

presents...

LEILA JOSEFOWICZ | Violin
JOHN NOVACEK | Piano

Saturday, February 24, 2024 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

DEBUSSY

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor

Allegro vivo
Intermède: Fantasque et léger
Finale: Très animé

SZYMANOWSKI

Myths, Opus 30

The Fountain of Arethusa
Narcissus
Dryads and Pan

INTERMISSION

TÜÜR

Conversio (1994)

STRAVINSKY

Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss*

Sinfonia
Danses suisses
Scherzo
Pas de Deux: Adagio, Variation, and Coda

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Leila Josefowicz and John Novacek are represented by Harrison Parrott
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Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents Leila Josefowicz and John Novacek for the fifth time. They first appeared in March 1996.

Ms. Josefowicz also opened the 1999–2000 season in concert with pianists André Watts, Jake Heggie, and Kristjan Järvi, and baritone Thomas Hampson.



Leila Josefowicz's passionate advocacy of contemporary music for the violin is reflected in her diverse programs and enthusiasm for performing new works. A favorite of living composers, Josefowicz has premiered many concertos, including those by Colin Matthews, Luca Francesconi, John Adams and Esa-Pekka Salonen, all written specially for her.

Artist-in-Residence of Iceland Symphony Orchestra for the 2023–24 season, Josefowicz will perform Helen Grime's *Violin Concerto* with Daniel Bjarnason and Bartók's *Violin Concerto No. 2* with Eva Ollikainen, as well as present a solo recital at Harpa Hall. Elsewhere, Josefowicz's season includes engagements with Die Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Musikkollegium Winterthur, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and Lahti, Milwaukee, Taipei, and Antwerp symphony orchestras. Josefowicz also presents the world premiere of Jüri Reinvere's *Concerto for Violin and Harp* alongside Trina Struble and The Cleveland Orchestra, and tours Germany and Austria with Junge Deutsche Philharmonie with concerts Berlin, Vienna, and Dresden.

Josefowicz enjoyed a close working relationship with the late Oliver Knussen, performing various concerti, including his violin concerto, together over 30 times. Other premieres have included Matthias Pintscher's *Assonanza* with Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, John Adams' *Sche-*

herazade.2 with New York Philharmonic, Luca Francesconi's *Duende—The Dark Notes* with Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Steven Mackey's *Beautiful Passing* with BBC Philharmonic.

Together with John Novacek, with whom she has enjoyed a close collaboration since 1985, Josefowicz has performed recitals at world-renowned venues such as New York's Zankel Hall and Park Avenue Armory, Washington DC's Kennedy Center and Library of Congress, and London's Wigmore Hall, as well as in Reykjavik, Trento, Bilbao, and Chicago. This season their collaboration continues with recitals in California, appearing at Festival Mozaic, UC Santa Barbara, San Francisco Performances, and Los Angeles Philharmonic's Colburn Celebrity Recital series.

Josefowicz has released several recordings, notably for Deutsche Grammophon, Philips/Universal and Warner Classics and was featured on Touch Press's acclaimed iPad app, *The Orchestra*. Her latest recording, released in 2019, features Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Violin Concerto* with Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Hannu Lintu. She has previously received nominations for Grammy Awards for her recordings of *Scheherazade.2* with St. Louis Symphony conducted by David Robertson, and Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Violin Concerto* with Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer.

In recognition of her outstanding achievement and excellence in music, she won the 2018 Avery Fisher Prize and was awarded a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 2008, joining prominent scientists, writers and musicians who have made unique contributions to contemporary life.

Grammy®-nominated pianist **John Novacek** regularly tours the Americas, Europe and Asia as both soloist and chamber musician. The current season includes concerto performances with the Mexico City Philharmonic, Austin Symphony Orchestra, Springfield (MA) Symphony Orchestra, National Academy Orchestra of Canada, Traverse (MI) Symphony Orchestra, Vista Philharmonic (Groton, MA), Anderson (IN) Symphony Orchestra, Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra, and the orchestras of Colorado College Summer Music Festival, Festival Mozaic and the Mendocino Music Festival.

Frequent performance venues include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center's David Geffen and Alice Tully Halls, Kennedy Center, Chicago's Symphony Center, Disney Hall, Hollywood Bowl, Paris's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, London's Wigmore Hall



and Barbican, and Tokyo's Suntory, Opera City, and Bunkamura Halls.

Novacek is a frequent guest artist at festivals, having participated in Mostly Mozart, Aspen, Great Lakes, SummerFest La Jolla, Cape Cod, Caramoor, Mimir, Ravinia, Seattle, Wolf Trap; Scotia, Toronto Summer Music, Ottawa Chamberfest, SweetWater and Festival of the Sound (Canada); BBC Proms (England); Braunschweig (Germany); Lucerne, Menuhin Gstaad, and Verbier (Switzerland); Sorrento (Italy); Serenades d'Estiu (Mallorca, Spain); and Stavanger (Norway).

A frequent presence on radio, Novacek is regularly showcased on NPR's *Performance Today*, *St. Paul Sunday* and (as featured composer/performer) *A Prairie Home Companion*; television appearances include *CNN International*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and *The Tonight Show*. A highly sought-after chamber musician and collaborator, Novacek performs with Leila Josefowicz, Lynn Harrell, Yo-Yo Ma, Joshua Bell, Cho-Liang Lin, Emmanuel Pahud, Jeremy Denk, Renaud Capuçon, Truls Mørk, Matt Haimovitz, Elmar Oliveira, and Dmitry Sitkovetsky, as well as with the members of the Emerson, Ying, St. Lawrence, Miro and Tokyo String Quartets. He is also a member of the versatile piano trio Intersection, with violinist Laura Frautschi and cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper.

An active composer, Novacek's works have been taken up by many prominent international musicians; commissioning bodies include the 5 Browns, Ying Quartet, Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo, Eastman School, Scotia Festival, Concertante, Pacific Symphony, Ensemble Liaison, Schubert Club, Millennium, Seattle Commissioning Club, Three Tenors, Kiri Te Kanawa, and pop diva Diana Ross. Novacek is an active recording artist whose many CDs have garnered numerous international awards (*Gramophone*, *BBC Music Magazine*, Grammy® nomination

for “Best Chamber Music Performance”); labels include Philips, Nonesuch, Naxos, Arabesque, Warner Classics, Sony/BMG, Koch International, New World, Universal Classics, Ambassador, Azica, Marquis, Arkay, Neuma, IBS Classical, Pony Canyon, Four Winds, and EMI Classics. Novacek teaches piano and chamber music at Mannes School of Music in New York City.

PROGRAM NOTES

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862–1918)

Debussy's final years were wretched. He developed colon cancer in 1909 and underwent a painful operation, radiation therapy, and drug treatment. It was all to no avail, and the disease took its steady course. The onslaught of World War I in 1914 further depressed him, but it also sparked a wave of nationalistic fervor, and he set about writing a set of six sonatas for different combinations of instruments. It may seem strange that the iconoclastic Debussy would return in his final years to so structured a form as the sonata, but he specified that his model was the French sonata of the eighteenth century and not the classical German sonata. To make his point—and his nationalistic sympathies—even more clear, Debussy signed the scores of these works “Claude Debussy, musicien français.”

Debussy lived to complete only three of the projected six sonatas: a *Cello Sonata* (1915); a *Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp* (1916); and the *Violin Sonata*, completed in April 1917. It was to be his final work, and it gave him a great deal of difficulty. From the depths of his gloom, he wrote to a friend: “This sonata will be interesting from a documentary viewpoint and as an example of what may be produced by a sick man in time of war.” Debussy played the piano at the premiere on May 5, 1917, and performed it again in September at what proved to be his final public appearance. His deteriorating health confined him to his room thereafter, and he died the following March.

For all Debussy's dark comments, the *Violin Sonata* is a brilliant work, alternating fantastic and exotic outbursts with more somber and reflective moments. In three concise movements, the sonata lasts only about 13 minutes. Debussy deliberately obscures both meter and key over the first

few measures of the *Allegro vivo*, and only gradually does the music settle into G minor. The haunting beginning of the movement feels subdued, almost ascetic, but the dancing middle section in E major is more animated. Debussy brings back the opening material and rounds off the movement with a *con fuoco coda*.

The second movement brings a sharp change of mood after the brutal close of the first. Debussy marks it *fantasque et léger* (“whimsical and light”), and the violin opens with a series of leaps, swirls, and trills before settling into the near-hypnotic main idea. The second subject, marked “sweet and expressive,” slides languorously on glissandos and arpeggios, and the movement comes to a quiet close. Over rippling chords, the finale offers a quick reminiscence of the very opening of the sonata, and then this theme disappears for good and the finale's real theme leaps to life. It is a shower of triplet sixteenths that rockets upward and comes swirling back down: the composer described it as “a theme turning back on itself like a serpent biting its own tail.” There are some sultry interludes along the way, full of glissandos, broken chords, rubato, and trills, but finally the swirling energy of the main theme drives the music to its animated close.

Debussy may have been unhappy about this music while working on it, but once done he felt more comfortable with it, writing to a friend: “In keeping with the contradictory spirit of human nature, it is full of joyous tumult...Beware in the future of works which appear to inhabit the skies; often they are the product of a dark, morose mind.”

Myths, Opus 30

KAROL SZYMANOWSKI
(1882–1937)

World War I forced Szymanowski to remain in his native city of Tymoszowska in Poland, and there he composed prodigiously: the *Symphony No. 3*, *Violin Concerto No. 1*, and numerous songs, cantatas, and piano pieces all date from the first years of the war. Now in his early thirties, Szymanowski had only recently thrown off the influence of Wagner and Strauss to forge his own style, a style that grew in large measure from his exploration of Sicily and North Africa and from his new awareness of ancient cultures. Musically, this meant a style characterized by great attention to instrumental color, busy textures, and an expressionism that can verge

on intoxicated ecstasy.

Szymanowski composed several works for violin and piano during this period, among them his three *Myths, Opus 30* in 1915. Szymanowski had fallen in love with classical antiquity, and each of the three movements—*The Fountain of Arethusa*, *Narcissus*, and *Dryads and Pan*—is based on a different Greek myth. Arethusa was a nymph loved by both Artemis and the river god Alpheus. Bathing in a river, she was forced to flee underwater to the island Ortygia to escape Alpheus; on that island, Artemis transformed her into a fountain, but Alpheus followed, was himself transformed into a river, and so was united with Arethusa at last. Szymanowski makes no attempt to cast this myth in a “classical” style but instead sets *The Fountain of Arethusa* in a shimmering, post-impressionistic musical language. This is a display-piece for both instruments, from the delicate piano introduction (clearly the sound of the fountain) through the writing for violin, which has a sort of fantastic tonal opulence, soaring high in its range, slipping into passages played entirely in harmonics, and leaping between an extroverted brilliance and a reflective lyricism. *The Fountain of Arethusa* has become one of Szymanowski's most popular works.

Narcissus was loved by Echo, but he was so consumed with himself that he rejected her; she in turn caused him to fall in love with his own reflection in a pool, where he withered away and was transformed into a flower. Szymanowski casts his *Narcissus* in a rondo-like form, with the violin's principal melody returning in different keys and guises.

Dryads were tree-nymphs (the most famous of them was Euridice, wife of Orpheus), and Pan the god of fields, forests, and flocks. Pan pursued the nymph Syrinx, who fled to the river Ladon and prayed to be turned into a reed; her prayer was granted, and Pan cut the reed and from it made his pipes. Szymanowski's setting of this tale is notable for its brilliant writing for violin: *Dryads and Pan* offers the violinist a cadenza (rare in chamber music) and features quarter-tones and harmonics used to imitate the sound of Pan's flute. Szymanowski wrote *Myths* for the Polish violin virtuoso Paul Kochanski and dedicated it to Kochanski's wife Sofia.

Conversio (1994)

ERKKI-SVEN TÜR
(B. 1959)

Among the many results of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is that Western au-

diences discovered a range of original musical voices that had been kept from general public attention during the period of Soviet control. These voices, quite varied, included Giya Kancheli in Georgia, Henryk Gorecki in Poland, Peteris Vasks in Latvia, and an impressive range of Estonian composers, of whom Erkki-Sven Tüür is one of the most prominent. As a young man, Tüür formed a rock group that combined contemporary rock with renaissance music, but his professional training had a more traditional basis: he graduated from the Tallinn Conservatory in 1984. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and Estonia's declaration of independence, Tüür was able to achieve a measure of independence of his own: he left his state job and became a freelance composer. Today Tüür, who is also a painter, lives and works on one of the remote islands off the Estonian coast in the Gulf of Finland. He is quite a prolific composer. His catalog of works includes nine symphonies; concertos for violin, viola, cello, piano, piccolo, clarinet, and bassoon (as well as such unusual instruments as accordion, marimba, recorder, and percussion); plus numerous works for chamber ensembles, for piano, and for voice.

Tüür's *Conversio* for violin and piano (1994) achieves an unusual sonority for this combination of instruments. Instead of trying to generate the lyric sound of most violin music, Tüür defies expectations with a sonority so staccato that it sounds pointillistic. The violin's opening ostinato figure—surging and asymmetric—is gradually interrupted by the piano's sharp chords. The two textures weave together, eventually rising to strident climax made of disconnected but rhythmic attacks. The music's hard edges gradually melt away in favor of a more sustained, almost tolling sonority, and *Conversio* fades into silence on the violin's virtually inaudible tremolo.

Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss*

IGOR STRAVINSKY
(1822–1971)

As a small boy, Stravinsky was taken to see a performance of *Sleeping Beauty* and fell in love with the music of Tchaikovsky on the spot. In one of his autobiographies, Stravinsky recalls an even more intense memory: at a performance of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* in 1893, the eleven-year-old Stravinsky came out of his family's box to see a tall figure stride past. His mother leaned down and whispered: "Igor, look, there is Tchaikovsky." Stravinsky notes: "I looked and saw a man with white hair, large shoulders, a corpulent back, and this image has remained in the retina of my memory all my life."

A love for Tchaikovsky's music remained with Stravinsky all his life as well, and when in 1927 the dancer Ida Rubinstein suggested that he write a ballet for her new company, Stravinsky quickly accepted her proposal that he compose a score based on themes by Tchaikovsky, much as he had written *Pulcinella* on themes by Pergolesi in 1920. Stravinsky based the ballet on the Hans Christian Andersen tale *The Ice Maiden*, in which a fairy finds a boy lost in a snowstorm and imprints a magic kiss upon him. This kiss gives her control of the boy, and 20 years later—on his wedding day—she reappears, kisses him again, and takes eternal possession of the young man.

Stravinsky drew his themes for this ballet from five of Tchaikovsky's songs and about a dozen of his piano pieces, so that the resulting ballet is an amalgam of both composers' styles, combining Tchaikovsky's melodic gift with Stravin-

sky's own sensibilities (and not all the music in the ballet is by Tchaikovsky—Stravinsky himself composed a number of short or transitional sections). First performed in Paris on November 27, 1928, *The Fairy's Kiss* (as Stravinsky called the ballet) has never enjoyed the success of his other ballets, but Stravinsky retained his fondness for the music. Several years later, in the early 1930s, when Stravinsky went on concert tours with the violinist Samuel Dushkin, he needed music for the two of them to play together. He composed the *Duo Concertant* for Dushkin and arranged several of his orchestral scores for violin and piano to fill out these programs. One of these scores was *The Fairy's Kiss*, though when Stravinsky made the violin-piano arrangement, he changed its title to the more abstract *Divertimento*.

The ballet was in four scenes, and Stravinsky kept the order of the original pieces intact but made cuts that reduce the *Divertimento* to less than half the length of the 45-minute ballet. The *Divertimento* is in four movements, with the first two performed without pause: the serene opening *Sinfonia* is the ballet's first scene, the stately *Danses suisses* the second. The brief *Scherzo* is taken from the third scene; some of this music bears a strong resemblance to Stravinsky's *Apollo*, completed the same year as *The Fairy's Kiss*. The final movement, characterized by great rhythmic variety, is based on three of the four sections of the original ballet's *Pas de Deux: Adagio, Variation, and Coda*. As ballet or as instrumental suite, this music remains a heartfelt tribute from one artist to another.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger