

Season Finale with Joshua Bell

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Daniel Bernard Roumain: *Farah (Joy)* for Voice and Orchestra (World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Commission)

Violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain (who goes by his monogram DBR) is a musical polymath who has embraced electronica, jazz, R&B, pop, hip-hop, gospel and traditional African-American music in addition to classical. *Farah (Joy)* is his second work commissioned by the New Jersey Symphony in his capacity as the orchestra's first Resident Artistic Catalyst. Scored for solo vocalist and orchestra, *Farah (Joy)* is in complete contrast to DBR's commission last year, *Symphonic Scenes and Samples from We Shall Not Be Moved*, a work that centered on protest. Collaborating again with librettist Marc Bamuthi Joseph, DBR and Joseph chose to focus on joy. He says, "We felt it was time to create work that centered our proclamations for the people and places that we love – and to do this with an open hand and a determined heart . . . Where is the evidence of our joy, and how is it centered in our lives? The answers to these questions occupy my mind and are, at this moment, best expressed in *Farah*."

Max Bruch: Violin Concerto in G Minor, Op. 26

Max Bruch was schooled in the conservative tradition of Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. His Violin Concerto in G Minor, Op. 26 has origins extending back to the 1850s. It was first performed in 1866, then revised with the assistance and input of the great Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (for whom Brahms later wrote his splendid violin concerto). Bruch's concerto became hugely popular. How frustrated he must have been, as a prolific composer of choral music, songs, and chamber music, that audiences knew him almost exclusively for this one work! But it is indeed a masterpiece. Joachim called Bruch's concerto "the richest, the most seductive" of the German violin concertos. The concerto is classically structured: three movements in sonata form, all wonderfully rich in melodic material. The improvisatory opening Prelude is related to the bold, free opening of Beethoven's "Emperor" Piano Concerto. Bruch's lovely Adagio celebrates the violin's rich tone. Rhythms and melodies make the finale sparkle.

Igor Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring*

Igor Stravinsky's landmark ballet *The Rite of Spring* traverses the primitive energy of the spring season. In musical terms, primitivism means aggressive rhythms – and sometimes clangorous sonorities. Rhythm is the major challenge in *The Rite of Spring*. It must be not only accurate, but also demonic. The ballet scenario portrays a prehistoric ritual in which a virgin is sacrificed to the god of spring. Its premiere in Paris in 1913 prompted riots, not only because of the risqué subject matter, but also because of the realistic costumes (burlap sacks instead of organza tutus) and the aural jolt of Stravinsky's vigorous, atavistic music. The

orchestral score divides into two principal sections: “The Adoration of the Earth” and “The Sacrifice.” Today, more than a century after it was composed. Stravinsky’s ballet still has the power to shock. It is also brilliant and gorgeous music, surprisingly rich in Russian folk sources. Perhaps most important, it leaves no listener neutral, reminding us that we are thrillingly alive.

Daniel Bernard Roumain: *Farah (Joy)* for Voice and Orchestra (World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Commission)

Daniel Bernard Roumain

Born: May 3, 1971, in Skokie, Illinois

Composed: 2023

World Premiere: This weekend’s performances are the world premiere.

Duration: 12 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, three roto-toms, two floor toms, two bongos, suspended cymbals, glockenspiel, tubular bells, vibraphone), vocal soloist and strings

Daniel Bernard Roumain — who goes by his monogram DBR — is an old friend to the New Jersey Symphony. The Symphony first performed his *Dancers, Dreamers, and Presidents* in April 2011. The relationship developed and flourished in the intervening years, especially since Xian Zhang was named Music Director. Now Roumain is the New Jersey Symphony’s first Resident Artistic Catalyst. He was the featured soloist in his *Voodoo Violin Concerto*, which opened the 2021–2022 season. The season finale in spring 2022 included his *We Shall Not Be Moved: Symphonic Scenes and Samples*, also a New Jersey Symphony commission. This weekend we hear his latest work for the NJS: *Farah (Joy)* for Voice and Orchestra.

DBR has come a long way from the small town in South Florida where he grew up. Starting violin at age 5, he soon became a musical omnivore. Before graduating high school, he had played backup for Ray Charles and Dizzy Gillespie. His musical talent got him to Vanderbilt University in Nashville, where he earned a BM in music composition and theory in 1994. From there he went on to University of Michigan, studying with Michael Daugherty and William Bolcom, completing his masters and DMA in composition in 1999. He served for years as Chair of the Music Theory and Composition Department and Composer-in-Residence at the Harlem School of the Arts, and remains a Visiting Scholar at Dartmouth College. Currently, he is on the faculty of the University of Arizona’s School of Music, Dance and Theater.

Roumain is known for a dizzying array of musical pursuits around the country. He has ventured far beyond his

classical training, exploring electronica, jazz, rhythm & blues, urban pop, hip-hop, gospel, and traditional African American music. He has collaborated with artists as wide-ranging as minimalist composer Philip Glass, the experimental hip-hop musician DJ Spooky and singer/songwriter/pop icon Lady Gaga. Oh, and he continues to play violin, both acoustic and electric. Somehow amid all this, he has also found time to compose, and his compositions have earned both recognition and acclaim.

Many of his works have dealt with socio-political topics, particularly issues of race. In a sense, so does *Farah (Joy)* for Voice and Orchestra. In this latest work, his approach is resolutely positive and celebratory. His composer's note explains.

Farah is the second work commissioned by the wonderful New Jersey Symphony (the first having been *We Shall Not Be Moved: Symphonic Scenes and Samples*, premiered in June 2022) in my position as their first Resident Artistic Catalyst. My ongoing collaboration with the orchestra continues to provide opportunities for me to explore my interest in and concern for our communities, and to respond artistically to the events that occupy our national discussions.

Working with the brilliant librettist Marc Bamuthi Joseph, we both agreed we wanted to center joy. After years of creating work that centered protest (with a clenched fist and determined mind), we felt it was time to create work that centered our proclamations for the people and places that we love — and to do this with an open hand and a determined heart.

Farah means 'joy' in Arabic, and the very first words of Bamuthi's libretto speaks to us directly:

Remember me a Black girl named for Joy, oriented forward toward an eastern star.

I always find Bamuthi's words musical and delightfully rhythmic and with this opening sentence, the score poured out onto the page in an endless and elaborate set of variations based on an initial theme set to these first few words. The orchestra, under the meticulous direction of Maestra Xian Zhang, is a true partner to the singer, and each section of the ensemble has an opportunity to collaborate with the voice in a myriad of ways: lush, romantic textual settings; a military march; a brief set of inventions and musical rounds; and a closing meditation with 'call and response' between the voice and strings. The work ends with everyone holding a single note as it fades into the ether.

This work was composed for my friends in the New Jersey Symphony and the voice of the incomparable Becky Bass. Becky and I met in Providence, Rhode Island, years ago in a series of collaborations and performances, brought together by the presenter Kathleen Pletcher under the auspices of the presenting organization FirstWorks.

As a Black, Haitian American composer, I am fortunate to live and work within communities of care. And

I have questions. What are the things worth protesting? How do we proclaim our love for one another? Where is the evidence of our joy, and how is it centered within our lives? The answers to these questions occupy my mind and are, at this moment, best expressed in *Farah*.

— Daniel Bernard Romain (DBR)

DBR correctly describes Bamuthi's text as both musical and rhythmic. Roumain's musical settings are equally so, shaping the natural cadences of spoken English transported on wings of song. The text cites history and mythology, alluding to struggle but always resolving in hope and positivity. DBR's melodic fragments elicit the reverence, nobility, and integrity of spirituals, sometimes using pentatonic scales. Instrumental interludes between the eloquent paragraphs of the solo vocal line echo and reinforce his melodic threads and their harmonies. *Farah* delivers and processes the message: hope, determination, and yes: Joy.

Max Bruch: Violin Concerto in G Minor, Op. 26

Max Bruch

Born: January 6, 1838, in Cologne, Germany

Died: October 2, 1920, in Friednau, near Berlin

Composed: 1857 to 1866; revised in 1868

World Premiere: First performance April 24, 1866 (first version; withdrawn); revised version premiere in Bremen, Germany on January 5, 1868. Joseph Joachim was the soloist; Karl Martin Rheinthal conducted.

New Jersey Symphony Premiere: 1937–38 season

Duration: 25 minutes

Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, solo violin and strings

Max Bruch spent most of his mature career in a state of frustration and annoyance that he was known solely as the composer of the G-Minor Violin Concerto. He had considerable justification. A prolific composer, he produced two later violin concerti and a number of other concerted works for violin and orchestra, in addition to Opus 26, not to mention three symphonies! He also composed operas, cantatas, secular choral works and a wealth of chamber music — almost 100 compositions in all. One can sympathize with his exasperation. And yet the First Violin Concerto has held the stage better than any of Bruch's other works. Who among us has seen a Bruch opera staged? Or heard one of his great secular choral works?

With the exception of a brief stint in Liverpool during the 1880s, Max Bruch spent his entire career working in his native Germany. By no means provincial, he garnered professional musical experience throughout that musical country, working in Mannheim, Koblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Bonn and Breslau as well as his native

Cologne. But public recognition of his compositional gift came late, and except for the First Violin Concerto, popular acceptance eluded his music. The three violin concerti, his *Kol Nidrei* for cello and orchestra and the *Scottish Fantasy* for violin and orchestra are his only compositions to have secured a place in the standard repertoire. Oddly, these works are best loved abroad, and not in Bruch's native Germany.

The first violin concerto proved a daunting project for Bruch, absorbing him for the better part of a decade. He had begun work on it as early as 1857, well before moving to Koblenz in 1865. In July 1872 he wrote to his publisher Fritz Simrock of the problems the concerto had given him:

It is a damned difficult thing to do; between 1864 and 1868 I rewrote my concerto at least half a dozen times, and conferred with x violinists before it took the final form in which it is universally famous and played everywhere.

Two of those "x" violinists were Joseph Joachim and Ferdinand David; both had an advisory hand in the formation of the First Violin Concerto. In particular, Joachim provided detailed written comments to Bruch, and he spoke warmly of how violinistic and effective Bruch's ideas were. They corresponded before they met, and Bruch did adopt many of Joachim's suggestions, writing to the famed virtuoso: "Your alterations to the last cadenza are written as if from my soul." Decades later, when portions of their correspondence surfaced following Joachim's death in 1907, Bruch became infuriated. In 1912 he wrote:

I did not know that such a detailed reply from me to [Joachim's] letter existed, and knowing it now gives me no pleasure; for in this reply I appear dreadfully dependent (not to say schoolboy-like) on Joachim.

In all fairness, Joachim did play Bruch's concerto widely, and with great success. He was to make a similar contribution toward the evolution of another great concerto a decade later, for his friend Johannes Brahms, where his Hungarian roots left a comparable imprint on the finale.

Bruch's concerto is distinguished by an unusual Prelude-Adagio-Finale structure. All three movements are in sonata form, a measure of discipline belied by the rhapsodic, recitative-like opening. The soloist has ample opportunity to display superior technique and rich sound, the latter especially in the first two movements. For the finale, Bruch bursts into sunny G Major with a strong Hungarian flavor. The movement compares creditably with its spiritual younger sibling, the finale of the Brahms Violin Concerto.

Igor Stravinsky: *The Rite of Spring*

Igor Stravinsky**Born:** June 17, 1882, in Oranienbaum, near St. Petersburg**Died:** April 6, 1971, in New York City**Composed:** 1913**World Premiere:** May 29, 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris**New Jersey Symphony Premiere:** 1967–68 season**Duration:** 33 minutes**Instrumentation:** Three flutes (one doubling piccolo), another piccolo, alto flute, four oboes (one doubling English horn) and another English horn, three clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), E-flat clarinet, and another bass clarinet, four bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon) and another contrabassoon, eight horns (two doubling Wagner tubas), four trumpets, piccolo trumpet, bass trumpet, three trombones, two tubas, five timpani requiring two players, percussion (bass drum, tamtam, guïro, cymbals, tambourine, triangle, crotales) and strings

When Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 29 May 1913, the Parisian audience rioted. According to Stravinsky's biographer Eric Walter White:

Even during the orchestral introduction mild protests against the music could be heard. When the curtain rose the audience became exacerbated by Nijinsky's choreography as well as Stravinsky's music and protests and counter-protests multiplied. At times the hubbub was so loud that the dancers could not hear the music they were supposed to be dancing to To those present on the first night the riot in the theatre was a traumatic experience.

To a generation of music-lovers that knows this score from Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, the fuss is difficult to understand. Much of the brouhaha resulted from the subject matter. In his 1936 autobiography, Stravinsky recalled his thoughts as the idea for the ballet came to him.

I saw in imagination a solemn pagan rite: sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death. They were sacrificing her to propitiate the god of spring. Such was the theme of the *Sacre du printemps*. I must confess that this vision made a deep impression on me, and I at once described it to my friend, Nicholas Roerich, a painter who had specialized in pagan subjects. He welcomed my inspiration with enthusiasm and became my collaborator in this creation.

While *The Rite of Spring* has become one of Stravinsky's most frequently performed orchestral scores, we may better understand the scandal it precipitated by thinking of it in its original context of the ballet. "Pictures of Pagan Russia" is its subtitle; this was heady stuff for 1913. The scandal attending the premiere helps us to understand the image of Stravinsky as iconoclast and revolutionary.

“Nature reborn”

The ballet score consists of two large parts, “Adoration of the Earth” and “The Sacrifice.” There are eight dances in part one and six in part two, thus *The Rite of Spring* is basically a suite of 14 movements taking approximately 33 minutes in performance. Stravinsky later wrote, “What I was trying to convey was the surge of spring, the magnificent upsurge of nature reborn.” To do so, he enlisted the largest orchestra yet assembled, and surely the largest in any ballet pit. Even today, more than a century later, musicians refer to an orchestra in terms like “the size of the *Rite*’s.”

Paradoxically, Stravinsky does not unleash the full power of this huge ensemble except for the climactic points in each part of the ballet. To the contrary, he emphasizes the breadth of color available to him with such a wide variety of instruments; in a very real sense, this work is the first concerto for orchestra as much as it is a bellwether work for the entire twentieth century. The famous opening bassoon solo, and the intertwined woodwinds that answer it before the atavistic “Dance of the Adolescents” breaks forth, are a fine example. Stravinsky actually succeeds in making some of this remarkable score sound like chamber music. In other places, he stages a veritable assault on the ears that can make the rafters resonate.

Color and Pulse

Volumes have been written about the complexities of *The Rite of Spring*. The two key concepts to guide listeners hearing a live performance are color and pulse.

With respect to color, one marvels at Stravinsky’s command of this huge instrument called the orchestra. He was a brilliant colorist who learned his craft from another superb orchestrator, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Few compositions draw so comprehensively and effectively on the variety and combination of sounds of which the orchestra is capable.

With respect to pulse, the most noteworthy characteristic of *The Rite* is the complexity of its rhythms without any loss of forward momentum. We do not become so mired in intricacy that we lose track of the beat. Yet the meter shifts constantly. As soon as we think we have established a steady pulse, Stravinsky throws off our sense of balance, as if to affirm nature’s supreme unpredictability. He is often at the precipice, but his music never forfeits control, and the impact is as visceral and thrilling in 2023 as it was more than 100 years ago.