

**Program Notes for Thursday, August 4**  
**Alasdair Neale, Conductor**  
**Jeremy Constant, Violin**  
**Amos Yang, Cello**

Adams	<i>The Chairman Dances</i> , Foxtrot for Orchestra
Brahms	Concerto in A Minor for Violin and Cello, Opus 102 Allegro Andante Vivace non troppo

***The Chairman Dances*, Foxtrot for Orchestra (1985)**  
**John Adams (b. 1947)**

Tonight's performance of *The Chairman Dances* is part of the "How Much Less is More" collaborative minimalism project with the Sun Valley Center for the Arts and the Community Library.

American composer John Adams has been on the forefront of the minimalist movement since the late 1970's. Using varied repetitions of short melodic ideas, Adams' dynamic orchestral music layers rhythms and textures to create driving momentum and at times hypnotic soundscapes. His six operas have garnered wide acclaim and have served to define a new direction in modern stage scoring. His Pulitzer Prize winning choral work *On the Transmigration of Souls* (2002) has proven to be one of the most moving artistic tributes to the victims of September 11, 2001.

Adams wrote *The Chairman Dances* during the initial composition phase of his first opera, *Nixon in China* (1987), adapting the elements of the opera's music for orchestra. The music was designed to depict a particular scenario written by Peter Sellars and Alice Goodman, one that ended up being changed considerably by the time the opera was completed. It is clear from their synopsis that the word "dances" in Adams' title of his orchestral work functions both as a noun and a verb:

Chiang Gh'ing, a.k.a. Madame Mao, has gatecrashed the Presidential Banquet. She is first seen standing where she is most in the way of the waiters. After a few minutes, she brings out a box of paper lanterns and hangs them around the hall, then strips down to a cheongsam, skin-tight from neck to ankle and slit up to the hip. She signals the orchestra to play and begins dancing by herself. Mao is becoming excited. He steps down from his portrait on the wall and they begin to foxtrot together. They are back in Yenan, dancing to the gramophone ...

The beginning of the music vividly depicts the hustle and bustle of the banquet, with the guests and waitstaff in constant motion. Eventually, this activity fades to the background as Madame Mao performs her entrancing dance, richly accompanied by a slinky violin melody divided into four parts. The music becomes gradually denser and more active, but suddenly everything stops as Mao begins a slow foxtrot with his wife. The dance goes through a number of incarnations, blending with the sounds of the banquet hall. These extraneous sounds gradually grow fainter as the pair finds themselves lost in a nostalgic reverie.

**Concerto in A Minor for Violin and Cello, Opus 102 (1887)**  
**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

Tonight's Double Concerto grew out of an unfortunate conflict between Brahms and his close friend of many years, violinist Joseph Joachim in 1881. At that time, Joachim had brought a lawsuit against his estranged wife Amalie, but Brahms came down on the side of Amalie and expressed his support in a letter to her that was later introduced in court (without Brahms' permission). The judgment went against Joachim, and the incident caused a severe rift between Brahms and his longtime friend.

With the Double Concerto, according to Max Kalbeck, Brahms hoped to "regain the lost friendship of his youth through recollection of the happiest days of concertizing with Joachim, when he had accompanied him at the piano in the Violin Concerto in A minor by [Giovanni Battista] Viotti." Viotti wrote 29 violin concertos, and Concerto No. 22 in A minor was a favorite of both Joachim and Brahms. In the summer of 1887, Brahms wrote to Joachim:

Be prepared for a little shock – I could not resist for the time being writing a concerto for violin and violoncello though I tried again and again to talk myself out of it. But I am quite indifferent on the subject until I hear what is your attitude towards it. In all friendliness of spirit however, I beg you to be quite frank. If you send me a card that simply says: 'I disown it,' that will be quite sufficient for me and I shall know what to do ... I will not say out loud and in detail what I hope in secret.

After Joachim responded positively, Brahms sent him the parts with the dedicatory inscription "To him for whom it was written" and arranged a meeting. In September 1887, the work was given an initial reading with Joachim and Robert Hausmann (a member of Joachim's well-known quartet) as soloists and with the municipal orchestra in Baden-Baden. Clara Schumann, who was part of the small private audience, wrote in her diary: "I warmed to the Concerto completely, it is a thoroughly original work .... This concerto is, so to speak, a work of reconciliation – Joachim and Brahms spoke to each other again after years of silence .... It was an unexpected pleasure and a great treat. The work is fresh, full of interesting themes and development." The work was given a public premiere the following month in Cologne with Brahms conducting and subsequent performances followed in Frankfurt, Basel and Leipzig.

The two main themes of the first movement are derived from elements of Viotti's concerto and are themselves motivically related. The first of these appears in truncated form as the work opens, but quickly gives way to a stunning cello solo functioning as a displaced cadenza. The winds pick up the second theme and again retreat as the violin joins the cello continuing the virtuosic display. The themes are explored through the development section that ends with a truly sublime rising sequence of sustained harmonies.

The three section Andante is constructed around the four note rising motive A-D-E-A that opens the movement in the horns and winds. The melody that follows in the violin and cello is built from this motive juxtaposed with a transformation of itself (the two rising fourths a fifth apart become two falling minor thirds a fifth apart) to form what musicologist Donald Tovey calls "one of the broadest and most swinging melodies ever written." In the transition back to the opening material, the four-note motive is cleverly used again with A-D appearing in the low strings and brass and E-A in the solo instruments.

The Finale is an animated rondo with an unforgettable first theme appearing first in the cello and then the violin. The rhythmic angularity, staccato articulation, and chromatic melody have been

described as playful, humorous, and gypsy-like. Elements of this melody return again and again during the course of the movement and are contrasted with broad, lyrical lines.