

CELESTIAL SERENADES

1.12 In Focus Season 1 Episode No. 12

broadcast: June 3 to September 3, 2021 via Adella

filming: April 11 and April 8-9, at Severance Hall

AARON JAY KERNIS (b. 1960)

Elegy . . . for those we lost

(world premiere arrangement for trumpet and harp)

with

Michael Sachs, trumpet

Yolanda Kondonassis, harp

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

Vinay Parameswaran, conductor

AARON JAY KERNIS (b. 1960)

Musica Celestis *(for string orchestra)*

JOSEF SUK (1874-1935)

Serenade for Strings, Opus 6

1. Andante con moto
2. Allegro ma non troppo e grazioso
3. Adagio
4. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo presto

This PDF is a print version of our digital online

Stageview program book, available at this link: stageview.co/tco

CONCERT OVERVIEW

THIS PROGRAM embraces the journey of finding meaning in grief and reflection, while also returning to the simple joys of everyday life.

The broadcast opens with two works by American composer Aaron Jay Kernis, with the first — a world premiere of an arrangement created especially for Cleveland Orchestra principal trumpet Michael Sachs and renowned harpist Yolanda Kondonassis of a work written just one year ago — offering music to reflect, mourn, and remember those lost to the Covid-19 pandemic. *Musica Celestis* then envisions a celestial choir of heavenly angels singing God's praises without end.

Closing the performance, we are firmly rooted on earth with a gentle and cheerful Serenade by Josef Suk, Dvořák's favorite student (and future son-in-law). This work was written the summer after Suk finished his studies and began rooming with the Dvořák household. The older composer, noting that so much of his student's work was intense and emotional, suggested Suk write "something fun and light-hearted."

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ABOUT THE MUSIC: KERNIS

"Sometimes, when I'm imagining music, I see colors. Not just the colors around me, but the colors in my mind that the music evokes. At times, a key, a sound, or a chord brings out mixtures of subtle or bold hues, or simply bright and singular ones."

—Aaron Jay Kernis

AMERICAN COMPOSER Aaron Jay Kernis has grown and developed as a creative artist throughout his career, freely admitting his changing creative desires. He has surprised many by following his heart (and ears) across new influences and sometimes contradictory ideas, all in search of music that speaks to him and speaks for him.

Throughout his decades of exploration, the Pulitzer and Grammy award-winning composer has drawn inspiration from a wide and varied set of sources — textual and visual, as well as from philosophies, religions, and conceptual narratives. In addition, his work often mixes ideas and techniques from multiple musical genres. Jazz or chant can be at home in his soundworld just as much as standard symphonic hits or lesser-known world traditions.

Kernis has long likened the immense variety of an orchestra's potential utterances, the palette of its aural colors, to the nearly infinite possibilities inherent in combining together visual colors and shapes.

All of which is to say that music, for Kernis, is a language that translates ideas or patterns from other realms of human thought, that music can say what other forms of artistic or human expression cannot. So different are some of his creations that, for audiences, the appeal of one piece may not follow to another.

This week's concert broadcast features two different works, one for an unusual instrumental duo (trumpet and harp) created in the past year in reaction to the pandemic — and to the composer's own reaction to suffering a Covid-19 infection — and a luminous work for string orchestra, created out of his first string quartet three decades ago. Different ingredients, different recipes. Contrasting ideas and implementation.

Kernis's music has been commissioned and performed by orchestras, solo artists, and chamber ensembles throughout the United States and Europe, with his creative accomplishments acknowledged by a series of honors and awards.

Born in Philadelphia, he began musical studies on the violin. By age 12, he was teaching himself piano and, the next year, began experimenting with the idea of becoming a composer. His musical schooling included work at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, as well as the Manhattan and Yale Schools of Music.

He has taught composition at Yale University since 2003.

—program note by Eric Sellen © 2021

ELEGY . . . FOR THOSE WE LOST

by **Aaron Jay Kernis** (b. 1960)

Composed: 2020

*Originally scored for: solo piano,
and then adapted for a variety of instrumental combinations*

Adapted: for trumpet and harp, by the composer, 2021

*Premiered: this "In Focus" episode features the world premiere performance
from April 2021 of this version*

Duration: just over 5 minutes

The composer has written the following introduction to this music:

AFTER EXPERIENCING a mild (but terrifying) case of Covid-19 in March 2020 — understanding from inside some of the most frightening aspects of the virus — I read a piece by Helen Ouyang in the *New York Times*. This writing truly exposed, for me, the terrible reality engulfing U.S. hospitals and medical professionals, and the entire world.

Reading more about the virus's effect on Americans and their families, I began to work on a set of piano pieces. I strived to compose music to honor the dead and give some measure of solace to families through sharing a personal expression of grief.

In this, I was deeply affected by the inability of families to be with their loved ones at the time of their passing — having to mourn at a distance, usually without friends or relatives present.

I decided to commission a short film with one of the piano pieces and discovered Esther Shubinski's work, which shows a deep sensitivity to the everyday world of families along with a natural sense of musicality and musical phrasing. We crafted a call for submissions — home movies, photographs, and mementos, and received materials from fifty-one families, all of whom are honored in the resulting film.

The musical piece and the film are titled *Elegy . . . for those we lost*.

In the year since, I have adapted the work for several combinations of instruments, and am honored to do so, for trumpet and harp, for Michael Sachs and Yolanda Kondonassis for this Cleveland Orchestra "In Focus" broadcast.

To watch the film, please follow (and share) this link:
https://youtu.be/iml_7F3Gq_Y

Stay well!

—Aaron Jay Kernis, 2021

MUSICA CELESTIS

by **Aaron Jay Kernis** (b. 1960)

Composed: 1990

Scored for: originally created as the second movement of String Quartet No. 1, adapted by the composer in 1991 for string orchestra

Duration: just over 10 minutes

The composer has written the following introduction to Musica Celestis:

MUSICA CELESTIS is inspired by the medieval conception of that phrase which refers to the singing of the angels in heaven in praise of God without end. As Aurelian of Réôme wrote: "The office of singing pleases God if it is performed with an attentive mind, when in this way we imitate the choirs of angels who are said to sing the Lord's praises without ceasing." (Translated by Barbara Newman)

I don't particularly believe in angels, but found this to be a potent image at the time that was reinforced by listening to a good deal of medieval music, especially the soaring work of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179).

Musica Celestis is adapted from the second movement of my First String Quartet. It follows a simple, spacious melody and harmonic pattern through a number of variations (somewhat like a passacaglia) and a corresponding series of modulations. It is framed by an introduction and coda.

—Aaron Jay Kernis, 1991

The composer wrote the following comments about the string quartet from which Musica Celestis was excerpted and arranged:

I BELIEVE THAT a good piece of music should not need words to be described, so I hope that listeners will find these words superfluous in retrospect. But I would like to provide some background on some of the ideas and influences in this work.

Composing this quartet was an exhilarating experience for me. I had wanted to write a quartet for years, and was delighted when the Lark Quartet asked me to provide one for their Naumburg commission. But, at the time, I would not have imagined the sense of growth and pure pleasure that I felt during its composition.

The form of the work I created is based on the string quartet model from the Classical period. That is, it is in four movements of standard types:

1. Sonata form
2. Slow movement
3. Scherzo with Trio
4. Rondo

This seems ordinary and quite basic, but if anyone had told me five or even two years ago that I'd write a classically structured work in the future, I'd have suggested (politely) that they see a helpful and friendly doctor. This quartet follows

on the heels of my Symphony in Waves, written in 1989 for the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and for which the same remark holds true in regard to symphonic form. (Not for me, thank you). At that time, I'd felt traditional forms were outmoded and unapplicable to the music of our time.

But I'd also been gradually realizing that the music I keep going back to — the music I really love — was written before 1945 and especially before 1911. I love the emotional inclusiveness of music of the past and, by the time of writing these new works, I'd grown weary of the intellectualization that limited the expression and communicativeness of so much music in the 20th century.

I want everything to be included in music: soaring melody, consonance, tension, dissonance, drive, relaxation, color, strong harmony, and form — and for every possible emotion to be elicited actively by the passionate use of those elements.

This brings us back to the quartet.

As I began writing it, I found that the musical ideas that I chose to work with demanded extensive development and a well-shaped harmonic basis for that development. This led me, with great reservations at first and even greater disbelief, to the use of sonata form and caused me to confront using all the above elements head on, at once, in this abstractly formed composition. This felt especially new to me since so much of my work in the past derived its inspiration from images or texts. What convinced me to use the form, however, was the organic way that it developed from the musical ideas themselves.

—Aaron Jay Kernis, 1990

ABOUT THE MUSIC: SUK

SERENADE FOR STRINGS in E-flat major, Opus 6
by **Josef Suk** (1874-1935)

Composed: for piano solo in 1892

Premiered: February 25, 1895, in Prague by the Prague Conservatory Orchestra

Scored for: string orchestra

Duration: about 30 minutes

THERE IS IRONY in how Josef Suk's charming Serenade for Strings in E-flat major came to be, emerging from an abundance of gloom at the mere suggestion of his teacher.

Born into a musical family in what is now the Czech Republic, Suk was identified as a talent at a young age. At 11 years old, he entered the Prague Conservatory to study both violin and composition, excelling in both. By the age of 17, he was a founding member of the Bohemian String Quartet (he was its second violinist for more than four decades) and a favorite student of the reigning Czech composer, Antonín Dvořák.

During the summer of 1892, Dvořák invited his then 18-year-old pupil to join him at his country home an hour southwest of Prague. The teacher insisted Suk take a break from the stream of dark minor-key compositions he had written and “go and make something lively for a change, to compensate for all those pomposities in minor.”

And Suk did indeed compose a delightful piece for string orchestra, radiating warmth across each of its four movements, all written in major keys (E-flat major, B-flat major, G major, and E-flat major, respectively). Though Suk became known in the 20th century for compositions of increasingly complex and dissonant harmonies, his early work shows the influence of his famous teacher. Dvořák’s popular *Serenade for Strings*, which premiered 17 years earlier, certainly informed Suk’s own late-Romantic work for string orchestra.

With its premiere by the Prague Conservatory Orchestra in 1894, the *Serenade for Strings* was immediately seen as Suk’s first mature work. It was published in 1896 on the recommendation of Johannes Brahms, launching Suk’s career as a composer.

No longer a pupil, the young man’s relationship with his mentor deepened. In 1898, he married Dvořák’s eldest surviving child, Otýlie, a talented pianist as well as a composer, whom he had met the summer he composed the *Serenade*. However, tragedy struck the family a short few years later. In 1904, Dvořák, then director of the Prague Conservatory, died from a stroke at the age of 62. The following year, Otýlie passed away at the age of 27. Suk commemorated them both with what became his most famous composition, the *Asrael Symphony* from 1905-1906. He continued to follow in his father-in-law’s footsteps, as a teacher and eventually director of the Prague Conservatory 1924-26 and again 1933 until his death in 1935.

From the opening bars of the first movement, the *Serenade* in E-flat major takes one back to the summer of 1892, brimming with optimism and young love. Suk sets a lively yet restrained mood with a motif of three descending notes that lightheartedly passes between the first violins and cellos. This motif returns throughout the piece, often marking a change in mood or a wistful reflection. In the *Andante*, it sets a cheerful and relaxed scene, adhering to Dvořák’s instructions.

The second movement, an *Allegro* qualified as “not too fast” but “graceful,” also begins with a falling triad, which soon transforms into a reserved country dance. At the movement’s impassioned climax, the violins voice the primary theme from the first movement, introducing a bittersweet tang even as the dance spins towards its conclusion.

Whispers of adolescent yearning and angst find full poignancy in the achingly tender third movement *Adagio*, despite being written in G major. Alternating between pensive and passionate — and twice as long as each of the other movements — it forms the emotional core of the *Serenade*.

The finale, marked *Allegro, gio ma non troppo* [“cheerful, but not too much”], adds a virtuosic flourish as well as heft from the lower strings. In the final bars, the primary theme from the first movement returns, inserting a meditative moment before a crescendo propels the *Serenade* toward its triumphant end.

—program note by Amanda Angel © The Cleveland Orchestra

CHAMBER MUSICIANS:

MICHAEL SACHS

Principal Trumpet

Robert and Eunice Podis Weiskopf Endowed Chair

Principal Cornet

Mary Elizabeth and G. Robert Klein Endowed Chair

The Cleveland Orchestra

Michael Sachs joined The Cleveland Orchestra as principal trumpet in 1988. His many performances as soloist with the Orchestra include the world premieres of trumpet concertos by John Williams and Michael Hersch (both commissioned by the Orchestra for Mr. Sachs), the United States and New York premieres of Hans Werner Henze's *Requiem*, and, most recently, the world premiere of Matthias Pintscher's *Chute d'Étoiles*.

Mr. Sachs serves as head of the trumpet department at the Cleveland Institute of Music and is a member of the faculty at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music. In addition to teaching with leading summer festivals and, since 2015, as music director of Strings Music Festival in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, he presents masterclasses and workshops at conservatories and universities throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia as a clinician for Conn-Selmer instruments.

Michael Sachs holds a bachelor's degree in history from UCLA, with additional studies at New York's Juilliard School. For more information, please visit www.michaelsachs.com.

YOLANDA KONDONASSIS

Yolanda Kondonassis is acclaimed among the world's premier solo harpists and one of today's most recorded classical harpists. In addition to her performing careers, she is also a published author, speaker, professor of harp, and environmental activist, often weaving her many passions into a vibrant and multi-faceted career.

Since making her debut at age 18 with the New York Philharmonic, Ms. Kondonassis has appeared as soloist with major orchestras throughout the United States and around the world. Her performances have also been featured at renowned festivals, and has appeared on many radio and television arts and features programs. In addition to her active performing and recording schedule, she heads the harp departments at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Music and has presented masterclasses around the world.

Born in Norman, Oklahoma, Ms. Kondonassis attended high school at Interlochen Arts Academy. She continued her education at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she received both bachelor's and master's degrees as a student of Alice Chalifoux. Her long list of honors includes top prizes in the Affiliate Artists National Auditions in New York, the Maria Korchinska International Harp Competition in Great Britain, and a 2011 Cleveland Arts Prize.

Yolanda Kondonassis plays a Lyon & Healy Salzedo Model concert harp. For more information, please visit www.yolandaharp.com.

CONDUCTOR: **VINAY PARAMESWARAN**

Associate Conductor

*Elizabeth Ring and William Gwinn Mather Endowed Chair
The Cleveland Orchestra*

Music Director

Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra

The 2020-21 season marks Vinay Parameswaran's fourth year as a member of The Cleveland Orchestra's conducting staff. In this role, he leads the Orchestra in several dozen concerts each season at Severance Hall, Blossom Music Festival, and on tour. He also serves as music director of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra.

Mr. Parameswaran came to Cleveland following three seasons as associate conductor of the Nashville Symphony (2014-2017), where he led over 150 performances. In the summer of 2017, he was a Conducting Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. Recent seasons have included Mr. Parameswaran making his guest conducting debuts with the Rochester Philharmonic and the Tucson Symphony, and also made his subscription debut with the Nashville Symphony conducting works by Gabriella Smith, Grieg, and Piev. Other recent engagements have included debuts with the National Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, Eugene Symphony, and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to his concert work, Mr. Parameswaran has led performances of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* with Curtis Opera Theater. He also assisted with Opera Philadelphia's presentation of Verdi's *Nabucco*.

Mr. Parameswaran has participated in conducting masterclasses with David Zinman at the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, as well as with Marin Alsop and Gustav Meier at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. He is the conductor on the album *Two x Four* with the Curtis 20/21 ensemble alongside violinists Jaime Laredo and Jennifer Koh, featuring works by Bach, David Ludwig, Philip Glass, and Anna Clyne.

A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Mr. Parameswaran played percussion for six years in the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in music and political science from Brown University, where he began his conducting studies with Paul Phillips. He received a diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Otto-Werner Mueller as the Albert M. Greenfield Fellow.

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA

ONE OF THE FEW major American orchestras founded by a woman, The Cleveland Orchestra's inaugural concert took place in December 1918, at a time of renewed optimism and progressive community ideas. By the middle of the century, with its own concert hall, the decades of growth and sustained effort had turned the ensemble into one of the most-admired around the world. Under the leadership of Franz Welser-Möst since 2002, The Cleveland Orchestra has extended its artistry and musical abilities and remains one of the most sought-after performing ensembles in the world — year after year setting standards of extraordinary artistic excellence, creative programming, and community engagement. In recent years, the *New York Times* has called it “the best in America” for its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion, “virtually flawless,” and “one of the finest ensembles in the country (if not the world).”

The partnership with Franz Welser-Möst, begun in 2002 and entering its 19th year with the 2020-21 season, has earned The Cleveland Orchestra unprecedented residencies in the U.S. and around the world, including one at the Musikverein in Vienna, the first of its kind by an American orchestra. It also performs regularly at important European summer festivals. The Orchestra's 100th season in 2017-18 featured two international tours, concluding with the presentation on three continents of Welser-Möst's *Prometheus Project* featuring Beethoven Symphonies and overtures; these Beethoven concerts were presented in May and June 2018, at home in Cleveland, in Vienna's Musikverein, and in Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

The Cleveland Orchestra has a long and distinguished recording and broadcast history. A series of DVDs (available through Clasart Classics) and CD recordings under the direction of Mr. Welser-Möst continues to add to an extensive and widely praised catalog of audio recordings made during the tenures of the ensemble's earlier music directors. In addition, Cleveland Orchestra concerts are heard in syndication each season on radio stations throughout North America and Europe.

From 2020 forward, a number of new digital media initiatives are being launched to share and extend the ensemble's artistry globally. These include debut releases on the Orchestra's own recording label, an ongoing series of podcasts titled “On A Personal Note,” a new digital streaming platform named Adella (after the Orchestra's founder Adella Prentiss Hughes), and a series of premium concert broadcasts created from the 2020-21 season titled *In Focus*.

For more information, visit: www.clevelandorchestra.com.

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The Cleveland Orchestra is proud of its long-term partnership with Kent State University, made possible in part through generous funding from the State of Ohio.

The Cleveland Orchestra is proud to have its home, Severance Hall, located on the campus of Case Western Reserve University, with whom it has a long history of collaboration and partnership.