

Livermore-Amador Symphony

Lara Webber, Music Director & Conductor

Arthur P. Barnes, Music Director Emeritus

Saturday, May 16, 2015, 8 p.m.

 **BANKHEAD**
THEATER



MUSIC OF THE VALLEY

Beethoven and the Red Violin

Prelude Talk at 7 p.m. by Lara Webber

Polonaise from *Eugene Onegin*, Opus 24

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840–1893)

Symphony No. 3 in A Minor (“Unfinished”)

I. Moderato assai

II. Vivo

Alexander Borodin
(1833–1887)

Intermission

Violin Concerto in D Major, Opus 61

Allegro ma non troppo

Larghetto

Rondo

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Elizabeth Pitcairn, soloist

Conductor

Lara Webber

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Kristina Anderson

Concertmaster

Norman Back

Feliza Bourguet

JoAnn Cox

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Juliana Zolynas

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Ursula Goldstein

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Program Notes

Polonaise from Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky *Eugene Onegin*, Opus 24 (1840–1893)

Best known today for his symphonic music, Tchaikovsky also composed eleven operas, two of which, *The Queen of Spades* and *Eugene Onegin*, are frequently produced today. Both operas are based on works by the premier poet of nineteenth-century Russia, Alexander Pushkin.

Tchaikovsky, ever on the lookout for suitable operatic material, got the idea of using Pushkin's epic poem *Eugene Onegin* from a friend during a casual conversation. The composer wrote that the idea at first seemed far-fetched, but after dining alone in a tavern, he had made up his mind to use it and, after a sleepless night, had created in his mind the complete scenario for the opera.

Composed in 1877–78, *Eugene Onegin* tells the common operatic story of love, jealousy, and a missed chance for happiness. Tatiana is madly in love with Onegin, who rebuffs her and flirts instead with Olga, the beloved of his friend Lensky; she flirts with him in return. Lensky, appalled, challenges Onegin to a duel and is promptly killed. Onegin goes into exile, returns after six years, and tries to talk Tatiana into eloping with him, but she—by then older and wiser—rejects his offer.

Tchaikovsky described *Eugene Onegin* as lyrical and wanted his performers to concentrate on subtlety of characterization. He chose students to give the premiere, fearing that seasoned opera singers would think their job was only to make a beautiful sound.

The polonaise opens Act III, a ball in the house of a St. Petersburg nobleman, with an elaborate fanfare. The dance rhythm known as *polonaise* is a stately Polish national dance in triple meter. Names such as *polonaise* and *polnischer Tanz* hark back to the late sixteenth century, but the classical polonaise acquired its current form in Poland only around 1800.

The polonaise from *Eugene Onegin* is structured like the classical minuet/trio, with the polonaise section constituting the main theme, followed by a “trio” with a transition that leads back into the repeat of the main theme.

Symphony No. 3 Alexander Borodin in A Minor (“Unfinished”) (1833–1887)

As a member of the so-called Mighty Five, composer Alexander Borodin did much to establish and cultivate a definitive Russian nationalist school of composition. This group—made up primarily of amateurs including Mily Balakirev (1837–1910), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908), César Cui (1835–1918), and Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)— strove to incorporate Russian folk idioms, melodies, harmonies, and rhythms into German-dominated or Western European-dominated classical music forms. A chemist by profession, Borodin remained largely unfettered by the constraints of conventional conservatory

training. Through the use of colorful orchestration and exotic tonalities, he succeeded—especially in his tone poem “In the Steppes of Central Asia,” opera *Prince Igor*, and Symphonies 2 and 3—in creating a musical identity that was uniquely Russian.

At the time of his death in 1887, Borodin had a sketch for the first movement of his Symphony No. 3 in A minor and a completed version of the second movement. Composer Alexander Glazunov (1865–1936) orchestrated both sections and reworked the first movement, *moderato assai*, which was originally written for string quartet. It opens with a lovely Russian-sounding unaccompanied oboe solo that expands into a woodwind choir. Unison strings repeat this theme, which dominates the entire movement. Borodin was masterful at transforming and manipulating thematic material by altering the character and mood through changes in tempo, rhythm, and tonality. The nature of the opening theme is one of forward momentum, helped by Glazunov's imaginative use of instrumentation as he features thematic fragments throughout the orchestra. Much of the second movement, *vivo*, written in 1882, also intended for string quartet, is in the unusual meter of five beats per measure. The use of this uneven meter is common in the music of eastern European and Mediterranean countries, thus distinguishing the style even further from the Western tradition. It is a fairly typical scherzo, quick and energetic, with a contrasting middle section that is slower, more lyrical, and pastoral in character. As expected in this particular form, the opening material makes a triumphant return. In spite of the symphony's brevity, it distinctly captures Borodin's undeniably Russian voice.

Violin Concerto Ludwig van Beethoven in D Major, Opus 61 (1770–1827)

Beethoven's violin concerto is one of the lengthiest written by any composer. Yet, remarkably, it is also one of the quietest, crafted with great serenity and as lyrical as anything else Beethoven ever composed. Often, when the music reaches a dramatic moment, it climaxes not with thunder but with pastoral amplitude. It reflects, sometimes contrary to our usual perception of Beethoven, a composer who was compassionate, witty, deeply humane, and understanding of whispered joys.

“One might be inclined to say off-hand that the most mysterious stroke of genius in the whole work is the famous opening with five strokes of the drum which introduces the peculiarly radiant first subject on the wood-wind...” So wrote the esteemed musicologist Donald Tovey. This violin concerto is, in fact, a work filled with unexpected strokes of genius. Another of the more remarkable examples occurs shortly after that famous opening. Although the piece begins in D major, the violins play a D-sharp after the second phrase. This note—completely unrelated to the key of the work, to the preceding music, or even to what is to follow—is presented as if it were the most natural note in the whole concerto. It's one of the many delights of a

masterpiece brimming with delicate surprises.

The second movement, *larghetto*, is a beautifully radiant and sentimental set of variations. Beethoven seems to have reached the sublime with its hymnlike opening — so simple, so pure, and so breathtaking — which allows the soloist to daydream in the Elysian fields. Then, without a pause, the third-movement rondo sets out with an energy respectful of the intimate meditation that preceded it, but it gathers exuberance and strength and joyfulness. About midway through the movement, the orchestra is almost giddily drunk in a dialogue with the soloist. Although, as a finale, it doesn't wander too far from the concerto's overall tranquility, it brings some charming twists of energy and offbeat rhythms. The jubilant ending is not so much a grandiose affair as it is a boisterous farewell of good humor and good cheer.

The concerto was premiered by 26-year-old Franz Clement in December 1806. Concert lore has it that Clement sight-read most of the performance, the music not having been finished in time for him to practice it. What is not lore is that after Beethoven's death, another violin prodigy, the famous Joseph Joachim (1837–1907), would soon be associated with the concerto as much as any soloist has ever been linked to any concerto. And Joachim's championing of this concerto with such passion shows that the solo part, besides being some of the most exquisite solo writing in the repertoire, is also some of the most difficult.

*program notes compiled by Kathy Boster
from Internet sources
edited by Eva Langfeldt*

Soloist—Elizabeth Pitcairn, violin

Violin virtuoso Elizabeth Pitcairn has earned a reputation as one of America's most beloved soloists. She appeared as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Academy of Music and gave her New York debut at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in 2000 with the New York String Orchestra. She has performed at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall; Walt Disney Concert Hall; the Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall in Philadelphia; and the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. She has given performances of the Mendelssohn and Bruch violin concerti with the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra of China. Under the baton of Hannu Koivula, Pitcairn has appeared in Finland with the Vaasa City Symphony and with the Helsingborg and Jönköping Symphonies of Sweden. She has also given concerts in Italy, France, Germany, the British Isles, Bulgaria, Brazil, Canada, and Mexico.

This season, Pitcairn played the Tchaikovsky violin concerto with the San Luis Obispo Symphony and music director Michael Nowak. She will tour Italy with the TOC-CATA-Tahoe orchestra, performing Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. She appears in recitals in New York and Pennsylvania with Barbara Podgurski; in Budapest and Szeged, Hungary, with Anikó Szokody; in Vienna, Austria, with Louise Thomas

on May 20; and makes her Fisher Center recital debut at Bard College with Cynthia Elise Tobey. Pitcairn gave a nationally televised broadcast in Bulgaria with the Classic FM Orchestra; on May 25 and 26, she will record the Beethoven violin concerto with the orchestra, conducted by Maxim Eshkenazy.

Pitcairn is passionate about youth and education. In 2012, she was appointed president, CEO, and artistic director of the internationally renowned Luzerne Music Center Festival in upstate New York, which provides training for gifted young musicians ages 9 to 18.

She commissioned Sweden's renowned composer Tommie Haglund to compose the violin concerto tone poem "Hymnen an die Nacht" ("Hymns to the Night"), which she premiered in 2005 and recorded for Phono Suecia in 2009, receiving a Swedish Grammis nomination. She has also commissioned a sonata for violin and piano by Russian-American composer David Finko. "Blue Vishuddha" by Sara Carina Graef was recently commissioned for Pitcairn's Bard College Fisher Center recital debut.

Her discography includes Tchaikovsky and Mozart concerti with the Slovenia Radio Television Orchestra and the Bruch "Scottish Fantasy" and Sarasate "Carmen Fantasy" with the Sofia Philharmonic of Bulgaria.

Born in 1973 in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, to a closely knit musical family (her mother is a Juilliard-trained cellist), Pitcairn began playing the violin at age 3 and made her debut with orchestra at 14. Her path led her to Los Angeles to study with preeminent violin professor Robert Lipsett at the University of Southern California. She is a former faculty member of USC and the Colburn School and an alumna of the Marlboro Music Festival, Temple University's Center for Gifted Young Musicians, the Meadowmount School, the Encore School for Strings, and the National Repertory Orchestra. She is the former concertmaster of Southern California's New West Symphony under the direction of Boris Brott.

The artist performs with one of the world's most legendary instruments, the "Red Mendelssohn" Stradivarius of 1720, said to have inspired the Academy Award-winning film *The Red Violin*. The 10th Anniversary Meridian Collection DVD (2008) of *The Red Violin* features Pitcairn in a special feature called "The Auction Block."

Pitcairn's gowns are courtesy of LaFemme Fashion. The "Red Mendelssohn" Stradivarius is fitted with Wittner Finetune-Pegs and travels in a titanium case by GEWA.

For her concert schedule and history of the "Red Mendelssohn" Stradivarius, please visit redviolin.com.



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NEXT SEASON — “Dream along with the Pops” October 23, 2015; formal concerts December 5, February 20, April 9, and May 21

Livermore-Amador Symphony is a member of the Livermore Cultural Arts Council and a resident company of the Bankhead Theater.

See the Cultural Arts Calendar at www.independentnews.com.

