GENEVA CONCERTS

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PRESENTS

THE SYRACUSE ORCHESTRA

JON NAKAMATSU PLAYS BRAHMS

Lawrence Loh, conductor
Jon Nakamatsu, piano

Sunday, March 9, 2025 • 3:00 p.m.
Smith Opera House

GENEVA CONCERTS

2024-2025 Season

Sunday, September 22, 2024 at 3:00 pm
THE SYRACUSE ORCHESTRA
Lawrence Loh, conductor; Michelle Cann, piano
Garrop, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky

Saturday, October 19, 2024 at 7:30 pm
RUBBERBAND Dance
Vic's Mix

Sunday, November 24, 2024 at 3:00 pm
ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Andreas Delfs, conductor; Juliana Athayde, violin;
Thomas Warfield, narrator
Britten, Liebermann, and Prokofiev

Sunday, March 9, 2025 at 3:00 pm
THE SYRACUSE ORCHESTRA
Lawrence Loh, conductor; Jon Nakamatsu, piano
Bunch, Mendelssohn, and Brahms

Friday, May 2, 2025 at 7:30 pm
ROCHESTER PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Andreas Delfs, conductor; Tessa Lark, violin
Adams, Bernstein, Copland, and Gershwin

Performed at the Smith Opera House, 82 Seneca Street, Geneva, NY

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THE SYRACUSE ORCHESTRA

Lawrence Loh, conductor
Jon Nakamatsu, piano

PROGRAM

KENJI BUNCH — Groovebox Fantasy

FELIX MENDELSSOHN — **Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 56 (Scottish)**
I. Andante con moto - Allegro un poco agitato
II. Vivace non troppo
III. Adagio
IV. Allegro vivacissimo - Allegro maestoso assai

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS — **Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 83**
I. Allegro non troppo
II. Allegro appassionato
III. Andante
IV. Allegretto grazioso

Jon Nakamatsu, piano

JON NAKAMATSU, piano

Now in his third decade of touring worldwide, American pianist Jon Nakamatsu continues to draw critical and public acclaim for his intensity, elegance and electrifying solo, concerto and chamber music performances. Catapulted to international attention in 1997 as the Gold Medalist of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition—the only American to achieve this distinction since 1981—Mr. Nakamatsu subsequently developed a multi-faceted career that encompasses recording, education, arts administration and public speaking in addition to his vast concert schedule.

Mr. Nakamatsu has been guest soloist with over 150 orchestras worldwide, including those of Baltimore, Berlin, Boston, Cincinnati, Dallas, Detroit, Florence, Los Angeles, Milan, San Francisco, Seattle, Tokyo and Vancouver. He has worked with such esteemed conductors as Marin Alsop, Sergiu Comissiona, James Conlon, Philippe Entremont, Hans Graf, Marek Janowski, Raymond Leppard, Gerard Schwarz, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Michael Tilson Thomas and Osmo Vänskä.

As a recitalist, Mr. Nakamatsu has appeared in New York City's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, Washington DC's Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Musée d'Orsay and the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris and in major centers such as Boston, Chicago, Houston, London, Milan, Munich, Prague, Singapore, Tokyo, Warsaw and Zurich. In Beijing he has been heard at the Theater of the Forbidden City, the Great Hall of the People, China Conservatory, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts. His numerous summer engagements included appearances at the Aspen, Tanglewood, Ravinia, Caramoor, Vail, Wolftrap, Colorado, Brevard, Britt, Colorado College, Evian, Interlochen, Klavierfestival Ruhr, Santa Fe and Sun Valley festivals. In 2025 he will participate in an extended residency at the Bowdoin Festival in Maine and return to the Chautauqua Institution in New York where he has served as Artist in Residence from 2018 to 2023. In 2025 Mr. Nakamatsu will also serve on the juries of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and the United States Chopin Piano Competition.

With clarinetist Jon Manasse, Mr. Nakamatsu tours as a member of the Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo. Following its Boston debut in 2004, the Duo released its first CD for harmonia mundi usa (Brahms Sonatas for Clarinet and Piano) which received the highest praise from *The New York Times* Classical Music Editor James Oestreich, who named it among the "Best of the Year" for 2008. A frequent chamber musician, Mr. Nakamatsu has collaborated with ensembles such as the Emerson, Escher, Jupiter, Miró, Modigliani, Prazak, St. Lawrence, Tokyo and Ying string quartets, the Imani Winds and the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet with whom he made multiple tours beginning in 2000.

Mr. Nakamatsu's 13 CDs recorded for harmonia mundi usa have garnered extraordinary critical praise. An all-Gershwin recording with Jeff Tyzik and the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra featuring Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and *Concerto in F* remained in the top echelons of *Billboard's* classical charts for over six months. Other acclaimed discs include the recording premiere of Lukas Foss' first Piano Concerto with Carl St. Clair

and the Pacific Symphony, the Brahms Piano Quintet with the Tokyo String Quartet in the quartet's final recording as an ensemble, and a solo recording including Robert Schumann's Second Piano Sonata whose YouTube posting has garnered over 800K hits.

A former high school teacher of German with no formal conservatory training, Mr. Nakamatsu studied privately with Marina Derryberry for over 20 years beginning at the age of six; worked with Karl Ulrich Schnabel since the age of 9; and trained for 10 years in composition, theory and orchestration with Dr. Leonard Stein of the University of Southern California's Schoenberg Institute. Mr. Nakamatsu holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Stanford University in German Studies and secondary education. In 2015, he joined the piano faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and in 2023 the Department of Music at Stanford University as a Visiting Artist. He lives in the Bay Area with his wife Kathy and young son Gavin.

LAWRENCE LOH, conductor

Described as bringing an "artisan storyteller's sensitivity… shaping passages with clarity and power via beautifully sculpted dynamics… revealing orchestral character not seen or heard before" (*Arts Knoxville*) Lawrence Loh enjoys a dynamic career as a conductor of orchestras all over the world.

After an extensive two year search, Lawrence Loh was recently named Music Director of the Waco Symphony Orchestra beginning in the Spring of 2024. Since 2015, he has served as Music Director of The Syracuse Orchestra (formerly called Symphoria), the successor to the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra. Loh will hold this position until the end of the 2024-2025 season. "The connection between the organization and its audience is one of the qualities that's come to define Syracuse's symphony as it wraps up its 10th season, a milestone that might have seemed impossible at the beginning," (*Syracuse.com*) The Syracuse Orchestra and Lawrence Loh show that it is possible to create a "new, more sustainable artistic institution from the ground up."

From 2005-2015, he served as Assistant, Associate and Resident Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and he returns frequently to lead a wide variety of programs. Mr. Loh's previous positions include Music Director of the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra; Music Director of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic; Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Syracuse Opera; Music Director of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra; Associate Conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra; Associate Conductor of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra; and Music Director of the Denver Young Artists Orchestra.

Mr. Loh's recent guest conducting engagements include the San Francisco Symphony, Dallas Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Sarasota Orchestra, Florida Orchestra, Pensacola Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Detroit Symphony, San Diego Symphony, Seattle Symphony, National Symphony (D.C.), Utah Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Indianapolis Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Buffalo

Philharmonic, Albany Symphony and the Cathedral Choral Society at the Washington National Cathedral. His summer appearances include the festivals of Grant Park, Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Tanglewood with the Boston Pops, Chautauqua, Sun Valley, Shippensburg, Bravo Vail Valley, the Kinhaven Music School and the Performing Arts Institute (PA).

As a self-described "Star Wars geek" and film music enthusiast, Loh has conducted numerous sold-out John Williams and film music tribute concerts. Part of his appeal is his ability to serve as both host and conductor. "It is his enthusiasm for Williams' music and the films for which it was written that is Loh's great strength in this program. A fan's enthusiasm drives his performances in broad strokes and details and fills his speaking to the audience with irresistible appeal. He used no cue cards. One felt he could speak at filibuster length on Williams' music." (*Pittsburgh Tribune*)

He has assisted John Williams on multiple occasions and has worked with a wide range of pops artists from Chris Botti and Ann Hampton Calloway to Jason Alexander and Idina Menzel. As one of the most requested conductors for conducting Films in Concert, Loh has led *Black Panther, Star Wars* (Episodes 4-6), *Jaws, Nightmare Before Christmas, Jurassic Park, Casablanca, The Wizard of Oz* and *Singin' in the Rain*, among others.

Lawrence Loh received his Artist Diploma in Orchestral Conducting from Yale, his Masters in Choral Conducting from Indiana University and his Bachelor of Arts and Certificate of Management Studies from the University of Rochester. Lawrence Loh was born in southern California of Korean parentage and raised in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He and his wife Jennifer have a son, Charlie, and a daughter, Hilary. Follow him on instagram @conductorlarryloh or Facebook at @lawrencelohconductor or visit his website, www.lawrenceloh.com

Program Notes

In the nineteenth century's great battles over musical style, **Felix Mendelssohn** (1809-47) and **Johannes Brahms** (1833–1897) were both considered conservative composers who resisted the "music of the future" championed, in particular, by Wagner and Liszt. Today's two primary works suggest that this binary distinction is, at the very least, lacking in nuance. Our soloist, Jon Nakamatsu, points out that the Brahms ***Piano Concerto No. 2*** is not a "normal concerto." And one can argue that Mendelssohn's **Symphony No. 3 ("Scottish")** (1842) is not really a normal symphony, either, at least in terms of its form. Both veer away from the conventions of their times.

On the surface, the Mendelssohn, inspired by a trip to Scotland in 1829, might seem to be a standard four-movement work. But contrary to custom, the slow movement comes after, rather than before, the Scherzo. And the first movement begins with an introduction of such unprecedented length that it could easily seem a movement in itself (it's only a minute or so shorter than the entire second movement)—especially since it draws attention to itself by being, as conductor Larry Loh puts it, "one of the most beautiful introductions in the repertoire." Then, too, just as the fourth movement seems to be winding down to a gentle, resigned conclusion (already an oddity), Mendelssohn surprises us with a long, stirring coda labelled "Finale Maestoso," wrenching us from minor to major and from 4/4 to 6/8, and introducing new thematic material. Like the introduction to the first movement, this is a lengthy section with enough individual character to appear to be almost an independent movement.

So does it really have four movements, or does it have five? Or six? Or perhaps only one? For as he was to do in his Violin Concerto, Mendelssohn asks that the Third Symphony be played without pause, producing what Larry calls a single "journey from the beginning to end"—and the major problem he sees facing the conductor is handling the transitions so that it "feels like it's a through-composed piece." To make the organization even tighter, there are subtle thematic links among the movements, too. In a way, it seems to presage the single-movement symphonic poems that Liszt was to start publishing a few years later.

Whatever the ambiguity concerning its shape, there's no ambiguity about the Third's quality. The numbering of Mendelssohn's symphonies doesn't match their order of composition—and the Third was the last he composed. He was at the height of his powers, and the work has a confident melodic surge from beginning to end, as well as a wide expressive range, including—between the outer movements—a scorching Vivace and a powerful movement that sounds like a funeral march.

It's also orchestrated with transparency and finesse, especially for the woodwinds. One of Larry's favorite moments is the clarinet solo that launches the second movement. Principal clarinetist Allan Kolsky, unsurprisingly, agrees—although, as he points out, there are wonderful solos for the clarinet in all of the movements. But it's not just solos: Mendelssohn created an exquisite sense of ensemble, and Allan always looks forward to the "beautiful, lyrical wind writing" of the extended duet with the first bassoon (enriched with some contributions by the second clarinet) just before the "Finale Maestoso."

Nor, as Jon suggests, is the Brahms Second a "normal" piano concerto. Brahms described it as "a tiny, tiny little concerto [*Konzerterl*—what we might translate as a mini-concerto or concertoette] with a tiny, tiny little scherzo [*Scherzerl*—a similar diminutive]." Of course, the comment was ironic: it's in fact one of the grandest of piano concertos, cast symphonically in four rather than the traditional three movements, and longer than any other concerto in the standard repertoire. The pianist hasn't got a moment to relax.

And yet there's more to Brahms's quip than simple self-mockery. Certainly, there's some grain of truth to it in the sense that, after two movements of increasing intensity (that wisp of a Scherzo is a virtuoso knockout), the concerto moves in the opposite direction. "Not that the third movement is any less emotionally involved; I think it's really one of the greatest things that a human has ever done." But whatever its depth, this movement—which, perhaps inspired by Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto, features the solo cello—is much more introspective than the first two. And the finale concludes the Concerto surprisingly lightly, given that the size and character of the first two movements would lead you to expect it to tear us to pieces. "I've had musicians tell me that they don't like the ending of the piece," says Jon, "because it doesn't feel as satisfying as the ending of the first movement. The ending of something that's so big in scope, so important, so profound should have more closure. But that's not the point. The point is not to make you feel as if you've completed something. It's to make you just feel as if this is the beginning of a longer journey." Quite different from the overall trajectory of the Mendelssohn.

In fact, the last two movements of the Brahms not only contrast with the first two in terms of intensity—they're also much more modest in terms of orchestration. In his symphonies, Brahms, following a model set up by Beethoven, often increased the size

of the orchestra for his finales: the trombones only show up for the last movement in the First and Fourth. Here, in contrast, the orchestra is larger in the first two movements than in the last two. As Jon puts it, "You could send the trumpets and the timpani home."

Why this unconventional balance? "I've always wondered about that," says Jon. "It doesn't seem as if he was as concerned about the ends of pieces in the same way that many other composers were." With composers like Liszt and Rachmaninoff, he points out, "the end was to please your audience. I think that in this case, the end was rather to be a musical foil to the first two movements. There's so much drama there, they're so demanding of the listener." You can't just give more: "What *could* you do, except maybe the exact opposite?"

There's another way in which Brahms's quips about the size of this concerto make sense, at least in an oblique way. "One of the things that I notice when I hear the concerto more and more is that despite the demands on the pianist in terms of both physicality and focus, it's really a huge chamber piece. There's so much riding on the dialogue between the orchestra and the piano." Of course, this is true, to some extent, of nearly every concerto—but this one is special. "There's something masterful about how the piano is woven into the work of the orchestra. Really, most of it is inseparable from the orchestra; the piano isn't playing by itself very much. Often I don't have the most important or the main line. I'm providing texture, restating something that was already said or embellishing some idea that was developed by another instrument. So the interplay, even structurally, is pretty astounding. And yet the solo element still seems to remain; it still feels like it's a concerto."

With an unconventional symphony and an unconventional concerto taking up the bulk of our concert, it seemed appropriate to begin with an unusual opener: one wide-ranging musician's tribute to another, a work that combines classical minimalism, pop, and jazz elements into a single, toe-tapping surge of sound. **Kenji Bunch** (b.1973) is, among other things, a bluegrass fiddler, a jazz performer, a classical violist, and a composer. And in ***Groovebox Fantasy***, written (and premiered by the Seattle Symphony) in 2016, is a tribute to the late Quincy Jones (1933-2024), a jazz performer, an arranger for singers including Frank Sinatra and Sarah Vaughan, and a composer (including the scores to such films as *In the Heat of the Night*).

A groovebox is an electronic or digital instrument that can be used, among other things, to create and superimpose rhythmic and melodic sequences; and although this work does not employ any actual electronic instruments, it is inspired by the kinds of things grooveboxes can do. Starting with the instruction to be played "with a relentless groove," the work might well strike you as a twenty-first century *Bolero*. It consists of 42 four-beat measures, each repeated four times; and while, in contrast to *Bolero*, the rhythmic patterns (often multiple patterns superimposed) shift from measure to measure, varying in complexity as the music progresses, there is the same sense of persistence and the same overall accumulation of tension until the pattern explodes for the final five bars.

Peter J. Rabinowitz

The Syracuse Orchestra

Lawrence Loh, music director
Sean O'Loughlin, principal pops conductor

VIOLIN I
Peter Rovit, Concertmaster
Sonya Stith Williams, Associate Concertmaster
Edgar Tumajyan, Assistant Concertmaster
Noemi Miloradovic
Liviu Dobrota
Asher Wulfman
Laura Smith
Bin Gui
Benjamin Mygatt
Charles Loh

VIOLIN II
Amy Christian, Principal
Anita Gustafson, Assistant Principal
Sara Silva
Linda Carmona
Sarah Ng
Adam Jeffreys
Renée Choi

VIOLA
Yanbing Chen, Acting Principal Viola
Arvilla Wendland, Acting Assistant Principal
Carol Sasson
William Ford-Smith
Batmyagmar "Miga" Erdenebat

CELLO
Heidi Hoffman, Principal
Lindsay Groves, Assistant Principal
Gregory Wood, Assistant Principal
Walden Bass
George Macero

BASS
Spencer Phillips, Principal
Michael Fittipaldi, Assistant Principal
Joshua Kerr
Marshall Henry

FLUTE
Xue Su, Principal
Kelly Covert

PICCOLO
Kelly Covert

OBOE
Eduardo Sepúlveda, Principal
Mickenna Keller

ENGLISH HORN
Mickenna Keller

CLARINET
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BASS CLARINET
John Friedrichs

BASSOON
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Jessica Wooldridge King

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HORN
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Jonathan Dozois
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Tyler Ogilvie

TRUMPET
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Roy Smith

TROMBONE
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