



Shostakovich 5
October 2 & 3, 2026

PROGRAM NOTES

PUZZLE BOX

Nicholas Bentz

Some of my earliest memories are of intricate boxes. My father, a furniture maker, often restores antique pieces, and I remember being fascinated by wardrobes and desks that had secret drawers and spaces. These are often only accessible by putting one's hands in the right spot with the right pressure, a type of haptic code. In writing *Puzzle Box*, I wanted to create a work that pays homage to these beautifully compact pieces, where one has to explore around an object and test it in various ways until a hidden passageway opens. *Puzzle Box* was written for the Cabrillo Festival as part of the 2024 Conductors /Composers Workshop and is dedicated to my father.

--Nicholas Bentz

POÉME, OP. 25

Ernst Chausson

Ernest Chausson wrote *Poème* for his friend, renowned violinist and composer Eugene Ysaye in 1896.

Chausson was inspired by a short story by Russian writer Ivan Turgenev, "The Song of Triumphant Love." It is a mystical tale of a violin and two young men who fall in love with the same woman. The structure and inspiration are both somewhat abstract, filled with brooding secrets and soaring ethereal melodies. It can be heard with the violin as storyteller, guiding you through a complex love story with a hint of magic.

A sinister opening rumbles from the orchestra, coaxing the storyteller to emerge, a haunting chant like opening begins the tale. The second entrance is stronger, yet still alone; twisted fingers and dissonance, sighing and building to something more powerful, before the orchestra and violin are finally joined together.

Next a fluttering and swirling of leaves seems to transport us to a dreamlike section, perhaps remembering bittersweet memories, before building to something more decisive and determined.

At the center of the story is a storm or perhaps a spell, starting playfully before becoming uncontrolled and wild. The music swirls and spirals building until a release is finally reached as both the orchestra and violin soar together in unison.

As the storm subsides, it is followed by a lament that is beautiful, hopeful and haunting. The now familiar melody begins to expand once more, but this time powerful and triumphant.

Now at last the tale has come to an end, returning to the mystery of the opening, fluttering and fading back into the mist from which it emerged.

--Amy Chryst

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MAJOR, OP. 35

Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Born in Vienna at the close of the 19th Century, Erich Wolfgang Korngold was hailed as Austria's greatest child prodigy since Mozart. Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler heard him play piano and both declared to his father that he need not enroll in conservatory, as he was already too advanced for anything that would be taught there. Throughout the 1920s, he toured Europe, conducting his own operas and concert pieces. With the rise of the Nazi party in the 1930s, however, he and his family fled Austria to Hollywood, where Korngold would spend much of the rest of his career writing film music – his lush, late romantic style influencing what would become the golden age of MGM films. Perhaps his most famous film, *Kings Row*, starring future president Ronald Reagan, had its opening theme quoted nearly verbatim by the opening of *Star Wars*.

After the Second World War, Korngold wished to return to Europe and resume his career there from before he left, but sadly, his peers had moved on from musical Romanticism and he was regarded no longer as a pioneering Wunderkind, but rather as a relic of the past. So, he remained in America for the rest of his life, spending his last decade on concert music. At the prodding of violinist Bronislaw Huberman, Korngold wrote the Violin Concerto in 1945, and dedicated it to Alma Mahler, Gustav Mahler's widow, with whom he'd been close as a child. The concerto uses themes from several of his films, including *Another Dawn* and *Juarez* in the first movement, *Anthony Adverse* in the second, and *The Prince and the Pauper* in the finale. It was premiered by violinist Jascha Heifetz in 1947, at which point it immediately became one of Korngold's most popular concert pieces and a staple in the violin canon.

--Joseph Morag