



Waarts Plays Sibelius **Silicon Valley Symphony**

Stephen Waarts, violin soloist

Michael Paul Gibson, music director and conductor

Saturday
19 May 2012
7:30 pm

Holy Trinity
Episcopal Church,
Menlo Park

Sunday
20 May 2012
5:00 pm

Saint Mark's
Episcopal Church,
Palo Alto

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

PROGRAM

Vaughan Williams: *The Wasps: Aristophanic Suite*

1. Overture
2. Entr'acte
3. March Past of the Kitchen Utensils
4. Entr'acte
5. Ballet and Final Tableau.

Tchaikovsky: *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture

Andante non tanto quasi Moderato—Allegro giusto

INTERMISSION

Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D minor Op.47

Stephen Waarts, Violin

1. Allegro moderato
2. Adagio di molto
3. Allegro, ma non tanto

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Vaughan Williams: *The Wasps: Aristophanic Suite* (1909)

Death, taxes, and the unbreakable speed of light barrier are among the immutable truths that imbue the universe as we know it. In ancient Greece, Aristophanes drew sardonic attention to another: the paradox that necessary though it is for civilization to function, the law is basically an ass. His play, *The Wasps*, first performed in the year 422 BC, was a biting satire on the role of the courts in his time. In 1909 Ralph Vaughan Williams was commissioned to write incidental music to accompany a performance of the play at Trinity College, Cambridge.

The *Wasps* of the play's title, hinted at by the buzzing sound played by the strings early in the overture, is a reference to the jurors in ancient Greece who were essentially volunteers attracted by the small stipend that was paid to listen to cases. A hearing would typically involve, incredible as it may seem, as many as 500 or more jurors who were left unfettered by the admonishments of a judge or by the strict rules of evidence and procedure that we see today. One can only imagine how noisy and unruly court hearings must have been. Aristophanes saw these jurors as a venomous bunch easily manipulated by the leading political figure of the day, Cleon, who may have encouraged the use of litigation to fend off his enemies.

The music Vaughan Williams wrote to accompany the play was one of his first major symphonic works and originally ran for some two hours. While the overture is often played on its own the composer extracted a suite of five pieces that encompass the entire play. Already in his mid-thirties the composer had the previous year spent three months studying orchestration with Maurice Ravel. While he clearly learnt much from the French maestro, Vaughan Williams's music remained stubbornly English drawing upon local folk tunes rather than making any concessions to the French or to the ancient Greeks. As one web essayist put it: "The Overture shares with the rest of the Aristophanic Suite a flavor as far removed from ancient Greece as Down Ampney is from Athens." Down Ampney, in case you are wondering, has nothing to do with *Downton Abbey* but was the place of the composer's birth in the rolling hills of the Cotswolds.

Consistent with the comedic aspects of the play, though, the music has a well developed jaunty tongue-in-cheek quality. In one scene of the play a dog dressed to look like Cleon is brought out to accuse another dog of stealing a Sicilian cheese - an allegorical reference perhaps to the real Cleon, who had set himself up as "watchdog" of Athens and had prosecuted a member of the Sicilian military for theft. Exemplifying Aristophanes' sarcasm, in the play witnesses for the defense include a bowl, a pestle, a cheese-grater, a brazier and a pot, who unable to speak up have to have their testimony "interpreted". It's almost sounds like the stuff of *Monty Python* and to be sure through the mind of Vaughan Williams it gets re-imagined with more than a whiff of a quintessentially British sense of humor.

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Tchaikovsky: *Romeo & Juliet* Fantasy Overture (1880)

It's hard to imagine a composer better suited than Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky to write a work that evokes the romantic passion and strife identified with Shakespeare's tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, surely the most potent symbol in all of literature of young doomed love. The beauty of his famous love theme alone more than rose to the challenge and yet the great Russian composer struggled with the work for over a decade rewriting it several times.

The idea of composing a work based on *Romeo and Juliet* was hardly new - Berlioz had used the theme for a choral symphony some thirty years earlier while Bellini and Gounod had also written complete operas. But on the advice of the Russian conductor and composer, Mily Balikirev, Tchaikovsky took up the Shakespearian theme for a symphonic poem. Even then, the composer suffered a bad case of writer's block and it was only after much encouragement and many suggestions on the work's structure that Tchaikovsky was able to produce the first draft in 1869. Its first performance fizzled and Balikirev suggested a number of improvements. Tchaikovsky revised the work and a second version was performed two years later but again Balikirev thought the composer could do better. In 1880 Tchaikovsky revised it yet again producing the third and final version - the masterpiece everyone hears today.

The overture fantasy does not adhere to the strict narrative flow of the play but instead encompasses three aspects. The solemn church-like introduction symbolizes Friar Laurence, the priest who before secretly marrying Romeo and Juliet delivers a soliloquy with a premonition of the tragedy to come. This is followed by the core of the work symbolizing the two feuding families, the Montagues and Capulets, intertwined with the passionate romance of the two star crossed lovers. Eventually through cruel misfortune and bad timing, Romeo and Juliet each commit suicide which leads us into an epilogue that in spite of its funereal beginning finishes on a rousing note of optimism as the Montagues and Capulets are finally reconciled. Overarching the whole work is the burning love theme which appears multiple times in different guises, the composer's acknowledgement perhaps that, as the Roman poet Virgil once said, love conquers all.

Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D minor Op. 47 (1905)

The history of art, literature, and music is littered with masterpieces that were initially poorly received. Besides Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, outstanding examples include Emily Brontë's emotionally tumultuous novel *Wuthering Heights*, Rembrandt's magnificent yet defiantly disfigured painting *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis*, and Stravinsky's revolutionary ballet *The Rite of Spring*. Joining the distinguished line up of flops was Jean Sibelius's violin concerto, which totally bombed at its first performance. It did not help

that the soloist was ill-prepared for one of the most technically difficult of all violin concertos. But Sibelius also felt that there were aspects of the concerto that did not quite work. Often his own fiercest critic, he chose to edit and rewrite certain portions of the concerto - the only concerto, sadly, he ever wrote.

The essential ingredients of the revised concerto, the only version ever normally played (although there is a very interesting recording by Leonidas Kavakos of the original version), were all present in the original. By cutting out additional soloistic circumlocutions Sibelius certainly created a work that was more concise but even then it was not until Jascha Heifetz dusted off the concerto in the 1930s to make the first recording that it began to get the attention it deserved.

In his youth Sibelius had a passionate desire to become a violin virtuoso himself but gave up when he decided he had started training too late. It is no wonder then that the solo part in the concerto is fiendishly difficult. Yet the technical demands are never there for mere display but serve a highly integrated musical purpose.

The iconic opening of the concerto, like Mendelssohn's famous E minor violin concerto, begins with a hushed slow tremolando figure in the strings soon subjugated by the entrance of a sonorous theme articulated by the solo violin. Despite the similarity of scoring, though, the iciness of Sibelius's soundscape feels like a million miles from the sunnier world occupied by Mendelssohn. Finnish cool, notwithstanding, the mood remains melodic albeit streaked by long shadows with charged symphonic passages interrupted by an extended cadenza fully scored for the violin. The second slow movement, which opens with a brief figure announced by two clarinets, offers the solo violin an opportunity to wander into warmer romantic terrain but this soon leads into a turbulent passionate section that gives the sojourn considerable bite, rendering the climax played in high octaves on the solo violin close to the movement's conclusion all the more fulfilling.

The opening of the last movement has a thrilling warlike quality with percussion and lower strings announcing what sounds like the start of a battle. What follows are some extraordinary pyrotechnics on the solo violin cutting its way through the wilderness ahead like some demonically supercharged knight flashing and slashing sword and axe against anything in the warrior's path. The full orchestra then returns with a sombre waltz-like theme that is as far removed from Johann Strauss and the ballrooms of Vienna as one can imagine - perhaps one reason why the movement was once described as a "polonaise for polar bears". The music continues its heroic charge until the coda where we hear the soloist run up scales in D major only to descend again in the minor. Reinforced by dark energy in the orchestra, it's a turning point whose ambiguity keeps the listener in suspense right up until the last exhilarating few measures when the solo violin ascends to the heavens with a figure that lands on a high D.



*Violin by Antonio Stradivari made
circa 1732 - 1734*

The 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, an instrument by Antonio Stradivari, and twin of the famous Lord Wilmotte Strad which belonged to Yehudi Menuhin.

This currently unnamed Strad is for sale and is being offered for a fraction of the \$8.9 million price tag on its twin, the Lord Wilmotte Strad. We believe it is an excellent investment for any individual or group with the means to acquire it. The violin can then be loaned to Stephen or another artist at the owner's wish. The new owner can also name the violin if they wish. As the violin is used for concerts and recordings by great and aspiring artists we believe it has great potential in time to "catch up" to its famous twin, the Lord Wilmotte. A significant portion of the proceeds of sale will be donated to support the Silicon Valley Symphony.

Violin notes by Robert Maltz



Stephen Waarts, age 15, started his violin studies in the Bay Area, California at age 5 and piano studies at age 8. After graduating from both high school and the San Francisco Conservatory Preparatory at age 14, he is currently pursuing a bachelor of music at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in

Philadelphia. Since age 11, Stephen has been performing with numerous professional and community orchestras all over the world, playing a large repertoire including many rarely performed violin concertos. Winner of numerous international violin competitions, including the Menuhin Competition, the Spohr Competition, and recently the Sarasate Competition, Stephen has received acclaim in several continents for his soulful, poetic, and truly virtuosic playing. For his prize winning performances the UK's Daily Telegraph commented "...something special,... not just the mechanical wonder, but a soul."

Stephen has performed in Germany, Spain, Norway, Russia and in the US he has appeared at New York's Carnegie Hall, in San Francisco and Los Angeles, as well as at hundreds of concerts in the Bay Area. He has played, often multiple times, over 20 concertos, with the Staatskapelle Weimar Orchestra, Navarra Symphony, Kostroma Symphony, San Francisco Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, Fremont Symphony, Symphony Parnassus, Redwood Symphony, Silicon Valley Symphony, Saratoga Symphony, and a multitude of others.

At the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, Stephen studies violin with celebrated violinist and master teacher Aaron Rosand and he also continues there his studies in piano and composition. Since [April 2005](#) Stephen has been a student at the studio of world-renowned Bay Area violin teacher Li Lin, with whom he continues his close collaboration. Concurrently, since 2009, Stephen has studied also with Alexander Barantschik, Concertmaster of San Francisco Symphony, and with Baroque violinist Elizabeth Blumenstock, and since 2010 he is also a student at the Perlman Music Program, headed by Itzhak Perlman.

Stephen is also an avid mathematician (having won many national math awards) and a visual artist. In the rest of his free time Stephen enjoys reading, table tennis, swimming, card games, and playing with his friends, including his younger sister and twin brother. Find more about Stephen at www.stephenwaarts.com.



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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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* denotes principal player

The Silicon Valley Symphony thanks our sponsors: Bay Area Music Foundation and Performing Arts Alliance at Foothill College.

Special thanks to Julian Brown for program notes and production, Ron Bobb for stage management, Ranjith Jim Box for photography, and Peter Prier Violins and Robert Maltz Violins for the loan of the Stradivarius. Thanks to all of our helpers, ushers, and advertisers. Tickets, website, and recording by BACH to Music.

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