

LONG BEACH SYMPHONY

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2024-2025 Season

6/7/25

Classical series

Terrace Theater



Love Stories: Tchaikovsky 4 and More!

Eckart Preu, conductor | Gao Can, violin | Modern Apsara, dancers
Master Ho Pin Peat Ensemble, instrumentalists

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LongBeachSymphony.org | (562) 436-3203

Saturday, June 7, 2025 | 7:30PM

Terrace Theater



Love Stories: Tchaikovsky 4 and More!

Eckart Preu, conductor

Gao Can, violin

Modern Apsara, dancers | **Master Ho Pin Peat Ensemble**, instrumentalists

Sovann Macha & Hanuman an excerpt from the Cambodian
(Arr. Hans Preu). **World premiere!** Ramayana 'Reamker' (7') –
with Modern Apsara Dancers
and Pin Peat Ensemble

Chinary Ung *Water Rings*, Overture (6')

***** **20 min. Intermission** *****

He Zhanhao & Chen Gang *The Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto* (27')
Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 4* (44')

Tonight's Concert is Generously Sponsored By:

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*Please take a moment
to silence your cell phone.*

*Please refrain from
flash photography while
musicians are performing.
Recordings are not allowed.*

*By attending this concert,
you may be included in
event photography.*

*Program and artists are
subject to change.*

Widely recognized as one of the most talented violinists of his generation, Gao Can enjoys an international career during which he has appeared with major orchestras and at prestigious venues and festivals throughout the world.

The orchestras he has collaborated with include the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, Houston Symphony Orchestra, Rostock Philharmonic Orchestra, Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Teatro di San Carlo Orchestra, China Philharmonic Orchestra, China National Symphony Orchestra, China Central Opera Symphony Orchestra, Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, and Beijing Symphony Orchestra, among others.

He has also performed at notable music festivals such as the Verbier Festival, Beethoven Festival in Bonn, the Salzburg Festival, Attersee Festival, Korea Tongyeong International Festival, and the Festival Internacional de Jazz de Getxo. He has graced such prestigious venues as the Berliner Philharmonie, Hamburg Concert Hall, Salzburger Festspiele, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Hong Kong Cultural Center, and the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. Among the notable musicians he has performed with are Mischa Maisky, Yuri Bashmet, and Charles Dutoit.

In recent years, Can has devoted significant time to mentoring the next generation of violinists through teaching, lecturing, and giving masterclasses. He was the youngest-ever Associate Professor at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, and from 2007 to 2012, he served as the youngest professor granted foreign-guest teaching status at the University of Cincinnati's music faculty. He has given lectures, seminars, and workshops

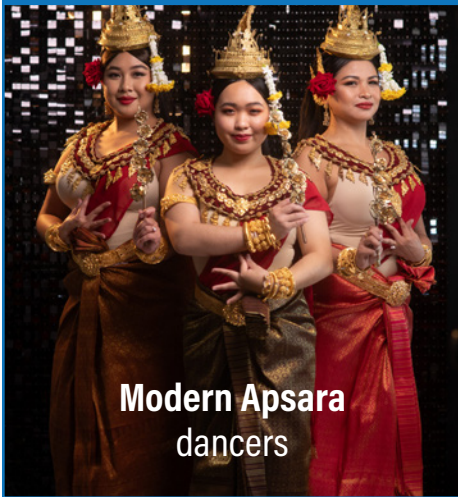


at institutions such as the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, University of Northern Colorado, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shanghai Orchestra Academy, Hong Kong Institute of Education, University of Macau, Xinghai Conservatory of Music Guangzhou, and University of Taipei, among others. At the National Centre for the Performing Arts alone, he has led more than 60 events, including concerts, seminars, and masterclasses.

Gao Can also serves as Music Director of the Poly WeDo Music Education Programme, established by the Poly Cultural Group to nurture the next generation of violinists. His achievements in both performance and pedagogy have been recognized by numerous institutions. He was appointed Ambassador of the Verbier Festival Orchestra, the only official ambassador of Chinese nationality. In 2015, he was elected a committee member of the Violin Society of the Chinese Musicians Association. He was also featured in the "Impression China" series by the China Post Office, which issued a set of personal stamps and postcards titled "*Chinese Cultural Artists*."

In March 2015, Can performed at the closing ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) in front of 17 national leaders and thousands of political and business figures. The China Recording Arts Association (CRA) has released several of his albums, including Beethoven's and Brahms's Violin Concertos and the Beethoven Sonata cycle (2017).

Gao Can's principal teachers were Prof. LIN Yaoji, Prof. Kurt Sassmannshaus, and Prof. Zakhar Bron. He performs on the 1617 'Lobkowitz' Amati, sponsored by the Bein & Fushi-Stradivary Society.



**Modern Apsara
dancers**

The *Modern Apsara Company* bridges the modern world to the sacred art of Cambodian classical dance. Through performance, training, and workshops, the *Modern Apsara Company* honors the legacies of past and current dance masters by showcasing their work in elevated spaces. The company was founded by first-generation Cambodian-American refugee, Reaksmei "Mea" Lath with the purpose of preserving the integrity and quality of the traditions left by the ancestors.



**Master Ho Pin Peat
Ensemble
instrumentalists**

Master Ho Chan plays every instrument of the pin peat ensemble, a form of percussive Cambodian classical music. He began to study at age 16 with his grandfather. In 1975, under the Khmer Rouge regime, Chan was forced into slave labor camps; he fled to Thailand in 1979 where he joined a pin peat ensemble headed by master musician Yinn Ponn. In 1986, he resettled in the U.S. and moved to California in 2000 where he joined the Arts of Apsara Ensemble led by master dancer and singer Sophiline Cheam Shapiro. He has received awards from the California Arts Council, the Public Corporation for the Arts, and the Alliance for California Traditional Arts.

Sovann Macha and Hanuman – an excerpt from the Cambodian Ramayana “Reamker”

No one knows exactly when the epic Sanskrit poem Ramayana migrated to Cambodia. Dating back more than two millennia in India, the earliest evidence of the “Reamker” as it is known in Cambodia, is found at Angkor Wat where there are 7th century wall paintings and sculpted reliefs depicting scenes from the story. An oral tradition in Cambodia for centuries, the earliest Khmer written record dates to the 1600s. Today, the Reamker is the national epic of Cambodia and a fundamental source of Khmer culture; its stories deal with love and trust, good and evil, temptation and loyalty, deceit and truth, revenge and victory over adversity.

While Ramayana and Reamker contain many similar elements, the story of the mermaid princess Sovann Macha and the heroic monkey king Hanuman is unique to the Khmer story. Hanuman and his soldiers are building a bridge of stone to connect the mainland to an island where an evil overlord has a hostage imprisoned. While gathering more boulders for the bridge, Hanuman sees that mermaids are stealing them to prevent its completion. In retaliation, he captures the mermaid princess Sovann Macha, but falls deeply in love with her. At first frightened and angry, the princess ultimately returns his affection, and their mermaid and monkey troops proceed to join forces and construct the bridge together to rescue the captured hostage.

Artistic retellings of this tale through classical dance, ballet, opera, and shadow puppet shows abound in Cambodia, usually with accompaniment by traditional Cambodian pin peat orchestra. Pin peat ensembles include, at a minimum, five instruments (xylophone, gong chimes, barrel drum, twin drums, oboe) but may have as many as eleven. The music, typically not written, is extremely elaborate, contrapuntal, and repetitive, with basic core structures that allow for improvisation by the musicians. Trained musicians learn the traditional forms and structures by heart directly from master musicians.

Tonight, Long Beach Symphony presents a new version with orchestra of the Sovann Macha and Hanuman vignette. Master Ho and his Pin Peat Orchestra will be joined by musicians of Long Beach Symphony in an expanded musical storytelling, with the traditional music transcribed and enhanced for western instruments by composer Hans-Peter Preu. The Modern Apsara Dancers will perform this dramatic chapter from the Reamker.

Chinary Ung – *Water Rings Overture*

Composer Chinary Ung, perhaps the orchestra world’s most prominent Cambodian-American composer, has a long history with Long Beach Symphony dating back thirty years. In 1995, under the baton of then-Music Director JoAnn Falletta, the Symphony performed the World Premiere of what has become a stand-out signature work by Ung, *Antiphonal Spirals*. The L.A. Times’ Josef Woodard declared it “fascinating” for the innovative new ways the composer explores the Western symphony orchestra through a Cambodian-American musical prism.

Ung has followed a highly personal musical path. He left Cambodia in 1964 to study clarinet at the Manhattan School of Music, then pursued a Ph.D. in composition at Columbia. Commissions, awards, and professional teaching posts followed, culminating in his current position as Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Music at U.C. San Diego. However, along the way he took a hard left. Between 1975 and 1985, Ung completely left composing behind to focus on studying and performing Cambodian music and

culture, learning to play the roneat-ek (a xylophone used in pin peat). He devoted himself to preserving the musical and cultural heritage of Cambodia in the wake of years of brutal attack by the infamous Khmer Rouge and to helping scores of Cambodians, including his own relatives, escape to the U.S. and Australia. During this time, he was also President of the U.S. Khmer Studies Institute and an advisor for the Killing Fields Memorial.

The work on tonight's program, Ung's *Water Rings*, Overture, was composed in 1993, just two years before Antiphonal Spirals. Ung's work, composed for Western orchestral instruments, is notable for the masterful and unique way it integrates Asian musical elements and techniques he learned during his decade immersed in amassing knowledge and skills from his mother country's cultural heritage.

He Zhanhao/Chen Gang - *The Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto*

Tragic stories of star-crossed lovers appear in cultures around the globe. In ancient China, the inherent themes of yearning, secret passions, joy, and anguish drive the legend of *The Butterfly Lovers*, a tale set in the time of the Jin Dynasty (317-420 CE). As the story goes, an ambitious and privileged young girl wants to attend school, which is forbidden, so she runs away and masquerades as a boy. She meets and befriends a boy from a lower caste, and a deep relationship develops without the boy ever discovering his friend is a girl. When they must separate, the girl invents a "sister" for her friend to marry. Fate, and social expectations, intervene when her father arranges her marriage to someone else. Finally realizing the truth, the boy is heartbroken. He pines away and dies. The girl, equally heartbroken, visits his tomb during a storm and when a thunderbolt cracks the grave open, she throws herself in and the ground swallows her. Shortly after, two butterflies flutter up from the grave and disappear together, the souls of the young lovers united forever.

This concerto is among the first works by Chinese composers to blend traditional Chinese melodies with Western orchestration. In *The Butterfly Lovers* the violin carries the role of the disguised girl student, while the boy is represented by the cello. The work incorporates distinctive musical themes from Chinese Opera and also attempts to mimic the sounds of Chinese traditional instruments with the western orchestra.

Composers He Zhanhao and Chen Gang were graduate students together in 1959 at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, among the first cadre of Chinese musicians studying Western instruments and musical forms. Given an assignment to write a violin concerto, the two decided to use *The Butterfly Lovers* as the basis for their composition. He Zhanhao has stated that they were inspired by forays into the countryside, where he and fellow students would take their instruments and play. Says Zhanhao, "We performed the western classical repertoire we learnt in class to the farmers, and even though they found the music beautiful, they couldn't appreciate it as they grew up listening to Chinese opera and folk songs... So I had to write music that could be understood and liked by the Chinese folks."

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky - Symphony No. 4

Note: Exactly 90 years ago to the day, Long Beach Symphony concluded its inaugural season with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4—a fitting way to now close our 2024-25 90th Anniversary Season. This powerful work also holds special significance for Music Director Eckart Preu, as it was the piece he conducted during his 2016 audition that earned him the baton with Long Beach Symphony.

There is copious and undeniable evidence that the year 1877 was a major turning point in the life of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. First, he struck up what became a career-defining 14-year "epistolary relationship" (i.e., pen pals) with a wealthy, recently widowed matron named Nadezhda von Meck. A trained pianist who enjoyed playing at home with her family but was otherwise determinedly reclusive, von Meck's self-introduction via a December 1876 fan letter led first to small commissions for her own use but soon evolved to become sponsorship of Tchaikovsky's composing career. By late 1877, Von Meck was providing a luxurious stipend to enable the composer to resign his teaching position (a long-held desire) at Moscow Conservatory to concentrate all his talent and energy on writing music. Just as important, the two became platonic soulmates through their correspondence, sharing candid thoughts and philosophies on innumerable topics. The surviving archive of lengthy letters between the two tops 1,200.

Also in 1877, Tchaikovsky became engaged (April) and married (July) to his young, besotted piano student Antonina Milyukova. The marriage was, in a word, disastrous. Speculation abounds as to his motives, but he swiftly realized his mistake: Tchaikovsky was neither attracted to his wife (or to women, as his later letters confirm his homosexuality), nor temperamentally suited to domestic life. By October, after twice departing for weeks and returning for just a few days each time, Tchaikovsky abandoned Antonina for good. She, however, steadfastly refused to divorce. The couple had little interaction but remained officially married until the composer's death at 53 in 1893.

Tchaikovsky's correspondence with Madame von Meck proved to be both the emotional support and intellectual inspiration to help him through the difficulties arising from his catastrophic marriage, and to contribute artistically to the composition of his Symphony No.4. The letters between the two became very frequent and increasingly intimate. Tchaikovsky made it clear privately that the dedication of Symphony No.4 "To my best friend" was for none other than Nadezhda von Meck. The work premiered in Moscow on February 22, 1878.

Fun fact: Throughout Tchaikovsky's acquaintance with Madame von Meck (1876-1890), the two never had a personal, face-to-face relationship. She, a strong-willed and imperious matriarch, eccentrically reclusive and private but also blessed with great riches, insisted that they should never meet. Wrote Tchaikovsky, "You are afraid that you will not find in me those ideal qualities that your imagination has attributed to me. And you are quite right"

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Chopin Piano Concerto No. 2

Tchaikovsky *Romeo & Juliet*

Bernstein *Westside Story*

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Martinů Concerto for Two Pianos

Beethoven Symphony No. 6 "Pastorale"

1/31/26

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D

Strauss *Don Quixote*

2/28/26

Pepe Romero Returns

Joaquín Rodrigo *Concierto de Aranjuez*

Handel Water Music Suites 1 & 2

6/6/26

Mozart Eline Kleine Nachtmusik

(A Little Night Music)

Mahler Symphony No. 5