



## **“OUR OCEAN” MASTERPIECE CONCERT SHOW NOTES**

The Cape Symphony Orchestra presents “Our Ocean” in collaboration with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on Saturday, June 15, 2024 at 7:30 PM and Sunday, June 16, 2024 at 3:00 PM at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center.

### **Cape Symphony**

[Carolyn Watson](#), Guest Conductor

[Cape Symphony Orchestra Musicians](#)

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*Please note the program is subject to change.*

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## **About Today's Program**

Here on Cape Cod, the ocean is part of our identity. Many of us earn our living through its bounty or its beauty. With the summer season, visitors and residents alike are getting back to the sea; we're swimming, paddling, fishing, sailing, painting, and studying the Atlantic. We're watching whales, gathering shells, and making memories. We're reigniting a connection to the eternal as we inhale that gorgeous salt air.

Today's concert is a special collection of masterworks inspired by our ocean. Let this music transport you. When next you're gazing at the blue horizon, whether standing before crashing waves or beachcombing by a gentle surf, feel yourself recharged by the power of the sea and connected to every human through the ages who has felt that same awe and inspiration.

Cape Symphony's Our Ocean concert, presented in collaboration with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI), brings arts and sciences together to celebrate the majesty of the sea and champion its protection. We owe special thanks to the WHOI scientists who have joined us for the pre-concert events, sharing local stories of vulnerability, strength, and resilience in the face of rising seas, erosion and flooding, as well as the innovative techniques being used to save corals in crisis, including what coral sounds and acoustics can tell us about the health of reefs. Through this collaboration, we can refresh our community spirit and renew our sense of empowerment toward a strong, resilient future.

**The Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave)**

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

This piece was inspired by an 1829 excursion to the remote Scottish Inner Hebrides island of Staffa and its remarkable basalt column formation called Fingal's Cave. The cave is known for its remarkable acoustical properties, including the echo of the booming Atlantic within.

A prolific composer from an early age, Mendelssohn is said to have jotted down the opening theme to the Overture on first sight of this natural wonder. In a letter to his sister Fanny back in Berlin, he wrote, "In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, I send you the following, which came into my head there." (Fanny was herself a considerable musical talent; as a woman, she was disallowed a professional life.)

Though an overture, this piece is intended to stand on its own. It is considered to be an early Romantic "tone poem," a piece that rather than telling a story itself, evokes a mood based on a poem or story, painting, landscape, or other non-musical inspiration. The focus is on feeling over strict traditional form.

**And God Created Great Whales**

ALAN HOVHANESS (1911-2000)

Born in Somerville, Massachusetts to parents of Armenian and Scottish descent, Hovhaness was one of the most prolific composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He's known for his interests in spirituality and the natural world. "My purpose is to create music, not for snobs, but for all people, music which is beautiful and healing," he wrote.

"And God Created Great Whales" is an unusual symphonic poem for orchestra and recorded whale song. It was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, which premiered it in 1970 to mixed reviews.

Hovhaness wrote of the piece: "Free rhythmless vibrational passages, each string player playing independently, suggest waves in a vast ocean sky. Undersea mountains rise and fall in horns, trombones, and tuba. Music of whales also rises and falls like mountain ranges. Song of whale emerges like a giant mythical sea bird. Man does not exist, has not yet been born in the solemn oneness of Nature."

The recordings are of humpback and bowhead whales, from the album *Songs of the Humpback Whale*, produced by bioacoustician Roger Payne.

**Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes***

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

- I. Dawn: Lento e tranquillo*
- II. Sunday Morning: Allegro spiritoso*
- III. Moonlight: Andante comodo e rubato*
- IV. Storm: Presto con fuoco*

Benjamin Britten was central to 20<sup>th</sup> century British classical music, with a wide range of compositions including opera, orchestral works, and chamber music. He was born near the North Sea in Suffolk, England, and lived much of his life close by. Britten's operas are widely performed and appreciated. They often reflect aspects of his own life; as a gay man and a pacifist, he found himself at odds with society. Alienation was a common theme.

A haunting opera in three acts, *Peter Grimes* is among Britten's best loved works. It was begun while he was living in the US in the early years of World War II and completed after his return to Britain in 1943. It premiered in London in 1945 and has been a critical and popular success ever since.

*Peter Grimes* is based on an early 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative poem by George Crabbe. Set in an isolated coastal village, it examines the downfall of a misanthropic fisherman accused of murder. Themes of isolation, prejudice, and the terrible power of gossip play out against the backdrop of hard labor, bracing winds, and salt spray. The North Sea – bleak and powerful, beautiful and treacherous – is a constant force.

The Four Sea Interludes are purely orchestral music, used during scene changes to establish the mood for the next act. They were published separately and are frequently, as today, performed as an orchestral suite.

“Dawn” opens Act I with a birdlike flute solo and ominous booming chords that herald both maritime daybreak and tragedy to come. The second act begins with “Sunday Morning,” a busy piece that evokes churchgoing and chatter. “Moonlight” provides the unsettling transition to Act III. The mood is uneasy: What lies in the dark depths? “Storm” sees the townsfolk waiting out a maelstrom in a pub while Grimes faces it alone.

~ *Intermission* ~

**The Wreckers (Les naufrageurs; Strandrecht): Overture**

ETHYL SMYTH (1858-1944)

Ethyl Smyth was an exuberant English composer and suffragist whose work included operas, choral and orchestral works, chamber music, songs, and compositions for piano. With her forceful personality, cigar smoking, tweed suits, and utter rejection of societal norms, she was a singular presence in English society. In 1922, she became the first composer to be awarded a damehood.

*The Wreckers* is her third opera, said to be “the most important English opera composed during the period between Purcell and Britten.” It premiered in Leipzig in 1906 to critical acclaim and became Smyth’s best-known work, despite her difficulty getting it published, let alone staged.

*The Wreckers* was inspired by old tales of Cornish villages whose inhabitants lured passing ships to wreck on the rugged Atlantic coast, then looted their cargoes (across the pond on Cape Cod, such land-based pirates were called “mooncussers”). “I had been haunted by impressions of that strange world of more than a hundred years ago,” she wrote, “the plundering of ships lured on to the rocks by the falsification or extinction of the coast lights; the relentless murder of their crews; and with it, all the ingrained religiosity of the Celtic population of that barren promontory.”

The overture to *The Wreckers* conjures the danger and majesty of seafaring life. The story it foretells is one of desperate circumstances and religious zealotry, dictated by the treacherous sea and the powerful church.

**La Mer**

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

- I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From dawn to midday on the sea)*
- II. Jeux des vagues (Play of the waves)*
- III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue of wind and waves)*

French composer Claude Debussy was a seminal force in 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music. Firmly established in core repertoire, *La Mer* is considered to be his most important orchestral work.

Subtitled “trois esquisses symphoniques pour orchestra” (three symphonic sketches for orchestra), *La Mer* premiered in Paris in 1905, but was not especially well admired until its second performance there in 1908. Debussy is said to have called the piece “three symphonic sketches” to avoid its being categorized as either a symphony or a symphonic poem, but rather to position it between them.

Though he had fond childhood memories of summers by the Mediterranean, Debussy is said to have drawn inspiration for *La Mer* more from representations of the sea in literature and visual art. Much impressed by Japanese art, he chose Katsushika Hokusai’s woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* for the cover of its printed score; however, he was irritated by analogies drawn between *La*

Mer and French Impressionist paintings. Despite his scorn for “impressionism,” favorable comparisons have persisted.

Debussy scholar Caroline Potter writes that *La Mer* “avoids monotony by using a multitude of water figurations that could be classified as musical onomatopoeia: they evoke the sensation of swaying movement of waves and suggest the pitter-patter of falling droplets of spray.” The three movements of *La Mer* transport listeners from gradual awakening to playful effervescence to awe and terror, with moments of serenity appearing throughout. The sea, infinitely more powerful than we who take it in, delivers all of this.

Astute listeners have detected simplified string motifs from *La Mer* in John Williams’ score for the 1975 blockbuster film *Jaws*.

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## Tickets for “Our Ocean”

“Our Ocean” concert performances will be at the Barnstable Performing Arts Center, 744 West Main Street, Hyannis on Saturday, June 15, 2024 at 7:30 PM and Sunday, June 16, 2024 at 3:00 PM.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit [capesymphony.org](https://capesymphony.org), call the Box Office at 508.362.1111, email [tickets@capesymphony.org](mailto:tickets@capesymphony.org), or visit us at 2235 Lyannough Road in West Barnstable, MA. The Box Office is open Monday – Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. During concert weekend, we can only be reached by email.

*Only tickets purchased on Cape Symphony’s secure website or through the Cape Symphony Box Office are legitimate and guaranteed. Exchanges or credits can only be honored for tickets purchased on the Cape Symphony website or through the Cape Symphony Box Office. See our [ticket policies](#).*

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