 1906, returning to Russia only during the summers. Now, cut off from his native land, he decided to settle in the Alpine nation, and in 1915 took a lease on a house near Lausanne, in the canton of Vaud. During the ensuing years of exile, Stravinsky became intimate with local artists and musicians. Among the latter was a group of string players called the Flonzaley Quartet, whose leader, Alfred Pochon, suggested the Concertino to Stravinsky. The composer later recalled: “M. Pochon wished to introduce a contemporary work into their almost exclusively classical repertoire, and asked me to write them an ensemble piece, in form and length of my own choosing . . . . So it was for them that I composed my Concertino, a piece in one single movement, treated in the form of a free sonata allegro with a definitely concertante part for the first violin.”

Stravinsky only got around to writing the piece after he left Switzerland. After the war ended, he realized that living in Switzerland kept him too far from the artistic centers of Europe; in the summer of 1920, Stravinsky and his family moved to France, first to Brittany (where he complained about the tourists) and then to the home of Coco Chanel (who was probably not only Stravinsky’s landlady but also his lover) in the Parisian suburb of Garches. The Concertino, begun in the former locale, was completed in late September in the latter.

The great social and economic disruption caused by the war had made it impractical for Stravinsky to continue the string of large-scale works of the sort he had produced before 1914 for Serge Diaghilev’s company, the Ballets Russes. He concentrated on music for smaller ensembles that could be staged economically. During the period leading up to 1920, Stravinsky went through one of his trademark changes of style, moving away from the intensely Russian-flavored post-Romanticism of his early work to a more

objective neo-classicism heavily influenced by the forms and practices of pre-19th century music.

Chronologically, the Concertino is sandwiched neatly between two neo-classical masterpieces: the ballet *Pulcinella,* based on 18th-century melodies, and the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments.* Like the works of this period, the Concertino employs spare textures, static (sometimes polytonal) harmonies, and pithy themes, all supported by a taut rhythmic skeleton. Stravinsky's description of the Concertino, quoted above, cites two features from the classical tradition that he drew upon for the new work: sonata form and the concerto.

Indeed, in its original form, the Concertino is structured like a miniature concerto for the solo violin, with the other players in supporting roles. When Stravinsky came to revise the work in 1952, he expanded the scoring from four instruments to twelve, and added a solo cello which, together with the violin, forms a sort of solo group. As he wrote in the program note for the premiere of the revised work, "My present intentions towards my earlier work have led me to re-bar it rather extensively, to clarify some of the harmony, and to punctuate and phrase it more clearly."

Formally, the work resembles not so much the textbook single-movement "sonata form," but rather seems to compress all four movements of a standard sonata movement work (fast-slow-dance-fast) into one. Furthermore, the characteristic rising scales (in two keys simultaneously) heard at the very opening recur at important structural points, reminiscent of classical rondo form.

The supposed stars of the work, the solo violin and cello, make a subdued entrance noodling around in a low register. Accompanied by burbling bassoons and occasional interjections from the brass and other winds, the soloists begin to assert themselves (some passages bear the unusual marking *Glissez avec tout l'archet,* indicating they should use the full length of the bow on each note). Another statement of the rising scales leads to a halt and a moment's reflection, followed by a slow, quiet cadenza for the first violin (taken verbatim from the string quartet version) played entirely using double stops.

As the tempo picks up again, the bustle of the first section returns. The accumulated rhythmic energy gathers itself into a climactic series of repeated chords for the whole ensemble, punctuated in unpredictable ways. Out of this emerges an Eastern European-sounding folk tune, an echo of the Stravinsky from *Petrouchka* days. It fades away and is followed by a repetition of the pulsating chords. The work ends wistfully, with a nostalgic glance back at the cadenza.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Minor, Op. 47

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

Jean [Johan] Christian Julius Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland, on December 8, 1865. He died in Järvenpää, also in Finland, on September 20, 1957. Sibelius began work on the first version of his only violin concerto in 1903. He completed it in 1904, and it received its premiere in Helsinki on February 8, 1904, with Viktor Nováček as soloist and the composer himself directing the Philharmonic Society. The composer was dissatisfied with the work, and withheld it from publication; it was not released into print until 1990. He revised it in 1905, and this version was first performed by Karel Halíř and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, with Richard Strauss conducting on October 19, 1905. It is this revised version that is most commonly performed, and it is the one that will be heard at tonight's concert. This version of the work is scored for pairs each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons; 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings, and solo violin. Duration ca. 33:30.

Even today, a half-century after his death, Jean Sibelius is among the best-known of all Finnish artists, and is certainly the most easily recognized Finnish musician. He came of age during the first stirrings of nationalist sentiment in his native land, and played a large role in forging a Finnish artistic identity. For hundreds of years, Finland had been ruled by outsiders: the nation was a Swedish possession from the Middle Ages until Napoleonic times, then a Grand Duchy of Russia from 1809 to 1917. The long years of foreign domination left their mark: to this day, a significant minority of Finns in the southwest part of the country speak Swedish as their mother tongue.

Sibelius, too, grew up speaking Swedish. He was sent to a Finnish-language school from the age of ten, but did not gain a mastery of the language until he was an adult. Ironically, it was only while studying in Vienna in the early 1890s that he found a fascination for Finnish language and culture—due, at least in part, to having fallen in love with a young Finnish-speaking woman. He became enamored of the *Kalevala,** the Finnish national folk epic, whose strict meter and use of repetitive poetic imagery and rhythmic patterns struck him as "extraordinarily modern." His interest in Finnish culture remained largely literary; unlike many nationalist composers in other European countries, he did not tramp about the countryside, collecting and cataloging folk tunes, nor did he make great use of Finnish melodies in his own works. Nevertheless, the musical language he crafted in the 1890s was permeated with the rhythmic and melodic elements gleaned from a study of Finnish folk poetry.

The first fruit of this study was the sprawling work for orchestra and men's chorus, *Kullervo,* based on an episode from the *Kalevala.* Describing the work in the second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary,* James Hepokoski offers a summary of the characteristics of Sibelius's "Finnish" style:

> Shunning conservatory correctness, the work gave prominence to modally-tinged "Finnish" melodies and reiterative accompaniment patterns; obsessive ostinato repetition, long pedal point and epic recyclings of brief melodic ideas; bluntly cut rhythms; broodingly thick, dark an often minor-mode textures, redolent of stern historical burdens and inescapable tragedy; unmediated juxtapositions of utterly contrasting timbre fields; and a favouring of texturally stratified, prolonged sound-images at the expense of traditional, linear-contrapuntal development.

Much of this could be said as well about Sibelius's Violin Concerto, but the "Finnish" element is more muted than in his overtly nationalistic works. This is to be expected from a composer working within a standard Western European concert genre, and in fact many commentators have noted that Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto is at least as great an influence as Sibelius's Finnish heritage. Some have found that the composer's own rock-hewn style to be an infelicitous match for the virtuoso display customary in works of this sort; the general opinion is, however, that he met the challenge brilliantly, and his concerto

*Modern audiences may be interested to learn that J.R.R. Tolkien cited the *Kalevala* as one of the principal inspirations for *The Lord of the Rings.*

has become a staple of the repertoire.

In the early years of the 20th century, Sibelius's international fame was growing, and it seems likely that the Violin Concerto was conceived for the export market, as it were. He began the work in 1903, but his personal demons of procrastination and alcoholism conspired to drag out its completion. Perhaps he never would have finished it were it not for the dedication of his wife, Aino, who sometimes resorted to hiring a cab in the middle of the night to go into town and drag Sibelius home from whatever club or tavern he had settled in. But the work was completed, and was performed in February of 1904. The concert was not a success—the soloist was overwhelmed by the technical demands of his part, and the composer was dissatisfied with the work overall. He withdrew this first attempt and held it back from publication (it was not printed until 1990). Setting himself to the task of revising the work, he worked quickly and in June 1905 was able to inform his German publisher that a new version of the concerto was ready. Its premiere took place four months later in Berlin with Richard Strauss conducting, and this revised form of the concerto (the one heard tonight) was deemed a success. One critic wrote that it reminded him of "the Nordic winter landscape painters who through the distinctive interplay of white on white, secure rare, sometimes hypnotic and sometimes powerful, effects."

Like many orchestral works of the period, the concerto opens *pianissimo,* with muted strings sustaining a single chord. This technique blurs the boundaries of the piece, giving the effect of something perceived first from a distance that is now coming into clear view. After only a few bars, the soloist presents the main theme of the piece: a long, eloquent melody whose chiseled contour is punctuated by the interval of the descending fifth at key points. The prominence of this falling motif contributes to the atmosphere of melancholy that pervades the work. The orchestra remains a passive accompanist throughout this passage, which is its usual role when the soloist is playing. Only when the soloist is silent does the orchestra come to the fore. One finds none of the lively give-and-take between solo and tutti, which can take the form of conversation or confrontation, so typical of the concerto genre. Rather, Sibelius organizes the work in great blocks of contrasting texture.

The most arresting formal feature of the work is the placement of the soloist's cadenza. Sibelius built upon Mendelssohn's and Tchaikovsky's idea of putting the cadenza between the development section and the recapitulation by having the cadenza alone serve as the development section. This fiendishly difficult passage combines virtuosic display with a re-examination of the movement's principal themes, building to a climax just before the restatement of the opening melody. A final outburst of violinistic fireworks brings the movement to a close.

The poignant slow movement opens with an introductory passage featuring a dotted-rhythm theme played in parallel thirds in the winds. As in the first movement, the principal melody, introduced by the soloist, is colored by drooping melodic intervals. It is characteristic of this composer that he sets the passage low in the instrument's range, lending it a burnished sheen; the more conventional approach would have been to place it higher for more brilliance. Because of this low placement, when the melodic line does eventually rise the emotional effect is all the greater. An orchestral passage takes up the wind idea from the opening of the movement, then the soloist develops the main theme. The movement is rounded off with an impassioned restatement of the principal melody, which eventually dies away, exhausted.

Perhaps the most impressive showpiece for the soloist of all, the finale provides only occasional brief respites for the soloist. It opens with what Erik Tawastjerna called a "proud, chivalrous idea" whose distinctive rhythmic character informs the whole movement. Indeed, a forward-driving rhythmic impulse is ever-present—the timpani are kept very busy tapping out repetitive patterns that lend a peasant-dance atmosphere to the proceedings. The crisp second subject, played by the orchestra, suggested to Sir Donald Francis Tovey a "polonaise for polar bears." The soloist takes up this idea, adding syncopation and flourishes, until the swirling flutes join in to lighten the mood. Another theme, a gossamer filigree spun by the soloist that evokes Mendelssohn, closes the exposition. A brief development passage serves as a transition to the restatement of the opening material. The orchestra and soloist traverse the series of themes again, with the latter providing ever-more-dazzling treatments of the melodies. For a time, the movement, which began in D major, threatens to send us back to the dark world of D minor—only at the very end is a triumphant conclusion assured.

Curtain Tune from *The Tempest*

MATTHEW LOCKE
(1621/3?–1677)

Matthew Locke was born sometime between March 1621 and March 1623, probably in Exeter, in the southwest of England. Locke probably composed his incidental music for Thomas Shadwell's operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's The Tempest *shortly before its premiere at the Dorset Garden Theatre in London in March or April of 1674. The music was published in London the following year in a collection titled The English Opera. The work is scored for strings (but the bass part would probably have been taken by bass violins rather than cellos and double basses) and continuo (most likely harpsichord and perhaps theorbo). Duration ca. 3:20.*

Matthew Locke was probably the most important composer in England at the time of the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660. It seems likely that he followed Charles II into exile in France in 1646, where he became well acquainted with French theatrical music. He also became a Catholic while on the continent, which strengthened his ties to the royal family. For his loyalty he was well rewarded: upon Charles's return to London, Locke was named composer for the court string band, the "The Twenty-Four Violins" (modeled on the private orchestra of Charles's cousin, Louis XIV, the *Vingt-quatre violons du roi*).

The activities of Locke and the 24 Violins were not confined to court, however. They (along with singers from the Chapel Royal) frequently performed incidental music for plays in London's two theaters. After years of prohibition under the puritanical Commonwealth regime, the English theater enjoyed a rebirth during the Restoration. New plays and old were performed in great numbers, most with music interspersed among their scenes. Revivals of Shakespeare were popular, but the plays were all "modernized," and most had songs, dances, and descriptive music added. Locke wrote music for at least a dozen plays, but the only set to have survived complete is the suite he composed for *The Tempest,* adapted by Thomas Shadwell and performed in early 1674. The Curtain Tune contained in the suite has become famous as an early example of pictorial orchestral writing, representing as it does the storm with which the play famously opens.

The score, published in 1675, is headed with a detailed description of the play's physical setting. First, it lists the orchestral setup:

> The Front of the Stage is open'd, and the Band of 24 Violins, with the Harpsicals and Theorbo's which accompany the Voices, are plac'd between the Pit and the Stage. While the Overture is playing, the Curtain rises, and discovers a new Frontispiece . . . .

The "Overture" cited above was in fact the Curtain Tune, which did accompany the raising of the curtain; it was not, however, the first music heard in the performance. As was customary for the time, Locke provided two short suites of dance music which were to precede the show proper: the First Musick and Second Musick. These pieces served the same function as the warning bell (or electronic alarm) that nudges modern audiences to their seats so the performance can begin.

After lavishing much care on the ornamentation of the proscenium, the text continues:

> Behind this [frontispiece] is the Scene, which represents a thick Cloudy Sky, a very Rocky Coast, and a Tempestuous Sea in perpetual Agitation. This Tempest (suppos'd to be raised by Magick) has many dreadful Objects in it, as several Spirits in horrid shapes flying down amongst the Sailers, then rising and crossing in the Air. And when the Ship is sinking, the whole House is darken'd, and a shower of Fire falls upon 'em. This is accompanied with Lightning, and several Claps of thunder, to the end of the Storm.

The proverbial calm before the storm opens the work: serene chords and a slow-moving melodic line represent the sea at rest. Gradually, the harmony takes on a chromatic cast and a series of rising figures begin to build tension. In a passage marked "lowder by degrees" (for the period, the score is unusually well-supplied with performance indications) the pace quickens. Melodic lines become more angular, surprising dissonances and unexpected shifts of harmony intensify the sense of unease. The most vigorous line bears the label "violent," but is immediately followed by another calm passage ("soft"). Once more, the storm gathers its energies and reaches a climax on a chord spanning the total gamut of the orchestra (down to the low B-flat on Locke's bass violins) hammered out in a series of repeated sixteenth-notes. Its fury abated for the moment, the storm relents and the music relaxes "soft and slow by degrees." The work ends with a repeat sign, possibly an indication that the orchestra was to play the piece as many times as was necessary to cover the action on stage—in modern parlance, to "vamp." In an era when theatrical special effects could rely only on flickering candles and painted canvas, a vivid musical accompaniment played a large role in maintaining the illusion being created on the stage.

Hold On: Symphony No. 3

OLLY WILSON (b. 1937)

Olly Wilson was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 7, 1937. Hold On: *Symphony No. 3 was composed in response to a commission from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which gave the work its premiere on February 27, 1999, under the direction of William Eddings. It is published by G. Schirmer. The work is scored for 3 flutes plus piccolo doubling on alto flute, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets (1 and 2 doubling on piccolo trumpet), 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, a substantial percussion section: steel drums, 3 sizzle cymbals, 3 suspended cymbals, 3 gongs, triangles, tubular bells, metal wind chimes, crotales, amglocken, timbales, bass drum, marimba, vibraphone, and xylophone; harp, piano, and strings. Duration ca. 41 minutes.*

The composer has provided the following comments:

Hold On: Symphony No. 3 is at once a reflection on, and celebration of, the African-American spiritual tradition. "Hold On" is also the title of a specific spiritual, part of whose text is as follows:

> Nora said you lost your track
> Can't plow straight and keep looking back
> Keep-a-your hand on-a-the plow
> Hold on.
>
> Hold on, hold on
> Keep-a-your hand
> On-a-the plow
> Hold on.

This musical/poetic exhortation to persist—to transcend the immediate debased life of chattel slavery and proceed undaunted toward an attainable goal of physical and spiritual liberation—is a theme that is characteristic of the richly coded texts of African-American spirituals. It is in this sense that spirituals in general, and "Hold On," in particular, celebrate the indomitable human spirit; that remarkable, resilient quality that enables humankind to overcome any obstacle that impoverishes, impedes, or degrades it. It is this universal human capacity, expressed so cogently by the spiritual in this particular instance, that inspired the composition of *Hold On*: Symphony No. 3.

The first movement of this three-movement work focuses on the idea of human persistence. I have attempted to explore in sound the concept of human tenacity and fortitude. Proceeding from the gradual emergence of a central motivic idea that occurs in the full orchestra in the first minute of the piece, the movement unfolds, presenting several episodes of music which are all derived from the original musical motive. The movement contains three major sections. The middle slow, cantabile, section provides a lyrical contrast to the more agitated first and last sections whose motivic interrelationship is more apparent.

The music of the second movement is based on the spiritual "Hold On" proper, which gradually emerges from a musical framework of textures in which the purposefully ambiguous alternates with the musically explicit. Complex sound textures of equivocal pitch and timbre ultimately progress to musical statements of pristine clarity and simplicity. The melody of the original spiritual appears in the middle of the movement, and many of the musical gestures of the movement were inspired by the vocal gestures associated with the wordless religious moans and chants that were the predecessors of the African-American spiritual.

The final movement of the piece is an attempt to evoke the exhilarating mood of the triumphant spiritual that celebrates not only the belief in an impending freedom, but the courage to maintain that belief. This movement features *a perpetuum mobile* idea (initially played by the strings) that evolves in several directions prior to being interrupted by a series of celebratory phrases in the high brass instruments. Near the end of the movement a polyphony of riffs occurs before the piece ends with a final solemn reference to the spiritual "Hold On."

—Olly Wilson

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