

A close-up, low-angle photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a dark shirt, playing a cello. He is looking down at the instrument with intense focus. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the cello's wood and the man's features. The background is a dark, solid color.

# Narek Hakhnazaryan

"Mr. Hakhnazaryan's intense focus and expressive artistry never flagged."

— *The New York Times*



**NAREK HAKHNAZARYAN, CELLO**  
**2017-2018 Season Full Biography**

Since winning the Cello First Prize and Gold Medal at the XIV International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2011 at the age of 22, Narek Hakhnazaryan has performed with major orchestras across the globe and has established himself internationally as one of the finest cellists of his generation. Hakhnazaryan has earned critical acclaim worldwide, with *The Strad* describing him as “dazzlingly brilliant” and the *San Francisco Chronicle* hailing his performing as “nothing short of magnificent”. In 2014 he was named a BBC New Generation Artist and in August 2016 he made his highly distinguished and critically acclaimed BBC Proms debut.

In the 2017-2018 season, Hakhnazaryan tours North America with more than a dozen performances of diverse orchestral and recital repertoire. Highlights include debuts with the St. Louis Symphony conducted by Hannu Lintu and with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra led by Marin Alsop, performing Tchaikovsky’s *Variations on a Rococo Theme* with both orchestras. He plays the Shostakovich Cello Concerto with the Erie Philharmonic conducted by Daniel Meyer and tours with the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra led by Pavel Kogan with performances of the Schumann Cello Concerto at Michigan State University’s Wharton Center, University of Connecticut’s Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts, SUNY Purchase, and University of Florida Performing Arts. Additional highlights include a live radio broadcast at the Dame Myra Hess Concert Series in Chicago. Hakhnazaryan also gives several recitals with pianist Noreen Polera, performing lush, vibrant programs of Albeniz, Brahms, Cassado, Ligeti, Massenet, Schedrin, and Tsintsadze among others with San Francisco Performances, the Royal Conservatory in Toronto, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and the Peoples’ Symphony Concerts series in New York. Internationally, Hakhnazaryan gives a recital at the Vienna Konzerthaus with Pavel Kolesnikov, and recitals throughout Germany and in London’s esteemed Wigmore Hall with pianist Oxana Shevchenko. He makes his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Norway’s Stavanger Symphony, and at the Dresden Music Festival, and he returns to Ireland’s RTE National Symphony Orchestra. The cellist is Artist-in-Residence with the Malta Philharmonic, and he tours the UK, China, and Hong Kong with the Z.E.N. Piano Trio with colleagues Zhou Zhang and Esther Yoo.

Hakhnazaryan’s previous season included debuts with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Utah Symphony, Berlin Konzerthaus, Netherlands Philharmonic, Teatro Dell’Opera (Rome), Munich Chamber, and Essen Philharmonic orchestras, with returns to the Kansas City and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras, BBC Philharmonic, Orchestre della

Toscana, and to the Warsaw Easter Festival. He has performed concertos with the Detroit, Chicago, Seattle, Milwaukee, Toronto, London, Sydney, and NHK Symphony Orchestras, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Aspen Music Festival Orchestra, the Rotterdam, Czech, and Seoul Philharmonics, the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, and l'Orchestre de Paris, among others, and he has appeared with acclaimed conductors such as Gergiev, Guerrero, Hrůša, Koopman, Neemi Järvi, Pletnev, Slatkin, Sokhiev, Robertson, and Bělohlávek. In 2015 he made a hugely successful debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Lionel Bringuier at the Hollywood Bowl and toured Spain with the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne and Jukka-Pekka Saraste, and in Summer 2017 he toured Southeast Asia with concerts in Taipei, Seoul, Kyoto, and Tokyo, which included a performance of the six Bach Cello Suites.

An eager chamber musician and recitalist, Hakhnazaryan has performed in New York's Carnegie Hall, Boston's Jordan Hall at New England Conservatory, Chicago's Harris Theatre, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Salle Pleyel Paris, Wigmore Hall, Berlin Konzerthaus, Vienna Konzerthaus, Oji Hall Tokyo, Shanghai Concert Hall, and esteemed festivals such as Ravinia, Aspen, Piatigorsky, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Kissinger Sommer, Robeco Summer concerts, Beethovenfest Bonn, Mikkeli, Pau Casals, Lucerne, and Verbier, amongst many others.

Hakhnazaryan has received scholarships from the Rostropovich Foundation and the Russian Performing Arts Fund, and awards including First Prize in the 2006 Aram Khachaturian International Competition in Armenia and First Place in the 2006 Johansen International Competition for Young String Players. As First Prize winner in the 2008 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, Hakhnazaryan made his debuts at Carnegie's Zankel Hall and in Washington, DC.

Narek Hakhnazaryan was born in Yerevan, Armenia, into a family of musicians: his father is a violinist and his mother a pianist. Mentored by the late Rostropovich, Hakhnazaryan received an Artist Diploma from the New England Conservatory of Music in 2011 where he studied with Lawrence Lesser. Prior to this he studied at the Moscow Conservatory with Alexey Seleznyov and at the Sayat-Nova School of Music in Yerevan with Zareh Sarkisyan. Hakhnazaryan plays the 1707 Joseph Guarneri cello and F.X. Tourte and Benoit Rolland bows.

**DECEMBER 2017 - AT THE REQUEST OF THE ARTIST, PLEASE DO NOT ALTER  
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## Narek Hakhnazaryan

### Critical Acclaim



"Mr. Hakhnazaryan's intense focus and expressive artistry never flagged."  
*The New York Times*

"Hakhnazaryan had what few other cellists can boast: the power to stand up to such a wall of dark, overpowering Estonian sound... Even his grandly shaped lyrical phrases had the quality of mowing down anything in his way. His tone is as gorgeously sure as it is huge. Hakhnazaryan is clearly on his way to a big career."

*Los Angeles Times*

"Hakhnazaryan's performance was nothing short of magnificent... He's an artist to watch out for."

*San Francisco Chronicle*

"His tone was rich, his control immaculate and his performance stunning."  
*Kansas City Star*

"Hakhnazaryan is the real deal."  
*Baltimore Sun*

"Hakhnazaryan launched into Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme with a tone whose beauty shone all the more brightly for its restraint. Every nuance of this subtle work was lovingly observed, and when he did let rip it was with blazing virtuosity."  
*The Independent*

"When Narek Hakhnazaryan becomes a familiar name - and it will - people will think back to his Hong Kong debut recital, in which the young Armenian-born cellist enchanted the audience with his impeccable technique and luminous tone."

*South China Morning Post*

"This cellist is without a doubt a major presence on the international stage."

*The Strad*

"The cellist combined elegance and simplicity with a rare and enticing kind of vulnerability... An enthralling performance."

*Thoroughly Good*

"Playing with complete technical command and musical freedom, Hakhnazaryan gave an extraordinarily communicative performance."

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

"As soon as he put bow to string the beauty of the sound was striking - rich, mellow and highly expressive. Variations on a Rococo Theme allowed him to display elegance and virtuosity, both qualities that he has in abundance."

*The Advertiser*





October 27, 2017

## BSO shines with Strauss; cellist makes notable debut

By Tim Smith

Last weekend, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra memorably performed sumptuous music of Richard Strauss with guest conductor Jun Markl. It's doing so again this weekend with music director Marin Alsop.

There's another connective thread between the two programs — impressive cello playing.

It came last weekend from the BSO's principal cellist Dariusz Skoraczewski, tackling the hefty solo part in Strauss' practically cinematic masterwork "Don Quixote." This time, it's from guest artist Narek Hakhnazaryan, making his BSO debut in a gem by Tchaikovsky, "Variations on a Rococo Theme."

The orchestra began Friday night at Meyerhoff Symphony Hall sounding less polished than the week before. Still, Mendelssohn's Overture to "A Midsummer Night's Dream" flowed by pleasantly.

Things really got going after that with the Tchaikovsky piece. Alsop ensured a tight mesh between the ensemble and Hakhnazaryan, drawing sensitive playing to complement the soloist's refined artistry.

The 29-year-old, Armenian-born Hakhnazaryan is the real deal.

He demonstrated the prowess you'd expect from an International Tchaikovsky Competition gold medalist (that was in 2011). His articulation was clear even in the score's wildest dashing and darting. And, a brief slip aside, he

maintained tonal purity in the many soft, high notes that give so much character to the work.

But the more important distinction was the cellist's superb sense of style. He caught the sweetness in what is basically Tchaikovsky's homage to the spirit of Mozart, but also the melancholy strain woven into the music. Those darkly poetic moments were phrased exquisitely.

Responding to a demonstrative reception, Hakhnazaryan offered a mesmerizing encore that has become a specialty of his — "Lamentatio," a 1998 work by Italian cellist and composer Giovanni Sollima.

It calls on the performer to vocalize wordlessly over the cello's solemn drone several times; contrasting episodes, passionate and almost percussive, add to the tension. Hakhnazaryan made every note, sung and played, communicate on a deep, personal level.

On the second half of the program, Alsop and the BSO clicked beautifully.

Debussy's "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" worked its evocative magic. Alsop's spacious sculpting allowed the musicians to luxuriate in the sonic haze. Emily Skala delivered the flute solo with a subtle radiance; her colleagues in the woodwind section likewise excelled. The strings sounded downright sensual.

The Strauss feast came in the form of the Suite from "Der Rosenkavalier," the



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composer's 1911 opera about love — young and old, foolish and wise. Strauss didn't prepare this suite; an uncredited colleague prepared it. All the wonderful highlights from the opera are included, but the arrangement's seams show. And, most unfortunately, it closes with a waltz from the score and a tacky coda, rather than the opera's original and perfect orchestral ending.

That said, Alsop conducted masterfully, bringing out the lush lyricism with great flair (though I sure would have loved a slower tempo for the beyond-sublime Trio) and giving the waltzes lots of nuance. The BSO seemed to have a blast. Pristine technique was matched by such electric phrasing that I'd welcome more Strauss every week.



# Narek Hakhnazaryan



March 12, 2017

## **Soul Music: Narek Hakhnazaryan “unwraps” Russian and Armenian cello repertoire at King's Place**

By Mark Pullinger

Many ascribe the cello's popularity to it sounding the closest instrument to the human voice, encompassing the range from *basso profondo* to soaring soprano. It's also an instrument one has to practically embrace in order to play. No wonder people love it. And no wonder King's Place year-long “Cello Unwrapped” series is proving such a success, with inventive programming and starry names to draw audiences. Narek Hakhnazaryan may be a less starry name for now – and a tricky one to pronounce – but on the basis of this recital he is destined to join the cellists' firmament.

His programme with Kazakhstani pianist Oxana Shevchenko was titled “Russian Soul”, though “Armenian Soul” would have been just as apt, with a trio of works in the first half drawn from Hakhnazaryan's homeland. Framing the recital, the Russian part paid tribute to the great cellist Anatoly Brandukov who, as a child, saw Berlioz conducting Beethoven, yet lived to witness the emergence of Shostakovich and Prokofiev in the 1920s. Brandukov studied with Tchaikovsky, who composed his *Pezzo capriccioso* for him, as well as arranging his piano *Nocturne*. Sergei Rachmaninov's Cello Sonata was dedicated to Brandukov, cellist and composer giving the première in December 1901.

Hakhnazaryan seems a quiet, modest young man. From the first bars of Tchaikovsky's *Nocturne*, he immediately struck a calm, composed manner. Eyes closed most of the time and leaning right over his cello, he wasn't anxious to force his sound, relying instead on restraint and a beautiful cantabile line to draw us in. Vibrato teased out a myriad of colour and even in the most *furioso* section of the *Pezzo capriccioso*, his bowing was incredibly deft and light. In the Armenian section, Hakhnazaryan caressed in the familiar Lullaby from Khachaturian's ballet *Gayane*. Unfamiliar fare came via Alexander Arutiunian's *Impromptu*, where vigorous spiccato and steely pizzicatos made up for a slightly scrambled start, and Adam Khudoyan's emotional sonata for solo cello. The latter premiered in 1961 and commemorates, in its mournful second subject, the 1.5 million Armenians killed by Turkish forces between 1915 and 1923. Staying solo, Hakhnazaryan then pulled out his party piece to conclude the first half – Italian composer Giovanni Sollima's *Lamentatio*, where the cellist has to sing as well as play. Intoning in a high baritone, like a cantor, he lulled us in before launching a dazzling display of cello pyrotechnics: skating glissandos and furious bowing, causing loose bow-hairs to fly as if Hakhnazaryan was casting a fishing rod.



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Striking in a scarlet dress, Oxana Shevchenko played just as important a role in the recital's success. Crouching low at the keyboard, she drew variegated tone, especially in the Khachaturian, where the chromatic, sinuous introduction adds the Armenian local colour. Shevchenko shaped Rachmaninov's long phrases tenderly in the sonata, creating the atmosphere of wistful melancholy beautifully at the start of the *Andante* third movement, closing it with a trickling cascade. "Cello Unwrapped" title aside, it would have

been wonderful if she'd been given a solo number in the programme.

The Rachmaninov was superbly played, from its musing, questioning opening, through its *Allegro scherzando*, scuttling like a malevolent gnome, to the passionate finale, where Hakhnazaryan drew muscular tone and walnut darkness from his 1707 Guarneri. The encore was easy to predict, but perfect – Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* drawing further comparisons to the human voice. And why not? This young Armenian makes the cello sing.



# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## The★Star

THE KANSAS CITY STAR

February 12, 2017

### Exuberant Jun Märkl leads KC Symphony in dazzling program

By Ruth Crafer



Color, contrast and buoyant energy marked Jun Märkl's return to the Kansas City Symphony as guest conductor. He and cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan dazzled the audience at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday with an expansive, multifaceted program of nationalistic flavor.

Märkl excels in German and French repertoire, and the program of Anton Webern, Claude Debussy, Camille Saint-Saëns and Felix Mendelssohn was a mix

of 20th century invention and 19th century Romanticism.

Music is used both deliberately and subtly to influence an audience's emotional state, often evoking nationalistic styles defined through distinctive timbres, modes and rhythms to provoke or to cheer. In this concert, both Debussy and Mendelssohn quoted the Lutheran chorale "Ein Feste Burg" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God") but with the intent to convey very different connotations to their contemporary audiences.

Märkl was eager, nearly leaping onto the podium to lead Webern's Passacaglia Op. 1. The subtleties of the pizzicato opening statement were lost in the shuffling of latecomers, unfortunately, though the spare grounding of the piece set up a surge of prismatic timbres from the winds and muted brass. The primary motif was thrown round somewhat chaotically between principal voices, underscored by tremolo and colliding sforzandi.

Debussy's "En blanc et noir," originally written for two pianos, was orchestrated by Robin Holloway. His treatment drew out the distinct attitudes of the three movements, as well as echoing the tone colors of Debussy's impressionist palette: shimmering, shifting, exotic. Written during World War I, this was one of his last works and indicates a stoic rage against Germany's infringement on France.



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The dancing cascades of the first movement opened with ringing exuberance. The solemn start of the second movement, Lent et somber (dedicated to Lt. Jacques Charlot, who died in action), was harshly interrupted, continuing with lonesome solo voices. The horns perpetrated a threatening statement from “Ein Feste Burg” against a clamorous fabric of martial snippets. Märkl pushed the ensemble all the way through the vivacious Scherzando for a rousing performance.

Hakhnazaryan was impassioned in the Gallic lyricism of Saint-Saëns’ Cello Concerto No.1, and he seemed to smile slightly during the rapid virtuosic moments. His tone was rich, his control immaculate and his performance stunning. Märkl kept the reduced orchestra in check, leaning to indicate attention, often animated but never with affected gesture.

Hakhnazaryan’s encore, on Giovanni

Sollima’s “Lamentatio,” was an absolutely captivating five minutes, with wordless singing over modal droning chords that led into a feverish display of technique as punk as anything, dissolving into harmonic smears.

Mendelssohn’s compelling Symphony No. 5 savored the expressive tendencies of the era. A sense of majesty and vast, yet subtle, gradations in dynamics marked this performance, as the strings achieved an incredibly full and lovely quiet. At turns terrifying, lighthearted or pensive, it was the finale that triumphed, from the flute’s introduction of the chorale theme and the imaginative iterations, through to the ensemble’s massive statement.

Enthusiastic applause and whistling met the concert’s conclusion, the audience and orchestra expressing appreciation for Märkl’s leadership. Saturday was, incidentally, his birthday. Alles Gute zum Geburtstag, Maestro.



# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## The Salt Lake Tribune

February 3, 2017

### Young cellist rocks Abravanel

By Catherine Reese Newton

Each season, the Utah Symphony honors one young soloist or conductor with the Evelyn Rosenblatt Young Artist Award, underwritten by a fund honoring the late Utah arts philanthropist. It might be easy to miss the discreet mention in the concert program, but this award has turned up some outstanding musicians in the early stages of their careers. Twentysomething Armenian cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan is the latest of these, bowling over the Abravanel Hall crowd on Friday with his thrilling performance of Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1.

The piece is one of the most athletically demanding concertos in the repertoire, and Hakhnazaryan tackled it with fearsome technique. He drew impressive volume from his 1707 Guarnerius, formerly owned by cello titan Janos Starker, yet the quietest passages were no less intense. A gripping duel with Utah Symphony hornist Edmund Rollett and an incisive dialogue with clarinetist Erin Svoboda added interest. Hakhnazaryan put on a textbook demonstration of left-hand pizzicato and other technical feats in the spellbinding cadenza. To the amazement of the crowd, the cellist capped this marathon with the equally dazzling "Lamentatio" by Giovanni Sollima, spiced up with vocalizations and percussive techniques.

Conductor Thierry Fischer bookended the evening with Brahms: "Academic Festival Overture" and Symphony No. 2, whose friendly melodies piled one on top of another in a big, comforting blanket of sound.



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May 22, 2017

## NZSO, Pathetique - Tchaikovsky & Dvorak

By John Button

Those who have the two Naxos recordings with the NZSO conducted by the young Singaporean conductor Darrell Ang would have known what to expect from this concert.

This young prize-winner (Besancon International) proved in Meyerbeer and the Grammy-nominated disc of music by Zhou Long and Chen Yi that he was a very precise, direct, conductor who could draw a very big sound from his orchestra. And that is exactly what we got in this concert.

In the fabled Dvorak *Cello Concerto*, he supported the young Armenian cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan with a crisp, powerful approach. The brass were very direct, yet all of Dvorak's delicious woodwind writing was brought to the fore. And the young cellist was superb; always completely unruffled and possessed of a poetic instinct that made

the slow movement especially memorable.

The emotionally laden Sixth Symphony *Pathetique* by Tchaikovsky was similarly direct. But it was also completely sympathetic and, although other performances may have been more personal, Ang's directness really got to the heart of things. The first movement development section exploded into life with brass again very exciting, and the March caught the faux high spirits to perfection, but it was the dark resignation of the Finale that set the seal on this very fine performance.

Earlier, the concert opened with *Embiosis* by David Grahame Taylor, a young New Zealander studying in San Francisco and after setting quite a impressive mood with dark glissandos, it stopped – after only a brief five minutes or so.





# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## The New York Times

October 24, 2008

### A Prize-Winning Cellist Opens Young Artists Series

By Steve Smith

Narek Hakhnazaryan, an Armenian cellist who turned 20 on Thursday, has already won enough prizes to fill two paragraphs in his professional biography. Among the latest entries is first prize in this year's Young Concert Artists International Auditions. On Tuesday Mr. Hakhnazaryan reaped a major benefit of the award: a Zankel Hall recital opening Young Concert Artists' 48th season.

Mr. Hakhnazaryan, tall and wiry, projected intensity from the moment he took the stage. But rather than opening with fireworks, he started with Schumann's genial "Fantasiestücke." Mr. Hakhnazaryan's tone was lean but warm and supple, animating Schumann's lyrical phrases with grace. Noreen Polera, a pianist, was an alert, responsive partner.

Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 3 (Op. 69) cast Mr. Hakhnazaryan and Ms. Polera as equals in a balancing act pitched between Classical elegance and Romantic expressiveness. They negotiated the sonata's capricious moods and quirky rhythms with compelling unanimity at a slightly subdued overall dynamic that made bold accents leap off the page.

Mr. Hakhnazaryan demonstrated his considerable technical prowess in the unaccompanied Sonata No. 1 by Adam

Khudoyan, an Armenian composer. The work, from 1961, packed folkish melodies, tricky combinations of simultaneous bowing and plucking, a passage in ghostly harmonics and more into a dense continuous span. Abrupt transitions made the piece seem restless and occasionally aimless, but Mr. Hakhnazaryan's commitment was persuasive.

In a commanding account of Shostakovich's Cello Sonata in D minor, the martial rhythms that interrupt the opening movement's melodic outpouring felt especially charged and brittle. Mr. Hakhnazaryan brought a daredevil verve to the intricate Scherzo and opened the stark Largo with an eerie, vibrato-free tone.

A gorgeous rendition of Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" offered gentle relief, and the program ended with Paganini's flamboyant Variations on One String on a Theme by Rossini, transcribed from the original violin version.

A hearty response from the audience brought two encores: a gorgeous account of the Andante from Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata and a rollicking romp through "Expromt," by the Armenian composer Alexander Arutiunian. To the very end, Mr. Hakhnazaryan's intense focus and expressive artistry never flagged.



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# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## San Francisco Chronicle

August 6, 2014

### Narek Hakhnazaryan a solo standout

By Joshua Kosman



Chamber music is all about community and collaboration, so you don't necessarily go to a chamber music festival expecting to run across a solo artist of dazzling gifts and originality. But there he was during Tuesday's Music@Menlo concert: Narek Hakhnazaryan, a young Armenian cellist whose performance of Ligeti's Cello Sonata was the evening's thrilling highlight.

Hakhnazaryan, 26, has a respectable resume, including a 2011 win at the Tchaikovsky Competition and solo appearances with a few top-level orchestras. But none of that was enough to prepare a listener for the richness and beauty of his string tone, or the rhythmic and emotional clarity that he brought (playing from memory) to this

nine-minute work from Ligeti's early years.

Written in two movements, the piece is more accessible and emotionally transparent than many of Ligeti's later, more ambitious modernist works, but it retains his trademark qualities of formal clarity and subversive wit. The first movement is a rhapsodic treatment of a melody rooted in Hungarian folk strains, with interlocking dialogue reminiscent of Bach; the second is a fiery burst of nonstop energy.

Hakhnazaryan's performance was nothing short of magnificent. He shaped the first movement in particular with exquisite tenderness, bringing out both the delicacy of the melody and the close-knit structure of the counterpoint, and dispatched the second movement



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precisely but with an exhilarating sense of rhythmic freedom. He's an artist to watch out for.

The rest of the program at the Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton, devoted to a range of Hungarian composers, stood in Hakhnazaryan's shadow but still included plenty of fine music making. Erno Dohnányi's Piano Quintet No. 1, written in 1895 in almost slavish imitation of Brahms, made a splendid finale, in a vigorous performance by violinists Alexander Sitkovetsky and Nicolas Dautricourt,

violist Paul Neubauer, cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han.

A more original creation, Kodály's 1920 Serenade for Two Violins and Viola, got an appealing and focused rendition by Sitkovetsky, Neubauer and violinist Benjamin Beilman. Beilman and pianist Gloria Chien began the evening with Liszt's dullish "Grand Duo Concertante," and Sitkovetsky collaborated with violinist Jorja Fleezanis for a wonderfully kaleidoscopic selection of 12 of Bartók's Duos for Two Violins.



# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## Los Angeles Times

July 10, 2014

### **Bringuier does Shakespeare; a young cellist impresses**

By Richard S. Ginell

In his second appearance with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl this week, Lionel Bringuier showed up Thursday night with a concept weighted on both ends of the evening by Prokofiev's and Tchaikovsky's impressions of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet."

Bringuier could have made it an all-R&J evening by programming, say, excerpts from Berlioz's "Romeo and Juliet" or even Bernstein's "West Side Story" dances, but that wouldn't have left room for a guest soloist. And this guest soloist was worth making room for.

His name is Narek Hakhnazaryan, a 26-year-old cellist from Armenia who has all the equipment it takes to be a star. Hakhnazaryan may not be the easiest name to pronounce, but neither was that of his mentor, Mstislav Rostropovich, and that didn't stop him.

Just this April in Glendale, Hakhnazaryan made a formidable showing with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra in Saint-Saens's Concerto No. 1 – and if anything he was even more impressive at the Bowl in Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme."

Over the loudspeakers came a big, fluid, elegant tone quality, always in tune, and the balance between the cello and orchestra was just right. He brought dramatic suspense to the line, tugging on it but never stretching it too far. And, written all over his face and projected on the Bowl's giant video monitors, he conveyed humor and the

sheer joy of being in command of his instrument.

As in Glendale, Hakhnazaryan's Armenian fans turned up in droves to cheer – and as he did on that occasion, the cellist dedicated a solo encore to this year's 100th anniversary of the 1915 Armenian genocide.

This one was Italian composer-cellist Giovanni Sollima's "Lamentatio," in which droning passages accompanied by Hakhnazaryan's vocalise gave way to furious perpetual-motion whirlwinds, phenomenally and passionately played. Prokofiev arranged three suites from his evening-length "Romeo and Juliet" ballet, but these days conductors often prefer to assemble their own versions of varying lengths.

Bringuier's was a 34-minute survey that began with the jarring, dissonant blasts at the top of "Montagues and Capulets" and concluded with the quiet, haunting strains of Juliet's death at the tail end of the ballet. Bringuier did well here, maintaining a good, insistent rhythm in "Masks," whipping up "Death of Tybalt" with plenty of drive, keeping a firm, unsentimental hand on the big, singing lines elsewhere.

Likewise in Tchaikovsky's "Romeo," Bringuier brought fire and a lyrical bent that moved along without bathos. His command of this orchestra looks even more assured and expressive now than ever, and as the evening unfolded, the Phil's playing grew smoother and more polished without losing any heat.



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# Narek Hakhnazaryan

theguardian

August 22, 2016

## Ulster Orchestra/Payare – reminds us what a valuable cultural asset this orchestra is

By George Hall



For its visit to this year's Proms, the Ulster Orchestra and its chief conductor, Rafael Payare, brought a new work by the English-born, Belfast-based Piers Hellawell, who turns 60 this year. At 20 minutes long, *Wild Flow* consists of five pieces with faster outer sections framing a central slow movement.

Hellawell suggests that rather than developing organically, the result “offers a zigzag progression of mood and event”; he’s also distrustful of the notion of music being “about” something beyond its musical meaning. So if the piece itself registered as bitty – a sequence of diverse individual episodes without much sense of a larger picture – that was presumably deliberate, though there were certainly moments of striking character, colour and texture along the way, with sudden bursts of manic activity offset by moments of uneasy stasis – though rarely of calm. This premiere performance felt entirely assured. The big work in the second half was Tchaikovsky’s popular Fifth Symphony. Though the quality of playing was high throughout, reminding listeners what a valuable cultural asset to Northern Ireland this orchestra is, the performance could have done with a stronger sense of the music’s immediate and long-term goals.

The concert’s highlights came in the shape of Armenian cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan’s technically impeccable and distinctively personal account of Haydn’s First Cello Concerto, and with his encore – Lamentatio by the contemporary Sicilian composer Giovanni Sollima – in which his singing along to his own playing was just one remarkable feature of an outstanding display of musicianship.



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# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## Thoroughly Good

August 21, 2016

### **BBC Proms 2016 / 47: Ulster Orchestra plays Haydn's Cello Concerto, Piers Hellawell's Wild Flow, and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5**

By Jon Jacob



The Ulster Orchestra is a plucky bunch. They returned to the Royal Albert Hall this afternoon still no surer as to their financial future but eager, hungry and defiant. This was a high profile gig for them, played to a near capacity audience with a conductor whose passion is reflected in his love of the art form and his gleeful attention to detail. I can think of no other concert this season I've enjoyed more.

This may have something to do with what else has been going on in the world

today. Team GB is celebrating a second place in the Olympics medal table. BBC News headlines with the 'Great Britain beats China'. The world is, thanks to the Olympics, standing up and taking notice of us (at least that's what we think). What the vast majority of people are overlooking is the extent to which that success is as a result of considerable commercial investment.

I don't deny us that. I'm not a completely cold-hearted bastard. Of course I recognise that Olympic achievement comes from hard work, dedication, passion and talent. But don't overlook the fact that it also needs money. And don't forget that, where some Olympic athletes and sportsmen and women are concerned, these people are now celebrities for their skill and accomplishment. We are basking in their achievement. In some cases we have assumed some of that triumph as though it is our own. It isn't at all. All we've done is watched from the other side of the world.

What the Olympics has done this year, I think, is highlight what can be achieved when considerable sums are invested in the development of individuals. At the same time it underlines those areas where investment is lacking. And where it is, in the case of the arts in general, and classical music in particular, the question asked then is, why?

We don't value our orchestras in this country. At least, I don't think we value



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them enough. Orchestra concerts don't carry with them a tangible benefit of the kind that Olympic gold medals do. Funding gets cut. Education policies get down-graded. Generations miss out. I may sound a little whiny and boring, but that is how it is. And the more we celebrate the celebrity of sporting achievement, the more the chasm between the investment necessary to get to that point and that which is sadly lacking in the arts begins to show.

The Ulster Orchestra has had its local detractors. Local government there haven't been terribly forthcoming in their support (although I understand that this might be changing). Their management has gone through some dramatic changes too. The hard work showed in their concert this afternoon at the BBC Proms. The Ulster Orchestra shone in a way I've never seen before.

Piers Hellawell's *Wild Flow* – a BBC commission and world premiere deployed a fragmented compositional style to great effect. This was a hugely entertaining new work that conjured with exciting, inventive and immersive textures, particularly at the beginning of the second movement. *Wild Flow* had clearly been orchestrated with passion. The work was full of drama. I really connected with it.

Cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan's cello concerto by Haydn was a revelation. The cellist combined elegance and simplicity with a rare and enticing kind of vulnerability. The second movement in particular had a touching humility about it. Taut playing in both strings and the solo line helped maintain a breakneck third movement. There was urgency in the final bars. An enthralling performance.

The band's numbers swelled for the symphony. Tchaikovsky 5 may have seemed to some under-powered, but this was a resourceful interpretation, with distinctive twists – notably the horn solo at the beginning of the second movement. Here conductor Rafael Payare seemed to draw something special out of the orchestra. The wind ensemble work at the end of the second movement was stunning.

In the third movement Payare showed great panache; in the fourth he showed his cards. This was an impressive combination of grace and defiance with enviable boldness, making this a distinctive performance.

We need to stop thinking of orchestras and the works they perform as miracles or some kind of historical curiosity. It's about time we recognised that they are the product of hard work and lifelong passions. They sustain communities and livelihoods. They aren't better or worse than sport, they are part of our culture. They deserve more respect than they currently receive. And we might start by all of us making a conscious effort not to take them for granted.

The Ulster Orchestra's 2016 BBC Proms concert was a tangible demonstration as to why that's important. Under Payare they appear transformed. Hearing them play today, I'm reminded about how they – the only professional orchestra in Northern Ireland – deserve more than one Sunday afternoon gig at the Proms every year. They represent an important part of the UK. We should hear from them more.



# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## South China Morning Post

May 11, 2016

### Narek Hakhnazaryan cello recital - impeccable technique, luminous tone

Those who witnessed brilliant young Armenian's enchanting debut will remember where they heard him first - this musician is going places

By Alexis Alrich



When Narek Hakhnazaryan becomes a familiar name - and it will - people will think back to his Hong Kong debut recital, in which the young Armenian-born cellist enchanted the audience with his impeccable technique and luminous tone in an all-French programme.

The first singing note from his cello, in Faure's *Élégie*, seemed to expand the concert hall itself. The lines were long and connected, the music romantic but restrained and elegant.

Hakhnazaryan had eloquent control of his bow arm and shaded the tones with endless variety. The pitch was as pure as ice water no matter how daring the leaps. Pianist Noreen Polera also drew

the audience into the piece's poetic world with her sensitive touch and timing.

Debussy's Cello Sonata demands a different, cooler approach. The delicate motifs sound best in a calm, still voice, and can't take much drama and drive.

In the *Finale* the fast passages were sometimes slighted, speed winning out over clarity and enunciation. Hakhnazaryan's exuberance will no doubt mellow enough over time to make these passages as beautiful as the more intense ones are now. But still, his interpretation was lively and interesting – pizzicato sections sounded wild and grotesque in a good way.



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Camille Saint-Saëns' *Allegro Appassionato* was ideally suited to Hakhnazaryan's personality. He gambolled through the music like a young colt, dazzling with his left-hand agility on the fingerboard as well as his dexterity with the bow.

Fauré's *Papillon*, or Butterfly, resembles Rimsky Korsakov's perpetual-motion *Flight of the Bumblebee*. Although it was almost too fast to hear the pitches, it was still fun.

The performance of Fauré's *Après Un Rêve*, a transcription of a song about a dream where lovers rise together toward a mysterious light, was flawless and breathtaking, the audience stilled as the cello soared up into the soprano range.

In César Franck's Sonata in A Major, originally published for violin and later transcribed for cello, Polera was more

than just support, she was an equal partner in the triumphant realisation of this formidable piece.

The opening movement was tranquil, an echo of the elegiac tone of the Fauré. The second movement, *Allegro*, was fast and brusque with phrases torn off at the ends as if blown away by the wind. The third movement married a great composition with magnificent playing that built to the intensity of stadium rock. The violin version arguably has advantages over the cello at some points in this piece, but here the cello won the day in power and eloquence.

The last movement combined lyricism and intensity in equal balance, with stirring octaves in the piano joining with impassioned cello strokes in a ferociously exciting performance.

# Narek Hakhnazaryan

## The Advertiser

May 1, 2016

### Exceptional cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan soars with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

By Stephen Whittington

Narek Hakhnazaryan may not – not yet – be a household name, but he is certainly a cellist of exceptional ability and, given that he is still quite young, of even greater promise. For his first appearance here he chose Tchaikovsky, beginning with a charming, rather sentimental *Nocturne*. As soon as he put bow to string the beauty of the sound was striking – rich, mellow and highly expressive. *Variations on a Rococo Theme* allowed him to display elegance and virtuosity, both qualities that he has in abundance. He was ably supported by the ASO under Arvo Volmer. Giovanni Sollima's *Lamentatio*, which requires the cellist to sing as well as perform apparently impossible feats on the cello, was a stunning encore to this stellar performance.

The concert had begun with *Tapiola*, a tone poem by Sibelius, in which Arvo

Volmer's depth of experience with this composer was shown to great advantage. This is a more complex work than most of the symphonies, subtly orchestrated and requiring a fine sense of balance and rhythmic flexibility from the conductor. The orchestra responded to Volmer's confident and insightful direction with a rewarding performance. Volmer was still on his Baltic home ground with Carl Nielsen's *Fourth Symphony*, 'The Inextinguishable', a mighty piece which requires a firm grasp of its overall form balanced by great attention to details of balance and phrasing. Once again Volmer's experience showed in a perfectly paced and well-shaped performance that reached a rousing climax with thunderous timpani.



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April 1, 2016

## Milwaukee Symphony explores friendly confines of Pabst Theater

By Elaine Schmidt

The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra has taken up residence in the Pabst Theater for the weekend, showcasing music of Mozart, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky.

The Pabst's stage is significantly smaller than the Uihlein stage, the orchestra's usual venue, as is the hall itself. Although smaller quarters make for a somewhat crowded experience for both audience and orchestra, the space also creates a far more intimate listening and viewing experience.

Playing to those differences, the MSO and guest conductor Ben Gernon opened the evening program with a crisp, colorful interpretation of Mozart's Symphony No. 31.

Nuanced phrasing, constant attention to delicate layering of instrumental timbres, as well as wonderful dynamic contrasts, from very soft to very full, were part of a delightful interpretation that worked extremely well in the old hall.

Gernon and the players moved on to Stravinsky's Symphony in C, mixing energy, sophistication and constant attention to structural and musical detail into a thoroughly involving performance.

Cellist Narek Hakhnazaryan joined the orchestra to open the program's second

half with a completely captivating performance of Tchaikovsky's "Variations on a Rococo Theme."

Playing with complete technical command and musical freedom, Hakhnazaryan gave an extraordinarily communicative performance.

Using an enormous dynamic range and huge palette of sonic colors, he moved from intense, driven passages to light, playful, almost teasing phrases elsewhere. He effectively reached out to his audience in some spots and pulled them in others, winning a standing ovation.

Gernon and the orchestra gave a highly supportive, sensitive performance of the piece's orchestra accompaniment, matching Hakhnazaryan's musical intent at every turn.

With an orchestra pared from the 50 players of the piece's first half to 35 players for the final piece, Gernon and the MSO closed the program with a delightful rendition of Mozart's Symphony No. 29, with lovely musical shapes and artful sonic contrasts.

Despite the sonic warmth of the hall, seating some players under or in front of the proscenium arch and the rest farther upstage, under the stage's acoustic baffles, created occasional imbalances in the ensemble's sound.













