

ORCHESTRA *Seattle* CHAMBERSINGERS
GEORGE SHANGROW, MUSIC DIRECTOR

present



Fall Gala
with
Chuanyun Li

Tuesday, **September 16**, 2008-7:30pm at **Benaroya Hall**

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Chuanyun Li

"If China wants to have a great violinist, they have one. All they have to do is [to] look after him," concluded the violinist maestro Ruggiero Ricci after listening to Chuanyun Li in 2004.

Hailed by *The Daily Camera* as "a massive talent with astonishing dynamic and expressive range," Chuanyun Li is one of the foremost violinists of his generation from China and internationally. Under the sponsorship of entrepreneur Mr. Kinchung Choi, Li studied with Professor Yaoji Lin from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing for 10 years before studying at the Juilliard with full scholarship under Dorothy DeLay, Itzhak Perlman and Hyo Kang. Li participated in the Aspen Music Festival for six consecutive years and furthered his studies with DeLay and Kurt Sasmannshaus at the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati, and later Joey Corpus in New York with the support of the Clarisse B Kampel Foundation. He has won numerous prizes, including the 1st Prize in the 5th Wieniawski International Youth Violin Competition at the age of 11 with a unanimous vote of 20 jurors, and the Nakamichi Violin Concerto Competition in Aspen in 1998.

Li has toured extensively in China, Japan and the US and collaborated with such orchestras as the Rotterdam Philharmonic with Valery Gergiev, Detroit Symphony with Neemi Järvi, Hong Kong Philharmonic with Edo de Waart, Queensland Symphony Orchestra with Michael Christie, China National Symphony with Xincao Li and Singapore Symphony with Lan Shui, among others. In September 2003, at 5 days notice, Li replaced Maxim Vengerov and performed Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* and Ravel's *Tzigane* with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra under Rumon Gamba. In the same year, he braved the threat of SARS and returned to Hong Kong to replace an international soloist who could not come and performed with the Hong Kong Sinfonietta under Wing-sie Yip to great critical and audience acclaim.

Chuanyun Li performed the solo violin part for the original soundtrack of Chen Kaige's movie *Together* (2002), noted by the *Washington Post* for "his ethereal playing...which has given the movie such a magnificent aural backdrop." In 2004, Li appeared in a Radio Television Hong Kong documentary series of outstanding young Chinese musicians along with Lang Lang, Yundi Li, Jian Wang, Xuan Zhang and others. When Li toured the US in 2006 with the China National Symphony Orchestra under Xincao Li, *The New York Times* referred to him as "a first-rate violinist" and remarked that "[having] the chance to hear Mr Li's violin playing made the evening all worthwhile."

Li is currently one of the most sought after violinists in China and one of the most active and exciting Chinese violinists on the international stage. Noting the "excitement galore" in his debut recital in Seattle (2008), *The Seattle Times* observed that Li "shares Perlman's amazing dexterity in untangling virtuoso pieces" and that "despite his technical accuracy and incredible speed, Li plays with great abandon, and where appropriate, a lot of soul." His 2008 engagements include recitals in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, Washington DC and concerto performances in Hong Kong, Xiamen, Spain, and New Zealand. Li has seven CDs and DVDs to his credit, including Paganini's complete 24 Caprices at the age of 15, *Prophetic Bird*, *Salut d'Amour* and *The Soul of Violin* with pianist Robert Koenig; and DVDs *La Ronde des Lutins* and *Stradivari Campaign*, both with Koenig.

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE

VIOLIN

Susan Carpenter
Eugene Cho
Lauren Daugherty
Dean Drescher
Stacey Dye
Jason Hershey
Manchung Ho
Fritz Klein*
Cecelia-Wendy A. Lee
Mark Lutz
Gregor Nitsche
Margaret Olson
Susan Ovens
Stephen Provine**
Theo Schaad
Kenna Smith-Shangrow
Nicole Tsong
Derek Wong

VIOLA

Sarah Bass
Deborah Daoust

Audrey Don
Katherine McWilliams*
Robert Shangrow
Ella Wallace

CELLO

La Verne Chen
Zon Eastes
Christy Johnson
Priscilla Jones
Patricia Lyon
Valerie Ross
Katie Sauter-Messick
Maryann Tapiro
Matthew Wyant*

STRING BASS

Jo Hansen*
Ericka Kendall
Kevin McCarthy
Steve Messick

FLUTE/PICCOLO

Jenna Calixto
Shari Müller-Ho*
Melissa Underhill

OBOE/ENGLISH HORN

David Barnes
John Dimond*
Taina Karr

CLARINET

Alan Lawrence*
Steven Noffsinger

BASSOON

Jeff Eldridge
Gary Claunch
(contrabassoon)
Judith Lawrence*

HORN

Jennifer Barrett
Barney Blough
Don Crevie*
Jim Hendrickson*

TRUMPET

David Cole*
Daniel Harrington
Janet Young

TROMBONE

Moc Escobedo*
David Holmes
Grant Reed

TUBA

David Brewer

HARP

Melissa Shaw

PIANO

Robert Kechley

PERCUSSION/ TIMPANI

Lacey Brown
Eric Daane
Kathie Flood
Dan Oie*

* principal

** concertmaster

FALL GALA with Chuanyun Li

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2008 – 7:30 PM
S. MARK TAPER AUDITORIUM – BENAROYA HALL

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE
George Shangrow, conductor

PROGRAM

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)
Academic Festival Overture, Opus 80

HE ZHANHAO (born 1933) and CHEN GANG (born 1935)
The Butterfly Lovers Concerto (1958)

Chuanyun Li, *violin*

– Intermission –

ARAM KHACHATURIAN (1903-1978)
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra
I. *Allegro con fermezza*
II. *Andante sostenuto*
III. *Allegro vivace*

Chuanyun Li, *violin*

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Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

PROGRAM NOTES

Academic Festival Overture (1880) -- Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

The University of Breslau conferred an honorary degree on Brahms in 1879. The rectors of the University no doubt expected the composer to respond to the honor by composing a special piece fitting the Latin citation that came with his degree: "the foremost composer of serious music in Germany today." Perhaps it would be a darkly somber symphony or an immensely complicated choral work, showing off all the contrapuntal techniques. They could hardly have expected what they got - a potpourri of German student songs celebrating the less intellectual aspects of college life: wenching, drinking, and freshman initiation! The various tunes include *Wir haben gebauet ein stattliches Haus* ("We have built a stately house") in the trumpets, followed by the noble *Landesvater* ("Father of his country") melody in the strings. Then comes the lively tune of the freshman-initiation "fox-ride" *Was kommt dort von der Höhe?* ("What comes there from on high?"). All of these tunes parade past once again before Brahms brings in the oldest and most famous German student song, *Gaudeamus igitur*: "Let us rejoice while we are still young; after a jolly youth and a burdensome old age, the earth will claim us."

- Donald Teeters

The Butterfly Lovers Concerto (1958)

He Zhanhao (born 1933) and Chen Gang (born 1935)

The butterfly is found in many human cultural traditions. The Maori of New Zealand believe that the soul returns to earth as a butterfly. In ancient Greece, the word "psyche" meant "soul and breath," and was symbolized by a butterfly. Myths about moths and butterflies abound in Celtic lore, and in Aztec and Mayan mythology, sacrifice was deeply associated with the butterfly. But probably the most ancient mythology equating the soul with butterflies comes from China.

Nor is there a lack of cultural lore about star-crossed lovers. The West has Romeo and Juliet, and Tristan and Isolde. China has the ancient love tragedy of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, who, sometime in the 4th Century, were undone by rigid social conventions. The story made its way into the traditional Yueju opera of Zhejiang Province.

This is the tale that composers He Zhanhao and Chen Gang, keenly familiar with the Yueju repertoire, chose as the basis for tonight's beautiful Butterfly Lovers Concerto, which they co-wrote in 1958 while students at the Shanghai Conservatory. At the turn of the 20th Century, "classical" Chinese musicians felt that serious music should be modeled upon Western traditions, and thus began their rigorous study of European composers, especially Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Debussy, and Grieg. But over time, Chinese idioms and modes blended with Western forms and ideas. Of the "Four Generations" of the New School in Chinese music, Zhanhao and Gang were of the Fourth—and last. Only a few years after they wrote this concerto, the Cultural Revolution put an end to everything Western.

Their composition, a marvel of lushness and beauty, is a wonderful mix of the Western symphonic tradition with Chinese folk music and vocal techniques. Zhanhao and Gang originally wrote the concerto for a Western violin, imitating the sound of the erhu, a traditional bowed Chinese instrument that has only two strings—and no fingerboard—attached to a resonating body typically encased in snakeskin. The lack of a fingerboard allows for extreme vibrato and bending of pitches. This beautiful, intimately emotive instrument was most often used to express weeping and intense emotion.

In 1988, after Chen Gang met Jiebing Chen at the Shanghai Conservatory and listened to her spiritual playing of the erhu, he realized that perhaps the erhu could be even more expressive than the violin in depicting the lovers' conversations and their inner feelings. He arranged the concerto for erhu and asked Miss Chen to premiere the new version. Since then, Miss Chen has performed the concerto with many of the world's top symphonies, including the New Moscow Philharmonic, Shanghai Symphony, and San Francisco Symphony.

The Story of The Butterfly Lovers

A young woman, Zhu Yingtai, disguises herself as a man so that she can travel to a southern province to study. There she meets a young man, Liang Shanbo. They develop a deep friendship. Before she returns home, Zhu tells Liang about a younger sister and entreats him to ask the

young woman's parents for her hand in marriage. In fact, Zhu has no sister. She is offering herself. When Liang arrives at Zhu's home, he is thrilled to discover her true identity. But, tragically, because Liang arrives a few days late, Zhu's father has already betrothed her to another man. The lovers meet at a tower and lament their misfortune. Upon his return home, the brokenhearted Liang falls ill and dies. Zhu hears of his death on her marriage day, and flees to his grave. It opens beneath her, and she commits suicide by jumping in. Zhu and Liang are transformed into butterflies. They rise into the air, never again to be separated.

The free-form concerto is divided into three sections, played as a single movement. Part 1 describes Zhu and Liang's meeting (Liang is represented on the cello, and Zhu on erhu), their joining hands in brotherhood, the blossoming of love, their study and play, and their sad separation when Zhu returns home. Part 2 portrays their resistance to the arranged marriage and their meeting at the tower. Part 3 expresses the drama of Liang's death and Zhu's suicide. The erhu's free rhapsodic play, with many syncopated chords (Zhu and her resistance to the arranged marriage), is pitted against the orchestra (Zhu's father forcing the marriage). The lovers' meeting at the tower is exemplified by the interplay between cello solo (Liang) and erhu solo (Zhu). The composers borrow theatrical devices to portray Liang's sickness and death, and Zhu's suicide. The saga ends with the flute and harp suggesting the mystery of the lovers' metamorphosis. After the love theme is recapitulated, one can hear the butterflies at play. —Max Derrickson and Jiebing Chen

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1940)

Aram Khachaturian (1903--1978)

Although he was indicted (along with Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and a number of other prominent Soviet musicians) for formalism in the infamous Zhdanov decree of 1948, Aram Khachaturian was, for most of his long career, one of the Soviet musical establishment's most prized representatives. Born into an Armenian family in Tbilisi in 1903, Khachaturian's musical identity formed slowly, and, a self-taught pianist, he joined Miaskovsky's composition class at the Moscow Conservatory. Khachaturian graduated in 1934, and the successful premieres of such works as the Symphony No. 2 in A minor, *With a Bell* (1935) and, especially, the Piano Concerto in D-flat major (1936), established Khachaturian as the leading Soviet composer of his generation.

Khachaturian's characteristic musical style draws on the melodic and rhythmic vitality of Armenian folk music. Although not averse to sharp dissonance, Khachaturian never strayed from a basically diatonic musical language. The Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto in D minor are truly Romantic works, virtuosic, clear, and unaffectedly expressive, remaining, therefore popular, and frequently performed compositions. Of course, neither of these works matches the popularity of the famous *Sabre Dance* from the ballet *Gayane*, which made Khachaturian a household name during World War II. His other works include film scores, songs, piano pieces, and chamber music. The degree of Khachaturian's success as a Soviet composer can be measured by his many honors, which include the 1941 Lenin Prize for the Violin Concerto, the 1959 Stalin Prize for the ballet *Spartacus*, and the title, awarded in 1954, of People's Artist.

The particular élan that characterizes Aram Khachaturian's concerti has no doubt contributed to their continued popularity, and indeed, the Violin Concerto (1940) takes a place among the staples of the twentieth century violin repertoire. The concerto bears the unmistakable stamp of its composer in its characteristic rhythmic drive and rich, folk-infused melodies. The first movement begins with a fierce, energetic figure, played in unison that eventually evolves into the rustically lyrical second subject. The intoxicating *Andante sostenuto* second movement, redolent of the undulating, gradually unfolding style of *ashugs* (Armenian folk musicians), has a free-flowing, semi-improvisatory feel. Based largely on material from the first movement's secondary theme, the highly folk-influenced *finale* takes the form of a vigorous Armenian country-dance in which the solo violin figures prominently with unrelenting, fiery virtuosity.

Khachaturian wrote the Violin Concerto for David Oistrakh, the dedicatee of so many mid-century Russian violin concerti. Oistrakh was the soloist at the work's premiere on November 16, 1940.

Biography by Blair Johnston--Composition Description by Graham Olson