We salute Maestro Michael Morgan and the Oakland Symphony for redefining the American symphony orchestra with the multicultural music of this great city.

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VAN-ÁNH (VANESSA) VŐ, DAN TRANH ZITHER

Vân-Ánh (Vanessa) Võ is one of the finest performers of Vietnamese traditional instruments in the world, as well as a rapidly emerging composer. She dedicates her life to creating music by blending the wonderfully unique sounds of Vietnamese instruments with other music genres, and fusing deeply rooted Vietnamese musical traditions with fresh new structures and compositions.

In 1995, Vân-Ánh won the championship title in the Vietnamese National Đàn Tranh (Zither) Competition. Since settling in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2001, Vân-Ánh has focused on collaborating with musicians across different music genres to create new works, bringing Vietnamese traditional music to a wider audience and preserving her cultural legacy through teaching. In 2002, Vân-Ánh released her first CD, Twelve Months, Four Seasons. In 2009, she released She's Not She, with award-winning composer Bao Đô. In 2013, she released her third CD, Three-Mountain Pass, with the Kronos Quartet as her guest artist. This work has brought positive reviews and high praises by NPR, BBC “The World,” the L.A. Times and others.

Vân-Ánh has also been collaborator and guest soloist with the Kronos Quartet, Yo-Yo Ma, Southwest Chamber Music, Oakland Symphony, jazz artists, rap artists, and other world music artists. Additionally, she was co-composer and arranger for the soundtracks of the Oscar®-nominated and Sundance Best Documentary Grand Jury Prize winner, Daughter from Danang (2002), the Emmy® Award-winning film Bolinao 52 (2008), and A Village Called Versailles (2009), the winner of multiple “Best Documentary” and “Audience Favorite” awards. She has performed her music at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, on NPR, at Houston Grand Opera, Yerba Buena Performing Arts Center, many World Music festivals throughout the U.S., and the London Olympic Games 2012 Music Festival. She has been invited and participated as a screening judge in the World Music category for both the 2015 & 2016 Grammy® Awards. In addition to the zither (đàn tranh), Vân-Ánh also performs as soloist on the monochord (đàn Bûa), the bamboo xylophone (đàn Trùng), traditional drums (trống) and many other traditional instruments.

Recently, in collaboration with Asian Americans for Community Involvement, a NGO which has served refugees for 40 years in Santa Clara County, Vân-Ánh has been awarded $40,000 from Creative Work Fund to work on her next coming production, which is scheduled to premiere at the Kennedy Center in March, 2016. The Odyssey – from Vietnam to America aims to highlight the incredible power of the human spirit, the value of freedom and the will to survive of the Vietnamese Boat People. Beyond that, The Odyssey... also wants to deliver the message of Forgiveness, Peace and Unity.

For more information, please visit www.vananhvo.com

Michael Urie, Narrator

Born on August 8, 1980, in Dallas, Texas, actor Michael Urie attended the Juilliard School in New York City and, in 2002, won the prestigious John Houseman Prize for Excellence in Classical Theatre. Urie’s big break came in 2006, when he landed a role on the popular ABC show Ugly Betty. He played Marc St. James, Betty’s flamboyantly gay and impeccably dressed nemesis and fellow staff member of Mode magazine. The series ran until 2010 and garnered wide acclaim, including Golden Globe and Emmy awards. Urie resides in New York City.
With its members ranging from ages 7 to 18, the VA’V Young Ensemble & SƯ VIỆT ENSEMBLE is dedicated to sharing traditional Vietnamese music with the new generation. By performing thousand-years old folk songs to pop music with a traditional twist, they hope to inspire young people to embrace their culture and heritage. The members join together from San Francisco, San Jose, and Fremont with Vân-Ánh (Vanessa) Võ to provide the younger generation a glimpse of what traditional music is like. Over the past five years, the Ensembles have grown in number, developed in musical expertise, and performed across the U.S. in many Vietnamese cultural and modern contemporary productions, such as the San Francisco Legion of Honor, the World Festival of Vietnamese Traditional Music in Seattle and Vietnam (and will perform at the upcoming festival in Paris, 2017), and the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The Ensembles have also had the pleasure of working with several renowned musicians from all around the Bay Area and have an upcoming performance with the Oakland Symphony Orchestra. The VA’V Young Ensemble hopes to continue to grow and inspire other young musicians.

Performers:
Nicolle Huynh
Andrea Huynh
Audrey Do
Kieu-Thu Vu
Lan-Thuy Nguyen

Eugenia Truong
Kelly Nguyen
Emily Quach
Hoang-Anh Nguyen
Huyn-Nga Nguyen
Linh-Chi Tran
Christopher Lam
Jacqueline Lan
Athena Le

Vionna Huang
Ashley Hua
Alison Hua
Mahathai Jayaraman
Kai Monno
Pallavi Balay
Anjali Gard
Vivek Gard

Dr. Phan has received numerous commissions, including from the American Composers Orchestra, Ensemble Alternance, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, the Greater East Lansing Symphony, the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, Indiana University, the Kronos Quartet, the Samaris Piano Trio, etc.

Recently premiered by the IU Opera Theater, his grand opera The Tale of Lady Thị Kính was hailed as “…this first-of-its kind operatic retelling of Our Benevolent Buddha … can be compared with a finely cut gemstone whose beauty reveals itself through the eye of the beholder.” He recently completed A Vietnamese Requiem, a 35-minute work for 4 vocal soloists, chorus and chamber orchestra, employing Vietnamese Buddhist text, and dedicated to the approximately 10 million Vietnamese victims of wars in the 20th Century.

A frequent guest composer and lecturer in Asia, Dr. Phan Quang Phuc is Professor of Music in Composition at Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University. He has previously taught at University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and at Cleveland State University.

MUSE ORCHESTRA

The after-school MUSE Orchestra is one component of Oakland Symphony’s MUSE (Music for Excellence) Education Program. Aimed at 4th-6th graders, the MUSE Orchestra is open to all Oakland students as an opportunity to participate in an All-City Honors Orchestra. The tuition-free program is fully sponsored by the Symphony and hosted by Franklin Elementary School and the Oakland Unified School District.

This weekly program is designed to serve as a first training ground for the orchestral experience. Students are taught orchestral skills such as: how to be a team player, preparing for a concert performance, listening to others, looking at the conductor while playing music, note and rhythmic reading, creative practice ideas, marking valuable notations in the music, scales and minimal music theory, and organizational skills. The students are given several opportunities to perform during the school year, which allows them to practice the skills they are learning.

During the 2015-16 season, participating students unite from the following 11 Oakland schools to form the MUSE Orchestra: Cleveland, Franklin, Glenview, Kaiser, Manzanita, and Sequoia Elementary Schools; Connections Academy, Bret Harte, Claremont, Edna Brewer, and Montera Middle Schools.

Symphony musicians lead as Mentors: Amy Likar (flute/winds), Hande Erdem (violin, viola), Candy Sanderson (violin, trumpet, clarinet, sax, trombone) and Beth Vandervennet (cello, violon). Alumni MUSE students assist in the leadership role as Student Mentors.
ANTONIN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Carnival Overture, Op. 92

The Carnival Overture was originally the second in a trilogy of overtures called Nature, Life and Love. (The other two were subsequently titled In Nature’s Realm and Othello.) Finished in September, 1891, the Carnival was first performed the following April in Prague under the composer’s direction.

When Dvořák sent the three overtures, the New World Symphony and other works to his publisher, he described them as “my best orchestral works.” This opinion, while shared by most, is not unanimous. Julius Harrison, for one, complained about and laughing with pleasure at hearing what he’d done.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Henry Purcell, Op. 34
(The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra)

In 1945 the British Ministry of Education commissioned Britten to compose the score for a documentary film called The Instruments of the Orchestra, with a narration by Eric Crozier. The Crown Film Unit’s production was first shown at the Empire Theater in London on November 29, 1946. During the recording session, according to the sound engineer, Britten “was sort of jumping about and laughing with pleasure at hearing what he’d done.”

By then, Britten’s film music had already been played in the concert hall under the title The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra. Sir Malcolm Sargent and the Liverpool Philharmonic gave the first live performance on October 15, 1946, in Liverpool.

The music is also known as Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Henry Purcell, because Britten used a theme from the seventeenth century composer Purcell. Purcell’s dance tune, a hornpipe, is from his incidental music to Apha Behn’s play called Abdelazar, or The Moor’s Revenge, which first appeared in 1695. In Britten’s work, there are six statements of the theme by various choirs of the orchestra, then thirteen variations on the theme by various single instruments, and a giant fugue at the end. Britten said the work “is affectionately inscribed to the children of John and Jean Maud: Humphrey, Pamela, Caroline and Virginia, for their edification and entertainment.”

Britten’s music has been used in at least two ballets, with choreography by Jerome Robbins and Frederick Ashton.

Lullaby for a Country – World Premiere

VÂN-ANH (VANESSA) VÕ

Supported by grants from:

Lullaby for a Country is inspired by lullaby tunes from the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. Personally, I grew up with lullabies that my mom sang to me. I heard people around me singing them a lot, and I sang them to my daughters. It’s traditional in Vietnam that all moms will sing lullabies for their children.

The Vietnamese lullabies, although in different dialects, all show the same common themes of providing comfort to children, giving encouragement, and longing for loved ones. Lullabies have been used to pass on the values and teachings of the culture to support the children of the next generation. These lullabies represent the deepest sense of comfort, calm, and inner strength that many Vietnamese have called upon in order to overcome the seemingly insurmountable psychological and emotional challenges in life.

Lullaby for a Country consists of four movements: LOVE – YEARNING – SORROW – NEW DAWN

-Notes by Charley Samson, copyright 2016.

NEW DAWN takes us to the land of hope, which helps us to pass through the most difficult times in life.