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About the Show

Modesto Symphony Orchestra Association

Rachmaninoff & Sibelius

Friday, November 11, 2022, 7:30 pm

Saturday, November 12, 2022, 7:30 pm

Gallo Center for the Arts, Mary Stuart Rogers Theater

Nicholas Hersh, *conductor*

George Li, *piano*

Program

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

arr. Nicholas Hersh

**String Quartet No. 14, II. Andante con moto
Variations on a Theme "Death and the Maiden"**

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (1934)

George Li, *piano*

INTERMISSION

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82 (1915)

Rachmaninoff & Sibelius

Soar to new symphonic heights
with the MSO



- I. Tempo molto moderato – Allegro moderato – Presto
- II. Andante mosso, quasi allegretto
- III. Allegro molto – Misterioso – Un pochettino largamente

Roster

Orchestra Roster

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

Violin I

Ilana Blumberg, *Concertmaster*
Dagenais Smiley, *Associate Concertmaster*
Hrabba Atladottir, *Assistant Concertmaster*
Kirstan Hilton
Valerie Tisdel
Milka Krалеva-Castro
Elizabeth Kidwell
Matthew Oshida
Jolán Friedhoff
Emanuela Nikiforova
Sara Chazin
Sarah Biagini

Violin II

Myriam Cotton-Rack, *Principal*
Ani Bukujian, *Assistant Principal*
Juan Carlos Gutierrez
Donald Grishaw
Josephine Gray
Donna Harrison
Randy Weiss
Aya Kiyonaga
Ray Reinebach
Ivelina Kofler

Viola

Patricia Whaley, *Principal*
Marcel Gemperli, *Assistant Principal*
Kathryn Juneau
Pauline Moreira
James Een



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Meg Titchener
Anne Martin
Jacob Hansen-Joseph

Cello

Timothy Loo, *Principal*
Adelle-Akiko Kearns, *Assistant Principal*
Dina Weinshelbaum
Daniel Davies
Hannah Harrington
Jonathan Flaksman
Farley Pearce
Janet Witharm

Bass

Raymond Vargas, *Principal*
Bill Everett, *Assistant Principal*
Michael Minor
Suzy Chun
Zachary Iscoff
Heidy Franklin

Flute

tbd, *Principal*
Gail Edwards
Brittany Trotter, *piccolo*

Oboe

Laura Griffiths, *Principal*
Robert Walker
Belinda Rosen, *English Horn*

Clarinet

Rob Patterson, *Principal*
Collin Lewis

Bassoon

William May, *Principal*
Alex Zdanis

Horn



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Adam Wolf, *Principal*
Mark Jansen, *Assistant Principal*
Nicky Roosevelt
Sarah Ference
William Harrington

Trumpet

John King, *Principal*
Derek McDonald
Owen Miyoshi

Trombone

Bruce Chrisp, *Principal*
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Tuba

Michael Kuntz, *Principal*

Timpani

John Weeks, *Principal*

Percussion

Thomas Rance, *Principal*
Joseph Runnels
David Gabrielson

Harp

Jacqueline Marshall, *Principal*

Roster as of 11/01/2022

Artist Biographies



Rachmaninoff & Sibelius

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Nicholas Hersh

conductor

Over a remarkable tenure as Associate Conductor of the Baltimore Symphony, **Nicholas Hersh** earned critical acclaim for his innovative programming and natural ability to connect with musicians and audiences alike. Nicholas created the BSO Pulse series, through which he brought together indie bands and orchestral musicians in unique collaborations; he led the BSO in several subscription weeks, and concerts in and around Baltimore; and he directed the BSO's educational and family programming, including the celebrated Academy for adult amateur musicians. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Nicholas developed and conducted the BSO's new digital concert series, BSO Sessions. Mixing performance with documentary-style interviews, Nicholas introduced the BSO and online audiences to a wide variety of new repertoire, including numerous living composers as well as seldom-performed historical composers. "His commitment to performing works by composers of color," described BSO leadership, "will continue to inform the BSO's programming long into the future."

Highlights of the 2021-22 season include engagements with the NY Philharmonic, Sarasota Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic, Portland Symphony, Richmond Symphony, Tucson Symphony, Winston-Salem Symphony, and Peabody Opera.

Nicholas appears regularly with the National Symphony Orchestra in concerts throughout Washington, D.C. He stepped in to replace an indisposed Yan Pascal Tortelier, on subscription, to great acclaim. Other guest conducting appearances include the Houston Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, and New World Symphony.

Nicholas is frequently in demand as an arranger and orchestrator, with commissions from orchestras around the globe for adaptations of everything from classical solo and chamber music to popular songs. His orchestration of Beethoven's Cello Sonata Op. 69 will receive its premiere by the Philharmonie Zuidnederland in January 2022, while his symphonic arrangement of Queen's [Bohemian Rhapsody](#) continues to see worldwide success as a viral YouTube hit. He



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also serves as arranger and editor for the James P. Johnson Orchestra Edition.

An avid educator, Nicholas has embraced the Young Persons Concert format as a crucial method for orchestras to serve their communities. From 2016-2020, he served as Artistic Director of the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestras, and he continues to be a frequent collaborator and guest faculty at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University.

Nicholas grew up in Evanston, Illinois and started his musical training as a cellist. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Stanford University and a Master's Degree in Conducting from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, studying with David Effron and Arthur Fagen. In 2011 and 2012, he was a Conducting Fellow with the prestigious American Academy of Conducting at Aspen, studying with mentors Robert Spano, Hugh Wolff, and Larry Rachleff, and has participated in masterclasses with Bernard Haitink and Michael Tilson Thomas. Nicholas is also a two-time recipient of the Solti Foundation Career Assistance Award.

Nicholas lives in Philadelphia with his wife Caitlin and their two cats, and in his free time enjoys baking (and eating) sourdough bread.

Website: <http://www.nicholashersh.com/>

Facebook:
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Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/nicholashersh/>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/NicholasHersh>



George Li

piano

Praised by The Washington Post for combining “staggering technical prowess, a sense of command, and depth of



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expression,” pianist **George Li** possesses brilliant virtuosity and effortless grace far beyond his years. Since winning the Silver Medal at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition and being named the recipient of the 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Li has rapidly established a major international reputation as he performs regularly with some of the world’s leading orchestras and conductors, such as Gustavo Dudamel, James Gaffigan, Valery Gergiev, Gustavo Gimeno, Manfred Honeck, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Kirill Petrenko, David Robertson, Leonard Slatkin, Yuri Temirkanov, Vladimir Spivakov, Michael Tilson Thomas, Long Yu, and Xian Zhang.

Highlights of the 2021–22 season include orchestral engagements with the Nashville, San Diego, New World, North Carolina, Pacific, and Valencia Symphonies, as well as the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia. In addition, Mr. Li will perform recitals presented by the Chicago Symphony, University of Washington in Seattle, The Cliburn Foundation in Ft. Worth, Emory University in Atlanta, and StuttgartKonzert in Germany.

Recent concerto highlights include performances with the Los Angeles, New York, London, Rotterdam, Oslo, St. Petersburg, and Buffalo Philharmonics; the San Francisco, Tokyo, Frankfurt Radio, Sydney, Montreal, Baltimore, Utah, and Pittsburgh Symphonies; as well as the Philharmonia, DSO Berlin, and Orchestra National de Lyon. His eight-concert tour of Germany with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra included performances at the Berlin Philharmonie, Philharmonie am Gasteig Munich, and the Stuttgart Liederhalle. Mr. Li frequently appears with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra, including performances at the Paris Philharmonie, Luxembourg Philharmonie, New York’s Brooklyn Academy of Music, Verbier Festival, Grafenegg Festival, and in various venues, such as the Mariinsky Concert Hall, and others throughout Russia. Li has also performed with major Chinese orchestras, such as the NCPA, China Philharmonia, and Shanghai and Guangzhou Symphony Orchestras, under the baton of Long Yu and Xian Zhang.

“A bracing, fearless account...Mr. Li’s playing combined youthful abandon with utter command.

— New York Times

In recital, Li performs at venues including Carnegie Hall, Davies Hall in San Francisco, the Mariinsky Theatre, Elbphilharmonie,

Munich's Gasteig, the Louvre, Seoul Arts Center, Tokyo's Asahi Hall and Musashino Hall, NCPA Beijing, Shanghai Poly Theater, and Amici della Musica Firenze, as well as appearances at major festivals including the Edinburgh International Festival, Verbier Festival, Ravinia Festival, Vail Festival, Seattle Music Festival, La Jolla Festival, Festival de Pâques in Aix-en-Provence Festival, Colmar Festival, and Montreux Festival.

An active chamber musician, Li has performed alongside Benjamin Beilman, Noah Bendix-Balgley, James Ehnes, Daniel Hope, Pinchas Zukerman, Amanda Forsythe, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Kian Soltani, Pablo Ferrandez, and Daniel Lozakovich.

George Li gave his first public performance at Boston's Steinert Hall at the age of 10. In 2011, he performed for President Obama at the White House in an evening honoring German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Among George Li's many prizes and awards, he was the First Prize winner of the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, the inaugural Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition, and the Grand Prix Animato, as well as a recipient of the 2012 Gilmore Young Artist Award and the 2018 Arthur Waser Prize.

George is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist. His debut album, "Live at Mariinsky," which was recorded live at the Mariinsky Concert Hall, won an Opus Klassik award for Soloist Recording of the Year in 2018. His second recording for the label features Liszt solo works and Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, which was recorded live with Vasily Petrenko and the London Philharmonic, and released in October 2019.

George began his piano studies at age 4 with Dorothy Shi, before continuing with Wha Kyung Byun at New England Conservatory beginning at age 12. In 2019, he completed the Harvard/New England Conservatory dual degree program, with a Bachelor's degree in English Literature and a Master's degree in Music. He is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma at the New England Conservatory. When not playing piano, George is an avid reader and photographer, as well as a sports fanatic.

Website: <https://www.georgelipianist.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/georgelipianist>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/Pianoloverok>

Program Notes

String Quartet No. 14, II. Andante con Moto; Variations on a Theme "Death and the Maiden"



Rachmaninoff & Sibelius

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Franz Schubert (arr. Hersh)

Franz Schubert (*arr.* Hersh)

String Quartet No. 14, II. Andante con Moto; Variations on a Theme "Death and the Maiden"

Composer: born January 31, 1797, Vienna; died November 19, 1828, Vienna

Work composed: March 1824; dedicated to violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh.

World premiere: First performed in a private gathering at the home of Josef Barth on February 1, 1826

Instrumentation: string orchestra

Estimated duration: 10 minutes

In 1824, 27-year-old Franz Schubert was physically and mentally worn out from his years-long battle with syphilis, a battle he lost four years later. The disease caused him extreme pain and weakness, and amplified his tendency to depression. On March 31, 1824, Schubert wrote to a friend, "I feel myself to be the most unfortunate, the most miserable being in the world. Think of a man whose health will never be right again, and who from despair over the fact makes it worse instead of better ... My peace is gone, my heart is heavy ... each night when I go to sleep I hope never again to wake, and each morning merely reminds me of the misery of yesterday."

The String Quartet in D minor reflects Schubert's understandable preoccupation with mortality, from its powerful opening notes through the meditative, soothing Andante; from the angry denunciations of the Scherzo to the breathless defiance of the Presto. The nickname "Death and the Maiden" comes from Schubert's 1817 setting of Matthias Claudius' eponymous poem, written in the form of a dialogue between Death and a young woman. The maiden pleads for her life, while Death woos her with promises of an eternal, all-embracing sleep. Schubert repurposed Death's melody from the song as the basis for the second movement's theme and variations.

Notes from the Arranger, Nicholas Hersh



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This set of variations on the lied "Der Tod und das Mädchen" is an orchestration of the complete second movement of the String Quartet No. 14 "Death and the Maiden," functioning in this arrangement as a standalone concert piece for chamber orchestra. The string section presents the unaltered theme, while the five subsequent variations and coda explore various orchestral colors. I have attempted to preserve Schubert's original markings wherever possible, but I also took an occasional liberty to better serve this symphonic milieu.

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Rhapsody on A Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Sergei Rachmaninoff

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

Composer: born April 1, 1873, Semyonovo, Staroruskyy District, Russia; died March 28, 1943, Beverly Hills, CA

Work composed: Rachmaninoff wrote his Rhapsody in six weeks, from July 3 – August 18, 1934, while staying at his villa in Switzerland.

World premiere: Leopold Stokowski led the Philadelphia Orchestra with Rachmaninoff as soloist at the Lyric Opera house in Baltimore, Maryland, on November 7, 1934

Instrumentation: solo piano, piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, triangle, harp, and strings.

Estimated duration: 23 minutes

After he left Russia, Sergei Rachmaninoff found little time for composition. He had a family to support, and his skills as a conductor and concert pianist were more in demand, and paid far better, than composition. Consequently, Rachmaninoff wrote relatively little in the years after the Russian Revolution; instead, he toured with earlier works, like the Second and Third Piano Concertos.

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The Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini is an exception; Rachmaninoff wrote it in 1934, just seven years before his death. Based on the last of Niccolò Paganini's 24 Caprices for Solo Violin, this melody has inspired variations from a number of other composers, including Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, and Witold Lutosławski.

Audiences immediately responded to the Rhapsody's technical virtuosity and unabashed romanticism. As the late musicologist Michael Steinberg noted, "[the Rhapsody] embodies [Rachmaninoff's] late style at its brilliant and witty best, it has one of the world's irresistible melodies and it gives the audiences the satisfaction of watching a pianist work very hard and with obviously rewarding results."

Critics were far less enthusiastic: one described it as "trite to the verge of cheapness," while another opined, "[it is] just a concert piece for the composer's playing, and the day for that sort of thing is past." The *New Yorker* critic was especially harsh, denigrating both music and audience: "The Rhapsody isn't philosophical, significant, or even artistic. It is something for audiences." Despite the condescending reviews, the Rhapsody became an instant hit on the concert circuit, and remains one of the most popular works for piano and orchestra.

The Rhapsody can be organized into the conventional outline of a piano concerto, with the first ten variations (some under 20 seconds) corresponding to a first movement. These ten variations stay very close to Paganini's theme and remain in the key of A minor, each one building on the excitement and tension of its predecessor. Variation 11 transitions to the slow "second movement" (variations 12-18). In keeping with the middle movement of a concerto, the harmony shifts from A minor and wanders through several other keys until it arrives at the famous 18th variation in D-flat major, which was featured in the 1993 hit movie *Groundhog Day*. "This one," Rachmaninoff shrewdly commented, "is for my agent." While this variation seems unrelated to the fundamental melody, Rachmaninoff constructed it by simply inverting Paganini's original theme. The final six variations make up the third movement and feature Paganini's opening theme as the *Rhapsody* builds to its fiery climax.

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Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82

Jean Sibelius

Jean Sibelius

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82

Composer: born December 8, 1865, Hämeenlinna, Finland; died September 20, 1957, Järvenpää, Finland

Work composed: 1914-15, *rev.* 1916, 1919

World premiere: Sibelius completed the first version of the Fifth Symphony just in time to conduct it for his fiftieth birthday on December 8, 1915, with the Helsinki Municipal Orchestra. A year later, Sibelius revised Op. 82 and conducted it with the same ensemble. The final version was completed in 1919; Sibelius conducted it on October 21, 1921.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings

Estimated duration: 31 minutes

“These symphonies of mine are more confessions of faith than are my other works,” wrote Jean Sibelius in 1918, while revising his Symphony No. 5 for the third time. Always his own harshest critic, Sibelius struggled to realize his original musical conception of the Symphony over a period of six difficult years.

Sibelius’ multiple attempts to write a version of the Fifth Symphony that withstood his implacable self-criticism were hampered by personal problems and global upheaval. In the years 1910-14, Sibelius struggled with the desire to be perceived by the world as a “modern” composer, but at the same time he rejected the prevailing styles established by Debussy, Mahler, and Richard Strauss. Composing, frequently difficult for Sibelius even under the best of circumstances, was made even harder by the composer’s poor health and chronic alcoholism.

From 1914-18, the chaos and brutality of WWI engulfed Europe. In 1917 Finland declared independence from Russia, which sparked additional conflict between the two countries. In 1918, an invasion of Russian soldiers into his town forced Sibelius and his family to flee to Helsinki. Later that year, Sibelius returned home and resumed his life and work, including the third revision of the Fifth Symphony, which he described as “practically composed anew.”

Rachmaninoff & Sibelius

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The reworked symphony condenses the original four movements into three – Sibelius combined the first and second movements – and features a new finale. The *Tempo molto moderato* is textbook Sibelius, featuring brief, fragmentary ideas that surface somewhat enigmatically from the depths of the orchestra. A short melody in the horns later coalesces into a fully developed theme. At times the instruments seem to murmur to themselves; as the music progresses, the strings and brasses declaim bold proclamations.

In the *Andante mosso*, pizzicato strings and staccato flutes state the primary melody, while a group of woodwinds and horns sound a counter-theme of long sustained notes. These shimmering notes become a backdrop for several variations on the staccato main theme.

On April 21, 1915, Sibelius wrote in his diary, “Today at ten to eleven I saw 16 swans. One of my greatest experiences. Lord God, that beauty!” The opening of the finale captures this rustle of wings with tremolo strings accompanying an expansive melody, also in the strings. Sibelius juxtaposed this breathless music with a majestic “swan theme” sounded first by the horns. As the symphony concludes, the swan theme becomes an exultant shout of triumph.

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Rachmaninoff & Sibelius

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Conductor's Circle

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