Oakland Civic Orchestra presents

REUNION

Zachary Umar Durr ©2021

May 15, 2022 at 4:00 PM

First Presbyterian Church of Oakland

Oakland Civic Orchestra

REUNION

PLEASE SILENCE ALL CELL PHONES AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES BEFORE THE CONCERT BEGINS. THANK YOU!

Grand March: "Entrance of the Guests"
from the opera *Tannhäuser*
Richard Wagner (1813-1883)
Arranged by Thomas Jöstlein

Hymn to Ukraine
Mykhailo Verbytskyi

Academic Festival Overture
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Zephyr in Gemini:
A Serenade for Two Cellos and Orchestra **(World Premiere)**
Niko Umar Durr (b. 1995)

Eamon Riley and Milo Klise, Violoncellli

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony No.7 in A Major, Op. 92
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Poco Sostenuto; Vivace
Allegretto
Presto
Allegro con brio

Martha Stoddard, Artistic Director and Conductor
Christine Brandes, Associate Conductor

FROM THE PODIUM

Welcome to *Reunion*
Oakland Civic Orchestra Spring Concert
May 15, 2022

Thank you for joining us for our **Reunion** concert, the first time since the onset of the pandemic that we are together as a full symphony orchestra. This is a celebration to be sure, on the heels of postponements and disappointments, dashed and renewed hopes. In this final program of a most challenging season, it is heartwarming to welcome so many people back to the orchestra and to live music, and to finally bring to fruition projects we could only dream of for the past two years.

It is fitting to refresh our sense of the value of being together to share in music-making Today we reunite to present the work of three brilliant composers; Johannes Brahms, Ludwig van Beethoven and our first ever *Composer-in-Residence*, Niko Umar Durr. We will perform two masterpieces of the orchestra canon; the spirited *Academic Festival Overture* of Brahms, Beethoven's brilliant *Symphony No. 7* and the full premiere of the Umar Durr *Zephyr in Gemini: A Serenade for Two Cellos and Orchestra*. We are also blessed to reunite with our two wonderful young cello soloists, Milo Klise and Eamon Riley, who joined us for a preview of the third movement of this work reorchestrated " Covid-Style" (translate: no winds) " in February.

Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture*, composed in 1879, was offered as a gesture of gratitude for the honorary doctorate he was awarded from the University of Breslau. He conducted its premiere there in 1881. Perhaps to poke fun at the stuffy academics, the musical themes in the piece, while clothed in rich harmony and inventive orchestration, are in fact student drinking songs with bawdy, irreverent lyrics, traditionally sung at what amounts to fraternity dinners. Fitting for a somber ceremony? Perhaps, not. Great for a Reunion? Definitely!

In *Zephyr in Gemini* (2021), Niko paints a moving, often humorous tribute and eloquent musical memoir to beloved grandparents, bringing a full complement of orchestral forces to

FROM THE PODIUM 2

the task. Stretching our personnel to the max, Niko calls for contrabassoon, bass clarinet, homemade chimes, an ocean drum, glockenspiel, piano, much other percussion, full brass and of course two virtuosic soloists. The orchestration suggests that Niko has spent a lot of time looking at Shostakovich and Mahler, and yet we find a freshness that is all Umar Durr, and Niko has reunited all of OCO to pull it off!

What could be a more fitting way to end our season than to perform Beethoven's mesmerizing *Symphony No. 7*? This symphonic masterpiece from 1811-12 has everything: an infectious, rhythmic drive and energy, sublime and yearning melody, huge, *unbuttoned* humor and exacting musical organization that reveals at every unexpected turn of phrase, an unrelenting genius. Beethoven's craft is so meticulously realized, one moment utterly outrageous with orchestral brilliance that it defies the imagination, then so heartbreakingly beautiful and tender as to draw one to tears. With everything history has taught us about Beethoven, it is still hard (for this author) to fathom how he ever imagined this piece into existence.

In fact, so much has been written about the Seventh Symphony, perhaps it is best for us to let the music speak for itself and simply consider the composer's own words:

"A most excellent symphony".

While Brahms and Beethoven are household names to classical music lovers around the world,

Umar Durr is a profoundly gifted and skilled composer known mostly to us and some SF Bay Area folks who explore new music. In championing Niko's orchestral works, the OCO has endeavored to bring a wider audience to this music, as well as provide a laboratory to further refine the craft of orchestral composition. Please refer to the composers' notes for a deeper look into *Zephyr in Gemini*.

– Martha Stoddard

* Please refer to reference links provided for further study of Beethoven and Brahms:

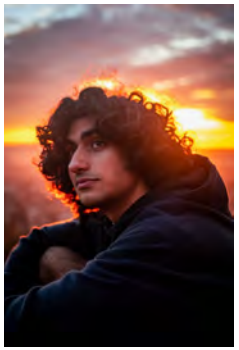
Beethoven Symphony No 7

Gerald Schwartz on Brahms Academic Festival Overture

Academic-Festival-Overture

OUR GUEST PERFORMERS

Milo Klise is a cellist from Berkeley, CA. He currently is a member of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra and a piano trio. Previously, Milo was assistant principal cellist in the Oakland Youth Symphony Orchestra for two seasons. For the past three summers, he was a member of the Sphinx Performance Academy at both The Juilliard School and Curtis Institute of Music, twice. He toured China and Canada with his orchestra and string ensemble. Milo has performed in Master Classes with Peter Wiley, Astrid Schween, Bonnie Hampton, Karlos Rodrigez, Thomas Mesa, as well as The Dover Quartet, The Telegraph Quartet, The Alexander String Quartet, The Catalyst Quartet and others. He was selected to play in the Junior Bach Festival four times, was chosen for the SF Bay Area Youth Honors Orchestra and invited to the Arnosen Cello Festival. His esteemed teachers are Cathy Allen Aird, Sebastien Gringas, Eugene Sor, Jill Brindel and David Goldblatt. He proudly attended The Crowden School where his love of chamber music was ignited.



Eamon Riley is an 18-year-old cellist and graduate of the Crowden School from Berkeley, California studying with Sergei Riabtchenko. He has won or placed in several solo competitions. In November 2018 he performed the Saint-Saëns *Cello Concerto in A minor* with the Oakland Symphony Youth Orchestra (OSYO) as first prize winner of the concerto competition; he also performed at Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall as a first-prize winner of the American Protégé International Music Competition, and was second-prize winner at the DVC/HNU Young Artists String Competition. In addition, he has soloed in the Junior Bach Festival. Eamon also enjoys chamber music, and was a semi-finalist for two years in the Galante Prize Competition at SF State. In January 2019 year he performed in the world premiere of *Lemuria*, a piece by composer Clarice Assad for the Left Coast Chamber Ensemble. He is currently a member of the San Francisco Youth Orchestra. Eamon also has performed with numerous chamber groups working with many musicians such as: Heghine Boloyan, Eugene Chukhlov, Bonnie Hampton, Robert Howard, Jeff Ladeur, Pei-Ling Lin, Joseph Maile, Tanya Tomkins, and Eric Zivian. As a soloist Eamon has worked with Tanya Anisimova, Igor Gavrish, Bonnie Hampton, and Tanya Tomkins as well as with his primary teacher Sergei Riabtchenko.

OUR COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE

Niko Umar Durr (b. 1995) is a composer-violinist based in the East SF Bay Area. Their first violin lessons began at age 6, and an almost rabid desire for composition followed not long after lead to formal lessons at age 10 with local composer and pianist Molly Axtmann, in conjunction with an education at The Crowden School.

Niko has had work performed by Left Coast Chamber Ensemble as well as various faculty and students associated with The Crowden School and Oakland School for the Arts. Niko was one of the inaugural students for the John Adams Young Composers Program at Crowden's Community Music Center, through which they studied under Martha Stoddard as well as John Adams himself. During this time, Niko was also director of music for Harmonikos, a kind of composer/performer's forum organized by fellow Crowden alumni. In 2021, Oakland Civic Orchestra announced Niko as Composer-in-Residence.

Niko has performed with Young People's Symphony Orchestra (YPSO) in Berkeley, Bay Area Rainbow Symphony (BARS) in San Francisco, and Berklee Contemporary Symphony Orchestra (BCSO) at Berklee College of Music in Boston MA, in addition to various one-off chamber ensembles or bands for various events as a musician for hire.

Check out our website

Interested in becoming a member of the orchestra? Contact us through our website, see link below.

Please visit the Oakland Civic Orchestra's website for the latest news on upcoming concerts and projects. You can also find links to videos from our previous concerts and watch us in our very own documentary!

https://www.oaklandcivicorchestra.com

ABOUT OUR CONDUCTORS

Martha Stoddard has held the position of Artistic Director of the Oakland Civic Orchestra since 1997. With her work centered in the heart of the Bay Area, she is also the conductor of the Piedmont Chamber Orchestra, and served as Guest Music Director for the Community Women's Orchestra's 2022 reopening concert. She is the newly appointed Conductor and Music Director of the Holy Names University Community Orchestra, and is a longtime Associate Conductor for the San Francisco Composers' Chamber Orchestra in San Francisco. She regularly performs on flute with the Handel Opera Project and Opus Oakland. Stoddard has repeatedly been named semi-finalist and finalist in recent American Prize competitions, both as conductor and composer, and is a four-time recipient of the AscapPlus Awards in composition. She holds music degrees from Humboldt State University and San Francisco State University and also studied conducting in courses around the USA, in Europe and in Russia. A dedicated educator, in recent years she also served as the first Resident Conductor for Enriching Lives through Music in San Rafael, and held the position of Program Director for the John Adams Young Composers Program at the Crowden Music Center. Ms. Stoddard held the position of Director of Instrumental Music at Lick-Wilmerding High School from 1991-2021, where she also served a six-year term as Chair of the Performing Arts Department.

Ms. Stoddard is published by Tetractys in London, UK and formerly by Shadow Tree Music Publishing, and appears on numerous recordings as flutist and conductor. She loves the outdoors and enjoys swimming, hiking and cycling and is an avid tennis player who enjoys competitive league play throughout the Bay Area.

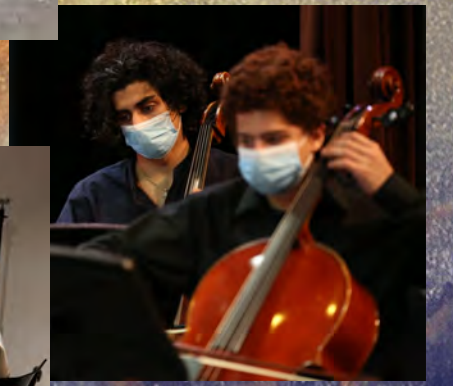
Associate Conductor Christine Brandes has long been held in high esteem as a professional singer of concert and operatic repertoire, she has increasingly felt drawn to the podium. Through her position as head of the Voice and Opera area at SF State University, she has conducted fully staged productions of Handel, Strauss, Mozart and Menotti. Her first professional engagement was a production of Rameau's *Achante et Céphise* (Sympathy) with Victory Hall Opera in Charlottesville, Virginia, to which she returned in the Fall of 2019 for Haydn's *Armide*. Ms. Brandes made her professional west coast debut in 2019 conducting Gluck's *Orfeo and Euridice* for West Edge Opera and will return in July of 2022 to conduct *Julius Caesar*. A noted specialist in baroque performance practice, she is the director of the University Baroque Ensemble at UC Berkeley.

To read more about Ms. Brandes please visit: christine-brandes

MILO, EAMON AND NIKO - MEMORIES

Back from China

MILO, EAMON AND NIKO - MEMORIES



Marty and Niko

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Oakland Civic Orchestra

Check out the OCO website for season updates, future performances and more information on upcoming YouTube video uploads including selections from today's concert event!

www.oaklandcivicorchestra.com

PROGRAM NOTES 1

Niko Umar Durr • *Burlesk from Zephyr in Gemini,*
Serenade for Two Cellos and Orchestra

When Martha Stoddard and I were first discussing my residency with Oakland Civic Orchestra, back in early 2020, she suggested I write two new pieces to be premiered in the then-upcoming season.

First, a fanfare for brass (***Merritt***, which was performed at our season opener this past year). Then, a concerto for 2 cellos and orchestra, to be co-commissioned and premiered by fellow Crowden School alums Eamon Riley and Milo Klise. Needless to say, nature had other plans and the compositions (among other things) were postponed indefinitely at the time.

Despite this unexpected deadline extension as well as a sudden influx of resources and even support, finding any motivation to compose was difficult. During the initial lockdown and in the year or so afterward, I ended up spending most of my non-working time locating and studying scores to pieces I'd never truly dove into before either because of their length and density, or simple ignorance. Examples of the former would be ***Mahler 9***, and Olivier Messeian's early orchestral work like ***L'Ascension*** and ***Turangalila-Symphonie.*** The latter would have to be Janacek's ***Sinfonietta***. All of this while waiting for word from Martha whether we could meet and rehearse again.

As fate would have it, in June of 2021, my grandmother passed away just a few days shy of her 79th birthday. Margrit Seidl Umar, along with my grandfather Rachmat Matt Umar (who passed in 2009), were near-constant presences in early life of my cousins, my brother, and myself, and a good amount of us are lucky to have core memories associated with both of them. In my case, every other musical path that I've taken could more than likely be traced back to my time being babysat by my grandparents. When I wasn't banging on the Chickering Baby Grand that once decorated the back corner of their condo, I would thumb through their CD and tape collections and listen to all different kinds of music; varying from compilations of classical music to Best of Billy Idol to their wedding song, Elvis Presley's "Can't Help Falling In Love", on their state of the art combination cassette tape/6 CD stereo system, to whatever music my grandfather would pirate off of various early 2000's internet download sites and either burn onto CD or play directly off his hi-tech Windows 98-running desktop.

I knew at once that the piece needed to be about transition. Not just that of my grandparents from Here to There, but that of my soloists as they are both upperclassmen in high school about to transition into college life. Because of all this, I strongly felt that this Serenade needed to be less solemn in tone than my chamber requiem Thanksgiving (written in 2010 after the passing of Rachmat). This is in no small part because 2022 would have been their 60th year married together, and all signs point to them being reunited again, just in time. (I didn't come to this realization until their actual anniversary which, as fate would have it, was this past February 15).

The Umar family held a memorial in July, following Margrit's passing. The service

PROGRAM NOTES 2

itself took place in Elk Grove, and afterward some of us went to Lake Tahoe to hold a memorial service and mini-family reunion. The beach we settled at was somewhere near Zephyr Cove, and I vaguely remember discussing astrology with one or some of my cousins, coming to the realization that Margrit and Rachmat's birthdays placed them both in Gemini which, according to popular astrology theories, could indicate that they were both romantically and personally compatible with each other. Meditating on this, as well as the two soloists being the same instrument, it only made sense that not only the title be ***Zephyr in Gemini***, but that this would be the subject for the double concerto that I was commissioned.

In preparation for this Serenade, I've utilized various note-naming and pitch classification methods to create small melodic motifs that I could use to create a harmonic foundation. I took the last 2 digits of my grandparents' birth years (19<u>39</u> & 19<u>42</u>), combined them, and turned the numbers into scale degrees, creating a 4-note motif that bookends the entire piece. I also converted Margrit and Rachmat's names into their own 7-note motifs, utilizing a combination of traditional solfège & German note names. Cello 1 always plays Margrit's motif, and Cello 2 always plays Rachmat's motif, but neither cellist plays the other's motif. This is despite sharing most of the other melodic material and even switching lines at several points throughout the work. This "casting" is not accidental, as several points of the piece are simply just musical retellings of memories I have and stories I've heard.

Zephyr in Gemini is in 3 movements attacca, without pause.

<u>Prelude</u> opens with four chords based on the birth year motif as both cellos state their respective name motifs. The soloists converse over an orchestral nebula, which comes to a head as their wedding song is hinted at. The movement ends with a restatement of the opening 7 bars and the sound of distant ocean waves leading into…

<u>Ballade</u> is a microcosmic retelling of their somewhat parallel lives up to when they met. Both grew up during and after World War II in countries totally wrecked by it (Germany and Indonesia) and as a result were surrounded by death from an early age, all implied by militaristic bombast interspersed with lullabic ***Dies Irae*** death chant quotes. The music repeats itself with the cellos switching roles the second time around. After a brief transition, Cello 1 and principal Viola duet while Cello 2 plays Rachmat's motif ascending. The movement ends with a musical portrait of their wedding, which fades into…

<u>Burlesk</u> is the Finale of the entire work, which is heavily inspired by the music my grandmother would listen to while cooking or otherwise stubbornly doing housework against the health advice of practically everybody around her. This could be anything from Bavarian Polka to Klezmer to ABBA, it would be blasting full volume on her headphones bleeding out for anyone within an arm's length to hear. The movement finishes off with a restatement of a theme played in the very first movement of the piece, followed by an ecstatic coda.

– Niko Umar Durr

SAVE THE DATES! OCO 2022-2023 SEASON

Planning for our 2022-2023 30th Anniversary Concert Season is underway!

OCT 23	PROGRAM 1 at 4 PM
JAN 22	PROGRAM 2 at 4 PM
APRIL 30	PROGRAM 3 at 4 PM

Watch website for complete program details coming soon!

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www.oaklandcivicorchestra.com
Our Inaugural Summer Session is a great time to get acquainted:
Rehearsals on June 15, 18, 22, 25, 29 and Concert on July 2 at Studio One

MUSICIANS

Today's concert is brought to you by the Oakland Civic Orchestra Association and the Oakland Parks and Recreation Department and is performed by members of the Oakland Civic Orchestra. The Oakland Civic Orchestra was founded in 1992 and is a volunteer community orchestra bringing together musicians of all ages and backgrounds to share in the joy and magic of music-making.

For more information about joining the orchestra or about our current season, please visit our website at: https://www.oaklandcivicorchestra.com.

You can also find concert information and current news about the orchestra on Facebook.
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Helen Tam
Jeremy Marley
Susan White

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Anne Nesbet
Lynn La
Tram Le-Nguyen
Nancy Ragle
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*Guest Musician

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