

## SCHUBERT, STRAUSS & SAINT-SAËNS

Thursday, February 6, 2025 • 7:30 PM

Thursday Classics presented by Quikcard

Featuring:

**Cosette Justo-Valdés**, Conductor – see bio on page 4.

**Sara Davis Buechner**, Piano – see bio on page 5.

**Eric Buchmann**, ESO Violin – see bio on page 6.

To read the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra roster, see page 7.

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### SAINT-SAËNS

*Introduction and Rondo capriccioso in A minor, Op.28*

(10')\*

### SAINT-SAËNS

*Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op.22*

(26')\*

*I - Andante sostenuto*

*II - Allegro scherzando*

*III - Presto*

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

### SCHUBERT

*Symphony No. 6 in C Major, D 589*

(27')\*

*I - Adagio – Allegro*

*II - Andante*

*III - Scherzo: Presto*

*IV - Allegro moderato*

### J. STRAUSS II

*Die Fledermaus: Overture*

(8')\*

*Program subject to change.*

\*indicates approximate performance duration

Works of **Camille Saint-Saëns**  
(b. Paris, 1835 / d. Algiers, 1921)

## ***Introduction and Rondo capriccioso in A minor, Op.28***

First performed: April 4, 1867 in Paris

Last ESO performance: ESO Outdoors, August 2024

Camille Saint-Saëns' popular *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso* was written for one of the finest violinists who ever lived, Pablo de Sarasate. The greatest composers of the day wrote works for him, and he also wrote many for himself. Many of them, both his creations and those written by others, follow a pattern; they begin with a slow section designed to illustrate his supreme mastery of lyricism and expression, followed by a whirlwind cavalcade of breathtaking and breakneck virtuoso music in which a full bag of violin tricks is used. Such is the case here.

Camille Saint-Saëns had originally intended to write his first violin concerto for Sarasate, and began sketching one as far back as 1859, when Sarasate would have only been 15. But the French composer, unsatisfied with what he had created, abandoned the plan. Four years later, he composed the *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso*. It has established itself as a favourite vehicle for prodigious violinists since its 1867 premiere.

Marked Andante malinconico, the opening of the Introduction is dominated by orchestral chords, around which the violin spins a series of dazzling phrases built around a sudden drop and a rising arpeggio. Slowly, the pace builds until a mini-cadenza ushers in the Rondo. With a decidedly (and unsurprisingly) Spanish flavour, the Rondo's main theme is played by the violin in 2/4, while the 6/8 orchestral accompaniment gives the work a fragrant syncopation. Following the oboe's final statement of the main theme, the violin is naturally given a dazzling, tour de force conclusion.

## ***Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22***

First performed: December 13, 1868 in Paris

Last ESO performance: Symphony Under the Sky 2018

In a vocation that has no lack of early bloomers, Camille Saint-Saëns still stands out. He was picking out piano tunes at the age of two. At five, he played the piano part of a Beethoven violin sonata with a professional violinist. He made his recital debut at age 11, playing a long and difficult program from memory. To music (as if that were not enough), he would add to his list of accomplishments volumes of poetry, plays, an avid scientific curiosity, and a lifelong love of travel and adventure.

His *Second Piano Concerto* was born out of friendship, and intended as a vehicle for entertainment. When Saint-Saëns' friend Anton Rubinstein announced his intention to visit Paris in 1868, the noted pianist and conductor told Saint-Saëns it was a perfect opportunity for them to perform together. In only 17 days, Saint-Saëns had a new concerto ready for the occasion, for which he performed the solo part, while Rubinstein conducted. "The form of it is new and very happy," announced Franz Liszt upon hearing it – and it was to Liszt that the work was dedicated.

In a very unusual move, the work's slow movement comes first. The piano opens with a swirling cadenza before the orchestra announces its arrival with two loud chords. Following that, the piano

presents the main theme proper of the movement, and it is that theme which dominates, presented more or less as a set of variations, throughout the rest of the movement.

The second movement has the earmarks of a scherzo following a slow movement. It is everywhere graceful, delicate, charming – indeed, all adjectives often used (occasionally pejoratively!) to describe Saint-Saëns himself. The finale is a brisk and vigorous Tarantella – a Neapolitan dance in 6/8 time. Its name, supposedly taken from the energy required to resist the bite of a tarantula, suggests the lively, energetic whirl of the music. A clever second subject, a witty dialog between the piano and the strings, momentarily intrudes on the bracing main material.

## ***Symphony No. 6 in C Major, D 589***

Franz Schubert

(b. Vienna, 1797 / d. Vienna, 1828)

First performance: 1818 by Otto Hatwig and a small orchestra in the conductor's Schottenhof apartment. The public premiere took place December 14, 1828 in Vienna.

Last ESO performance: November 2009

By the age of 21, Franz Schubert had already written five symphonies – this from a composer becoming known more for his short-form works, particularly lieder, than for large-scale orchestral compositions. It was 1818, and Vienna was under the sway of the infectious Italian operas of Gioacchino Rossini, and captivated by the titan from Bonn, Beethoven. Influences of both of these composers could not help but creep into Schubert's *Sixth Symphony*, written by a man still young enough to be seeking out his own distinctive compositional voice.

There is much of both the established composers, Rossini and Beethoven, in the symphony's first movement. It begins with Beethovenian chords and colouring in the slow introduction, though the playfulness of the Allegro which follows, particularly the woodwind scoring, has the air of a Rossini overture. But Schubert's emerging style is here, too – there is a fascinating tonal range explored in the development section, all based on the material established in the Allegro exposition. The Rossini charm returns in the recapitulation, as does the more muscular feel of Beethoven in the final notes leading to the coda.

There is a lightness and grace in the second movement, dominated by a graceful melody for strings and woodwinds, but punctuated by slightly more brusque contrasting material, adding some dynamic contrast. Beethoven's strong influence appears once again in the third movement – a Scherzo very much in the Beethoven mould, recalling in fact the older composer's *First Symphony*. The final movement finds perhaps the happiest compromise between the work's influences and Schubert's own emerging voice. The orchestration is deft, the quiet nature of much of the music does not detract from the movement's overall buoyancy. The loud-soft dynamic contrasts are used with playful dramatic flair, and listen for the quick twitter of flutes that so dominates the first movement reappear ever so briefly in the closing moments of the finale.

# Program Notes

## ***Die Fledermaus: Overture***

### **Johann Strauss II**

(b. Vienna, 1825 / d. Vienna, 1899)

Operetta first performed: April 5, 1874 in Vienna

Last ESO performance of the overture: October 2013

*Die Fledermaus* ("The Bat") is the most popular operetta composed by the "Waltz King," Johann Strauss II. A lighthearted and clever story of pretense, disguise, and of course love, it contains several of Strauss' great melodies – most of which are presented in the delightful overture. It will surprise no one that a gorgeous waltz is a highlight of the piece. The Edmonton Symphony united with Edmonton Opera for performances of the operetta last November, kicking off Edmonton Opera's 60th anniversary season.

Program notes © 2025 by D.T. Baker

## **Biographies**

### **Cosette Justo Valdés**

#### **Conductor**

Cosette Justo Valdés is the Resident Conductor of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. She has been with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra since the 2018-2019 season, when she started as the Assistant Conductor and Community Ambassador. Born and raised in Cuba, as a daughter of amateur musicians, she's loved music all of her life, and she began learning piano and music theory from age 8. At 18 she saw a symphony orchestra for the first time and immediately knew she wanted to be a conductor. She took up conducting in 2002 at the National Institute of the Arts of Cuba, in Havana, and after graduating in 2009 with a Bachelor's Degree in Orchestral Conducting, she was appointed Music & Artistic Director of the Orquesta Sinfónica de Oriente (OSO) (Santiago, Cuba), Cuba's second-most important orchestra.

During her first three years at the OSO, Cosette organized and conducted numerous concerts of a broad repertoire of classical, jazz, pop, and traditional Cuban music, which allowed her to start consolidating her foundation as a conductor. She also developed several programs for improving the technical and musical level of the orchestra, and founded a Kid's Orchestra and a Youth Orchestra, both tutored by the musicians of the professional orchestra.

With Cuba's OSO, Cosette conducted premières for some of Cuba's best known composers. She also performed the Cuban première of Domenico Scarlatti's intermezzo *La Dirindina*, including designing the costumes, sets, super-titles and directing the overall artistic production.

In 2012, Cosette entered the Mannheim Staatliche Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (State University for Music & Performing Arts) in Germany, to learn more about conducting classical repertoire from the European perspective, and she earned her Master's Degree in 2018. She has conducted many orchestral, choral, and chamber ensembles in Europe, while remaining Music & Artistic Director of the OSO and returning often to conduct it.

Her passion for 20th century music inspired her to conduct a performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1 with the National Orchestra of Cuba in Havana for the first time

in more than 30 years. She also organized several large projects combining the forces of the two major symphonic orchestras of Eastern Cuba.

Cosette also brought to the OSO for the first time pieces like Shostakovich's Symphonies Nos. 1 and 5, West Side Story Suite by Leonard Bernstein (in his centenary, performed in January, 2018), Symphony No. 1 by Robert Schumann, Symphony No. 5 by Felix Mendelssohn, Pulcinella Suite by Igor Stravinsky, The Unanswered Question by Charles Ives, and others. She conducted concerts specifically for children to give them an opportunity to get to know an orchestra and its instruments. She also invited music students to listen to and play with chamber orchestras and/or symphony orchestras for the first time.

Cosette conducted the OSO for the CD "Popularmente Sinfónico", and guest-conducted several other CD recordings in Cuba. She organized the project "SinfóniJazz" for jazz quartet and orchestra, which had its first performance in December 2016 at the International Jazz Festival of Havana. For it, she commissioned music from some of the best young jazz players and composers in Cuba. The National Orchestra of Cuba performed the première of this project, and it was a great success.

## **Sara Davis Buechner** Piano

Noted for her musical command, cosmopolitan artistry, and visionary independence, Sara Davis Buechner is one of the most original concert pianists of our time. Lauded for her "intelligence, integrity and all-encompassing technical prowess" (New York Times), "thoughtful artistry in the full service of music" (Washington Post), and "astounding virtuosity" (Philippine Star), Japan's InTune magazine sums up: "Buechner has no superior."

In her twenties Ms. Buechner earned a bouquet of top prizes at the world's premiere international piano competitions — Queen Elisabeth (Brussels), Leeds, Mozart (Salzburg), Beethoven (Vienna), and Sydney. She was a Bronze Medalist of the 1986 Tschaikowsky Competition in Moscow and the Gold Medalist of the 1984 Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition.

Ms. Buechner has performed in every state and province of North America — as recitalist, chamber musician and soloist with top orchestras like the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra; and in venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center and the Hollywood Bowl. She has toured throughout Latin and South America and Europe; and she enjoys a special following in Asia, where she has been a featured soloist with the Sydney Symphony, New Zealand Philharmonic, New Japan Philharmonic and Shanghai Philharmonic, among many others.

She has commissioned and premiered important contemporary scores by composers such as Michael Brown, John Corigliano, Ray Green, Dick Hyman, Vítězslav Kaprálová, Jared Miller, Joaquín Nin-Culmell, and Yukiko Nishimura. Ms. Buechner's performance versatility extends to unique collaborations with film and dance (including tours with the Mark Morris Dance Group, and Japanese kabuki-mime-mask dancer Yayoi Hirano).

Ms. Buechner has released numerous acclaimed recordings of rare piano music by composers such as Rudolf Friml ("a revelation" — The New York Times), Dana Suesse, Joseph Lamb, Joaquín Turina, Miklós Rózsa, and Ferruccio Busoni (including the world première recording of the Bach-Busoni "Goldberg" Variations). Stereophile magazine selected her Gershwin CD as

“Recording of the Month,” and her interpretation of Hollywood Piano Concertos won Germany’s coveted Deutsches Schauplatten Preis. Most recently her recorded traversal of the score to Carl Dreiser’s silent movie classic *Master of the House* (1925) may be heard on Criterion Collection DVD.

Sara Davis Buechner joined the faculty of Temple University’s Boyer College of Music and Dance in 2016, after previously teaching at the Manhattan School of Music, New York University and the University of British Columbia. She has presented masterclasses and workshops at major pedagogic venues worldwide, adjudicated important international piano competitions, and is also a contributing editor for Dover Publications International. In 2017 Ms. Buechner marked her 30th year as a dedicated Yamaha Artist.

As a proud transgender woman, Ms. Buechner also appears as a speaker and performer at important LGBTQ events, and has contributed interviews and articles about her own experience to numerous media outlets worldwide.

Sara is a dual American-Canadian citizen who makes her home in Philadelphia.

## **Eric Buchmann**

### **Violin**

Eric Buchmann has been a member of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra since 2006 and currently holds the title of Associate Concertmaster. From 2010 to 2013, he was appointed Interim Concertmaster under the direction of William Eddins and had the privilege of leading the orchestra at New York’s Carnegie Hall “Spring for Music Festival” concert.

Eric Buchmann studied violin at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal and at the Université de Montréal, where he earned a Bachelor of Music and a diploma. In 2001, he moved to Los Angeles to continue his studies at the University of Southern California with Martin Chalifour, the concertmaster of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Two years later, he joined the New World Symphony after auditions in Miami Beach where he played under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas.

Eric performs regularly as a soloist with the ESO and has been featured in works such as *Tzigane* by Maurice Ravel, Kabalevsky’s *Violin Concerto*, and Vaughn Williams’s *Lark Ascending*. He also premiered *Fantasy on Themes from Swan Lake* based on Tchaikovsky’s ballet and arranged for violin and orchestra by the composer David Matthews.

In his spare time, Eric likes to hike, bike, and ski in the mountains, as well as travel. His favourite composers include Sibelius, Bach, and Mozart and he loves Italian operas. Eric has the pleasure of playing on a 1930 Italian violin by Gaetano Sgarabotto.

## Meet the Musicians

**Cosette Justo Valdés**, Resident Conductor and Community Ambassador  
**William Eddins**, Music Director Emeritus, Conductor

### Violin I

Robert Uchida, Concertmaster  
*The John & Barbara Poole Family Concertmaster Chair*  
Eric Buchmann, Associate Concertmaster  
*The Arliss & Tevie Miller Associate Concertmaster Chair*  
Philip Manning, Assistant Concertmaster  
Broderick Olson  
Ewald Cheung  
Joanna Ciapka-Sangster  
Laura Veeze  
Anna Kozak  
Aiyana Anderson-Howatt  
Yeeun Ha

### Violin II

Dianne New – Principal  
Anita Walsh\*\* – Acting Assistant Principal  
Heather Bergen  
Yue Deng  
Danielle Greene  
Delia Li  
Buon Park

### Viola

Keith Hamm – Principal  
Ethan Filner – Assistant Principal  
Clayton Leung  
Rhonda Henshaw  
Stefan Jungkind

### Cello

Rafael Hoekman – Principal  
*The Stuart & Winona Davis Principal Cello Chair*  
Julie Hereish – Assistant Principal  
Ronda Metszies  
Meran Currie-Roberts  
David Bordeleau  
Victor Pipkin

### Bass

Hilda Cowie – Principal  
Chris Jones – Assistant Principal  
Janice Quinn  
Chantel Leung  
Rob Aldridge

**\*\*Replacing Musicians On Leave**

### Flute

Elizabeth Koch – Principal  
Sarah Pollard – Assistant Principal

### Oboe

June Kim – Principal  
Aidan Dugan\*\* – Acting Assistant Principal  
*The Steven & Day LePoole Assistant Principal Oboe Chair*

### Clarinet

Julianne Scott – Principal  
David Quinn – Assistant Principal

### Bassoon

Bianca Chambul – Principal  
Edith Stacey – Assistant Principal

### Horn

Allene Hackleman – Principal  
Megan Evans – Assistant Principal  
Ryan Garbett – Assistant Principal  
Molly Wreakes\*\* – Acting Assistant Principal

### Trumpet

Robin Doyon – Principal  
Frédéric Payant – Assistant Principal

### Trombone

Bruno Laurence Joyal – Acting Principal  
Kathryn Macintosh – Assistant Principal

### Bass Trombone

Tyler Cairns – Acting Principal

### Tuba

Scott Whetham – Principal

### Timpani

Barry Nemish – Principal

### Percussion

Malcolm Lim – Acting Principal

### Harp

Nora Bumanis – Principal

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(American Federation of Musicians of the United States  
and Canada) Local 390.*