

fall for Brahms *again*



Stephen Waarts

Photo courtesy Los Altos Town Crier

Silicon Valley Symphony

Stephen Waarts, violin soloist

Michael Paul Gibson, music director and conductor

Saturday

19 November 2011

7:30 pm

**Holy Trinity Episcopal Church,
Menlo Park**

Sunday

20 November 2011

4:00 pm

**Saint Marks Episcopal
Church, Palo Alto**

Ticket Donation \$20/\$15/Children 12 and under free with adult

Brahms: Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80 (1880)

Allegro - Maestoso - Animato - Maestoso

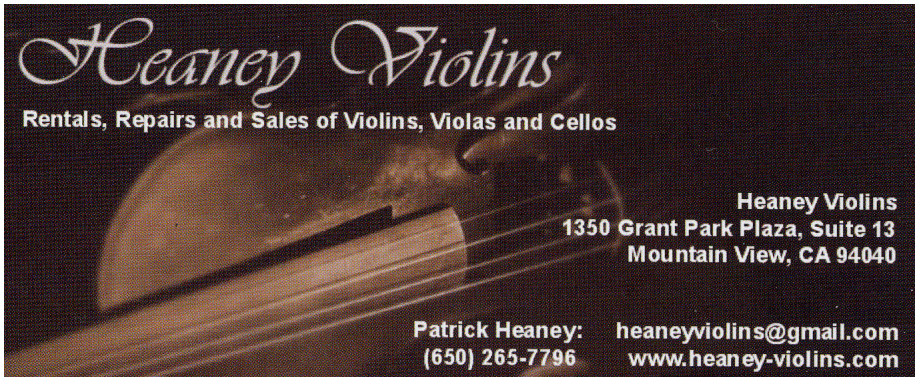
Saint-Saëns: Concerto for Violin No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 61 (1880)

Stephen Waarts, Violin Soloist

1. Allegro non troppo
2. Andantino quasi allegretto
3. Molto moderato e maestoso

Brahms: Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98 (1884-1885)

1. Allegro non troppo
2. Andante moderato
3. Allegro giocoso
4. Allegro energico e passionato

A dark, textured background featuring a close-up of a violin's body and f-hole. The text is overlaid in white. The logo 'Heaney Violins' is in a large, elegant script font. Below it, the text 'Rentals, Repairs and Sales of Violins, Violas and Cellos' is in a smaller, sans-serif font. The address '1350 Grant Park Plaza, Suite 13 Mountain View, CA 94040' is in a bold, sans-serif font. The contact information 'Patrick Heaney: (650) 265-7796' and 'heaneyviolins@gmail.com www.heaney-violins.com' is in a bold, sans-serif font.

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Brahms: Academic Festival Overture

As a virtuoso pianist constantly in demand for performances, the young Johannes Brahms never had the opportunity to go to college but if this piece is anything to go by it's tempting to think he would have enjoyed the more rowdy elements of student life. Although he was also an obsessive perfectionist, academia did not really enter his sphere until he was in his forties when his fame and success as a composer were such that Cambridge University offered him an honorary Doctorate in Music. With news of lavish plans to celebrate his visit to the UK, the composer's distaste for being the focus of a lot of public razzmatazz and his fear of crossing the Channel compelled him to leave the honor uncollected. A few years later the University of Breslau had better luck when they offered him an honorary Doctor of Philosophy and Brahms responded with a grateful message of thanks on a postcard. However, a postcard was not quite what the Director

of Music at Breslau, Bernhard Scholz, had in mind when he invited Brahms to pen a musical thank you, optimistically suggesting a symphony. Brahms being something of a joker, responded with the Academic Festival Overture, an infectious concoction that he described as “a very boisterous potpourri of student songs.”

The overture certainly tips its hat a lot more to the festive than to the academic, weaving together in a style only Brahms could do, a bunch of songs starting with one of his favorites from his youth, the Rakóczy March, a tune both Berlioz and Liszt had exploited many years earlier. Brahms then ushers in a series of tunes which at one point he cleverly plays off against each other until culminating in his take of “Gaudeamus Igitur” (a graduation song meaning “Therefore let us be merry”) in the form of a rousing, rambunctious finale with brass at full blast, strings doing power scales, and the whole orchestra generally ablaze. Brahms conducted the overture at a special convocation held at the university in 1881, and no doubt caused a few academics to raise their eyebrows at its tongue in cheek ebullience.

Saint-Saens: Violin Concerto No. 3

While it's easy to think the 19th century German musical powerhouse of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and Wagner more or less left all other countries in the dust, France was not without musical talent. Among them was Camille Saint-Saens, who erupted onto the musical world as a phenomenally precocious piano virtuoso. Aged 10 after his debut recital he offered to rattle off as an encore any of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas *from memory*. While he developed into an extraordinary polymath with interests in math, philosophy, geology, archeology, and botany, Saint-Saens also became a prolific composer producing hundreds of compositions over the course of a long life. Among them were several works for the Spanish violin virtuoso. Pablo Sarasate, including the much loved *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* and this the last and most popular of his violin concertos.



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The concerto exudes Spanish, Italian, and French idioms and with Saint-Saens' usual flair combines violin pyrotechnics with moments of lyrical sweetness. Such moments may remind of us of what the composer's contemporary Claude Debussy once rather harshly said: "I have a horror of sentimentality, and I cannot forget that its name is Saint-Saëns." The feeling of disdain between the two French composers was mutual though Debussy occasionally admitted a sneaking respect for Saint-Saëns' musical abilities, evidenced by his arrangement of the *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* for two pianos. Dwelling on the lyrical, the end of the second movement offers a moment of great impressionistic beauty where we hear the solo violin elaborate arpeggios of harmonics together with the clarinet against a hushed background of orchestral sultriness. It's a strikingly memorable moment. But perhaps the moment of greatest enlightenment comes in the last movement with a hymn like chorale that interrupts the flow of passionate storminess.

Brahms: Symphony Number 4 in E minor

While the Academic Festival Overture reflected the jovial side of Brahms' character, in the same year he also wrote "The Tragic Overture", a companion piece that reflected his darker side. In his fourth and last symphony which he wrote several years later, this aspect of his temperament was also very much on display. The work follows a tragic arc that was unusual in breaking the rule that a symphony that starts in a minor key should finish in the major. One only has to listen to Beethoven's 5th to remind oneself of how Beethoven could turn adversity portrayed in the stormy key of C minor into the heroic triumph of C major in the rousing climax of that work's final moments. Not so Brahms. We start in dark E minor and that's where we resolutely end.

After the drama and passion of the first movement, a solo French horn announces the opening of the slow requiem like second movement using notes from the so-called Phrygian mode, a scale familiar from Baroque and Medieval music that is what you get when you play the white keys on the piano starting and ending on E. The mode actually makes frequent appearances throughout the symphony but it's particularly prominent in this movement. Brahms himself noted that this musical mode expressed a longing for "heavenly comfort".

In the third movement we are suddenly catapulted into a joyfully vibrant scherzo that almost seems out of place given the seriousness of the other movements. But it's what makes the tragedy and genius of the last movement all the more compelling. In one of the most unusual inventions in the symphonic repertoire, Brahms adopted a neglected Baroque musical form, the passacaglia in which a set of variations is based on a eight bar opening theme. A passacaglia is essentially the same idea as that of a

chaconne and it's worth noting that in his famous D minor chaconne for solo violin, J S Bach fashioned from this deceptively simple formula an epic work that stands at the pinnacle of musical creation for a solo instrument. Brahms's passacaglia in this symphony consists of a simple but dramatic eight bar theme followed by thirty magnificent variations and a coda. The result makes for a masterful end that without doubt rounded off the composer's achievement as one of the greatest of all symphonists.

Program Notes by Julian Brown

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Saturday 3 December 2011: 2:00 pm & 7:30 pm

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San Jose Center for Performing Arts

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Saturday 3 March 2012: 7:30 pm at HTEC in Menlo Park

Sunday 4 March 2012: 4:00 pm at SMEC in Palo Alto

Mozart Overture to The Magic Flute

Mozart Arias from The Magic Flute with stars from Opera San Jose

Sibelius: Karelia Suite

Bethoven: Symphony No. 7 in A Major

Spring Concert

Saturday 19 May 2012: 7:30 pm at HTEC in Menlo Park

Sunday 20 May 2012: 5:00 pm at SMEC in Palo Alto

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Stephen Waarts, born in California in July 1996, started his violin studies at age 5 and piano studies at age 8. Since September 2011 he has been attending the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Bachelor of Music Program, where he studies violin with Aaron Rosand. Until September 2011, he studied at the San Francisco Conservatory, Preparatory Division, with his long time violin teacher Li Lin, whom he still

sees frequently. Since January 2009 he has studied concurrently with Alexander Barantschik, Concertmaster of San Francisco Symphony, and Baroque violinist Elizabeth Blumenstock. Previous violin teachers included Jenny Rudin, and from 2006 until this year his piano teacher was Irina Sharogradski.

For the last two years Stephen has been a student at the Perlman Music Program, headed by Itzhak Perlman, attending the summer program in Shelter Island, NY and the winter residency in Sarasota FL. In addition, during the last two years he has been attending the intensive violin program headed by Aaron Rosand in Summit Music Festival, NY. Previously he has attended for 4 years the Music at Menlo chamber music summer program headed by David Finckel and Wu Han.

Stephen has won many prestigious national and international prizes and awards including, last year, first prize in the junior division of the International Louis Spohr Competition for Young Violinists in Weimar, Germany where he also won a special award for best interpretation of a romantic concerto, and first prize in the international Summit Music Festival's Concerto competition, junior division, in New York. Most recently competing against violinists up to the age of 27 he won third prize in the Pablo Sarasate International Violin Competition in Pamplona, Spain. His performances have received rave reviews in numerous publications including the *Strad* and the *UK Daily Telegraph*.

In the last three years, Stephen has performed fourteen complete concertos and three show pieces with twenty orchestras, often multiple times internationally in Weimar, Pamplona, Oslo, Moscow, New York, and here in the Bay Area with the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, Fremont Symphony, Symphony Parnassus, Redwood Symphony, and Silicon Valley Symphony among many others.

Besides his numerous accomplishments on the violin, Stephen has also won awards for his piano playing and national awards in math competitions. In his free time he likes math, reading, drawing, table tennis, card games, and playing with his friends, including younger sister and twin brother. Find more about Stephen at www.stephenwaarts.com.

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Silicon Valley Symphony is proud to announce that by special arrangement with Peter Prier violins of Salt Lake City and Robert Maltz Violins of Palo Alto, our soloist Stephen Waarts will be playing on one of the finest and most prized violins in the world, a Guarneri del Gesu. For these concerts, we will have a unique opportunity to hear this rarely played and fantastic instrument - the 1732 "Forni" Guarneri - in the hands of a superb young player.



The mystery and mystique of Guarneri del Gesu (1698-1744)

Antonio Stradivari and Joseph Guarneri "del Gesu" are considered the two greatest violin makers of history. They worked within a stone's throw of one another in Cremona, Italy though Stradivari's career was waning just as del Gesu's was getting started. Between them they produced what today are regarded as the finest violins in the world with prices in auctions now regularly reaching many millions of dollars. del Gesu had a short life so his violins are much rarer than Stradivari's yet despite the famous reputation of the Strad, many of the world's greatest violinists from Heifetz to Perlman have expressed a preference for Guarneri violins.

Very little is known about del Gesu's life. In particular, there is an eight-year hiatus in which his whereabouts are unknown. Because of that, many wild stories circulated about him, such as that he went to prison, turned into an alcoholic or became mentally disturbed. There is actually no real

evidence for any of these. His later violins are sometimes eccentric by Cremona standards which may indicate ill health, but architecturally and tonally they are superb. The name "del Gesù" derives from the acronym IHS (Iesu hominem salvator) and the cross on his labels, which was the logo of the Jesuit order, under whose patronage he worked.



The early history of the 1732 Guarneri del Gesù is unrecorded but the violin turned up during the 1830s in the collection of a certain Count Cessole. Cessole was an intimate friend of Paganini who is known to have often performed on this violin. Cessole gave or sold the violin to a collector named Ferni who in turn passed it along with another del Gesù to his two daughters, Carolina and Virginia, who toured Europe to great acclaim as a violin-duet team. Virginia died early, but Carolina continued playing the 1732 del Gesù as a soloist and later had a simultaneous career as a famous opera singer. In 1874 she sold the violin to the French maker Eugene Gand, and from him it has passed from collector to collector, largely protected from the rigors of

concert use. As a result this violin is one of the best-preserved Guarneris in existence as exemplified by the beautiful ruby-red Cremona varnish that remains largely intact.

Violin Notes by Robert Maltz

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Michael Paul Gibson is one of the most versatile and experienced conductors in the Bay Area since 1975. Gibson founded the Silicon Valley Symphony in 2001 and is Music Director and Conductor. Maestro Michael Paul served as Conductor and Founding Music Director of the Foothill Orchestra (1999), Menlo Park Chorus (1998), and Colorado Springs Chamber Music Society (1971). His experience

includes conducting Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra, Concert Chorus, Church Choir, Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Musical Theater and Ballet Pit Orchestra. Michael's charismatic energy garners respect and reviews from critics, audiences and musicians. Maestro Gibson conducts the Nutcracker Ballet at the San Jose Center for the Performing Arts in December for the third straight year, in collaboration with the San Jose Dance Theatre. In addition to conducting, he has expertise in recording and editing audio and video of concerts and performances, and he makes the recordings of the Silicon Valley Symphony available on its website (siliconvalleysymphony.net).

Maestro Gibson has had master classes with Georg Solti and Carlo Maria Giulini working with the Chicago Symphony, Neville Marriner with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Pinchas Zukerman at San Francisco State University, and Peter Schickele (PDQ Bach) with the Denver Symphony. He studied orchestral conducting with Bernard Rubenstein (NU), John Miller (Denver Sym.), and Laszlo Varga (SFSU); instrumental conducting from John Paynter (NU); and choral conducting with Margaret Hillis (Chicago Symphony Chorus) at Northwestern University from which he holds Bachelor of Music Education and Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting degrees. He played trombone in the Denver Symphony, Bohemian Club Orchestra, and the San Francisco 49ers Band. Gibson is also Music Director and CEO of the Bay Area Music Foundation, a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation, fiscal sponsor of the SVS. He offers expertise in business, operating his own company, BACH to Music. For details and resume, please visit www.bach2music.com.

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