Sunday, January 18, 2009, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Sergey Khachatryan, *violin*
Lusine Khachatryan, *piano*

PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) — Sonata No. 3 for Unaccompanied Violin in C major, BWV 1005 (bef. 1720)

Adagio
Fuga
Largo
Allegro assai

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) — Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano in G major, Op. 78 (1879)

Vivace ma non troppo
Adagio
Allegro molto moderato

INTERMISSION

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) — Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 134 (1968)

Andante
Allegretto
Largo

This concert is part of the Koret Recital Series.

Cal Performances' 2008–2009 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Sonata No. 3 for Unaccompanied Violin in C major, BWV 1005

Composed before 1720.

From 1717 to 1723, Bach was director of music at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen, north of Leipzig. He liked his job. His employer, Prince Leopold, was a well-educated man, 24 years old at the time he engaged Bach. (Bach was 32.) Leopold was fond of travel and books and paintings, but his real passion was music. He was an accomplished musician who not only played violin, viola da gamba and harpsichord well enough to join with the professionals in his house orchestra, but also had an exceptional bass voice. He started the court musical establishment in 1707 with three players (his puritanical father had no use for music), and by the time of Bach's appointment, it had grown to nearly 20 performers equipped with a fine set of instruments. It was for this group that Bach wrote many of his outstanding instrumental works, including the *Brandenburg Concertos*, orchestral suites, violin concertos and much of his chamber music. Leopold appreciated Bach's genius (his annual salary as Court Conductor was 400 *thalers*, equal to that of the Court Marshal, Leopold's second highest official), and Bach returned the compliment when he said of his Prince, "He loved music, he was well acquainted with it, he understood it."

Bach composed the set of three sonatas and three partitas for unaccompanied violin at Cöthen before 1720, the date on the manuscript. Though there is not a letter, preface, contemporary account or shred of any other documentary evidence extant to shed light on the genesis and purpose of these pieces, the technical demands that they impose upon the player indicate that they were intended for a virtuoso performer: Johann Georg Pisendel, a student of Vivaldi, Jean Baptiste Volumier, leader of the Dresden court orchestra and Joseph Spiess, concertmaster of the Cöthen orchestra, have been advanced as possible candidates. After the introduction of the basso continuo early in the 17th century, it had been the seldom broken custom to supply a work for solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment, so the tradition behind Bach's solo violin sonatas and partitas is slight. Johann Paul von Westhoff, a violinist at Weimar when Bach played in the orchestra there in 1703, published a set of six unaccompanied partitas in 1696, and Heinrich Biber, Johann Jakob Walther and Pisendel all composed similar works. All of these composers were active in and around Dresden. Bach visited Dresden shortly before assuming his post at Cöthen, and he may well have become familiar at that time with most of this music. (Bach's reputation as a peerless keyboard virtuoso preceded him on his visit to Dresden in 1717: the French organist and clavecin player Louis Marchand fled town rather than be beaten in a contest arranged by a local nobleman.) Though Bach may have found models and inspiration in the music of his predecessors, his works for unaccompanied violin far surpass any others in technique and musical quality.

Though the three violin partitas, examples of the *sonata da camera* ("chamber sonata") or suite of dances, vary in style and structure, the three solo sonatas uniformly adopt the precedent of the more serious "church sonata," the *sonata di chiesa*, deriving their mood and makeup from the works of the influential Roman master Arcangelo Corelli. The sonatas follow the standard four-movement disposition of the *sonata da chiesa*—slow–fast–slow–fast—though Bach replaced the first quick movements with elaborate fugues and suggested a certain dance-like buoyancy in the finales. The opening *Adagio* of the Sonata No. 3 in C major, whose somber mood and dotted-rhythm tread recall the style of the French Overture, serves as a broad preface to the stupendous *Fugue* that follows. Bach borrowed the theme for this elaborate and precisely planned movement (his audacity at composing a fugue for just the four strings of a solo violin is justified by the superbly satisfying result that he achieves) from the Pentecost antiphon *Veni Sancte Spiritus* ("Come Holy Ghost"), a favorite melody of his that also appears in two Chorale Preludes (BWV 651 and 652), the Cantatas Nos. 59 and 175, and the motet *Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf* ("The Spirit Helpeth Our Infirmities," BWV 226). The poignant *Largo*, modest in its expression and dimensions, provides a foil for the grandeur of the preceding *Fugue*. The closing *Allegro assai*, in two-part dance form, eschews double-stopping in favor of a *moto perpetuo* unfolding of briskly moving melodic material.

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano in G major, Op. 78

Composed in 1879.

Brahms was inspired by his first trip to Italy, in the early months of 1878, to write his glowing and autumnal Piano Concerto in B-flat major. He returned to Goethe's "land where the lemon trees grow" six times thereafter for creative inspiration and refreshment from the chilling Viennese winters. On his way back to Austria from Italy in May 1879, he stopped in the lovely village of Pörtschach on Lake Wörth in Carinthia, which he had haunted on his annual summer retreat the preceding year. "I only wanted to stay there for a day," he wrote to his friend the surgeon Theodor Billroth, "and then, as this one day was so beautiful, for yet another. But each day was as fine as the last, and so I stayed on. If on your journeys you have interrupted your reading to gaze out of the window, you must have seen how all the mountains round the lake are white with snow, while the trees are covered with delicate green." Brahms succumbed to the charms of the Carinthian countryside, and abandoned all thought of returning immediately to Vienna—he remained in Pörtschach for the entire summer. It was in that halcyon setting that he composed his Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano.

Brahms is known to have written at least three sonatas for violin before the present work. All were lost, or destroyed by him. (Brahms was almost pathologically secretive about his sketches and unfinished works, and he refused to release any music that was not of the highest quality. He simply burned anything that he did not want others to see. Little, therefore, is known about his methods of composition.) Brahms had long been wary of the difficulty in combining the lyrical nature of the violin with the powerful chordal writing that he favored for piano, and it was only with the *Klavierstücke*, Op. 76, completed in 1878, that he developed a keyboard style lean enough to accommodate the violin as a partner. His other two violin sonatas followed within nine years. The First Sonata is a voluptuously songful and tenderly expressive testament to this important advance in Brahms's creative development, the musical counterpart of his sylvan holiday at Pörtschach. His faithful friend and correspondent Elisabeth von Herzogenberg told him that the work "appeals to the affection as do few other things in the realm of music." In his biography of the composer, Peter Latham noted, "Brahms has written nothing more spacious than these three sonatas, in which he never seeks grandeur, and woos rather than compels." Brahms himself allowed that the Sonata was almost too intimate for the concert hall. The work is one of his most endearing creations, and it did much to dispel the then widely held notion that his music was academic and emotionally austere. "[The Sonata] must have won Brahms almost more friends than any of his previous compositions," judged J. A. Fuller-Maitland.

The Sonata is, throughout, warm and ingratiating, a touching lyrical poem for violin and piano. The main theme of the sonata-form first movement, sung immediately by the violin above the piano's placid chords, is a gentle melody lightly kissed by the Muse of the Viennese waltz. Its opening dotted rhythm (long–short–long) is used as a motto that recurs not just in the first movement but later as well, a subtle but powerful means of unifying the entire work. The subsidiary theme, flowing and hymnal, is structured as a grand, rainbow-shaped phrase. The *Adagio* has a certain rhapsodic quality that belies its tightly controlled three-part form. The piano initiates the principal theme of the movement, which is soon adorned with little sighing phrases by the violin. The central section is more animated, and recalls the dotted rhythm of the previous movement's main theme; the principal theme returns in the violin's double stops to round out the movement. Brahms wove two songs from his Op. 59 collection for voice and piano (1873) into the finale: *Regenlied* ("Rain Song"—this work is sometimes referred to as the "Rain" Sonata) and *Nachklang* ("Reminiscence"). The movement is in rondo form, and, in its *scherzando* quality, recalls the finale of the B-flat Piano Concerto, written just

a year before. Most of the movement (whose main theme begins with the familiar dotted rhythm) is couched in a romantic minor key (it turns brighter during one episode for a return of the theme from the second movement, played in double stops by the violin), but moves into a luminous major tonality for the coda.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)
Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 134

Composed in 1968. Premiered on May 3, 1969, in Moscow by violinist David Oistrakh and pianist Sviatoslav Richter.

On October 29, 1966, in Leningrad, Shostakovich suffered a massive heart attack. He survived, but his health for the remaining nine years of his life was poor, making work and travel difficult for him. More than just a change in his physical well-being was wrought by his illness in 1966, however, because his thoughts and his music thereafter became imbued with a pervasive solemnity, a residual fatalism that turned him from the overt, public works of his earlier years to the introspective, thoughtful compositions of his last decade. In discussing in his purported memoirs, *Testimony*, the Fourteenth Symphony, a song cycle for soprano, bass and chamber orchestra from 1969 comprising settings of 11 poems dealing with the subject of death, the composer was clear and specific concerning his views following his heart attack: "I tried to convince myself that I shouldn't fear death. But how can you not fear death? Death is not considered an appropriate theme for Soviet art, and writing about death is tantamount to wiping your nose on your sleeve in company. But I always thought that I was not alone in my thinking about death and that other people were concerned with it too, despite the fact that they live in a socialist society in which even tragedies receive the epithet 'optimistic.' I wrote a number of works reflecting my understanding of the question, and as it seems to me, they're not particularly optimistic works.... I think that working on these compositions had a positive effect, and I fear death less now; or rather, I'm used to the idea of an inevitable end and treat it as such. After all, it's a law of nature and no one has ever eluded it.... When you ponder and write about death, you make some gains. First, you have time to think through things that are related to death and you lose the panicky fear. And second, you try to make fewer mistakes."

One of the first projects that Shostakovich undertook when he resumed composing in 1967 was the Violin Concerto No. 2 for David Oistrakh, whom he had met three decades before when he was a judge at the 1935 All-Union Performers' Competition, which Oistrakh won. They remained firm friends and toured and concertized together regularly thereafter; the First Violin Concerto was written for Oistrakh in 1948. The Concerto was intended as a 60th birthday gift for the violinist, but Shostakovich was a year early in his calculations, and so the following year he composed the Violin Sonata to mark the actual occasion. The Sonata, however—large in scale and stark in emotion—is hardly celebratory in nature, sharing its deep introspection with the finest of Shostakovich's late works. The piano, in barren octaves, as it is throughout most of the first movement, opens the Sonata with all 12 chromatic pitches splayed successively across the keyboard, not as the subject for any Schoenbergian serial procedures but simply to establish with their harmonic ambiguity an anxious, unsettled expressive state at the outset; the violin drapes a long, winding melodic thread across the piano's solemn, treading phrases. A sardonic little march for the violin, supported by a few sparse, grudging chords from the piano, provides a second theme. Eschewing a formal development section, the violin recapitulates its opening theme, but then moves on to a new passage of high, glistening arpeggios floated upon gentle piano chords that sounds positively luminous after the austerity of the preceding music. The march, briefly interrupted by the luminous arpeggios, returns, but takes on an enervated, almost haunted quality as the movement approaches its end.

The *Allegretto*, the Sonata's gritty scherzo, starts with an aggressive, march-like strain. Violin and piano try out an ironic waltz tune for some formal and metric balance, but it does little to check the music's demonic energy—when the triple meter returns later in the movement, its original waltz melody is stripped away and replaced by a transmogrification of the scherzo theme. Terror seems to lie just beyond the notes sounding in the closing pages.

The finale is a *passacaglia*, the ancient form comprising a series of continuous variations on a short, repeating melody that Shostakovich also used in his Eighth Symphony, First Violin Concerto and Piano Trio No. 2. Stern proclamations in strong, dotted rhythms provide an introduction to the passacaglia theme, an austere melody, presented first by the violin in pizzicato notes, that describes the shape of an arch. The variations accumulate power as they progress, culminating in vehement solo passages for each participant. The strong, dotted rhythms that opened the finale return, and the variations try to continue, but the music has been drained of its strength. Only memories of the luminous arpeggios and the enervated march from the first movement and the finale's dotted rhythms linger in the coda.

© 2009 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

About the Artists

Sergey Khachatryan (*violin*) was born in 1985 in Yerevan, Armenia. In December 2000, he won First Prize in the VIII International Jean Sibelius competition in Helsinki, becoming the youngest ever winner in the history of the competition. In 2005, he claimed the First Prize at the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels.

Mr. Khachatryan has performed with all the major UK orchestras, including the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic and regularly with the Philharmonia Orchestra. In July 2005, he made his debut at the BBC Proms with the BBC Philharmonic performing the first Shostakovich violin concerto.

Mr. Khachatryan's international profile initially developed through collaborations with orchestras such as the London Philharmonic Orchestra; NHK Symphony in Tokyo, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Orchestre National de France and Kurt Masur and the Frankfurt Radiosinfonieorchester with Daniel Harding.

In August 2005, Mr. Khachatryan made his debut at the Ravinia and Blossom festivals, and in March 2006 with the Baltimore Symphony orchestra before undertaking a major US concert tour with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, including venues in Boston, Washington, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New Jersey. In summer 2006, he made his New York debut performing Beethoven concertos in the Mostly Mozart Festival.

Highlights of Mr. Khachatryan's 2006–2007 season included the Beethoven concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London under Christoph von Dohnányi, the first Shostakovich concerto with the RSO Berlin and Marek Janowski, the Sibelius concerto with the Munich Philharmonic and James Conlon, Prokofiev's second concerto with the Oslo Philharmonic, the Beethoven concertos with the BBC Philharmonic and Gianandrea Nosseda at the Vienna Konzerthaus, and a third visit to the Cleveland Orchestra.

Mr. Khachatryan also made recent debuts with the New York Philharmonic and Kurt Masur, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Bernard Hatink, the Los Angeles Philharmonis with Stéphane Denève, the San Francisco Symphony with Michael Tilson Thomas, the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra with Valery Gergiev and the Berlin Philharmonic with Dmitri Kitajenko.

Performances during the 2007–2008 season included the London Philharmonic with Jukka-Pekka Saraste, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Jaap van Zweden, the Tonhalle Orchestra of Zurich with Peter Oundjian, and Mr. Khachatryan's debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Charles Dutoit at the Saratoga Festival.

Engagements this season have thus far included the Brahms concerto with the Deutsche Sinfonieorchester Berlin and Ingo Metzmacher, a tour with the Gothenburg Symphony with Gustavo Dudamel, the Santa Cecilia Orchestra in Rome with Masur and the Philharmonia Orchestra in London with Sir Charles Mackerras. Forthcoming highlights include performances with the Swedish Radio Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kurt Masur, the Russian National Orchestra and Mikhail Pletnev, the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as performances with the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra with Valery Gergiev in St. Petersburg, Moscow and at the festivals in Mikkeli and Baden-Baden.

With sister Lusine Khachatryan he has performed recitals at the Wigmore Hall London and Alte Oper in Frankfurt, the National Auditorium in Madrid and at Carnegie Hall, as well as the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

Following the success of his Sibelius concerto recording released in October 2003, Mr. Khachatryan's relationship with Naïve Classique continues with a double Shostakovich concerto disc with the ONF conducted by Kurt Masur and, most recently, a recording of the Shostakovich and César Franck sonatas for violin and piano with pianist Lusine Khachatryan, which is due for release in February 2008.

As winner of the 2005 Queen Elisabeth Competition, Mr. Khachatryan plays the 1708 "Huggins" Stradivarius violin on loan to him from the Nippon Music Foundation.

Lusine Khachatryan (*piano*) was born into a musical family in 1983 in Yerevan, Armenia, and has lived in Germany since 1993. Following her early years as a student with both her parents and at the Sayat Nova Music Academy in Yerevan, her studies continued with Professor Speidel (piano) and Professor Tatubaeva (chamber music) at the Karlsruhe Music Academy.

Ms. Khachatryan has participated in a number of international music festivals and concert series, including performances in the C. Bechstein Centrum (Frankfurt, 2007), the Bösendorfer Festival in New York, Slosberg Recital Hall (Brandeis University), Lang Recital Hall (2007), the Oscar Peterson Hall in Montreal, the AGBU Alex Manougian Cultural Center (Toronto, 2007), the Caprichos Musikales de Comillas Festival (Spain, 2007), the Vladimir Nielsen Piano Festival (2007), the Return Festival (Armenia, 2007), the Armenian Library & Museum of America (Watertown, 2006), Vancouver Playhouse (2006), Musikfest Bremen (2004), the Bartók & Mozart Music Festival in Miskolc, Hungary.

Ms. Khachatryan has performed as duo partner with her brother, Sergey, in concert halls such as the Alte Oper, Frankfurt; Wigmore Hall, London; Théâtre du Châtelet, Louvre and Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris; the Tonhalle, Zürich; the National Concert Hall, Dublin; the Center for Fine Arts, Brussels; Laeisz Halle, Hamburg; HOAM Art Hall, Seoul; Oji Hall, Tokyo; and Carnegie Hall, New York.

In 2002, Ms. Khachatryan made her debut CD for EMI Classics with Sergey Khachatryan.