SAN FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES

presents...

MIDORI | Violin
ÖZGÜR AYDIN | Piano

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 | 7:30pm

BUFORD **Resonances of Spirit**

BRAHMS **Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Major, Opus 78**
Vivace ma non troppo
Adagio
Allegro molto moderato

INTERMISSION

POULENC **Sonata for Violin and Piano**
Allegro con fuoco
Intermezzo
Presto tragico

RAVEL **Kaddisch** *(arr. Garban)*

Tzigane

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Midori is represented by Kirshbaum Associates Inc.
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Özgür Aydin ozguraydin.com

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ARTIST PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents Midori for the eleventh time. Midori made her SF Performances debut in November 1998.

Özgür Aydin makes his SF Performances' debut.

Midori is a visionary artist, activist and educator who explores and builds connections between music and the human experience. In the four decades since her debut with the New York Philharmonic at age 11, the "simply magical" (*Houston Chronicle*) violinist has performed with many of the world's most prestigious orchestras and has collaborated with world-renowned musicians including Leonard Bernstein, Yo-Yo Ma, and many others. Midori is the Artistic Director of Ravinia Steans Music Institute's Piano & Strings program; summer 2024 is her first year in that role.

This season, she premieres *Spirituals*—a new work written for her by Che Buford—on a recital program, with pianist Özgür Aydin, at the Edinburgh Festival; the 92nd Street Y, New York; the Celebrity Series of Boston; San Francisco Performances; and the Colburn Celebrity Series. Other highlights of Midori's 2024–25 season include appearances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Louisville Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, and Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

Outside the U.S., she performs with the Vienna Philharmonic under Andris Nelsons in Vienna and on tour in Japan and Korea (Prokofiev's *First Violin Concerto*); she appears twice in the spring of 2025 at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall, with the German National Youth Orchestra in May, performing Glanert's *Second Violin Concerto*, and with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (DSO) in June, performing Dvořák's *Violin Concerto*. She also joins the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under Jonathan Nott, performing Sibelius's *Violin Concerto* on a tour of Spain, and has concert appearances in Geneva, Köln and Nürnberg, as well as Mumbai, Istanbul, Izmir and Colombo.

Deeply committed to furthering humanitarian and educational goals, Midori has founded several non-profit organizations; the New York City-based Midori & Friends and Japan-based MUSIC SHARING have both been active for over three decades. For the Orchestra Residencies Program (ORP), which supports youth orchestras, Midori commissioned a new work from composer Derek Bermel, *Spring Cadenzas*, that was premiered virtually during the COVID lockdown and continues to be performed; this season, she is working on creating a video recording of the work to be accompanied by a tutorial. ORP also worked recently with the Afghan Youth Orchestra, which relocated to Portugal in order to continue operating. Midori's Partners in Performance (PiP) helps to bring chamber music to smaller communities in the U.S. In recognition of her work as an artist and humanitarian, she serves as a United Nations Messenger of Peace and was named a Kennedy Center Honoree in 2021.

Born in Osaka in 1971, she began her violin studies with her mother, Setsu Goto, at an early age. In 1982, conductor Zubin Mehta invited the then 11-year-old Midori to perform with the New York Philharmonic in the orchestra's annual New Year's Eve concert, where the foundation was laid for her subsequent career. Midori is the Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. She is the recipient of honorary doctorates from Smith College, Yale University, Longy School of Music and Shenandoah University, and of the 2023 Brandeis Creative Arts Award from Brandeis University.

She plays the 1734 Guarnerius del Gesù 'ex-Huberman' and uses four bows – two by Dominique Peccatte, one by François Peccatte and one by Paul Siefried.

Turkish-American pianist **Özgür Aydin** made his major concerto debut in 1997 in a performance of Brahms' *Piano Concerto No. 1* with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the same year, he won the renowned ARD International Music Competition in Munich and the Nippon Music Award in Tokyo—recognition that has since served as the basis for an active and diverse international performing career. He is also a laureate of the Cleveland International Piano Competition.

Mr. Aydin has appeared as soloist with numerous orchestras in Germany and Turkey, as well as with the BBC Concert Orchestra London, the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela, Slovak State Philharmonic and Canada's Calgary Philharmonic. Frequently invited to summer music festivals, he has appeared at Salzburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Rheingau, Ravinia and Edinburgh. He is a guest at many prestigious venues including New York's Carnegie Hall, London's Wigmore Hall, Munich's Herkulessaal and Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

Mr. Aydin has made recordings of solo piano works by Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Rachmaninov. His performances of the complete cycles of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas and five concertos as well as Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* have been highly praised by the critics.

He is also a dedicated chamber musician, he enjoys recurrent collaborations with violinists Midori and Kolja Blacher, cellist Clemens Hagen, and members of the Berlin Philharmonic. A new recording with Midori consisting of works by Bloch, Janáček, and Shostakovich is released on Onyx Classics.

Born in Colorado to Turkish parents, Mr. Aydin began his music studies at the Ankara Conservatory in Turkey. He subsequently studied with Peter Katin at the Royal College of Music in London and with Prof. Kammerling at the Hanover Music Academy. He has also received valuable instruction from artists such as Tatiana Nikolayeva, Andras Schiff and Ferenc Rados.

Mr. Aydin lives in Berlin and teaches at the University of the Arts.

Resonances of Spirit

CHE BUFORD
(B. 2000)

When Midori asked me to create a piece based on Negro spirituals—focusing on the violin's capacity to express pain and sorrow and fitting into a program that explores diverse spiritual influences—I was immediately intrigued. However, I spent time reflecting on how I could approach this in a new, personal way. I have always been deeply moved by the way Negro spirituals express profound sorrow and pain, but also resilience and joy. Yet rather than referencing them in a literal or transparent way, I wanted to capture their emotional essence and transform it through my own musical language that includes incorporating electronic elements, my own improvisational practice as a performer.

As I started this process, I found myself drawn to spiritual methodologies from the African diaspora, particularly Yoruba practices. I began asking: What recurring themes exist between Yoruba spiritual traditions and the messages conveyed in these songs? How broadly can "spirituals" be interpreted in the context of sound as a vehicle for spirituality? This led me to explore concepts of ancestral memory and the ways memory is embedded in nature.

The piece contains sounds of water, wind, deep vibrating sine tones, electronic drones, whispers of Yoruba prayer, and my own humming and singing within the electronics. The violin blends with these elements, enhancing the atmosphere through exploration of texture and timbre, while remaining fragmented and lyrical.

Resonances of Spirit is part of a multi-piece project that continues to explore these themes of memory, spirituality, and nature. This piece for solo violin and electronics, written for Midori, is Volume 1 of the series.

—Note by Che Buford

Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Major, Opus 78

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833–1897)

Brahms spent three consecutive summers—1877 to 1879—in the small town of Pörtschach on the Wörthersee in southern Austria, where he could escape the heat of Vienna and enjoy a setting of unbelievable beauty. To a friend he wrote to marvel "how all the mountains round the blue lake are white with snow, while the trees are covered with delicate green." In 1878, during his second summer at Pörtschach, Brahms wrote for the violin. From that summer came the *Violin Concerto*, and he quickly began a sonata for violin and piano, though that would not be completed until he returned the following June. The dramatic concerto and the gentle sonata could not be more dissimilar, and it is tempting to think that Brahms may have used his fiery and extroverted ideas for the violin in the concerto, reserving the more lyric and intimate ones for the sonata.

The *First Violin Sonata* is one of those rare things in Brahms' music, an instrumental piece based on extra-musical associations, in this case two songs Brahms had written in 1873: *Regenlied* ("Rain-Song") and *Nachklang* ("Memories"). It is also unusual in that it is unified around a tiny rhythmic cell that appears in many guises throughout the sonata. This cell—a simple dotted figure—is heard at the very beginning of the *Vivace ma non troppo*. The piano opens the sonata with quietly-tolling chords, and the violin quickly enters with the gentle main theme: the violin's first three notes, all D's, form the cell that will shape much of the sonata. There are several other themes in this sonata-form movement, but the music is remarkable for its consistent lyricism—Brahms avoids extroverted gestures and keeps the mood reflective, almost nostalgic.

Solo piano introduces the main theme of the *Adagio*, and only gradually does the violin take up this melody. The emotional outbursts absent from the first movement appear here, and near the end of the movement the violin—in double-stops—gently restates the main theme. The rhythmic cell of the first movement appears in the *Adagio* as a quiet accompaniment figure.

The haunting finale, *Allegro molto moderato*, is a rondo in G minor, based on the violin's opening melody. This opening is a direct quotation from Brahms' song *Regenlied,* and the text of that song is very much a part of the spirit of this movement. In the song, a speaker looks out through a window as rain falls against it, stirring his memories: "Pour down, rain; awake in me the songs we used to sing in the doorway when it rained outside. Would I could listen again to you, hear that sweet splashing and dissolve my soul in the wonder of childhood." Once again, the first three notes of the violin's theme, all D's, repeat the sonata's rhythmic cell, which will be heard throughout this movement. Beneath the violin's flowing melodic line, the piano keeps up a patter of sixteenth notes, clearly the sound of rain tapping gently on the window, and this lulling sound continues through much of the movement (a generation or two ago, this sonata was in fact nicknamed the *"Rain" Sonata*). Brahms breaks the rondo with several contrasting episodes, and in a remarkable touch, one of these is the theme from the *Adagio*, which soon threatens to take over the end of the movement. At the coda, the music moves to G major (marked *dolcissimo*), and Brahms weaves together the heartfelt *Adagio* theme with the main theme of the finale as this ravishing music soars to its gentle conclusion on the quiet patter of rain.

Many years later—in 1890—Brahms' good friend Clara Schumann wrote to tell the composer that she had just played the sonata with their mutual friend Joseph Joachim and that she had once more been astonished and moved by the final movement. Her concluding words capture perfectly the spirit of this radiant music: "I always wish that the last movement might accompany me on my journey from here to the next world."

Sonata for Violin and Piano

FRANCIS POULENC
(1899–1963)

Poulenc loved the sound of wind instruments. When he composed his *Sextet for Piano and Woodwind Quintet*, he referred to it as "an homage to the wind instruments I have loved from the moment I began composing," and he wrote wonderfully for winds throughout his life. About stringed instruments, however, Poulenc was much less sure. In particular, the combination of a stringed instrument with piano—a combination that had seemed very natural to Beethoven and Brahms—gave Poulenc trouble. He noted that he did not like the sound of "the violin in the singular," and he wrote only two string sonatas, the present violin sonata and one for cello. Yet both of these are impressive works.

A dark atmosphere hangs over the *Violin Sonata*. Poulenc composed it in Paris in 1942–43, during the German occupation, and dedicated it to the memory of the Spanish poet Frederico García Lorca, who had been murdered by the Fascists during the Spanish Civil War. Poulenc was the pianist at the premiere of the Violin Sona-

ta, and the violinist on that occasion was the young French violinist Ginette Neveu. When she was killed in an air crash in 1949, Poulenc went back and revised the last movement of this sonata, which is pointedly marked *Presto tragico*.

One should not approach this sonata thinking that it is all darkness and gloom, for it is not. The sonata is in the expected three movements, and Poulenc treats the piano and violin as equals. The aptly-marked *Allegro con fuoco* is indeed full of fire. Poulenc marks the violin's opening theme *Très violent*, and that marking will recur repeatedly throughout this sonata. The agitated beginning rides along a spiky energy that gives way to a more relaxed central episode, full of an unexpected sweetness; the opening material returns to drive the movement to a violent close. Poulenc attached a fragment of a quotation from Lorca to the slow movement—"The guitar makes dreams weep"—and we may hear something of the guitar, an instrument Lorca played, in the violin's pizzicato strokes here. This music has an exotic character, its long lyric lines full of dark swirls. The concluding *Presto tragico* returns to the manner of the opening movement, with a bristling energy and brilliant violin passages, including some for left-handed pizzicato. The ending is striking, and perhaps this is the section Poulenc re-fashioned after Neveu's death: the energy dissipates on a cadenza-like flourish for violin, and the sonata vanishes on sharp strokes of sound.

Kaddisch

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875–1937)

We do not normally think of Ravel—one of the most careful craftsmen who ever lived—as a composer much interested in folk music, but in fact Ravel loved folk and popular music and made a number of arrangements of it. This was usually a matter of taking a particular melody and text and creating a piano accompaniment that would project them most effectively. In 1906 Ravel wrote accompaniments to *Five Popular Greek Songs*, and in 1910—for a competition in Moscow—he wrote his *Chansons populaires*: settings of popular songs from Spain, France, Italy, and the Hebrew.

In the spring of 1914, at the request of Madame Alvina Alvi, a soprano in the St. Petersburg Opera, Ravel composed his *Deux mélodies hébraïques*: settings for voice and piano of two ancient Hebrew melodies and texts. The first of the songs, *Kaddisch*, sets a Hebrew prayer recited for the dead; it was originally in Aramaic, and that word means "holy" in Aramaic. But the Kaddish prayer never mentions the word "death." Instead, it is a prayer of praise for God, of acceptance, and finally of peace, and Ravel wisely chose to offer only the barest chordal accompaniment to its elaborate cantorial vocal line.

Ravel and Madame Alvina Alvi gave the first performance of the *Deux mélodies hébraïques* in Paris on June 3, 1914, and the songs have been heard in many arrangements, including Ravel's own orchestration of them. The present arrangement for violin and piano was made in 1924 by Lucien Garban, a close friend of Ravel.

Tzigane

MAURICE RAVEL

In the summer of 1922, just as he began his orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Ravel visited England for several concerts of his music, and in London he heard a performance of his brand-new *Sonata for Violin and Cello* by Jelly d'Arányi and Hans Kindler. Jelly d'Arányi must have been a very impressive violinist, for every composer who heard her was swept away by her playing—and by her personality (Bartók was one of the many who fell in love with her). Ravel was so impressed that he stayed after the concert and talked her into playing gypsy tunes from her native Hungary for him—and he kept her there until 5 a.m. the next morning, playing for him.

Tzigane probably got its start that night. Inspired by both d'Arányi 's playing and the fiery gypsy tunes, Ravel set out to write a virtuoso showpiece for the violin based on gypsy-like melodies (the title *Tzigane* means simply "gypsy"). Its composition was much delayed, however, and Ravel did not complete *Tzigane* for another two years. Trying to preserve a distinctly Hungarian flavor, he wrote *Tzigane* for violin with the accompaniment of lutheal, a device which—when attached to a piano—gave the piano a jangling sound typical of the Hungarian cimbalon. The first performance, by Jelly d'Aranyi with piano accompaniment, took place in London on April 26, 1924, and later that year Ravel prepared an orchestral accompaniment. In whatever form it is heard, *Tzigane* remains an audience favorite.

It is unusual for a French composer to be so drawn to gypsy music. Usually it was the composer from central Europe—Liszt, Brahms, Joachim, Hubay—who felt the charm of this music, but Ravel enters fully into the spirit and creates a virtuoso showpiece redolent of gypsy campfires and smoldering dance tunes. *Tzigane* opens with a long cadenza (nearly half the length of the entire piece) that keeps the violinist solely on the G-string across the span of the entire first page. While *Tzigane* seems drenched in an authentic gypsy spirit, all of its themes are Ravel's own, composed in the spirit of the tunes he heard d'Aranyi play late that night. Gradually the accompaniment enters, and the piece takes off. *Tzigane* is quite episodic, and across its blazing second half Ravel demands such techniques from the violinist as artificial harmonics, left-hand pizzicatos, complex multiple-stops, and sustained octave passages. Over the final pages the tempo gradually accelerates until *Tzigane* rushes to its scorching close, marked Presto.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger