

Merkin Concert Hall

Tuesday, May 24, 2016 at 8 pm

SONOS Chamber Orchestra

Erik E. Ochsner, *music director and conductor*

Yoo + Kim, *piano duo*; Edmund Stone, *narrator*

JESSIE MONTGOMERY
(b. 1981)

Starburst for strings

JEAN SIBELIUS
(1865-1957)

The Wood Nymph (Skogsrået), Op. 15 *N.Y. Premiere*
Melodrama version for speaker, piano, 2 horns & string orchestra
EDMUND STONE, *narrator*

ALEXANDER BROTT
(1915-2005)

Aurora Borealis *U.S. Premiere*

PEHR HENRIK NORDGREN
(1944-2008)

Chamber Symphony, Op. 97 (1996) *U.S. Premiere*

Intermission

PAUL MORAVEC
(b. 1957)

Albany Rhythms

ALICE PING YEE HO
(b. 1960)

Dark Waters *World Premiere* of new orchestration

FREDRIK SIXTEN
(b. 1962)

Concerto for Two Pianos and Chamber Orchestra
World Premiere
YOO + KIM, *piano duo*
Commissioned by SONOS Chamber Orchestra,
Erik Eino Ochsner, Music Director;
in honor of the Dranoff International 2 Piano Foundation;
Dedicated to the memory of Ruth Unger

DAVE GRUSIN
(b. 1934)

Theme to On Golden Pond *World Premiere*
Arranged by Jeremy Franklin Goodman with permission
Commissioned by Erik Ochsner in honor of Ruth Unger

Steinway is the official piano of Merkin Concert Hall
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A NOTE FROM THE PODIUM

A warm welcome to our many loyal followers, and those in the audience who are having a SONOS experience for the first time! Back in 1999, when the idea of SONOS began ruminating and steeping, I never could have imagined that we could still be putting on concerts in 2016! There is so much music to be heard and so many composers who have something to say. We work hard to present exactly that, even in a saturated market like New York City.

In addition to SONOS, I have now been Artistic Director of the Dranoff International 2 Piano Foundation for the past three seasons. Located in Miami Florida, Dranoff holds an international 2 piano competition every four years,

presents a concert season in Miami, has a large educational program called “Piano Slam” and has an incredible legacy of commissioning new works.

With Dranoff, I have been very active in curating the season, including enticing (read: demanding) duos to play Dranoff commissioned pieces,

in addition to examining and expanding the duo repertoire by finding pieces already composed for two pianos that are not being performed! Most people only know the Mozart and the Poulenc Concertos for two pianos, but there are so many: Arnold, Babin, Bergmann, Berio, Bliss, Bonawitz, Duski, Górecki, Hovhaness, Legrand, Martinu, Milhaud, Porter and Vaughan Williams to name a few. Plus, the concerto by Walter Piston, which is dedicated to famed piano duo Stecher and Horowitz, who are here with us at tonight’s concert!

SONOS is has commissioned composers before – like Brian Grundstrom and James Nyoraku Schleffer – but the thought of commissioning a fellow Scandinavian, premiering the work in New York City, performing it with SONOS, working with one of the Dranoff laureate teams AND asking for the composition to be a new Concerto for

two pianos was just too good to pass up!

Attending concerts requires active listening. As people attend their own “home theaters” so often – where they can talk during the show, multi-task on their phones and laptops, and comment on the action – audiences have become more passive listeners. On a daily basis, we hear music somewhere in the background, and we have no idea who the composer is, or who the performers are, or when it was recorded, etc. Not to mention being able to hear the work in its entirety, or the complete range of dynamics. The use of

recorded background music in bars, airport terminals, doctors’ offices and the ever present MUZAK in elevators has contributed to this phenomenon.

As most all of the music in a SONOS concert has never been heard by our audience, it really requires active listening.

You are invited to close your eyes, and discover your own connotative imagery; open your ears

and your heart to find your meaning in what the composer is saying.

Mother Nature has inspired so many pieces, from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* to Beethoven’s Symphony No. 6 “Pastoral,” which, coincidentally he stressed was “more an expression of feelings than a painting.” This leads to the idea of nature as in human nature, which I believe you will experience in the sometimes excruciatingly heavy and somber Chamber Symphony of Pehr Henrik Nordgren. Or in the glistening notes of *On Golden Pond*.

With that, I invite you to open yourself to this music, don’t judge it in the first 5 seconds; experience the piece as a whole. Maybe you won’t like it, and I’m ok with that – I’m here leading and curating a voyage of discovery. I am thrilled you are here to hear! Music can move and entertain, and music can make a difference!

–Erik Eino Ochsner, Music Director

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

A few words on the program...

by Brian Wise

Starburst for strings

JESSIE MONTGOMERY (b. 1981)



Violinist and composer Jessie Montgomery was raised on New York's Lower East Side where her father ran a music studio and she was "constantly surrounded by all different kinds of music," as she recently told NewMusicBox.org. Her works have accordingly drawn from a myriad of influences: African-American spirituals, civil rights anthems, elements of improvisation, film scoring and various other ingredients.

A graduate of the Juilliard School and New York University, Montgomery has been a member of the Providence String Quartet and the Catalyst Quartet, the latter a project of the Detroit-based Sphinx Organization, which creates opportunities for African-American and Latino string players. This season, Montgomery is a resident Composer-Educator for the Albany Symphony.

Montgomery's *Starburst* was commissioned by the Sphinx Organization and premiered by its resident Sphinx Virtuosi in 2012. She writes:

"This brief one-movement work for string orchestra is a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle fleeting melodies in an attempt to create a multidimensional soundscape. A common definition of a starburst: 'the rapid formation of large numbers of new stars in a galaxy at a rate high enough to alter the structure of the galaxy significantly' lends itself almost literally to the nature of the performing ensemble that premiered the work, the Sphinx Virtuosi, and I wrote the pieces with their dynamic in mind."

The Wood Nymph (Skogsrådet), Op. 15 - N.Y. Premiere

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)



Jean Sibelius clearly had a thing for "The Wood Nymph," an 1882 poem by the Swedish-language poet, Viktor Rydberg. The Finnish composer wrote no fewer than three pieces based on it: a solo piano piece, an orchestral tone poem and the melodrama (a piece with spoken narration) featured on tonight's program. But however enamored Sibelius was with the source material, the pieces largely vanished after their premieres, evidently because the composer was stung by some harsh reviews.

But after *The Wood Nymph* was rediscovered by a researcher at the Helsinki University Library in 1996, critics came around to its charms. Reviewing the premiere recording by the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Alex Ross in the *New York Times* deemed that the tone poem "is by no means a failure," citing its "rough-hewn, brutally direct" idiom.

The Wood Nymph is the story of a young, engaged student whose life is ruined after he

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has an affair with an exotic dancer and his fiancée finds out. While its 22-minute tone poem rendering has received several performances since its rediscovery, the melodrama version, which contains similar material, receives its New York premiere tonight. With its attractive scoring for two horns, piano and strings, Sibelius establishes a haunting, moody and yet enchanting atmosphere — all in an economical 12 minutes.

Aurora Borealis - U.S. Premiere

ALEXANDER BROTT (1915-2005)



Continuing with the nature thread on this evening's program is *Aurora Borealis* by Canadian composer Alexander Brott. Over a long and prolific career, Brott was a prominent figure in the cultural life of his home town of Montreal. As a violinist and conductor, he worked with most of that city's major ensembles, including the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. In 1939, he joined the faculty of McGill University, where he taught composition for more than 35 years.

A patriotic Canadian, some of his major works were portraits of nature and incorporated Canadian folk songs; several included quotations of the Canadian national anthem.

Aurora Borealis is from 1973. Brott, following in the footsteps of his muse Ludwig van Beethoven, was continually inspired by nature. He had purchased a property at Saint Sauveur in the Laurentian Mountains, one of the world's oldest mountain ranges where he was inspired by the beauty and poignancy of nature; the flora, fauna and drama of the four seasons. He composed many of his works seated in his chalet overlooking Lac de Chats. *Aurora Borealis* was first written for concert band and then orchestrated for chamber orchestra in the version you will hear tonight, which is its U.S. premiere.

Chamber Symphony, Op. 97 (1996) - U.S. Premiere

PEHR HENRIK NORDGREN (1944-2008)



Like many Finnish composers of his generation, Pehr Henrik Nordgren was strongly influenced by Jean Sibelius. Like the earlier Finnish master, Nordgren composed in a variety of traditional forms: eight symphonies, 11 string quartets, two operas and a number of choral, chamber and instrumental pieces. He even took after Sibelius by finding inspiration in the Kalevala, Finland's national epic.

But Nordgren was more maverick than throwback. He lived for the latter half of his life in Kaustinen, a small, Ostrobothnian village known for its folk music traditions — a fact reflected in two concertos for the Finnish folk zither, the kantele (1985, 1999). He also found inspiration in the music and philosophies of the Far East, having studied for three years at the University of Art and Music in Tokyo. And while Nordgren's earlier work was steeped in the 12-tone method, it gradually took on a

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more direct and accessible idiom. The Chamber Symphony, from 1996, reflects the deep humanity that radiates from Nordgren's later works. "I see composition as an outlet for the need to express myself more fully than in speech, a way of communicating with my fellow human beings." - Pehr Henrik

Albany Rhythms

PAUL MORAVEC (b. 1957)



Paul Moravec has received much attention this month for his operatic adaptation of Stephen King's novel *The Shining*, which premiered at the Minnesota Opera. A collaboration with librettist Mark Campbell, it drew widely favorable reviews and all four performances were sold out. Moravec's career began in the 1980s, after he received a B.A. in composition from Harvard University. In 2004 came his breakthrough work, *The Tempest Fantasy*, a 30-minute chamber piece that won the Pulitzer Prize in Music and led to several prestigious residencies and academic appointments.

A versatile and prolific composer, Moravec has composed for virtually every classical format.

Albany Rhythms was composed in 2007 for (Albany Symphony music director) David Alan Miller's new music group Dogs of Desire. The group premiered the work in Albany in March of that year.

Dark Waters - World Premiere of new orchestration

ALICE PING YEE HO (b. 1960)



The second Canadian composer on tonight's program, Toronto-based Alice Ping Yee Ho, has also shown an interest in evoking natural phenomena. Her pieces often feature raw, elemental qualities and carry vivid titles like *Breath of Fire*, *Ice Path* and *Jubilation of Spring*.

Ho was born in Hong Kong and studied composition at Indiana University and the University of Toronto. Asian influences can be found throughout her work, including Chinese folk and operatic idioms as well as Japanese Taiko drumming. Her pieces have been

performed by most of Canada's major orchestras (Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg) and chamber ensembles. She is also active as a classical pianist.

Dark Waters was originally scored for woodwind quintet and strings and has been expanded for this new arrangement. The composer writes:

Dark Waters is an imaginary title that paints a mental picture of the mysterious "altered state" of nature. The composition is written to showcase four distinctive instrumental forces: a woodwind quartet, a brass quartet, two percussion and strings. Each instrumental group is assigned with a characteristic music gesture to

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describe the vicious cycle or transformation of water.

The quiet rumbling woodwind gestures against sustained low brass chords and slow moving strings lines signifies some persistent everlasting energy. This prominent music theme is subdued at first, but becomes increasingly volatile and rises to an intense "tutti" figure that symbolizes the unifying force of destruction. The final dissolution of music textures into pointistic instrumental dialogues leaves an unsettled impression of the erratic traits of nature.

Concerto for Two Pianos and Chamber Orchestra - World Premiere

FREDRIK SIXTEN (b. 1962)



A Swedish composer living in Trondheim, Norway, Fredrik Sixten has a richly layered style that draws on numerous influences, including Swedish folk music, jazz, organ works and 20th-century French music. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, Sixten has worked as an organist and choir leader within the Swedish church. He has received particular acclaim for his sacred choral works (SONOS has previously performed his *Requiem*).

Tonight brings a different side to his output, a concerto for two pianos and orchestra. Sixten writes:

I've always had a fascination for piano concertos from early on. When I got the opportunity to write a concerto not only for one piano but two, it was a challenge I could not reject. The take off point was a short intense concerto in 3 movements with a durata of about 20 minutes. This tells you as a composer that you need to stay focused in both form and expressivity. I wanted the two pianos to be mostly in a dialogue and that the orchestra is both supporting and questioning what's going on between them.

There are three main themes in the first movement, all which returns in the other movements, sometimes obvious and sometimes hidden. In the first culmination, two of the themes melt together. There is a short hint of Sibelius's *Finlandia* as a humble tribute as well as the *Valse Triste* in the second movement, which bear a significant melancholic aura to it. Being a composer from Nordic Lands this is a congenial approach for me. I work with a lot with contrasts in my music, so besides these darker moods, there is a lot of humor and more light parts to balance it all.

In the third movement (which begins similar to the first) there is a very rhythmic and "scherzo" feeling at first, which is then contrasted with a more romantic and passionate theme; the latter one leads to an expected climax. However, we will all be reminded of the darkness once again before everything ends very suddenly. In a way, this is what I experience in life; all the drama coming from everywhere and unceremoniously it suddenly ends no matter what!

Musically it moves easily through a lot of different genres and externalizations. Each of them may be familiar at first, but when together they shapes new sound pictures. That is very significant for my art.

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Theme to *On Golden Pond* - World Premiere

DAVE GRUSIN (b. 1934), arranged by Jeremy Franklin Goodman, with permission



David Grusin began as music director on Andy Williams' TV show before directing his energies toward film. While he's worked in many capacities – including as a jazz pianist, producer and bandleader – his movie scores helped to define the sound of Hollywood during the 1980s and early '90s. They included “The Bonfire of the Vanities” (1984) “The Firm” (1993) and “The Fabulous Baker Boys” (1989). “On Golden Pond,” a 1981 family drama starring Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda and Jane Fonda, won three Academy Awards (10 nominations).

Among the film's Oscar nods was for Grusin's piano-focused score. The lush, poignant theme does what good soundtracks are supposed to do: it evokes the film's setting (pastoral New England), and underscores its dramatic themes (about the sunset of life). A two-piano version of the score gets its premiere to conclude tonight's program.

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EDMUND STONE - narrator



Born and raised in England, Edmund Stone is a classically trained Shakespearean actor. He toured in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* before moving to Scotland where he reviewed films for BBC Radio and various publications. In 1980, he moved to Los Angeles where he covered the Academy Awards and narrated more than 1,000 educational audio cassettes. Stone moved to Portland and joined All Classical FM in 2001 where he hosts the popular music program *The Score*. A weekly celebration of music in film, *The Score* has box office tie-ins, carefully crafted talk-sets, memorable musical elements and enticing weekly themes all woven together. Coupled with expert production aesthetics, *The Score* is an unparalleled exploration of the musical experience that makes film such an indelible activity. Edmund appears frequently as Emcee, does voice over work in the Pacific Northwest, and has narrated with many orchestras with works such as *Peter and the Wolf* and Copland's *Lincoln Portrait*.

YOO + KIM | piano duo

South Korea's Piano Duo Yoo & Kim, winners of the 2013 Dranoff International 2 Piano Competition, was formed almost by accident. Yoon-Jee Kim was a student at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien in Hannover, Germany, when her duo partner for the chamber music requirement was suddenly not available. So she teamed up with her friend and schoolmate Jackie Jaekyung Yoo. “It became very clear very

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quickly,” Yoon-Jee says, “that we had an uncanny musical chemistry.”

Yoon-Jee, who gave her piano recital at the age of eight, has already won several piano competitions, and early on, at Juilliard's Pre-college Division, she began her second successful career of conducting, with a specialty in opera. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in

conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music, where piano partner Jackie is also enrolled.

Jackie Jaekyung Yoo, acclaimed as one of the future leaders of Korean music, has won nearly thirty prizes at international competitions. She has appeared as soloist with the Orquestra Simfonica de les Balears “Ciutat de Palma,” the Symphony Orchestra of Croatian Radio and Television and the Manchester Camerata. With different individual approaches, the duo has evolved to create what Jackie calls “our music as opposed to my music.”

ERIK E. OCHSNER - conductor



Finnish-American conductor Erik Ochsner's versatility as a conductor has stretched across a broad range of repertoire: from conducting as few as five performers in contemporary and modern works, to leading 300 performers in “live to projection” film concerts of *Lord of the Rings*, *Pirates of The Caribbean*, *Star Trek* (2009), *Star Trek Into Darkness*, *Back to the Future* and *E.T!* After the success of *Pixar in Concert* at the Krakow (Poland) Film Music Festival, he returned to conduct (for an arena audience of 10,000) a fully synchronized live performance of Disney's *Frozen*. Ochsner is Principal Guest Conductor of *Bugs Bunny at the Symphony*, Artistic Director of the Dranoff International 2 Piano Foundation (Miami), and Music Director of New York's SONOS Chamber Orchestra. When reviewing a performance of *Rite of Spring* with SONOS, the *New York Times* said “All the hallmarks of a great “Rite” were here,” and the Ontario Arts Review said “Watch this man, he is brilliant.” He was previously Assistant Conductor of the Brooklyn Philharmonic, under Robert Spano.

In 2002, Ochsner began an 8-year collaboration as Rehearsal Conductor for Academy Award winning Chinese composer Tan Dun (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). A highlight was serving as Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master for the Shanghai workshop of *The First Emperor*, a Metropolitan Opera commission. His work can also be seen in the world premiere DVD recording of Tan Dun's opera *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*.

Ochsner has led orchestras in Adelaide, Albuquerque, Beijing, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kaohsiung (Taiwan), Kitchener-Waterloo, Krakow, Melbourne, Mexico City, New

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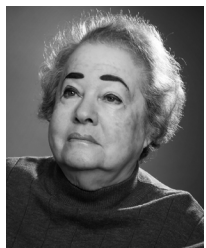
York, Oregon, Ottawa, Reykjavik, Richmond, Rochester, Round Top Festival Institute (Texas), St. Louis, Shanghai, Stockholm, Tampere (Finland), Wellington, West Saxony (Germany) and Wolf Trap.

Ochsner's SONOS Chamber Orchestra commissioned *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* by Swedish composer Fredrik Sixten. In December 2016, Erik will conduct a concert of all *Star Wars* music with the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, Canada. Erik studied with Charles Bruck, Erich Kunzel, Marin Alsop and Helmuth Rilling. Erik lives in New York and attended The Pierre Monteux School for Conductors and Dartmouth College.

www.erikochsner.com

IN MEMORIAM

I met my neighbor Ruth Unger many years ago. We saw one another in the elevator, and would say hello. I was born in Germany, and recognized her “rather” thick German accent, so one day I said something in German, to which she replied “I speak English.” We grew quite close: I would visit her in her apartment, we could go to concerts together, I would take her to doctors’ visits. Once when she had tickets to the New York Philharmonic, and she called me to ask if she “needed to take her cane, or whether she could take my arm!” For the last several years of her life, we spoke EVERY morning at 9am, except when I was out of town or on tour! Thank you Ruth for allowing us to do what we do best, express ourselves through music. – Erik



Ruth Unger (1926-2014) was born in Hamburg. In 1935, her family fled from Germany to Israel. Ruth had a deep love for music from an early age which she got from her parents. As Ruth’s family did not have much money, she was not able to afford tickets to the Israel Philharmonic (which was formed in 1936). Even though she couldn’t afford it, she decided to go anyway, oftentimes sneaking in through backstage! Ruth and her only daughter Carrie moved to New York City to be with Ruth’s parents. Having worked as a travel agent, Ruth often travelled the world attending concerts

on the great stages of the world. After the tragic loss of her daughter, Ruth said that classical music was the only thing that kept her going. Travelling was one of Ruth’s many passions along with her love of music, and tonight’s commission is a musical tribute to Ruth.

Keep up to date with SONOS on the web
www.sonoschamberorch.org



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Sasha Margolis
Reuben Blundell
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Amy Kimball
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Oboe/English horn

Erin Gustafson

Clarinet/E-flat/Bass clarinet

Enid Blount Press

Bassoon

Gili Sharett

French horn

Chad Yarbrough
Karl Kramer

Trumpet

Chris Bubolz, *principal*
Jason Covey

Trombone/Bass Trombone

Michael Lormand

Tuba

Andrew Bove

Timpani/Percussion

Jared Soldiviero
Chi-Ching Lin

Piano

Markus Kaitila

Celesta

Karl Kramer

ABOUT SONOS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Founded in 2000, SONOS Chamber Orchestra strives to be a vibrant alternative in the New York City cultural landscape. In a city that is internationally recognized for its active arts scene, SONOS seeks to discover adventurous works that offer artistic strength and potential beyond common acceptance and to expose audiences to the value of these compositions. At the same time, SONOS seeks to discover new venues and performance spaces, particularly in underserved neighborhoods of the city. SONOS is a flexible and versatile group of young professional musicians devoted to the promotion and performance of under-appreciated works from the traditional repertoire, along with innovative new works showcasing the talents of dedicated contemporary composers. SONOS is led by Finnish American conductor Erik Ochsner. To date the programming has included 62 different composers and has frequently included Scandinavian composers.

Under the direction of its founders: Music Director and Conductor Erik Ochsner, and musicians Allen Alexander and Pamela Ajango, SONOS began its work by focusing and exploring artistic opportunities in the diverse and unique neighborhoods throughout Upper Manhattan, including Washington Heights, Inwood, and the Upper East Side. SONOS has performed with as few as 3 musicians, to as many as 60 with the SONOS Chamber Orchestra, Chorus and soloists. SONOS has performed in a wide variety of venues, including community concerts, established music series, charitable gala events, collaborative choral concerts, national celebrations, and even outdoor garden parties.

When reviewing a performance of *Rite of Spring* with SONOS, the New York Times said “All the hallmarks of a great “Rite” were here.”

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