

Saturday, April 14, 2012 at 8pm
Sunday, April 15, 2012 at 3pm

Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, soloist-leader

GIOACHINO ROSSINI (1792-1868)

Sonata for strings in G Major (1804)

- I. Moderato
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro

ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921-1992)

Las estaciones porteñas (1970, arr. 1999)

("The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires")

Arranged by Leonid Desyatnikov (b. 1955)

- I. Primavera porteña
- II. Verano porteño
- III. Invierno porteño
- IV. Otoño porteño

Intermission

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Chamber Symphony in C Minor, Op.110a (1960)

Arranged by Rudolf Barshai (1924-2010)

- I. Largo
- III. Allegro molto
- III. Allegretto
- IV. Largo
- V. Largo

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Hungarian Dances, WoO.1 (1858-1879)

This concert is made possible in part with generous underwriting from Charles and Elaine Petschek.

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Since the introduction of the double bass in the 18th century, the string section of the symphony orchestra has remained essentially the same. While the woodwind, brass, and percussion sections have had an evolving roster of instruments and significant technical refinements to the instruments themselves, the violin family is the epitome of continuity, with the replacement of gut strings by synthetic strings being the most significant change. Such continuity is the result of versatility, and the works in this concert's program put the versatility of the strings on display.

Sonata for strings in G Major (1804)

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

(Born February 29, 1792 in Pesaro, Italy; died November 13, 1868 in Paris)

Instrumentation: strings.

While Rossini is best known as a prolific composer of opera, he also produced a sizable amount of vocal, choral, and instrumental music during his career. This G Major sonata was the first in a set of six sonatas that Rossini wrote at the age of 12. Oddly, these pieces were originally written for a string quartet consisting of two violins, cello, and double bass. Despite this bottom-heavy ensemble, the sonatas demonstrate the young Rossini's mastery of the musical language of Classical composers Haydn and Mozart.

The opening movement, *Moderato*, begins with a one measure violin phrase that sounds like playfully mocking laughter. This recurring figure epitomizes the light-hearted quality of this movement. Rossini gives each of the string sections the opportunity to carry the melody, while the others dutifully offer accompaniment. The *Andante* movement is characterized by a languorous feeling, with descending chromatic lines in the violins suggesting drooping eyelids. The sonata

concludes with a jaunty, 6/8 *Allegro*. With a wink, Rossini includes a reiteration of the first movement's 'laughter phrase' in the closing measures.

Las estaciones porteñas ("The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires") (1970, arranged 1999)

ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA

(Born March 11, 1921 in Mar del Plata, Argentina; died July 4, 1992 in Buenos Aires)
Arrangement by Leonid Desyatnikov
(Born October 16, 1955 in Kharkov, Ukraine SSR)

Instrumentation: solo violin and strings.

During his career, the Argentine composer Ástor Piazzolla achieved a synthesis of popular and classical styles akin to George Gershwin's. In his autobiography, Piazzolla invited the comparison: "We never ran into each other in our lives, but I always felt there was a certain affinity between George Gershwin's work and mine. Perhaps it is because his music represents New York and mine Buenos Aires. Perhaps it is because both of us, starting out with very traditional styles – jazz for him, tango for me – wanted to raise the level of what we liked."

Born in Argentina to Italian immigrants, Piazzolla spent his formative years in New York, where he was exposed to both jazz and classical music. The most important ingredient in his musical development was the bandoneón, a relative of the accordion traditionally used in Argentine tango. Piazzolla became a virtuoso performer on the instrument, and upon coming of age he returned to Argentina to perform tangos in nightclubs. There he studied composition with Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983), who recommended Piazzolla for a grant to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979), the celebrated teacher of Copland and many

others. With Boulanger's help, Piazzolla refined his composition skills, and for the remainder of his life was a prolific composer of stylistically innovative tangos.

The four tangos that make up *Las estaciones porteñas* are indicative of Piazzolla's myriad influences. Each contains the dramatic melodies, rhythmic syncopation, and 4/4 meter associated with traditional tango. To these basic elements Piazzolla adds harmonic dissonances, counterpoint, and, in homage to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, passages of Baroque-inspired music. Composed between 1964 and 1970, each of Piazzolla's "Seasons" was written for his own tango quintet, consisting of violin, electric guitar, bass, piano, and, of course, bandoneón.

Leonid Desyatnikov's arrangement for violin soloist and string orchestra expands upon Piazzolla's original pieces, but also tightens them into a more cohesive suite. The solo violin part is raised to virtuosic levels with many additional ornaments and cadenzas. The allusions to Vivaldi's Baroque style are brought to the foreground. Most strikingly, the arrangement exploits string players' extended technique to create a menagerie of sonic effects, from percussive scratching tones to shrieking *glissandi* up and down the fingerboard.

Piazzolla never specified any particular order for his "Seasons" when played as a suite, so performers mix and match as they please. *Primavera* ("Spring") commences with an incisive contrapuntal dance melody. The violin soloist duels against resounding orchestral chords in a dramatic display of force. In *Verano* ("Summer"), the soloist makes an unforgettable entrance in which each phrase ends on a smeared double-stop, sounding as if the violin were betraying its owner. The soloist eventually gains control, conducting the orchestra through contrasting excited and subdued passages. This dance concludes with a passage from Vivaldi's *Winter*—after all, it is winter in Venice

during Buenos Aires' summer. The main theme of *Invierno* ("Winter") is a nostalgic reverie that is intermittently interrupted by bursts of stormy weather, while a surprise appearance by one of the Baroque period's most recognizable sequences brings the piece to a relaxed finish. The last season, *Otoño* ("Autumn"), is notable for an extended cello solo accompanied by ethereal violin harmonics. Not to be outdone, the soloist responds with a frenetic cadenza before leading the orchestra into a percussive coda.

Chamber Symphony in C Minor, Op.110a (1960)

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

(Born September 25, 1906 in Saint Petersburg, Russia; died August 9, 1975 in Moscow, Soviet Union)

Arrangement by Rudolph Barshai
(Born September 28, 1924 in Labinskaya, USSR; died November 2, 2010 in Basel, Switzerland)

Instrumentation: strings.

Dmitri Shostakovich composed his String Quartet No. 8 while visiting East Germany, where he was sent to write a score for the Soviet film *Five Days-Five Nights*. The subject matter of the movie, the firebombing of Dresden by the Allies in WWII, appears at first glance to be the inspiration for the quartet, which Shostakovich dedicated to "the memory of the victims of fascism and war." The emotionally intense quartet was an immediate success, and Rudolph Barshai, then conductor of the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, was authorized by Shostakovich to arrange the work for string orchestra. The Chamber Symphony, as Barshai's arrangement of the quartet was named, was also popularized as a musical memorial. A closer analysis of the piece, however, reveals considerable ambiguity about its meaning.

The first movement, *Largo*, begins with an ominous four-note theme, played first by the cellos and then by the other sections in canon. These four notes—D, E-flat, C, B—comprise Shostakovich's musical signature. In German, E-flat is represented by "S" and B-natural by "H," so these notes spell out Shostakovich's initials: "D. SCH" (the C being necessary in Russian-to-German transliteration). The so-called "DSCH motif" appears in many of Shostakovich's compositions from this period, such as his Symphony No. 10 (1953) and Cello Concerto No. 1 (1959), but never more pervasively than in the Chamber Symphony. In this piece, Shostakovich uses the "DSCH motif" as a jumping-off point for self-quotation. The first movement includes mournful excerpts from both his Symphony No. 1 (1925) and Symphony No. 5 (1937).



Without warning, Shostakovich launches into the *Allegro molto* second movement. This aggressive movement continues to obsessively restate the "DSCH motif," while also borrowing a theme from Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 (1944). The sarcastically playful third movement, *Allegretto*, is similarly constructed: the "DSCH motif" serves as a springboard for quotations from the Cello Concerto No. 1. Surprisingly, the serene cello solo in the fourth movement is *not* a Shostakovich self-quote, but rather a melody borrowed from one of Lenin's favorite revolutionary songs, "Exhausted by the hardships of prison." This is followed by a similarly themed aria from Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1932). The desolate final movement does not include any overt quotations. Instead, Shostakovich elaborates on the DSCH canon first introduced in the opening bars of the

piece, which hauntingly fades to silence.

But what do these quotations *mean*? Why would Shostakovich write a piece so infused with his own persona unless he meant it to be a musical autobiography? What about the dedication? Some have suggested that Shostakovich was being subversively ironic: Given the artistic denunciations and terrors he had suffered at the hands of the Soviet regime, Shostakovich himself was a "victim of fascism and war." Others believe that Shostakovich intended the string quartet as a musical suicide note, but ultimately did not act on his intentions. As with much music written under the shroud of totalitarianism, interpretations are many, but concrete answers are few.

Hungarian Dances, WoO.1 (1858-1879)

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(Born May 7, 1833 in the Free City of Hamburg; died April 3, 1897 in Vienna)

Instrumentation: strings.

Alongside his career as a composer of large-scale symphonies, concertos, and chamber music, Johannes Brahms moonlighted as a collector of folk songs and dances. He delighted in visiting small villages throughout Germany and Austria-Hungary, transcribing the best tunes he heard. In all, he published eight collections of German folks songs and four books of Hungarian dances. Brahms wrote his twenty-one Hungarian dances for piano four-hands or solo piano, but only orchestrated three of the dances himself.

As the short pieces proved to be extremely popular, other composers including, Antonin Dvořák, took up the task of orchestrating the rest. Over the years, the Hungarian dances have been rearranged for numerous ensembles. The string orchestra versions were prepared by French-Canadian arranger Léon Bernier (b. 1936).)))

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Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, soloist-leader

Internationally acclaimed soloist and chamber musician Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg is best known for her exciting performances, passionate interpretations, and charismatic personality. An innovative artist, her daring, dedication, and enthusiasm for all facets of her career have resulted in her becoming one of today's leading violinists, renowned for her work on the concert stage, in the recording studio and in her role as Music Director of the San Francisco-based New Century Chamber Orchestra, which she joined in January 2008. Her first three seasons have been hailed as a tremendous success by audiences and critics alike—"a marriage that works," in her words, and for renewing enthusiasm for "one of the most burnished and exciting ensembles in the Bay Area," according to Rich Scheinin of the *San Jose Mercury News*.

Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg continues to divide her time between solo and chamber performances. This 2011-12 season, she appears as soloist with the Minnesota, Philadelphia, National, Seattle, Vancouver, Oregon, and Baltimore symphony orchestras

in North America, and with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Japan. Duo recitals with pianist Anne-Marie McDermott include performances in Colorado, Indiana, Illinois, and California. Following the success of their first U.S. tour together last season, Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg leads the New Century Chamber Orchestra on an East Coast Tour this fall as part of the 19-member string orchestra's 20th anniversary season, which also includes the world premiere of Featured Composer, Pulitzer Prize-winner Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's violin concerto in May 2012, written specifically with Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg's distinctive artistry in mind. This will be Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg's fourth season at the helm of the New Century Chamber Orchestra.

A powerful and creative presence on the recording scene, Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg continues to enrich the collection of her record label, NSS Music, which she started in 2005. The label's roster of artists includes Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg, pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, horn player John Cerninaro, pianist/composer Clarice Assad, conductor Marin Alsop, the American String Quartet, the Colorado Symphony, Orquestra Sinfonica do Estado de Sao Paulo, and the New Century

Chamber Orchestra. With New Century, Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg has released two records for NSS Music. The 2010 live recording featuring Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, Barber's *Adagio for Strings* and Mahler's *Adagietto* from Symphony No. 5 has been praised as "brilliant" by *Oregon Music News* and allmusic.com said: "For those who like orchestral music for strings that takes nothing less than revelation as its goal, this is a must-have." *Together*, the first CD recorded by Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg and New Century, features Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* and Gershwin's "Bess You is My Woman Now" from *Porgy and Bess*, arranged for string orchestra, both with Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg as soloist; *Impressions* by Clarice Assad (which was given its world premiere by New Century in 2008), and Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances* arranged for string orchestra. In addition to her more than twenty releases on the EMI and Nonesuch labels, Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg has also recorded for NSS Music: *Origins*, *Live from Brazil*, a recording which honors the Italian heritage of Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg and the Brazilian heritage of her collaborators, guitarists Sérgio and Odair Assad; *Merry* (a compilation of Christmas favorites); *Nadja* (Tchaikovsky and Assad violin concertos); and *Live* with pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. Also on Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg's label are The American String Quartet's *Schubert's Echo* (August 2010), *Love, All That It Is* (NSS Music's first jazz album featuring The Clarice Assad Trio), Anne-Marie McDermott's *Bach*, and John Cermanaro's *John Cermanaro, A Life of Music*.

Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg's exceptional artistry is paired with great musical intelligence, which, along with her unique personality, have served her well in numerous environments—on camera, in a commercial for Signet Bank, hosting a *Backstage/Live from Lincoln Center* program for PBS, appearing in the PBS/BBC series *The Mind*,

even talking to Big Bird on *Sesame Street*. She was the subject of the 2000 Academy Award®-nominated film, *Speaking in Strings*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. Released in theaters nationwide and subsequently premiered on HBO's Signatures channel in 1999, this intensely personal documentary on her life is available on VHS and DVD through New Video. The CD of music from the film was released in 1999 by Angel/EMI. Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg appeared on ABC's primetime comedy *Dharma & Greg* in 2001, and she has also been interviewed and profiled on CBS' *60 Minutes*, *60 Minutes II*, and *Sunday Morning*; CNN's *Newsstand*; NBC's *National News* and *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson; A&E's *Artist of the Week* with Elliot Forrest; Bravo's *Arts & Minds* and *The Art of Influence*; PBS' *Live from Lincoln Center*; *The Charlie Rose Show*; and *City Arts*. On the publishing front, *Nadja: On My Way*, her autobiography written for children and discussing her experiences as a young musician building a career, was published by Crown Books in 1989.

Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg's professional career began in 1981 when she won the Walter W. Naumburg International Violin Competition. In 1983, she was recognized with an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and in 1988 was Ovations Debut Recording Artist of the Year. In 1999, she was honored with the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, awarded to instrumentalists who have demonstrated "outstanding achievement and excellence in music." In May of that same year, Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg was awarded an honorary Master of Musical Arts from the New Mexico State University, the first honorary degree the University has ever awarded. An American citizen, Ms. Salerno-Sonnenberg was born in Rome and immigrated to the United States at the age of eight to study at The Curtis Institute of Music. She later studied with Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard School.)))