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GERARDO EDELSTEIN, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Romantic Reflections

Sunday January 18th | 3:00pm
PSU Recital Hall

Featuring
Katherine Benson

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Our Music Director

Gerardo Edelstein

A native of Argentina, Maestro Gerardo Edelstein has conducted symphonic music, opera, and choral works in Europe, Asia, South America, and the United States. Audiences, musicians, and press alike continuously praise him for his sensitive, charismatic, and energetic performances.

This season marks his third as the music director of the Pennsylvania Chamber Orchestra. Maestro Edelstein has also been music director/conductor of the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra for fifteen years and under his leadership, the orchestra has reached new artistic heights and secured financial stability.

In addition, he is director of orchestral studies, music director of the Philharmonic and Chamber Orchestras and music director of the Penn's Woods Music Festival at the Pennsylvania State University. Under his leadership, Penn State Orchestras have toured in Spain and performed in Carnegie Hall, the Kimmel Center, and Heinz Hall. For the 50th Anniversary of the College of Arts and Architecture, Maestro Edelstein conducted Leonard Bernstein's Mass.

Edelstein was principal conductor of the Jerusalem Oratorio Choir and Orchestra in Israel, leading the orchestra in radio and television appearances and touring throughout the country. In the United States, he served as assistant conductor, associate conductor, and music advisor for the Richmond Symphony in Virginia conducting a variety of performances. Under his leadership, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) awarded the symphony first prize for innovative music programming awarded in 2000.

Other conducting engagements have brought him to Israel, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Brazil. In the United States, he has conducted the Houston Chamber Orchestra, the Houston Ballet, the San Antonio Metropolitan Ballet, the Pennsylvania Chamber Chorale and Orchestra, and the Kalamazoo, Williamsport and San Antonio symphonies.



Over an illustrious career, Maestro Edelstein has performed with internationally renowned artists including Joyce DiDonato, Rachel Barton Pine, Jorge Maria Osorio, Randy Newman, and Dianne Schurr.

Committed to the education of young musicians, Maestro Edelstein has served as clinician and guest conductor for many orchestra festivals in Virginia, Texas, Vermont, Michigan, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. He has also collaborated with the San Antonio Symphony and the Pittsburgh Symphony in side-by-side concerts. He has presented masterclasses and conducting workshops in the United States, Argentina, Israel, Brazil and Turkey.

Maestro Edelstein graduated with high honors from the National Conservatory of Music in Buenos Aires (piano) and studied choral conducting at the J. J. Castro Conservatory of La Lucila, Argentina. He continued his education in Israel at the Jerusalem Rubin Academy of Music where he won the Leonard Bernstein Conducting Scholarship awarded by the American/Israel Cultural Foundation. In the United States, he received a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. His teachers included Mendi Rodan, Helmuth Rilling, and Larry Rachleff, among others.

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Katherine Benson, Piano

American pianist Katherine Benson is recognized as a significant artistic figure of her generation, renowned for her “stunning” (ArtsKnoxville) performances and her passion for arts leadership.

In demand as a soloist, chamber musician, adjudicator, and teacher, Dr. Benson has performed across the USA and abroad in China, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. Highlights from recent concert seasons include Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concertos No. 2 & 3, Poulenc’s Concerto for Two Pianos, Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue, Clara Schumann’s Concerto in A Minor, as well as solo recitals in Michigan, Georgia, Tennessee, West Virginia, Washington, and North Dakota.

In June 2025, Dr. Benson was one of five pianists on the faculty of Wuhan Conservatory’s 2025 International Piano Faculty Week, in which she presented a solo recital and masterclasses with conservatory students. Immediately following the festival in Wuhan, she then presented masterclasses, lessons, and performances in multiple other cities in China, including the Beijing Eastbank Academy of Music and appearances in Changchun, Nanchang, and Chengdu.

An avid chamber musician, Dr. Benson is the Artistic Director and pianist for The Paramount Chamber Players (TPCP), one of the premier chamber music ensembles of the southern Appalachian Region and in its twenty-first concert season. Passionate about arts leadership, Dr. Benson co-founded the Knoxville International Piano Festival and Competition and served as Director from 2023-2025.



She has additionally garnered numerous triumphs in over a dozen international and national piano competitions, having won top prizes and recognitions in the Heida Hermanns, Seattle, Kerikeri, Walled City Music, Teresa Carreño, and Thousand Islands International Piano Competitions.

She holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music, Northwestern University, and University of Michigan, and her teachers have included Nelita True, James Giles, Chih-long Hu, and Arthur Greene.

Dr. Benson currently serves as Assistant Professor of Piano at Penn State.



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Romantic Reflections

Noveletten, Op. 52 No. 2 in C Major

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

(1875–1912)

⌚ 6 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, op. 22

Camille Saint-Saëns

(1835–1921)

Katherine Benson, Piano

- I. Andante sostenuto
- II. Allegro scherzando
- III. Presto

⌚ 25 minutes

Intermission

Noveletten, Op. 52 No. 3 in A Minor

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

(1875–1912)

⌚ 6 minutes

Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a

Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

- Theme
- Variation I (Poco più animato)
- Variation II (Più Vivace)
- Variation III (Con moto)
- Variation IV (Andante con moto)
- Variation V (Vivace)
- Variation VI (Vivace)
- Variation VII (Grazioso)
- Variation VIII (Presto non troppo)
- Finale (Andante)

⌚ 20 minutes

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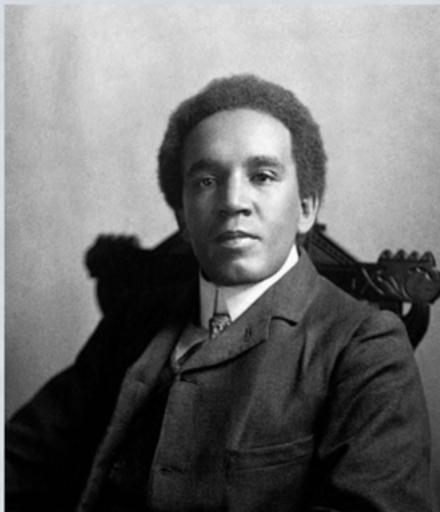
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Noveletten Nos. 2 & 3 **Opus 52** **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912)**



The Pennsylvania Chamber Orchestra continues its season-long exploration of the music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor with today's performance of his *Novelletten* nos. 2 and 3. Coleridge-Taylor was a prominent Afro-British violinist and composer who first found success with the 1896 premiere of his Ballade in A minor for Orchestra at the Three Rivers Choir Festival in England. In 1898, Coleridge-Taylor found even greater success with the premiere of the cantata *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, the first in what would become a trilogy of cantatas called *The Song of Hiawatha*, all based on the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* proved so popular that it won Coleridge-Taylor a following in the United States and an invitation to meet President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House.

Coleridge-Taylor also incorporated traditional African spirituals and folk songs into many of his works—inspired by composers like Antonín Dvořák and Johannes Brahms who incorporated traditional Bohemian and Hungarian folk music, respectively, into larger-scale symphonic forms. This was sparked by Coleridge-Taylor's involvement in early trans-Atlantic movements for racial equity at the beginning of the 20th century, when he met influential thinkers like American writer W.E.B. DuBois.

The two *Novelletten* on today's program were most likely inspired by another giant of the Romantic era, Robert Schumann, who wrote several piano miniatures with the name. Each of Coleridge-Taylor's *Novelletten* are scored for strings and percussion, and are structured in three parts featuring a primary theme, secondary theme and return of the first theme.

Novellette No. 2's opening theme is playful and sweet, contrasted with a lilting secondary theme that evokes the pastoral beauty of the countryside. *Novellette* No. 3 opens with an impassioned violin solo which gets reinterpreted in various moods throughout the rest of the movement.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor Opus 22 Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)



It took 32 year-old French composer Camille Saint-Saëns just 17 days to complete work on his second piano concerto in late April and early May of 1868. The concerto, which Saint-Saëns also premiered, is one of his most popular works and helped cement his reputation as a composer—alongside his lifelong career as a touring virtuoso pianist, church organist, conductor, and educator.

The concerto was written at the request of Saint-Saëns's good friend, Russian pianist and conductor Anton Rubinstein, who had come to Paris to give a series of concerto performances (each conducted by Saint-Saëns). But before he left, Rubinstein wanted to impress Parisian audiences further as a conductor himself with Saint-Saëns at the keyboard, and the concerto was born.

Saint-Saëns not only had to compose the work but learn how to play it along the way, and despite his best efforts, he didn't leave himself enough time to learn it thoroughly due to the high degree of virtuosity required to pull off some of the keyboard writing.

Despite his historical reputation as a conservative composer who rejected the innovative music of Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky, Saint-Saëns did himself experiment with the conventions of form, as evidenced by the somewhat unusual structure of this concerto:

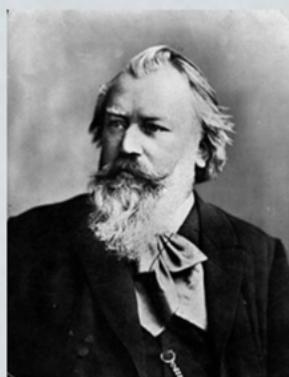
Andante sostenuto - Though cast in three movements like most solo concertos, Saint-Saëns opens the first movement not with a prolonged orchestral introduction, but an extended solo cadenza reminiscent of the keyboard writing of J.S. Bach, whom Saint-Saëns admired greatly. This cadenza gives way to the orchestra's first full statement, which recalls the noble air of a baroque French overture. The piano leads much of the movement after this—which is broader in tempo than is typical of other concerto first movements—before closing with another cadenza.

Allegro scherzando - In place of a typical slow movement, Saint-Saëns instead writes a playful scherzo featuring a jovial dialogue between the soloist and orchestra which commences with the drumbeat call of the timpani.

Cont'd on next page

Presto - It is in the finale where we find the most ebullient and difficult writing Saint-Saëns tasked himself with performing in this concerto. The soloist plays continually at quicksilver tempo in this movement, which is based on the tarantella (a whirling dance with origins in southern Italy that was thought to draw the poison out of someone after being bitten by a certain type of venomous spider). This movement so overflows with propulsive energy—in great contrast to the solemn opening of the concerto—that it led Polish pianist Zygmunt Stojowski to joke that the concerto “begins with Bach and ends with Offenbach.”

Variations on a Theme by Haydn Opus 56a Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)



In 1870, the famed German pianist and composer Johannes Brahms was introduced to the manuscript score for a woodwind octet written by an unknown composer by his friend, the musicologist Carl Ferdinand Pohl. Pohl believed that this score was penned by Franz Joseph Haydn, though that would later be disproved in the 1950s.

Within this manuscript was a setting of a chorale tune titled “Choral St. Antoni,” a melody built on irregular phrase lengths consisting of five measures instead of the typical four. Intrigued by the alleged authorship of the tune and its unusual structure, Brahms composed a set of variations on the St. Antoni Chorale at first for two pianos while on a retreat in Bavaria in 1873 and then immediately orchestrated it for full orchestra in the version heard today. It remains one of his most popular works in the symphonic repertoire.

Nearly every composer has written a theme and variations, a piece wherein a musical theme is presented, and then treated to a series of variations, or “remixes” that alter that theme. Sometimes the theme remains recognizable and sometimes it does not, but a composer will almost always adhere to the basic foundational underpinnings of the theme, such as phrase length or harmonic structure. Here is how Brahms treats the St. Antoni Chorale theme:

Cont'd on next page

Program Notes

Theme - The entire chorale theme, divided into two parts, is presented by the woodwinds with the addition of plucked cellos and basses.

Variation I (Poco più animato) - The strings offer fluid figurations over strongly pulsing chords in the winds, brass and percussion.

Variation II (Più Vivace) - Cast in the serious key of B-flat minor, this variation pairs short, descending figures with more flowing material in the clarinets and bassoon.

Variation III (Con moto) - Long flowing lines in the winds and strings come to the fore, emphasizing the bucolic qualities of the original theme.

Variation IV (Andante con moto) - Set in a minor key, this variation emphasizes the unique orchestral color of the oboe and viola, evoking a wistful and longing mood.

Variation V (Vivace) - A playful scherzo requiring a light touch and a strong sense of shared rhythmic pulse across the ensemble, as material flows seamlessly across instrument groups.

Variation VI (Vivace) - The excitement continues as the French horns declare a hunting fanfare that overtakes the entire ensemble.

Variation VII (Grazioso) - A gently lilting variation follows, reminiscent of a siciliano —a piece of music meant to evoke feelings of the countryside.

Variation VIII (Presto non troppo) - The last variation in a minor key with constantly overlapping, almost frantic lines of movement set in a hushed dynamic.

Finale (Andante) - The finale is cast as a chaconne, another type of theme and variations piece. Over a repeated bass line, Brahms composes a further series of variations on the St. Anthoni theme that is at turns noble, serious, and dark before giving way to glorious closure with a final restatement of the opening theme.

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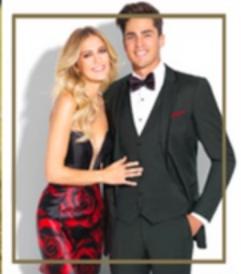
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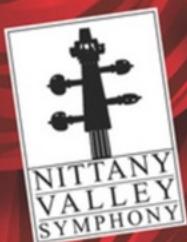
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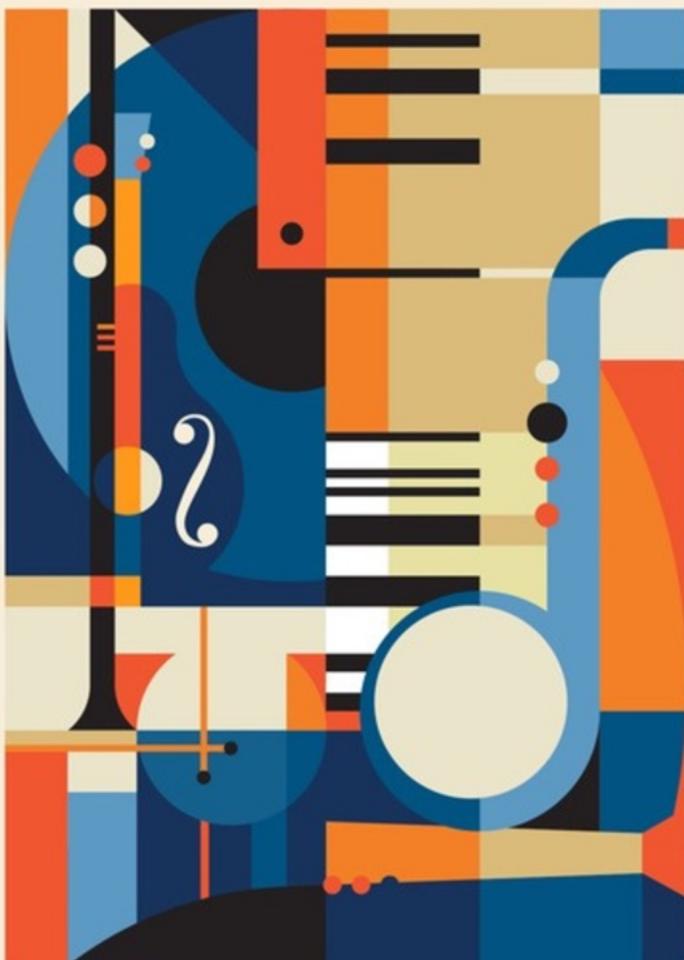
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