



*University of Maryland School of Music Presents*

**Rain, River, and Sea featuring Debussy's *La Mer***  
**University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra**

**Saturday, May 4, 2024 • 8PM**

DEKELBOUM CONCERT HALL

AT THE CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER



**SCHOOL OF  
MUSIC**

University of Maryland School of Music Presents

## RAIN, RIVER, AND SEA FEATURING DEBUSSY'S *LA MER*

University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra

**David Neely, conductor**

*Music Director*

*Through the Ear of a Raindrop*..... Robert Gibson  
(b. 1950)

*Vltava (The Moldau)*.....Bedřich Smetana  
(1824-1884)

### INTERMISSION

*La mer* ..... Claude Debussy  
(1862-1918)

*I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer [From Dawn to Noon on the Sea]*

*II. Jeux des vagues [Play of the Waves]*

*III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer [Dialogue of Wind and Sea]*



Born in Dayton, Ohio, conductor **DAVID NEELY** has been described by Opera News as "a ninja warrior with a baton" (Opera News). He maintains an active career in symphonic, opera, ballet, and educational settings.

As Music Director and Principal Conductor of Des Moines Metro Opera, a position he has held since 2012, Neely has elevated the company's musical profile and developed one of the nation's finest opera orchestras. He has led critically-acclaimed performances of a broad range of new and traditional repertoire that includes the recent world premiere of Kristin Kuster and Mark Campbell's *A Thousand Acres*, the in-person premiere of Damien Geter and Lila Palmer's *American Apollo*, regional Emmy award-winning productions of *Manon* and *Billy Budd* for Iowa Public Television, and approximately 30 other works including *Wozzeck*, *Pikovaya Dama*, *Yevkeny Onegin*, *Rusalka*, *Jenůfa*, *Falstaff*, *Elektra*, *Peter Grimes*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Flight*, *Macbeth*, *Don Giovanni*, *Candide*, *La Fanciulla Del West*, *Turandot*, and most recently *Bluebeard's Castle* and *The Love for Three Oranges*. He has led productions with Atlanta Opera, Sarasota Opera, Intermountain Opera, and numerous European opera houses including Bonn and Dortmund. His performances have been praised in Opera News, Opera Today, Opernwelt, the Chicago Tribune, and the Wall Street Journal.

Neely has led concerts with the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Portland Symphony Orchestra, Dortmund Philharmonic, Bochumer Philharmoniker, Eutin Festival Orchestra, Bregenz Symphony Orchestra, and is a regular conductor with the D.C. area's Apollo Orchestra.

He has led ballets with Dortmund Opera and the Indiana University Ballet Theater.

Neely is Director of Orchestras at the University of Maryland School of Music, where recent highlights include Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, Mahler's Symphony No. 2, Valerie Coleman's *Umoja*, Carlos Simon's *The Block*, Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5, Emilie Mayer's Symphony in F minor, and world premieres of Erich Stem's *Kayak* and Maria Newman's *Our Rights and Nothing Less*. He is a regular guest conductor and guest conducting teacher at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where he recently conducted Osvaldo Golijov's Flamenco opera *Ainadamar*.

Concerto soloists with whom he has collaborated include Hai-Ye Ni, David Chan, Eric Kutz, Roberto Diaz, Joshua Roman, Bella Hristova, Benjamin Beilman, Delfeayo Marsalis, Ricardo Morales, Ben Lulich, Phillipe Cuper, Nicholas Daniel, and Rainer Honeck. He has appeared as a collaborative pianist with numerous vocalists, including a recent recital with Joyce Castle and Schubert's *Winterreise* with David Adam Moore. He serves as a guest teacher with Washington National Opera's Cafritz Young Artist program, and was the conductor for WNO's American Opera Initiative in 2021. He recently appeared with the American Lyric Theater in New York and with the National Orchestral Institute + Festival.

***Through the Ear of a Raindrop***

ROBERT GIBSON

Born 1950, Atlanta

University of Maryland's own Robert Gibson first studied piano, trombone, and then double bass. His interest in music was also sparked by the harmonies of Protestant hymns and improvisation in popular music and jazz. While an undergraduate performance major at the University of Miami, Gibson took a single composition course, where he was encouraged to write more music. After moving to the Washington, D.C. area, having won the audition to join the United States Air Force Band, Gibson matriculated at Catholic University to study composition, receiving his MM in composition in 1975. Gibson then continued his education at the University of Maryland, completing his D.M.A. in composition in 1980, the same year that he was appointed as a faculty member.

*Through the Ear of a Raindrop* is, in part, a celebration of the University of Maryland, premiering in May 2002 for the opening season of the newly completed Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Gibson plays with the different timbral possibilities of the orchestra, layering different sounds and pitch registers. The influence of Claude Debussy, heard later in today's program, is heard in the harmony as well as in the structure, formed with distinct short sections of melodic and harmonic material. *Through the Ear of a Raindrop* is also representative of Gibson's frequent use of poetry and the relationship between music, words, and emotion for inspiration. In the program notes he wrote for the 2002 premiere, Gibson describes the poetic influence and how it translates into musical sound:

The title of my composition *Through the Ear of a Raindrop* is taken from Seamus Heaney's poem "The Rain Stick," wherein he writes of listening to the sound of this "instrument":

Who cares if all the music that transpires  
 Is the fall of grit or dry seeds through a cactus?  
 You are like a rich man entering heaven  
 Through the ear of a raindrop. Listen now again.

These beautiful, mysterious lines suggested many sonic possibilities that I felt could be most effectively realized by the large, colorful palette of the orchestra. I was also struck by the role of artifice in the transcendent effect of the rain stick sound (conveyed through Biblical allusion), since all musical instruments are ultimately of a similar origin. I was reminded of [English priest and poet] Joseph Hall's (1574–1656) description of the source of the "sweet and melodious noise" of the lute—"a hollow piece of wood and the guts of beasts stirred by the fingers of man." This transformation of wood and metal into musical sound remains a constant source of wonder.

***The Rain Stick***

Upend the rain stick and what happens next  
Is a music that you never would have known  
To listen for. In a cactus stalk  
Downpour, sluice-rush, spillage and backwash  
Come flowing through. You stand there like a pipe  
Being played by water, you shake it again lightly  
And diminuendo runs through all its scales  
Like a gutter stopping trickling. And now here comes  
A sprinkle of drops out of the freshened leaves,  
Then subtle little wets off grass and daisies;  
Then glitter-drizzle, almost breaths of air.  
Upend the stick again. What happens next  
Is undiminished for having happened once,  
Twice, ten, a thousand times before.  
Who cares if all the music that transpires  
Is the fall of grit or dry seeds through a cactus?  
You are like a rich man entering heaven  
Through the ear of a raindrop. Listen now again.

—Seamus Heaney, originally published 1993

**Vltava (The Moldau)**

BEDŘICH SMETANA

Born Mar. 2, 1824, Leitomyšl (now Litomyšl)

Died May 12, 1884, Prague

Born into what was then Hapsburg-controlled Bohemia, Bedřich Smetana grew up speaking German. Despite—or perhaps because of—this, Smetana became part of the growing nationalistic movements in the nineteenth century. Smetana grew up playing music, and after completing his formal schooling (on his father's insistence) in 1843, he moved to Prague to study and work as a musician. Having been unsuccessful at establishing himself as a piano virtuoso, Smetana turned to teaching and composing, coincidentally just as, throughout Europe, the many nationalist revolutions of 1848 began. Given this context, Smetana's compositions were highly political, though nonpartisan. This same year Smetana also wrote his first song with Czech text: *Píseň svobody* (Song of Freedom) on a poem by Josef Jiří Kolár.

Smetana became increasingly more dedicated to creating and representing a Czech style of music in the 1860s, when Bohemia was absorbed into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, therefore fanning the flames of self-determination. During this time, Smetana became an active member of musical circles and organizations in Prague; he was a music critic, directed a singing group, and eventually became the director of the Provisional Theatre. He also studied Czech for the first time and intentionally started speaking Czech instead of his native German. Smetana finally achieved success with his nationalistic operas, such as the 1866 *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride), which has Czech characters and uses folk idioms and popular dance forms.

*Má vlast* (My Fatherland), a cycle of six symphonic poems about Czech land and history, is representative of Smetana's Czech style. *Vltava* (in Smetana's native German: Die Moldau), composed 1874, is the second of the *Má vlast* set, and depicts the river that runs through the center of Prague. The piece begins with two flutes seamlessly passing running sixteenth notes back and forth, a bubbling stream in the Czech countryside. As the clarinets and violas join, the stream widens, and the *Vltava* river is introduced with the violins and oboe, the water rushing in the dancing rhythms. The brass joins with martial motives, and then a staccato peasant dance in the strings represents what was during Smetana's time seen as "the folk," or the true people of the national land. The water motive returns, accompanied by high *dolcissimo* strings that create a shimmering effect. Underneath, the brass enters with dotted rhythms, building to a powerful statement of the river theme as it runs past landmarks such as the Prague Castle and under the historic Charles Bridge. The theme gets faster at the end of the piece, with the full orchestration and pounding timpani bursting with national pride.

**La Mer**

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born Aug. 22, 1862, St Germain-en-Laye

Died Mar. 25, 1918, Paris

Claude Debussy began piano lessons at age eight and entered the Paris Conservatoire at just age ten. For the next fifteen years, he studied harmony, piano, and composition while also entering the world of a professional musician by teaching, accompanying, and composing. As his studies concluded, Debussy moved in circles with contemporaneous French composers, including Paul Dukas, Erik Satie, and Ernest Chausson. At the 1889 Paris Exposition, Debussy became fascinated with Javanese gamelan music, which remained an influence on his compositional style that explores timbre, uses parallel fifths (traditionally “incorrect” in Western art music theory), and uses non-functional harmonies, or those that evade cadential resolutions within Western major or minor scales.

Debussy’s compositional style was also influenced by French symbolism, a movement that emphasized spirituality, sensory experiences, and emotion. This translates into musical compositions with through-composed forms, short melodic fragments, irregular phrase lengths, and (in an overlap of the gamelan influence) non-functional harmonies or scales. This *fin de siècle* compositional style is often called impressionism, though Debussy himself would have rejected that label. The term was originally derogatory, coined by art critics to insult painter Claude Monet and other turn-of-the-century French artists for their splotchy brushstrokes and subjects that were left open to audience interpretation. By the 1880s, the term impressionism was also used to describe musical artists and works that evoked subjects in a similarly ambiguous way, often because of the symbolist influence.

*La Mer*, or *The Sea*, was composed 1903–1905, and inspired by the famous Japanese woodblock print *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, by Katsushika Hokusai. The print hung in Debussy’s office, and a variant of it was published with the score in November 1905. *La Mer* consists of three “symphonic sketches,” or movements that each represent something about the sea.

The first movement, *De l’aube à midi sur la mer* (From Dawn to Noon on the Sea), was originally a short story about and named after the Sanguinary Islands, an archipelago off the south-eastern coast of France. While the name may have changed between initial composition and publication, the pictorialism remains. The “call of the sea” motive, introduced almost immediately in the trumpets and English horn, is modal and throws off the sense of meter, emblematic of Debussy’s symbolism. This motive returns throughout the movement—and the entire piece—as a unifying element. The undulating strings and pentatonic woodwind melodies mimic the movement of the sea. Sudden, unison descending chords draw upon the gamelan influence in the open, parallel fifths, leading to a rocking cello melody that is passed up the orchestra, accompanied by splashing flourishes. The call of the sea motive returns, and the three gamelan chords close the movement. In the second symphonic sketch, *Jeux de vagues* (Play of the Waves), the pentatonic solo in the English horn and oboe has quick grace notes that create a fun dance, especially with the bright timbre added by the percussion and the swooping waltz in the violins. Continuously rolling waves are created by the harps and woodwind trills. The final movement, *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* (Dialogue of the Wind and of the Sea), begins with rumbling, ominous wind in the low voices of the orchestra. A brighter timbre is introduced with the trumpet, playing the call of the sea motive. After a sudden bang, the woodwinds introduce a rolling modal theme, which peacefully returns accompanied by harmonics in the violin, the sunlight shimmering on the water. The theme crescendos as the brass is both playful and solemn, building the piece to a majestic close.

– Program notes by Elizabeth Massey, Ph.D. '22

David Neely, *Music Director*  
 Mark Wakefield, *Manager of Instrumental Ensembles*

**VIOLIN**

Zoe Kushubar,  
*Concertmaster*  
 Yuan-Ju Liu,  
*Concertmaster*  
 Camden Stohl,  
*Principal Second*  
 Anton Doan  
 Jing Fan  
 Jose-Antonio Guzman  
 Alexandra Fitzgerald  
 Clare Hofheinz  
 Anthony Holc  
 Max Jacobs  
 Yu-Shin Lee  
 Yiyang Li  
 Kiran Kaur  
 Lina Kang  
 Anna Kelleher  
 Elsa Kinnear  
 Ellie Kim  
 Glen Kuenzi  
 Mykenna Magnusen  
 Hoclin Molina  
 Elisa Pierpaoli  
 Felipe Rodas  
 Nina Staniszewska  
 Eleanor Sturm  
 Ruth Swope  
 Anna Weiksner  
 Alan Whitman  
 Jessica Zhu

**VIOLA**

Maddie Stohl, *Principal*  
 Emily Bussa  
 Yu-Hsuan Chen  
 Fabio Dantas  
 Seth Goodman  
 Nathan Hoffman  
 Xach Lee-Llacer  
 Micah McCready  
 Rohan Prabhakar  
 John Ross  
 Brian Shoop

**CELLO**

Jenna Bachmann, *Principal*  
 Sarah Bennett, *Principal*  
 David Agia  
 Henry Bushnell  
 Gavriel Eagle  
 Rory Gallo  
 Ethan Gullo  
 Noah Hamermesh  
 Nailah Harris  
 Wesley Hornpetrie  
 Eva Houlton  
 John Keane  
 Simone Pierpaoli  
 Quinn Taylor

**DOUBLE BASS**

Joshua Rhodes, *Principal*  
 Britney Hansford  
 Teddy Hersey  
 Benjamin Knight

**FLUTE**

Courtney Adams  
 Lisa Choi  
 Andrew Hui  
 Kennedy Wallace

**OBOE**

Jonathan Alonzo  
 Michael Homme  
 Lauren Riley

**ENGLISH HORN**

Jonathan Alonzo  
 Lauren Riley

**CLARINET**

Ashley Hsu  
 Nick Lopez  
 Hallie Pike

**E-FLAT CLARINET**

Ashley Hsu

**BASS CLARINET**

Nick Lopez

**BASSOON**

Temon Birch  
 Jolene Blair  
 Makayla Bowen-Longino

**CONTRABASSOON**

Alex Wiedman

**HORN**

Andrew Bures  
 Elijah Kee  
 Liam McConlogue  
 Owen Miller  
 Matt Tremba

**TRUMPET**

Theresa Bickler  
 Amber Bowen-Longino  
 Allison Braatz  
 Julia Tsuchiya-Mayhew  
 Jacob Weglarz

**TROMBONE**

Marlia Nash  
 David Wilson

**BASS TROMBONE**

Kyle Gordon

**TUBA**

Grace Tifford

**HARP**

Lauren Twombly  
 Cambria Van de Vaarst

**PIANO**

Yimeng Xu

**PERCUSSION**

Jason Amis  
 Patrick Bain  
 Jonathan Monk  
 Bruce Perry

**TIMPANI**

Bruce Perry

**ORCHESTRA LIBRARIAN**

Mariana Corichi Gómez

**ORCHESTRAL OPERATIONS  
GRADUATE ASSISTANT**

Erica Spear