SCHUMANN'S PIANO CONCERTO

Coffee Concert on Friday, November 16, 2018 at 11am
Friday, November 16 & Saturday, November 17, 2018 at 7pm
UAB's Alys Stephens Center, Jemison Concert Hall

Carlos Izcaray, Conductor
Shai Wosner, Piano
ASO Chorus, under the direction of Dr. Philip Copeland

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)  Schicksalslied (Song of Destiny), Op. 54

PAUL HINDEMITH (1895-1963)  Mathis der Maler (Matthias the Painter)*
   I. Engelskonzert (Angelic Concert)
   II. Die Grablegung (Entombment)
   III. Versuchung des heiligen Antonius (Temptation of St. Anthony)

INTERMISSION

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)  Concerto in A minor, for Piano & Orchestra, Op. 54*
   (Shai Wosner, piano)
   I. Allegro affettuoso
   II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso
   III. Allegro vivace

*At the Coffee Concert, all pieces represented with an asterisk will be performed

This weekend’s performances generously supported by the Symphony Volunteer Council,
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Concert title, conductor, artists, and repertoire subject to change.
BRAHMS' SCHICKSALSLIED
(SONG OF DESTINY)

One minute you’re chatting with friends, the next you’re sitting on a beach furiously composing. Such was the situation with Johannes Brahms when he was first introduced to the poem, “Hyperions Schicksalslied,” from Hölderlin’s novel, Hyperion, while visiting friends at Wilhemshaven in the summer of 1868. Declaring himself “stirred to his depths,” Brahms began to set the poem to music at once—and reportedly disappeared during a beach walk the same day, only to be found elsewhere composing. In spite of this initial burst of activity, Brahms could not decide exactly how the piece should end, and did not complete work until May 1871. The piece premiered in Karlsruhe on October 18, 1871, with Brahms himself conducting. With the exception of Brahms’s German Requiem, it is generally considered to be his greatest choral work.

HINDEMITH’S MATHIS DER MALER

Paul Hindemith described the motivation behind his opera Mathis der Maler, the story of German Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald, as an exploration of “the ethical imperatives of music and the moral obligations of the musician.” More specifically, Hindemith was contemplating the conflict between societal obligation and one’s own ideals—a particularly salient topic in 1930s Germany. The Nazis were well aware of Hindemith’s stance. As a result of their scrutiny, the symphony Hindemith created from the opera premiered before the opera in Berlin in 1934, and then only at the insistence of conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler. (The opera did not make its public debut until 1938, after Hindemith had left the country.)

Mathis der Maler is based in part on Grünewald’s masterpiece, his triptych known as the Isenheim Altarpiece. Its three-paneled structure is mirrored in the three-movement symphony. The first movement, “Angelic Concert,” is the opera’s overture. The first movement, “Angelic Concert,” serves as the opera’s overture and appears here intact; its title comes from Hindemith’s use of the German folk song, “Es sungen drei Engel” (“Three angels sang”). “Entombment” follows—in the opera, a short elegiac piece expressing Mathis’s sorrow following the death of his daughter. In the finale, the temptation of St. Anthony (one of the Isenheim Altarpiece scenes) is compared to the temptations and trials of the artist. Hindemith uses the plainchant hymn “Lauda Sion salvatorem” (“Sion, lift up thy voice and sing”), concluding the entire symphony with a glorious brass symphony.

SCHUMANN’S PIANO CONCERTO IN A MINOR

For Robert Schumann, the genre of the concerto was somewhat fraught. While the baroque and classical concerto centered more on the interplay between soloist and ensemble, the genre evolved in the nineteenth century into a flashy showpiece for the soloist in which the orchestra played little more than a minor role. Schumann confronted this issue in an 1839 essay on the piano concerto, writing, “[The] separation of the piano from the orchestra is something we have seen coming for some time… [W]e must await the genius who will show us in a newer and more brilliant way how orchestra and piano may be combined, how the soloist, dominant at the keyboard, may unfold the wealth of his instrument and his art, while the orchestra, no longer a mere spectator, may interweave its manifold facets into the scene.” And as he mused to his wife, the piano virtuoso Clara Wieck Schumann, “Concerning concertos, I’ve already said to you that I can’t write a concerto for virtuosi and have to think of something else.”

After many aborted efforts in the genre, in 1841 Schumann composed a single-movement “concert phantasie” for piano and orchestra. After a private performance in which Clara played the solo part, she wrote in her diary, “The piano is most skillfully interwoven with the orchestra; it is impossible to think of one without the other.” About four years later, Schumann reworked this piece as the first movement of his Piano Concerto in A Minor. Far from being a virtuosic maverick that romps freely over the orchestra, soloist and orchestra form a unified pair that brings Schumann’s own aesthetic ideals to life.

© Program Notes by Jennifer More 2018
Pianist Shai Wosner has attracted international recognition for his exceptional artistry, musical integrity, and creative insight. His performances of a broad range of repertoire—from Beethoven and Schubert to Ligeti and the music of today—reflect a degree of virtuosity and intellectual curiosity that has made him a favorite among audiences and critics, who note his “keen musical mind and deep musical soul” (NPR's All Things Considered).

Described as a “Schubertian of unflagging authority and character” by Gramophone, Mr. Wosner continues his career-long, critically acclaimed engagement with composer’s music, including performances of his latest recital series, Schubert: The Great Sonatas. The series comprises Schubert’s last six piano sonatas, highlighting works that Mr. Wosner describes as “thick novels, rich with insight about the human condition.” Recitals take place at the Konzerthaus in Berlin, and include a residency at Cal Performances in Berkeley as well as appearances in Buffalo, Fresno, and Cambridge (MA). In the spring, he brings this series to the recording studio for a new double album on Onyx comprising the composer’s Sonatas in A minor, D. 845; G major, D. 894; C minor, D. 958; and B-flat major, D. 960. With this release, he completes the series of Schubert’s final six sonatas on recording, having released the Sonatas in A major, D. 959 and D major, D. 850 “Gasteiner” on previous albums. Mr. Wosner’s recital repertoire this season also includes works from his latest solo recording, Impromptu (Onyx Classics), which features an eclectic mix of improvisationally inspired works by composers from Beethoven and Schubert to Gershwin and Ives. The pieces range from true improvisations to such stylized miniatures as Schubert’s Four Impromptus, D935, and together they reflect Mr. Wosner’s interest in exploring subtle connections between works of contrasting styles and time periods. He performs music from the album at the Chopin Society in St. Paul and elsewhere.

Mr. Wosner’s concerto performances this season include appearances with the Detroit and Toronto Symphony Orchestras (Mozart’s Concerto No. 21); the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra (Brahms’ Concerto No. 2), and Schumann’s Piano Concerto with the Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Musikalische Akademie of the National Theater Orchestra Mannheim, Symphoria (Syracuse), and Wichita Falls Symphony Orchestra. He also embarks on a six-city U.S. tour (including a performance at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC) playing works for 4-hands and two pianos with longtime friend and collaborator Orion Weiss, on a program pairing works by Schubert and Brahms with David Lang’s companion works gravity and after gravity. Additional chamber music collaborations include performances with the Emerson Quartet presented by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center; New York Philharmonic musicians at David Geffen Hall; cellist Stephen Isserlis and violinist Laura Frautschi as part of Orpheus Chamber Orchestra’s Twilight at Tarisio series, and a program from his Bridge to Beethoven series with violinist Jennifer Koh on Baltimore’s Shriver Hall Concert Series.

Mr. Wosner records for Onyx Classics, and his recordings have been widely praised for their inventive pairings of classical and modern masters. In addition to Impromptu, releases include concertos and capriccios by Haydn and Ligeti with the Danish National Symphony conducted by Nicholas Collon, an all-Schubert solo album featuring a selection of the composer’s folk-inspired piano works, solo works by Brahms and Schoenberg, and works by Schubert paired with new works by Missy Mazzoli. Mr. Wosner has also recorded Beethoven’s complete sonatas and variations for cello and piano with Ralph Kirshbaum for Onyx Classics, as well as works by Bartók, Janáček, and Kurtág with violinist Jennifer Koh for Cedille Records.

Mr. Wosner is a recipient of Lincoln Center’s Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award—a prize he used to commission Michael Hersch’s concerto Along the Ravines, which he performed with the Seattle Symphony and Deutsche Radio Philharmonie in its world and European premieres. He was in residence with the BBC as a New Generation Artist, during which he appeared frequently with the BBC orchestras, including conducting Mozart concertos from the keyboard with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He returned to the BBC Scottish Symphony in both subscription concerts and Proms.

For Carlos Izcaray’s Bio please see page 6
Mr. Wosner has worked with such conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Jiří Bělohlávek, James Conlon, Alan Gilbert, Gunther Herbig, James Judd, Zubin Mehta, Peter Oundjian, Donald Runnicles, Leonard Slatkin, Jeffrey Tate, and Yan Pascal Tortelier, and has performed at summer festivals including the Bowdoin International Music Festival, Chautauqua Music Festival, Bravo! Vail festival, Grand Teton Music Festival, Mainly Mozart Festival in San Diego, Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center, and Ravinia Festival. For several consecutive summers, he was involved in the West-Eastern Divan Workshop led by Mr. Barenboim and toured as soloist with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

Widely sought after by colleagues for his versatility and spirit of partnership, Mr. Wosner has collaborated as a chamber musician with numerous artists, including Martha Argerich, Martin Fröst, Lynn Harrell, Dietrich Henschel, Ralph Kirshbaum, Jennifer Koh, Cho-Liang Lin, Christian Tetzlaff, and Pinchas Zukerman. He has also collaborated with leading chamber ensembles, including the Grammy Award-winning Parker Quartet in The Schubert Effect recital series. Mr. Wosner is a former member of Lincoln Center’s Chamber Music Society Two and performs regularly at various chamber music festivals, including Chamber Music Northwest in Portland, the Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival, the Oregon Bach Festival, the Piano Aux Jacobins festival in France, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Recent chamber music engagements include performances presented by the Internationale Beethovenfeste in Bonn and Kunstfreunde Wiesloch; Beethoven recitals with cellist Ralph Kirshbaum at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., and the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills, among other venues; a performance of Berg’s Chamber Concerto presented by the Kammerakademie Potsdam; and Bridge to Beethoven recitals with violinist Jennifer Koh.

Born in Israel, Mr. Wosner enjoyed a broad musical education from a very early age, studying piano with Opher Brayer and Emanuel Krasovsky, as well as composition, theory, and improvisation with André Hajdu. He later studied at The Juilliard School with Emanuel Ax. Mr. Wosner is on the faculty at the Longy School of Music in Boston. He resides in New York with his wife and two children. For more information on Mr. Wosner, please visit his fan page on Facebook and go to shaiwosner.com

ASO CHORUS

The Alabama Symphony Chorus formerly known as the Birmingham Concert Chorale was founded in 1966 as the Birmingham Civic Chorus under the direction of Bruce Tolbert of the University of Montevallo. In 1977, the name was changed to the Birmingham Concert Chorale. Past directors have included Hugh Thomas, Tom Gibbs, Timothy Banks, David Smith, and Mark Ridings.

The Chorale enjoyed a long association with the former Alabama Symphony Orchestra. In 1997, with the rebirth of the ASO, the Birmingham Concert Chorale was formally designated as “The Official Chorus of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra.” In recent years the Chorale has traveled to New York City for performances in Carnegie Hall, and also to England to participate in the International Cathedral Music Festival.

Starting with the 2010-2011 concert season, the Chorale officially merged into being a part of the Alabama Symphony and became the Alabama Symphony Orchestra Chorus. The ASOChorus exists to present artistically worthy and inspiring performances of great choral music that nurture the human spirit, preserve and foster our musical heritage, and enrich the cultural fabric of our community; and to be the indispensable partner of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra in jointly presenting a legacy of treasured choral/orchestral masterpieces. To accomplish these objectives, we will engage the most talented and committed choral performers and fully develop their musical potential.

Philip Copeland prepares the Alabama Symphony Orchestra Chorus in choral masterworks. He is also Associate Professor and Director of Choral Activities at Samford University, Director of Music Ministries at South Highland Presbyterian Church, and father of triplet 13-year-old daughters: Catherine, Caroline, and Claire.