FEBRUARY 2020

KODÁLY
Dances of Galánta

LISZT
Piano Concerto No. 2

DVOŘÁK
Symphony No. 7

BENJAMIN ZANDER
conductor

LUCAS DEBARGUE
piano
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The distillation of a lifetime investigating composers’ truest intentions … this account of the work heaps revelation on revelation.

The Sunday Times (London)

“… in explaining his efforts to take the composer at his word, Zander gets to the crux of musical interpretation.”

Gramophone

“A breathtaking new recording under Benjamin Zander’s inspired intellectual guidance that needs to be studied carefully by every conductor, musician and singer in the world, professional and amateur alike who loves this masterpiece. The reward for listeners and performers alike, is discovering what Beethoven really intended. This Beethoven 9 is historic and will change forever, our understanding of Schiller’s words, “Your magic binds together what habit and fashion have torn apart.””

Dan Kepl PerformingArtsReview

Visit the merchandise table to pick up your copy today! Downloads and physical purchases are available via iTunes and Amazon. Streaming is available via Spotify. Please visit www.benjaminzander.org for more information, including free access to the Discussion Discs.

CONCERT PROGRAM

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2020 AT 7:00PM
SANDERS THEATRE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Guide to the music with Benjamin Zander throughout the concert (Discovery Series)

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 22, 2020 AT 8:00PM
NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY’S JORDAN HALL
Guide to the music with Benjamin Zander, 6:45pm

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2020 AT 3:00PM
SANDERS THEATRE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY
Guide to the music with Benjamin Zander, 1:45pm

Benjamin Zander, conductor

KODÁLY
Dances of Galánta
16 mins

I. Lento
II. Allegretto moderato
III. Allegro con moto, grazioso
IV. Allegro
IV. Allegro vivace

LISZT
Piano Concerto No. 2
21 mins

1. Adagio sostenuto assai – Allegro Agitato assai
2. Allegro moderato
3. Allegro deciso – Marziale un poco meno allegro
4. Allegro animato

INTERMISSION
15 mins

DVOŘÁK
Symphony No. 7
35 mins

I. Allegro maestoso
II. Poco adagio
III. Scherzo: Vivace
IV. Finale: Allegro

This organization is funded, in part, by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

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Unauthorized use of cameras, video and tape recorders is not permitted. Listening devices are available from the venue, please ask for assistance.
Composers have always loved to integrate folk melodies into their works both for popular appeal and to show their ability to manipulate a simple tune. The practice was already common in the Middle Ages. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, composers often made the mistake of equating the popular music of the day with authentic folk melodies. The melodies that Brahms and Liszt used in their Hungarian dances and rhapsodies, for example, were not indigenous melodies, but were the popular street and café music of their time – often played by Roma (Gypsy) bands.

Zoltán Kodály and his colleague Béla Bartók, both pioneers of modern ethnomusicology, were among the first (in 1907) to use the newfangled invention, the wax cylinder recorder, to collect folk melodies at their source. They traveled extensively to the most rural backwaters of Central and Eastern Europe to collect their examples and were careful to authenticate their research. Critical to their systematic approach was seeking out the variations in music and text from different locales, in the attempt to determine the origin of the melodies and follow the geographical spread of both music and words. They avoided one of the great pitfalls in authenticating folk music, recognizing the fact that the simpler the melody, the greater the possibility that similar ones arose independently and were not necessarily derived from a common source. Like Bartók, Kodály used many of the collected folk melodies as themes for his compositions. Of the two, Kodály was the more conservative and the more Romantic. While his international reputation is generally overshadowed by that of Bartók, his music has become a national treasure in his native Hungary.

Kodály’s ethnomusicological research notwithstanding, the themes for Dances of Galánta, first performed in 1933 for the 80th anniversary of the Budapest Philharmonic Society, did indeed originate from street and café music. Galánta, a small town now in Slovakia, was part of Hungary when Kodály lived there as a child. In the eighteenth century Galánta had been a center of sophisticated Roma musicians who performed from notated scores, rather than from memory, and played in the orchestras of the gentry. Although their fame had waned by Kodály’s time, the composer wanted to revive the old tradition. The themes for Dances of Galánta came from a historical collection, Selected Hungarian National Dances of Various Gypsies from Galánta. Kodály selected five different melodies and rhythms, giving them a brilliant orchestral dressing that provided a special showcase for the upper winds.

The five dances employ different modes, themes and rhythms, but they are strung together in such a way that the final measures of one dance serve as an introduction to the next. The opening dance begins with a long introduction that has the effect of a warm-up or flexing of musical muscles. The first three dances feature an orchestral soloist; in the first dance, the clarinet introduces a slow modal theme, while the second features the flute, finally blending seamlessly into the third, which features the oboe and contains a dialogue between the upper winds and strings. The fourth dance pits the violins against the upper winds as the dance becomes wilder and wilder.

Suddenly everything shifts gear with a pompous interruption from the lower brass, slipping into the final dance. The tempo is fast, with the theme bouncing around the entire orchestra and including quotes from the previous dances.

Program notes by:
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn
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FRANZ LISZT

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2 IN A MAJOR

BORN:
October 22, 1811.
Raiding, Hungary

DIED:
July 31, 1886.
Bayreuth, Bavaria

WORK COMPOSED:
Liszt drafted this concerto in 1839, put it away for ten years, revised it repeatedly for the last time in 1861.

WORK PREMIERED:
January 7, 1857. Liszt conducted, in Weimar, Germany

INSTRUMENTATION:
3 flutes, 1 piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, and strings

Franz Liszt was a man of paradoxes and extremes who could only flourish in the Romantic period. He was a superficial showman and contemplative artist, mystic and hedonist, genius and poseur, saint and sinner. He broke many a commandment and many a heart, exhibiting incredible flamboyance in his virtuoso piano performances before adoring audiences, yet longing for a life of religious contemplation. He fathered numerous illegitimate offspring but ended up taking minor orders in the Catholic Church with the right to the title Abbé Liszt. He witnessed first-hand the cultural and musical transformation of Europe but unfortunately never wrote his memoirs, being “too busy living it.”

Entitled originally Concerto Symphonique, Liszt’s Piano Concerto in A major took 22 years and at least four revisions from the first version in 1839 to its final form in 1861. It is a unified, single-movement work, comparable in structure to his tone poems, and, in contrast to its predecessor, the athletic Concerto No.1 in E-flat, is said to be “for poets only.” The term Concerto Symphonique was coined by the romantic French composer and pianist Henry Litolff to denote a work that was actually a symphony with piano obbligato, in which the thematic material was usually reserved for the orchestra. Liszt admired both Litolff and the form, and for most of the A major concerto the piano remains subdued, working in true partnership with the orchestra. Only near the end does the soloist dominate.

The Concerto opens with a dreamy theme in the woodwinds including an unusual chord progression that serves as the basis for the whole work and undergoes many transformations in mood, rhythm, key and tempo. Thematic transformation was one of Liszt’s favorite techniques for achieving musical unity in a work. It involved making significant changes to the theme while retaining its basic shape and identity. A snide critic once commented that, if the Concerto were given “a poetic or dramatic title, it might have been something like The Life and Adventures of a Melody.” Indeed, the Concerto’s principal theme is analogous to stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. While the concerto consists of only one movement, the shifts in tempo, in addition to a couple of cadenzas, provide the musical contrast common in multi-movement works.

The response to the inevitable question of the distinction between thematic transformation and variation involves a certain amount of nitpicking. Generally, however, variations retain the phrasing and harmonic structure of the original theme, most often – but not always – a binary structure of which each strain is repeated. Thematic transformation is more like the changes in a theme in the development section of a sonata allegro form, and it is this latter model that Liszt expands upon. The originality of Liszt’s transformations is their emotive, sometimes programmatic, function. A set of variations would present one new aspect of the theme after another. In the Concerto, Liszt provides long transitions of entirely new music setting up harmonic tension before resolving into the next iteration of the theme. At other times, he disguises the theme, sending it underground as an accompaniment.

One of the most memorable sections occurs in the equivalent of a slow movement, where the cello takes up a hauntingly beautiful transformation of the theme with delicate piano accompaniment. After a series of further mood swings, from self-aggrandizement to pathos, the work ends with a march-like statement of the theme and a rather bombastic finale.

Program notes by:
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PROGRAM NOTES

ANTONÍN LEOPOLD DVOŘÁK

SYMPHONY NO. 7 IN D MINOR, OPUS 70

BORN: September 8, 1841. Mühlhausen (Nelahozeves), Bohemia

DIED: May 1, 1904. Prague

WORK COMPOSED: Begun December 13, 1884, and completed March 17, 1885. The score as we now know it incorporates a few revisions made in June 1885

WORK PREMIERED: April 22, 1885. Dvořák conducted the premiere at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert at Saint James’s Hall, London

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE: January 8, 1886. Theodore Thomas and the New York Philharmonic

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings

DURATION: About 38 mins

THE BACKSTORY

Dvořák’s fame at home had begun with the performance in 1873 of a patriotic cantata called The Heirs of the White Mountain. In 1878, at the urging of Brahms, the Berlin firm of Simrock added Dvořák to its list. Simrock began by issuing the Moravian Duets (for soprano and mezzo soprano) that had so impressed Brahms in the first place, following this with the first set of Slavonic Dances for piano four hands. The success of the latter work was enough to make an international reputation for Dvořák. The first performance of the Stabat Mater in Prague in 1880 made an immense impression; meanwhile, the Joachim Quartet took on his chamber music, and his work was also coming to be known in America, especially in New York as well as in Cincinnati and Saint Louis, with their big settlements of music loving Germans.

The success of the Stabat Mater was nothing less than sensational when Joseph Barnby introduced it in London in 1883, and in that English world of choir festivals Dvořák became beloved and revered like no composer since Mendelssohn. The Royal Philharmonic Society invited him to conduct concerts in London in 1884. It was in response to the success of the Symphony No. 6 that he was invited immediately to write a new symphony for performance the following year. That was the present work.

The invitation set him afire with ambition. “Just now,” he wrote to his friend Judge Antonín Rus on December 22, 1884, “a new symphony (for London) occupies me, and wherever I go I think of nothing but my work, which must be capable of stirring the world, and God grant me that it will!” He had been excited by Brahms’s newest symphony, the Third, which he had gone to Berlin to hear in January 1884 and which gave him a new standard to shoot for. Moreover, as a letter to Simrock in February 1885 tells us, he was spurred by Brahms’s verbal exhortations as well as by his direct musical example. “I have been engaged on a new symphony for a long, long time; after all it must be something really worthwhile, for I don’t want Brahms’s words to me, ‘I imagine your symphony quite different from this one [No. 6 in D major],’ to remain unfulfilled.”

The new work could hardly have been more different from its sunshine and blue skies predecessor. For in the early 1880s, Dvořák was at a point of crisis. His mother, to whom he was close, had died in December 1882, and he was in distress over the steady deterioration of the mental health of Bedřich Smetana, the founding father of modern Czech music. (Smetana was released by death in May 1884.) Not least, Dvořák was perplexed about his own life. Being swept along on waves of success also meant being under growing pressure, internal and external, to consolidate his position and turn from a provincial composer into an international one. But “international” really meant Austro German, and the idea was for him to move to Vienna, to write operas on German texts, and to quit pestering Simrock about having his first name appear as Ant., if not actually Antonín, rather than the German Anton. It was hard for him to say “no” to the well intended advice of people like Brahms and the critic Eduard Hanslick; on the
other hand, to deny his own ethnic and linguistic heritage was impossible for someone who identified himself so closely as did Dvořák with the rising tide of Bohemian nationalism. It added up to a troubled time for him. During this period and in this mood, he wrote his two masterpieces in tragedy, the F minor Trio, Opus 65, and the D minor Symphony.

THE MUSIC
Dvořák makes his way into the music with a theme as dark and undercover as it is determined. And before the violas and cellos even articulate that idea, a low D pedal (horns, drums, and basses) has already done its work in defining the atmosphere. Characteristically, Dvořák includes a wealth of thematic ideas. Quickly he builds to a climax, withdraws for a moment into a pastoral conversation of horn and oboe, then works up to an even more intense crisis before settling into a new key, B flat major, and delighting us with a wonderfully spacious melody.

This is expanded magnificently until the rich exposition comes to a close just as though there were going to be a formal repeat. Instead, the music plunges—pianissimo but with great intensity—into the development. This moves swiftly and masterfully, covering much territory. The recapitulation is tautly condensed—it even begins in mid paragraph—and only in the dying away coda does the music draw more leisurely breaths.

The Adagio is among Dvořák’s most searching slow movements. Here, too, there is astonishing richness and variety of material, presented lucidly, with a profoundly original sense of order, and gloriously scored. The most personal paragraph is one in which a reiterated phrase with a melancholy falling seventh in pianissimo strings is punctuated by pairs of soft chords for woodwinds and pizzicato strings.

The Scherzo moves in flavorful cross rhythms, the swinging theme in violins and violas falling into three broad beats per measure, while the cello and bassoon tune is in two. It is all force and energy, after which the trio brings contrast in every aspect, by being in a major key, by its gentleness, and by the skillful and evocative blurring of outlines and textures. The trios in Dvořák’s scherzos are usually picturesque in a folksy sort of way; this one is out of the ordinary not merely for its cunningly clouded sound but also in being so richly developed and extended. In most ways this scherzo is a moment of relaxation after the densely composed, attention demanding two movements that precede it, but the coda reminds us that the context is one of tragedy.

The Finale also presents a wealth of themes, from the first impassioned gesture, through the chorale to which this immediately leads, to the confident A major tune for the cellos. The development is ample, the recapitulation taut, and the powerful coda turns at last to a solemn close in D major.

-Michael Steinberg
ARTIST PROFILE

LUCAS DEBARGUE, PIANO

The uncommon talent of Lucas Debargue was revealed by his performances at the Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow in 2015. Though he placed fourth at the final round, he was the only contestant across all disciplines to receive the coveted Moscow Music Critic’s Prize as a pianist “whose incredible gift, artistic vision and creative freedom have impressed the critics as well as the audience.”

Following this breakthrough, Lucas was invited to play solo and with leading orchestras in the most prestigious venues: Theatre des Champs Elysées and Philharmonie in Paris; London’s Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall; Berlin Philharmonic and Prinzregententheater in Munich; Stockholm’s Konzerthuset; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Milan Conservatory; Carnegie Hall; Chicago Symphony Hall Kennedy Center in Washington; Maison de la Musique in Montreal, the Royal Conservatory of Toronto; the concert halls of Mexico City, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Seoul; and of course the legendary Grand Hall of Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall in Moscow, the Mariinsky Concert Hall and the Shostakovich Philharmonic Hall in St. Petersburg.

Lucas Debargue regularly collaborates with Valery Gergiev, Mikhail Pletnev, Vladimir Jurowski, Andrey Boreyko, Yutaka Sado, Tugan Sokhiev, Vladimir Fedoseev, Bertrand de Billy, and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. His chamber music partners include Gidon Kremer, Janine Jansen, and Martin Frost.

In the 2019-20 season, Mr. Debargue will make his mainstage Carnegie Hall debut with the American Symphony Orchestra and Leon Botstein. He will also perform in Boston, Toronto and Montreal. A tour with the Russian National Orchestra and Maestro Pletnev will take him to the Middle East and Switzerland, while Berlin will welcome him back to the Konzerthaus with Shostakovich First Concerto and music by a living Russian composer, Leonid Desyatnikov.

Born in 1990, Mr. Debargue forged a highly unconventional path to success. He began to study music when he was 11, but soon switched to literature and graduated from Paris Diderot 7 University as a Bachelor of Arts. In his teens, he continued to explore piano repertoire on his own.

At the age of 20 Mr. Debargue decided to re-dedicate himself to the piano and started his professional training at the Paris Cortot Music School under the guidance of the celebrated piano teacher Rena Shereshevskaya. It was her vision and support that helped him make a commitment to music for life. In 2014, Mr. Debargue won the First Prize at the Gaillard International Piano Competition (France), which gave him the confidence to participate and, eventually, to become one of the prize winners in the Tchaikovsky Competition.

A performer of fierce integrity and dazzling communicative power, Lucas Debargue draws inspiration for his playing from literature, painting, cinema, jazz, and develops very personal interpretation of a carefully selected repertoire. Though the core piano repertoire is central to his career, he is also keen to present works by lesser-known composers like Nikolai Medtner, Nikolai Roslavets, or Milosz Magin.

He also composes and performs his own music. Orpheo di camera concertino for piano, drums and string orchestra was premiered with Kremerata Baltica in Latvia in 2017. A Piano Trio was created later that year under the auspices of the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris. A Sony recording artist, Lucas Debargue has released three solo albums with music of Scarlatti, Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, Ravel, Medtner, and Szymanowsky. He collaborated with Janine Jansen, Martin Fröst, and Torleif Thedéen on a recording of Messian’s Quatuor pour la fin du Temps. The coming season will be marked by the release of Mr. Debargue’s monumental four-volume tribute to Scarlatti, containing 52 of his sonatas.

In 2017 Lucas Debaruge was awarded a prestigious German prize “ECHO Klassik.” In the same year, a documentary following the pianist right after his Tchaikovsky Competition break-through was released by Bel-Air Productions. Learn more at www.lucasdebargue.com.
In 1979, ninety-six enthusiastic players, professionals, students, amateurs, a dynamic, probing conductor named Benjamin Zander, and an impassioned donor and amateur musician named Seymour Rothchild joined together to found the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. Today, the musicians represent the original spirited blend and account for the passion, high level of participation, and technical accomplishment for which this ensemble is celebrated. The professionals maintain the highest standard, the students keep the focus on training and education, and the gifted amateurs—including doctors, lawyers, teachers, and computer programmers—remind everybody that music-making is an expression of enthusiasm and love.

The Boston Philharmonic’s message rings loud and clear—music making is a privilege and a joy, and above all, a collaborative adventure. The orchestra’s season includes performances at New England Conservatory’s Jordan Hall, Sanders Theatre at Harvard University, and the historic Symphony Hall. The BPO performs with a wide range of soloists from highly gifted performers at the start of their international careers such as Stefan Jackiw, Gabriela Montero, Jonah Ellsworth, and George Li, to world-famous artists like Yo-Yo Ma, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Russell Sherman, Kim Kashkashian, and Alisa Weilerstein, and legendary masters such as Ivry Gitlis, Denes Zsigmondy, Georgy Sandor, Leonard Shure, and Oscar Shumsky.

The BPO has released five critically acclaimed recordings, including works by Stravinsky, Beethoven, Mahler, Shostakovich, and Ravel. Among many other reviews of extravagant praise, Classic CD magazine gave the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra’s recording of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring the highest rank of all available recordings. Of Mahler’s Symphony No. 6, American Record Guide wrote: “This joins the Rattle and the two Bernstein recordings as the finest on record... All the glory to Zander and his semi-professional orchestra, for the sixth is probably Mahler’s most difficult and complex symphony...All things considered, when I reach for a recording of the sixth to play for my own pleasure, it will most likely be this one.”

Boston Philharmonic Orchestra concerts have long been a two-part experience; each performance is preceded by one of Benjamin Zander’s illuminating and entertaining pre-concert lectures, which prepare listeners to understand the ideas and the structure of the music they are about to hear. The Philharmonic’s commitment to reaching and educating a wide audience is maintained by its Music Without Boundaries program, which raises money to provide tickets for school-age students, and its Crescendo! Community Engagement programs that provide thousands of students throughout Boston with musical activities ranging from concerts to individualized instruction to workshops and more. The Boston Philharmonic is a 2019-20 partner orchestra in the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), a national initiative to increase diversity in American Orchestras.
Music was Benjamin Zander’s life at a very early age. When Zander was nine he was already composing and by twelve he was studying under Benjamin Britten and Imogen Holst. He left home at the age of fifteen to study for five years with the great Spanish cellist Gaspar Cassado in Florence and at the State Academy in Cologne. After completing his degree at London University, he went to the United States on a Harkness Fellowship and has made his home in Boston ever since. There, as conductor of the Boston Philharmonic since its formation in 1978, and a guest conductor of numerous orchestras, he has become the centre of an intense, at times almost cult-like following. In his case, however, the followers are not starry-eyed acolytes, but rather some of the most well-informed musical intellectuals in America. For nearly thirty years, beginning with Michael Steinberg’s passionate advocacy on his behalf in the pages of the Boston Globe, critics and public have been united in their praise of Mr. Zander’s interpretations of the central repertory.

For 45 years he was on the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music, where his class on interpretation attracted students from all over the world, and he travels extensively giving masterclasses, conducting guest performances, and touring with his own recently formed Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. He has established an international reputation as a guest conductor and has conducted the Israel Philharmonic for three consecutive years, and conducted orchestras as diverse as the Bournemouth Symphony, the Scottish and Irish National Orchestras, the St Petersburg Philharmonic, the Malaysian Symphony, the St Louis Symphony Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Youth Orchestra of the Americas, the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and has appeared with the National Youth Orchestras of New Zealand, Australia and Venezuela.

Mr. Zander has a unique relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra (London), with which he is currently recording a series of Beethoven and Mahler symphonies. Beethoven’s Fifth, Seventh and Ninth Symphonies and Mahler’s First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Ninth Symphonies have been released thus far. Each of these recordings includes a full-length discussion disc with Benjamin Zander explaining the music. High Fidelity named the recording of Mahler’s Sixth as “the best classical recording of 2002.” The recording of Mahler’s Third was awarded the “Critics’ Choice” by the German Record Critics’ Award Association in 2004, and the recording of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony was nominated for a Grammy Award. Their recording of Bruckner’s 5th Symphony was nominated for a 2010 Grammy for Best Orchestral Performance.

Benjamin Zander has traveled the world lecturing to organizations on leadership. He has appeared several times as a keynote speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he was presented with the Crystal Award for “Outstanding Contributions in the Arts and International Relations.” The best-selling book, The Art of Possibility, co-authored with leading psychotherapist Rosamund Zander, has been translated into seventeen languages.

In 2002, Mr. Zander was awarded the Caring Citizen of the Humanities Award by the International Council for Caring Communities at the United Nations. In 2007, he was awarded the Golden Door award by the International Institute of Boston for his “outstanding contribution to American society” as a United States citizen of foreign birth. In March of 2009, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from New England Conservatory of Music, and in 2012 he was awarded Faculty Emeritus status at that institution.

Benjamin Zander was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the ABSA Achievement Awards in Johannesburg on September 8, 2019. The award is given annually at an event celebrating the most outstanding South Africans in the fields of business, the arts, humanitarian work and community service. The Extraordinary Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Maestro Zander in recognition of his contributions in the spheres of Music, Culture and Leadership. This is the first time that the award has been given to a non-South African. Previous recipients of the Award include Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu.
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Individual and corporate contributions to our Music Without Boundaries Schools Program provide concert tickets to inner-city school students, their teachers, and parents. Boston Philharmonic concerts breathe life into the music curriculum and enable students to participate in concert-hall experiences that can lead to a lifelong love of classical music. Please call the Philharmonic office at 617.236.0999 to share in supporting this program.

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- Ursula Ziegler
- Janice Forgays

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