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# SOUNDINGS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE COLORADO SYMPHONY

Volume 14 • Number 1

colorado symphony

ANDREW LITTON, ARTISTIC ADVISOR



## RISING PHOENIX

### A Fiery Concerto For Transformative Times

**Yumi Hwang-Williams recalls the beginning of her collaboration with composer Daniel Kellogg on *Rising Phoenix*, a concerto for violin and orchestra.**

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## Symphony On The Rise.

It feels fantastic to be back at Boettcher Concert Hall doing what we do best: bringing outstanding classical music to the heart of Downtown Denver.

Our 2016/17 concert season is going to be a remarkable one, with many reasons to celebrate.

First, bravo to Associate Conductor Christopher Dragon and Assistant Conductor Andres Lopera for their one-year anniversaries with the Colorado Symphony. We're so glad you've joined us in making incredible music. Here's to another year!

And what a year it will be: a Masterworks repertoire including *La Bohème* and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, our rapidly growing Geek Series, and tributes to John Denver and Louis Armstrong promise yet another season of symphonic music for everyone to enjoy.

By the time we close the season with Mahler's *Symphony No. 3*, this year will have been a triumph of flawless performance driven by our talented musicians and artistic leadership.

Speaking of triumphs, we're glad you're sitting down, because we've saved the best news for last. Just five years ago, the Colorado Symphony was struggling to stay afloat. Today we can proudly announce that we are—for the first time in 27 years—beginning our concert season without a deficit.

You could say our quarter-life crisis has passed, and we're approaching our thirties with clear heads and big plans, as is often the case.

This achievement is possible because of the unstoppable dedication of our musicians, board, donors, and staff. It's the first of many milestones we'll need to reach as we continue strengthening our financial foundation. But we did it—all of us, together.

With so much to celebrate, and so much to look forward to, let's sit back and enjoy some beautiful music.

With gratitude,

Jerry Kern and Mary Rossick Kern

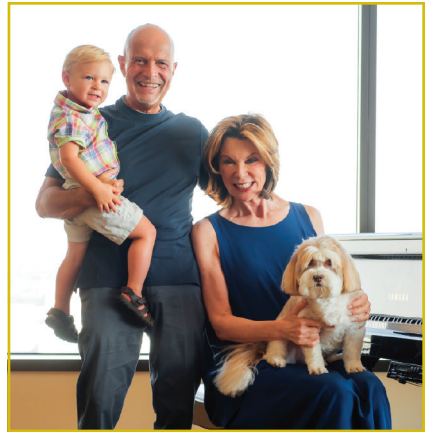


Photo: LOCK + LAND [lock-land.com]

*Co-Chairs, Mary & Jerry with their grandson, Graham and their Havanese, Mikey.*

# RISING PHOENIX:

## A Fiery Concerto For Transformative Times

By Rachel Trignano



“When Daniel asked me how I felt about using the Phoenix legend as the source of our concerto, I actually felt chills.”

That’s how Colorado Symphony Concertmaster Yumi Hwang-Williams recalls the beginning of her collaboration with composer Daniel Kellogg on *Rising Phoenix*, a concerto for violin and orchestra making its world premiere October 14, 2016, at Boettcher Concert Hall.

Kellogg, who holds the role of Associate Professor of Composition at the University of Colorado in Boulder, began collaborating on *Rising Phoenix* with Hwang-Williams in September 2015.

“All of classical music is a collaboration,” says Kellogg. “When it’s a premiere, it’s all a question mark until the performance. There is a lot to figure out before we bring the piece to the audience.”

This concerto marks Kellogg’s second world premiere with the Colorado Symphony; in December 2014, Hwang-Williams, Principal Horn Michael Thornton, and Artistic Advisor Andrew Litton performed and recorded Kellogg’s original composition *A Glorious Morning* at Carnegie Hall.

Since they first began working together, Kellogg was eager to compose a solo for Hwang-Williams. In search of folkloric inspiration to provide a dramatic story arc, Kellogg found his muse right in his own home: his wife, Chinese concert pianist Hsing-ay Hsu, was the first to suggest the story of the Phoenix. Their young daughter’s books on Eastern fables and legends stoked his imagination, and the first sparks of *Rising Phoenix* appeared.

For Hwang-Williams, the Phoenix resonates on a deeply personal level, as well. “After emigrating from South Korea at the age of nine, my new beginning in America was very much a rebirth.”

The tale of the Phoenix is widely known and well-traveled, found in many forms in cultures and religions across the globe and dating back thousands of years. The Phoenix is described as a magical and singular bird of stunning beauty, and is revered as a good omen.



PHOTO: PETER LOCKLEY

Many traditions tell of the Phoenix offering a morning song to the sun, and in return receiving immortality. Some say the mythic bird will live in seclusion for hundreds of years before becoming mysteriously set aflame and re-emerging young once more, from its own ashes.

And *Rising Phoenix* is indeed a fiery concerto, interlacing tranquil moments with bursts of rapid intensity, including a scherzo Kellogg describes as “four minutes of blazing-fast passages.” Kellogg didn’t hold back when composing Hwang-Williams’ “challenging and flashy” solo, admitting “it’s a lot for one person to carry off.”

For Hwang-Williams, the challenge lies as much in creating an emotional connection with the audience as demonstrating her renowned technical expertise. “As a performer, I’m an interpreter—my main job is to be a medium between composer and audience. Being comfortable enough with the piece to truly deliver its message and feeling is one my biggest challenges.”

Kellogg is completely confident in Hwang-Williams’ ability to pull off this rousing piece: “She is a spectacular player and, if I’ve done my job well, the audience will be captivated by her artistry.”

Yet *Rising Phoenix* promises to reveal far more than Hwang-Williams’ extraordinary talent as a solo violinist. It is wrought in emotion, with five movements in a thirty-minute span that play moments of lyrical serenity off dramatic, pulse-quickening bursts of energy. The concerto boasts a dynamic structure, textured with contrasting modes and dialogues soaring and pivoting like a powerful bird in flight.

Kellogg’s methodology in composing also resembles the elusive, ascendant Phoenix. “My ideas are born in the isolation and the infinite possibilities of my studio. Until a person plays that music live, it is theoretical.”

And what better performer to bring the piece to life than Hwang-Williams, who has always been intrigued by the idea of reinvention? “I believe we are all capable of transformation, of rising out of our circumstances,” she muses.

It’s fitting, then, that *Rising Phoenix* makes its world premiere during the Colorado Symphony’s 2016/17 Season. After years of uncertainty followed by a steady rise towards stability, the Symphony is in its best financial health since its inception 27 years ago—a re-emergence signifying good things to come, and proof that reinvention isn’t always a fable.

See *Rising Phoenix* October 14 and 15 at Boettcher Concert Hall. Tickets available at the box office or at [coloradosymphony.org](http://coloradosymphony.org).



# ENTER THE DRAGON

Looking Back on a  
Young Conductor's  
First Year with the  
Colorado Symphony



PHOTO: BRANDON MARSHALL

*"This is my home now. This is my life."*

– Christopher Dragon, Associate Conductor

One year ago, Australian conductor Christopher Dragon left his post at the West Australian Symphony Orchestra to join the Colorado Symphony as Associate Conductor. It's been a time of learning, leading, and adjusting to the Mile High City's notoriously thinner air. Known for his emphatic conducting style—and blink-and-you'll-miss-him power walk onstage—Dragon's growing fan base is spilling into the "Dragon Pit," a special seating area in Boettcher Concert Hall that directly faces the emotive conductor for prime Dragon-watching. Here, Dragon shares his impressions on his one-year anniversary with the Symphony and all that's happened since his arrival.

## **How did it feel when you led the orchestra for the first time at Boettcher Concert Hall?**

Walking onstage at Boettcher Concert Hall to lead the orchestra for the first time was a surreal and beautiful moment for me. I remember thinking, "This is my home now. This is my life."

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**Your big-audience debut was with Pink Martini at Red Rocks Amphitheatre. How would you describe the experience?**

Conducting at Red Rocks Amphitheatre right at the beginning of my career here was just amazing. I always compare Red Rocks to the Sydney Opera House, in that both have a special atmosphere you cannot describe. We are so lucky in Denver to have such a unique venue—and the concerts that Colorado Symphony perform there are always a lot of fun!

**You interviewed to be a conductor a year ago. Looking back, how did conducting the Symphony feel then, especially compared to now?**

Straightaway in the audition, it was clear there was a great chemistry between the musicians and myself. A year later, this connection has only gotten stronger. Having a bond like this with an orchestra is not always something that happens easily, so I feel so fortunate to be able to make music with them all. It is such a joy!

**How do you define the role of a conductor?**

Our orchestra consists of about 80 musicians, and each of them has a different perspective and interpretation of a piece of music. To me, the main objective of the conductor is to get everybody onto the same page so we can have a unified vision of the piece.

**What have you learned in your year with the Colorado Symphony?**

It has been a massive learning experience working with the Colorado Symphony, as the repertoire is so diverse. This first year alone, I have conducted a semi-staged musical, a videogame-themed concert, worked with a dance company, presented youth concerts, collaborated with major pop artists—and, of course, conducted numerous classical concerts. The biggest—and maybe most unexpected—lesson learned so far has to be from conducting the *Movie at the Symphony* concerts, where we perform the soundtrack in front of a full-screen film. The scores are often extremely complex, and to align the music to a movie and click-track can be quite difficult. Usually, soundtracks will be recorded over numerous takes, so to perform a whole soundtrack to a movie live in one shot is incredibly difficult.

**How would you describe the Colorado Symphony?**

The musicians of the Colorado Symphony are all extremely hardworking! The Symphony performs so many concerts in a season, and—regardless of this workload—they always have a great work attitude. Everyone is always trying to achieve the highest possible level of performance.

**Do you have any favorite composers or pieces you love to perform?**

As a young conductor, I think it's too early for me to have a favorite composer or piece. I enjoy conducting all types of different music and want to explore as much of it as possible. I've studied and conducted Brahms many times, so I feel comfortable with his works. When I was a clarinetist at university, I played quite a few pieces Brahms had written for clarinet, so even before switching to conducting his musical language was familiar and more natural to me. This season, my Masterworks concert will feature Brahms Symphony No. 3, and it is a concert I'm already looking forward to!



## What was it like moving from Australia to the States? What was your biggest culture shock in becoming a Coloradan?

Taking this position with the Colorado Symphony was a big moment in my life, since it's my first time living outside of Australia. The hardest thing specifically about moving to Colorado has been adjusting to the altitude—I have found that it can really affect my conducting in performances, stamina-wise.

## What do you enjoy about living in Denver? What are you getting used to?

I really enjoy living in Denver, and moving from Perth to Denver has probably been the easiest transition for me to make here as both cities have a similar vibe. One thing I still haven't quite gotten used to is tipping. It's not something we have in Australia, and it always takes me a little while to work it out. I still have regular conducting engagements in Australia, so it is nice that I get to travel back a lot—but that flight never gets any easier...

## What are your hobbies, outside of conducting?

Well, even though I'm not much of a cook, I love watching cooking programs. Anything with Gordon Ramsay, especially, because I think he's brilliant and hilarious.

## Finally, how do you prepare for a concert?

Lots of studying!



This season, put yourself face-to-face with Associate Conductor Christopher Dragon with seats in the Dragon Pit! (Parquet on seating chart) This is a unique opportunity to view the conductor and orchestra from an entirely new angle. Sit in the Dragon Pit for these select concerts with tickets starting at just \$20:

- Sept. 24 – The Second City Guide to the Symphony
- Oct. 16 – Inside Dvorak Symphony No. 9  
“From the New World”
- Jan. 14 – A Night of Pops: Tribute to  
Leroy Anderson
- Jan. 22 – Inside Symphonic Beginnings
- Mar. 11 – Time For Three
- Mar. 19 – Inside Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4
- May 13 – Dianne Reeves in Concert



*Christopher Dragon conducts excerpts from “How to Train your Dragon” at the 2016 Symphonic Tribute to Comic Con concert.*