

2023–2024 | 124th Season

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, May 30, at 7:30

Saturday, June 1, at 8:00

Sunday, June 2, at 2:00

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor

Mitsuko Uchida Piano

Ravel Piano Concerto in G major

I. Allegramente

II. Adagio assai

III. Presto

Intermission

Coleman Concerto for Orchestra ("Renaissance")

I. American Odyssey

II. Portraits

III. Cotton Club Juba

World premiere—Philadelphia Orchestra co-commission

Debussy *La Mer*

I. From Dawn to Midday at Sea

II. Play of the Waves

III. Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea

This program runs approximately 1 hour, 50 minutes.

These concerts are sponsored by **Mari and Peter Shaw**.

The June 1 concert is also sponsored by the **Manko Family**.

The June 1 concert is presented in honor of **David Kim's 25th anniversary**.

The appearance of Mitsuko Uchida is sponsored by **Dr. Alan R. Cohen and Michele Langer**.

The co-commission for Valerie Coleman's Concerto for Orchestra is part of the **Amplifying Voices** program, a New Music USA initiative powered by the Sphinx Venture Fund, with additional support from ASCAP and the Sorel Organization.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit www.wrti.org to listen live or for more details.

The
Philadelphia
Orchestra

24 | SEASON
25

MUSIC & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN



THE GRAMMY®-WINNING ORCHESTRA PRESENTS ITS MOST AMBITIOUS SEASON YET

Yannick Conducts *Tristan and Isolde* • Riccardo Muti Leads Verdi's Requiem
Yuja Wang Returns • Beethoven's Ninth at the Academy of Music
Yannick Explores Mahler and Beethoven • Commissions by Julia Wolfe,
Gabriela Lena Frank, and Terence Blanchard



Photos: Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Photo by Landon Nordeman; violinist Davyd Booth at Tattooed Mom. Photo by Jessica Griffin; Principal Tuba Carol Jantsch at Philadelphia's Magic Gardens. Photo by Neal Santos; Principal Bass Joseph Conyers at Cherry Street Pier. Photo by Kriston Jae Bethel; Principal Harp Elizabeth Hainen on Broad Street. Photo by Neal Santos.

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The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music, and furthering the place of the arts in an open and democratic society. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united to form The Philadelphia Orchestra and Kimmel Center, Inc., reimagining the power of the arts to bring joy, create community, and effect change.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 12th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is embraced by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community.

Your Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, in Verizon Hall and around the community, in classrooms and hospitals, and over the airwaves and online. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community initiatives engage over 50,000 students, families, and community members of all ages through programs such as PlayINs; side-by-sides; PopUP concerts; Our City, Your Orchestra Live; School

Concerts; sensory-friendly concerts; open rehearsals; the School Partnership Program and School Ensemble Program; All City Orchestra Fellowships; and residency work in Philadelphia and abroad. The Orchestra's free online video series, Our City, Your Orchestra (OCYO), uncovers and amplifies the voices, stories, and causes championed by unique Philadelphia organizations and businesses. Joining OCYO in connecting with the community is HearTOGETHER, a free monthly podcast featuring artists and activists who discuss music, social justice, and the lived experiences that inform the drive to create a more equitable and inclusive future for the arts.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador and one of our nation's greatest exports. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Mann Center, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich touring history, having first performed outside Philadelphia in its earliest days. In 1973 it was the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China, launching a five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange.

Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 13 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit www.philorch.org.

Music and Artistic Director

London Nordeman



Yannick Nézet-Séguin is currently in his 12th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. An inspired leader, Yannick is both an evolutionary and a revolutionary, developing the mighty "Philadelphia Sound" in new ways. His collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm have been heralded by critics and audiences alike. The *New York Times* has called him "phenomenal," adding that "the ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogenous richness, has never sounded better."

Yannick has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling and sought-after talents of his generation. He became the third music director of New York's Metropolitan Opera in 2018. In addition, he has been artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal's Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. In 2017 he became an honorary member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He served as music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic from 2008 to 2018 (he is now honorary conductor) and was principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic from 2008 to 2014. He has made wildly successful appearances with the world's most revered ensembles and at many of the leading opera houses.

Yannick has shown a deep commitment to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers and by performing the music of under-appreciated composers of the past. In 2018 he signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Under his leadership The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to recording with 13 releases on that label, including *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*, which won a GRAMMY® Award for Best Orchestral Performance in 2022.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at Montreal's Conservatory of Music and continued his studies with renowned conductor Carlo Maria Giulini; he also studied choral conducting with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College. Among Yannick's honors are an appointment as Companion of the Order of Canada; Companion to the Order of Arts and Letters of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Montreal; an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres; *Musical America's* 2016 Artist of the Year; ECHO KLASSIK's 2014 Conductor of the Year; a Royal Philharmonic Society Award; Canada's National Arts Centre Award; the Prix Denise-Pelletier; the Oskar Morawetz Award; and honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec, the Curtis Institute of Music, Westminster Choir College of Rider University, McGill University, the University of Montreal, the University of Pennsylvania, Laval University, and Drexel University.

To read Yannick's full bio, please visit philorch.org/conductor.

Soloist

Decca/Justin Pumfrey



Pianist **Mitsuko Uchida** is known as a peerless interpreter of the works of Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Beethoven, as well for being a devotee of the piano music of Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and György Kurtág. She was *Musical America's* Artist of the Year in 2022, is music director of the 2024 Ojai Music Festival, and is a Carnegie Hall Perspectives artist across the 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 seasons. Her latest solo recording, of

Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, was released to critical acclaim in 2022, earning a GRAMMY nomination and winning the 2022 *Gramophone* Piano Award.

Ms. Uchida has enjoyed close relationships over many years with the world's most renowned orchestras, including the Berlin and London philharmonics, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the London, Bavarian Radio, and Chicago symphonies. She recently celebrated her 100th performance with the Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Hall. She made her Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 1991. Conductors with whom she has worked closely have included Bernard Haitink, Simon Rattle, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski, Andris Nelsons, Gustavo Dudamel, and Mariss Jansons. Since 2016 she has been an artistic partner of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, with which she is currently engaged on a multi-season touring project in Europe, Japan, and North America. She also appears regularly in recital in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York, and Tokyo, and is a frequent guest at the Salzburg Mozartwoche and Salzburg Festival.

Ms. Uchida records exclusively for Decca. Her multi-award-winning discography includes the complete Mozart and Schubert piano sonatas. She is the recipient of two GRAMMY Awards—for Mozart concertos with the Cleveland Orchestra and for an album of lieder with soprano Dorothea Röschmann. Her recording of the Schoenberg Piano Concerto with Pierre Boulez and the Cleveland Orchestra won the *Gramophone* Award for Best Concerto. A founding member of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and director of the Marlboro Music Festival, she is a recipient of the Golden Mozart Medal from the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association. She has also been awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Wigmore Hall Medal. She holds honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 2009 she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1905

Debussy

La Mer

Music

Strauss

Salome

Literature

Wharton

House of Mirth

Art

Picasso

Two Youths

History

Einstein

formulates

Theory of

Relativity

1929

Ravel

Piano

Concerto in

G major

Music

Walton

Viola Concerto

Literature

Hemingway

A Farewell to

Arms

Art

Feininger

Sailing Boats

History

The Great

Depression

Maurice Ravel was at the height of his international fame in 1928 when he toured America, where he deepened his enthusiasm for jazz. Upon his return to France, he began composing the Piano Concerto in G major, which he interrupted to write the Piano Concerto in D major for the Left Hand, both pieces jazz inspired.

The concert continues with the world premiere of a Philadelphia Orchestra co-commission: The Concerto for Orchestra ("Renaissance") by the American composer Valerie Coleman, the fifth piece she has written for the Philadelphians. The concerto for orchestra is a tradition that dates back to the Baroque era and that found new expression in the past century. Coleman says that this work "is centered on honoring and reflecting upon the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance."

Composers tend not to like labels and it is perhaps understandable that Claude Debussy rejected the term "Impressionism" when it was first applied to his works. Yet equally understandable is that critics and listeners would make connections between his music and currents in French painting of his time. *La Mer*, subtitled "symphonic sketches," shows his marvelous ability to evoke three scenes associated with the sea: "From Dawn to Midday at Sea," "Play of the Waves," and "Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea."

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

The Music

Piano Concerto in G major

Maurice Ravel

Born in Ciboure, Lower Pyrenees, March 7, 1875

Died in Paris, December 28, 1937



In a 1932 interview with an English newspaper, Maurice Ravel declared: "I frankly admit that I am an admirer of jazz, and I think it is bound to influence modern music. It is not just some passing phase, but has come to stay. It is thrilling and inspiring, and I spend many hours listening to it in night clubs and over the wireless." The composition prompting the observation was his recent Piano Concerto in G major, each movement of which, he commented, "has jazz in it."

A Pair of Piano Concertos Ravel's interest in jazz had grown during a successful 1928 tour of America, where he had chances to hear more of it in New Orleans and New York, where he met George Gershwin. Soon after returning to Paris he began writing the G-major Concerto, some ideas for which date back more than a decade. The project was interrupted, however, by an attractive commission from the Viennese pianist Paul Wittgenstein (older brother of the great philosopher), who had lost his right hand in the First World War and sought out leading composers, including Strauss, Prokofiev, Hindemith, and Britten, to write pieces for left hand alone. In this way Ravel found himself composing two concertos, both jazz influenced.

Ravel intended the G-major Concerto as a vehicle for his own performances as a pianist and announced plans to take it on an extended tour across Europe, to North and South American, and Asia. Ultimately health problems forced him to cede the solo spotlight to Marguerite Long, to whom he dedicated the piece. Ravel assumed instead the role of conductor at the very successful premiere in Paris in January 1932, part of a festival of his music. Against the recommendations of his doctors the two then took the Concerto on a four-month tour to 20 cities, and also recorded it.

Ravel felt the genre of the concerto "should be lighthearted and brilliant and not aim at profundity or at dramatic effects." On several occasions he alluded to a famous review of Brahms, saying that the great German's "principle about a symphonic concerto was wrong, and the critic who said that he had written a 'concerto against the piano' was right." (Actually, the quip seems to have been made about Brahms's Violin Concerto and come from conductor Hans von Bülow,

who remarked that while Max Bruch had composed his concerto *for* the violin, Brahms had written his *against* it.)

A Closer Look Ravel acknowledged finding his models in concertos by Mozart and Camille Saint-Saëns: “This is why the [G-major] Concerto, which I originally thought of entitling *Divertissement*, contains the three customary parts: the initial Allegro, a compact classical structure, is followed by an Adagio ... [and] to conclude, a lively movement in Rondo form.”

The first movement (**Allegrement**) begins with a sparkling, vaguely bitonal, orchestral section before things slow down when the piano enters. Hints of the blues and of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* point to jazz, as do the soloistic use of woodwind and brass instruments. Near the end Ravel includes a cadenza for harp that is passed on to the woodwinds and horn before the piano gets the spotlight.

Ravel said the utterly contrasting **Adagio** was inspired by the slow movement of Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet. An extended solo for piano starts what is an unusually lyrical and heartfelt movement, especially so for a mid-20th-century concerto. The brief and rousing **Presto** finale has been a favorite ever since the premiere—Ravel and Long frequently had to repeat it at concerts—and projects infectious perpetual-motion energy.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Ravel composed his G-major Piano Concerto from 1929 to 1931.

The United States premiere of the Concerto was given simultaneously by The Philadelphia Orchestra and the Boston Symphony, in April 1932; Sylan Levin was the soloist and Leopold Stokowski conducted. The most recent subscription performances were in October 2018, with Kirill Gerstein and Louis Langrée. Some of the other pianists who have performed the work here include Eugene List, Jean Casadesus, Leonard Bernstein (who conducted from the keyboard), Philippe Entremont, Peter Serkin, Louis Lortie, Martha Argerich, and Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

The Philadelphians recorded the G-major Concerto in 1964 with Entremont and Eugene Ormandy for CBS.

The score calls for solo piano, piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet, E-flat clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, slapstick, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, wood block), harp, and strings.

The Concerto runs approximately 23 minutes in performance.

The Music

Concerto for Orchestra ("Renaissance")

Valerie Coleman

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, September 3, 1970

Now living in New York City

Kia Caldwell



Valerie Coleman showed a keen interest in music from an early age. She began her studies at age 11, composing three full-length symphonies by 14 and winning a string of competitions as flutist throughout high school. At Boston University she earned bachelor's degrees in flute performance and in theory/composition, and she subsequently earned a master's in flute performance at New York's Mannes College of Music. Among her flute teachers were Julius Baker,

Alan Weiss, Judith Mendenhall, Doriot Dwyer, and Mark Sparks. She studied composition with Martin Amlin and Randall Woolf.

A Performer, Composer, and Educator A renowned virtuoso flutist, Coleman founded Imani Winds in 1997—partly to create role models for young students wishing to move toward careers in music. The impact of this quintet's international touring, high-profile commissions, GRAMMY Award–nominated recordings, and collaborations (with such artists as Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, and Mohammed Fairouz) has been inestimable.

In 2011 Coleman founded the Imani Winds Chamber Music Festival. As a chamber musician she has performed with Yo-Yo Ma, Ani and Ida Kavafian, Anne-Marie McDermott, Wu Han, David Shifrin, the Dover String Quartet, the Orion String Quartet, the Miami String Quartet, the Harlem String Quartet, Quarteto Latinoamericano, and many others.

Coleman was recently appointed to the faculty of the Juilliard School of Music, starting with the 2024–25 academic year. She has previously served on the faculties of the University of Miami and the Mannes School of Music; she was also a visiting faculty member at the University of Chicago and an artist in residence at Mannes and at the Banff Chamber Music Intensive.

In 2017 Coleman was listed among the Top 35 Women Composers in the *Washington Post*, and in 2020 she was named Performance Today's Classical Woman of the Year for her activities as performer, composer, and educator. Her compositions have earned a MAP Fund award, an ASCAP Honors Award, a Herb Alpert Ragdale Residency Award, and many other honors. Her works have been

performed by most of the major orchestras of North America including those of Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Minnesota, St. Louis, Atlanta, Toronto, and Louisville, and have appeared on Sony Classical, Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, Cedille, and eOne Records.

Coleman's chamber works are among the most frequently performed by a living American. The bluesy *Portraits of Josephine* honors the singer-actor Josephine Baker; *Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes* for winds, strings, and piano is "a musical hybrid of Native American and African cultures that honor the legacy of the Freedmen," as the composer has said. *Tzigane* is a tribute to Romani culture, while *Fanmi Imèn* is named for an evocative Maya Angelou poem. The *Danza de la Mariposa* and haunting *Amazonia* are among several Coleman works that have become part of the standard flute repertoire.

Orchestral Works for the Philadelphians Coleman's orchestral works are characterized by a joy in the range and richness of the orchestral palette. They demonstrate a mastery of texture and a penchant for long-breathed, tonally based melodies. Among those written for The Philadelphia Orchestra are *Umoja*, *Anthem for Unity* (an expansion of a smaller work that exists in several versions), and *This Is Not a Small Voice*, an extensive setting for soprano of verse by the American poet Sonia Sanchez.

Seven O'Clock Shout, also commissioned by The Philadelphia Orchestra and written as an ode to front-line workers during the COVID-19 crisis, received its premiere online in June 2020 and has been performed by the Orchestra numerous times since, including in May 2021 for its first live concert after the pandemic and in October 2021 marking the re-opening of Carnegie Hall.

The roots of the "concerto for orchestra" as a genre lay partly in the Baroque concerto grosso, with multiple soloists playing in contrast with the full ensemble. Although Béla Bartók's masterpiece from 1943 has become the best-known Concerto for Orchestra, during the 1920s and '30s Neo-Classical composers had already tried to revive the Baroque model. Hindemith wrote his Concerto for Orchestra in 1925, followed by dozens of versions by Walter Piston, Goffredo Petrassi, Alfredo Cassella, Zoltán Kodály, Alan Hovhaness, Witold Lutosławski, Michael Tippett, Rodion Shchedrin, Roger Sessions, and many others. Among the examples from more recent years are several by women composers such as Joan Tower, Augusta Read Thomas, Jennifer Higdon (a Philadelphia Orchestra commission), Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Gabriela Lena Frank, and Unsuk Chin.

A Closer Look Valerie Coleman has written the following about today's work:

The Concerto for Orchestra ("Renaissance") is centered on honoring and reflecting upon the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance. Within the Great Migration, my focus has been upon writing music based on the reaction of hope in discovering one's freedom, and on life within the discovery of a new life and land.

Within this, I tie the sounds of Appalachia to deep southern bluegrass, to honor future generations: my own roots of growing up in Kentucky and my mother's roots of growing up in Mississippi.

The Harlem Renaissance reflects upon elements of the great big bands and "Le Jazz Hot," to commemorate expat luminaries such as Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington, Josephine Baker, Paul Robeson, and many others. There are short bursts of "features" for just about every section within the orchestra, with a nod to the principal players, whom I've admired greatly.

—Paul J. Horsley

The Concerto for Orchestra was composed from 2023 to 2024.

These are the world premiere performances of the work.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes (II doubling alto flute), two oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, bell plates, bongos, chimes, congas, crotales, cymbals, glockenspiel, large ride cymbal, marimba, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, temple blocks, tenor drum, tom-toms, triangle, vibraphone, xylophone), harp, piano, and strings.

Performance time is approximately 25 minutes.

The Music

La Mer

Claude Debussy

Born in St. Germain-en-Laye, August 22, 1862

Died in Paris, March 25, 1918



In a letter to André Messager dated September 12, 1903, Claude Debussy announced, "I am working on three symphonic sketches entitled: 1. 'Calm Sea around the Sanguinaires Islands'; 2. 'Play of the Waves'; 3. 'The Wind Makes the Sea Dance'; the whole to be titled *La Mer*." In a rare burst of autobiography, he then confided, "You're unaware, maybe, that I was intended for the noble career of a sailor and have only deviated from that path thanks to the quirks of fate. Even so,

I have retained a sincere devotion to the sea." Debussy points out to Messager the irony that he is working on his musical seascape in landlocked Burgundy, but declares, "I have innumerable memories, and those, in my view, are worth more than a reality which, charming as it may be, tends to weigh too heavily on the imagination."

The Advancing Tide But the quirks of fate, of which Debussy wrote so lightly in 1903 led him back to the sea over and over again in the two years that elapsed between this letter and the premiere of *La Mer* on October 15, 1905, performed in Paris by the Lamoureux Orchestra conducted by Camille Chevillard. It was a twist of fate that Debussy finished correcting the proofs of his symphonic sketches by the sea while staying at the Grand Hotel in the quirky British resort of Eastbourne. The otherwise ironical composer had washed up on the Atlantic shores of this little town swept away by that most oceanic of emotions: love.

What did the concierge at the Grand Hotel think of the curious French couple staying there during July and August of 1905? The other guests, who were probably too British and well-bred to have initiated a conversation, must have been intrigued by the saturnine Frenchman with the protruding forehead, who spoke no English and, indeed, rarely said a word even in his native tongue. But what of the woman with him, speaking fluent English with an enchanting accent, charming, vivacious, and clearly pregnant? Surely represented to the hotel management as Debussy's wife, she was in reality Emma Bardac, née Moyses, a socialite and gifted singer who had left her wealthy husband for an impecunious composer. Her husband, Sigismund, who had tolerated with indulgent good humor her earlier affair with the discreet Gabriel Fauré, assumed that she would return to him after her passion

for Debussy cooled. But Emma never looked back: She bore Debussy a daughter, Claude-Emma, nicknamed "Chou-Chou" by her adoring father, who was born some two weeks after the first performance of *La Mer*.

In the scandal that followed their elopement, especially after Debussy's first wife made an ineffectual attempt at suicide, he lost many friends—but not the loyal Messenger. In consequence of her adultery, Emma lost a lavish inheritance from her wealthy uncle, thus condemning her reticent husband to seek lucrative but agonizing public appearances as a pianist and conductor. They finally married in 1908, enjoying their life together until he died of cancer on March 25, 1918, as German artillery bombarded Paris; despite the acute danger, Emma refused to leave her husband's side.

"Symphonic Sketches" During his lifetime and after, critics labeled Debussy as an "Impressionist," associating him with the then-radical but now beloved painters Monet and Renoir. Debussy protested that he was not merely an Impressionist but a Symbolist like Maurice Maeterlinck, whose play *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902) he had transformed into an opera, or his friend Pierre Louÿs, whose poems he set in the voluptuous song cycle *Chansons de Bilitis* (1898). Despite the suggestive titles of his pieces, Debussy was at least as much a "literary" composer as he was a "visual" one. By insisting that his publisher, Jacques Durand, place a stylized picture of a wave by the great Japanese artist Hokusai on the cover of *La Mer*, Debussy indicated implicitly that his score was not merely a seascape painted rapidly from prosaic reality nor a pantheistic rhapsody, but rather an evocation of those elemental forces that the sea itself symbolizes: birth (in French, the word for the sea, *mer*, is a homonym for the word for mother, *mère*); desire (waves endlessly lapping the shore, forever unsatisfied); love (all-enveloping emotion in which the lover is completely submerged); and, of course, death (dissolution into eternity).

Furthermore, as was evinced in his choice of a Japanese print for the score's cover, Debussy went to considerable trouble to differentiate his work from the aesthetics of the Impressionist painters. Although its subtitle has puzzled critics over the years, Debussy knew exactly what he was doing when he called *La Mer* a series of "symphonic sketches." "Symphonic" because of the sophistication of the processes involved in generating the musical materials, but the word "sketches" is not used in the sense of something rapidly executed or unfinished, but rather to denote a clearly delineated line drawing, nothing remotely "Impressionistic."

A Closer Look Writing shortly after the premiere of *La Mer*, the critic Louis Laloy noted, "in each of these three episodes ... [Debussy] has been able to create enduringly all the glimmerings and shifting shadows, caresses and murmurs, gentle sweetness and fiery anger, seductive charm and sudden gravity contained in those waves which Aeschylus praised for their 'smile without number.'" The slow, tenebrous, and mysterious opening of the first "sketch," which Debussy ultimately called **From Dawn to Midday at Sea**, contains all of the thematic

motifs that will pervade the rest of the entire score, just as in a Beethovenian symphony. The resemblance to the German symphonic tradition essentially ends there, however, for only the most evanescent lineaments of sonata form, with its contrasting themes and development section, can be discerned flickering behind Debussy's complex formal design. There is no formal section devoted exclusively to development in *La Mer* because Debussy develops incessantly from the very first notes. The second of the "sketches," **Play of the Waves**, is constructed from tiny mosaic-like thematic and harmonic fragments, a process that anticipates the extraordinary subtlety of Debussy's last completed orchestral score, *Jeux* (1912–13), in which the "games" are more explicitly erotic. The final "sketch," **Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea**, begins in storm and, rising to grandeur, concludes with an orgasmic burst of enveloping, oceanic rapture.

—Byron Adams

La Mer was composed from 1903 to 1905.

Carl Pohlig conducted the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the piece, in January 1911. The most recent subscription performances were under the direction of William Eddins in October 2022. In between the work has been heard many times, with such conductors as Fritz Reiner, Pierre Monteux, Artur Rodzinski, Ernest Ansermet, George Szell, Charles Munch, Carlo Maria Giulini, André Previn, Christoph Eschenbach, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Stéphane Denève.

The Philadelphians have recorded the work four times: in 1942 for RCA with Arturo Toscanini; in 1959 for CBS with Eugene Ormandy; in 1971 for RCA with Ormandy; and in 1993 for EMI with Riccardo Muti.

Debussy scored *La Mer* for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, and triangle), two harps, celesta, and strings.

Performance time is approximately 25 minutes.

Musical Terms

GENERAL TERMS

Bitonality: The simultaneous, superimposed presence of two distinct tonalities

Cadence: The conclusion to a phrase, movement, or piece based on a recognizable melodic formula, harmonic progression, or dissonance resolution

Cadenza: A passage or section in a style of brilliant improvisation, usually inserted near the end of a movement or composition

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Coda: A concluding section or passage added in order to confirm the impression of finality

Concerto grosso: A type of concerto in which a large group (known as the ripieno or the concerto grosso) alternates with a smaller group (the concertino). The term is often loosely applied to any concertos of the Baroque period except solo ones.

Dissonance: A combination of two or more tones requiring resolution

Divertissement: A piece of entertaining music in several movements

Fantasia: A composition free in form and more or less fantastic in character

Harmonic: Pertaining to chords and to the theory and practice of harmony

Harmony: The combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions

Juba dance: An African-American style of dance that involves stomping as well as slapping and patting the arms, legs, chest, and cheeks

Legato: Smooth, even, without any break between notes

Meter: The symmetrical grouping of musical rhythms

Neo-Classicism: A movement of style in the works of certain 20th-century composers who revived the balanced forms and clearly perceptible thematic processes of earlier styles to replace what were, to them, the increasingly exaggerated gestures and formlessness of late Romanticism

Perpetual motion: A musical device in which rapid figuration is persistently maintained

Rhapsody: Generally an instrumental fantasia on folksongs or on motifs taken from primitive national music

Rondo: A form frequently used in symphonies and concertos for the final movement. It consists of a main section that alternates with a variety of contrasting sections (A-B-A-C-A etc.).

Sonata form: The form in which the first movements (and sometimes others) of symphonies are usually cast. The sections are exposition, development, and recapitulation, the last sometimes followed by a coda. The exposition is the introduction of the musical ideas, which are then "developed." In the recapitulation, the exposition is repeated with modifications.

Timbre: Tone color or tone quality

THE SPEED OF MUSIC (Tempo)

Adagio: Leisurely, slow

Allegramente: Cheerfully

Allegro: Bright, fast

Presto: Very fast

TEMPO MODIFIERS

Assai: Much



The
Philadelphia
Orchestra

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Music Director

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@philorch

Photo: Jeff Fusco

Audience Services

We want you to enjoy each and every concert experience you share with us. We would love to hear about your experience at the Orchestra and it would be our pleasure to answer any questions you may have.

Please don't hesitate to contact us via phone at 215.893.1999, in person in the lobby, or online at philorch.org/contactaudienceservices.

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Audience Services:
215.893.1999
Mon.–Fri., 10 AM–6 PM
Sat.–Sun., 11 AM–6 PM
Performance nights open until 8 PM

Box Office:
Mon.–Sun, 10 AM–6 PM
The Academy of Music
Broad and Locust Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Tickets: 215.893.1999

Concert dates (two hours before concert time):
The Kimmel Center
Broad and Spruce Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Web Site: For information about The Philadelphia Orchestra and its upcoming concerts or events, please visit philorch.org.

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PreConcert Conversations: PreConcert Conversations are held prior to most Philadelphia Orchestra subscription concerts, beginning one hour before the performance. Conversations are free to ticket-holders, feature discussions of the season's music and music-makers, and are supported in part by the Hirschberg-Goodfriend Fund in memory of Adolf Hirschberg, established by Juliet J. Goodfriend.

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Late Seating: Late seating breaks usually occur after the first piece on the program or at intermission in order to minimize disturbances to other audience members. If you arrive after the concert begins, you will be seated only when appropriate breaks in the program allow.

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Fire Notice: The exit indicated by a red light nearest your seat is the shortest route to the street. In the event of fire or other emergency, please do not run. Walk to that exit.

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Cameras and Recorders: The taking of photographs or the recording of Philadelphia Orchestra concerts is strictly prohibited, but photographs are allowed before and after concerts and during bows. By attending this Philadelphia Orchestra concert you consent to be photographed, filmed, and/or otherwise recorded for any purpose in connection with The Philadelphia Orchestra.

Phones and Paging Devices: All electronic devices—including cellular telephones, pagers, and wristwatch alarms—should be turned off while in the concert hall.