

Concerts of Thursday, March 28, and Friday, March 29, 2019, at 8:00p

Robert Spano, Conductor

Wu Han, Piano

Daniel Hope, Violin

David Finckel, Cello

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Overture to *Egmont*, Opus 84 (1810)

**Concerto for Piano, Violin, Cello and Orchestra in C Major, Opus 56
("Triple") (1804)**

I. *Allegro*

II. *Largo*

III. *Rondo alla Polacca*

Wu Han, Piano

Daniel Hope, Violin

David Finckel, Cello

Intermission

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat Major, Opus 38, "Spring" (1841)

I. *Andante un poco maestoso; Allegro molto vivace*

II. *Larghetto*

III. *Scherzo. Molto vivace*

IV. *Allegro animato e grazioso*

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827.

“My hearing has grown steadily weaker”

By the close of the 18th century, Ludwig van Beethoven had established himself as one of Vienna’s foremost pianists and composers. In June of 1801, Beethoven wrote to a friend:

My compositions are bringing in a deal of money, and indeed I have almost more commissions than I can satisfy. Moreover, for each work I can have six or seven publishers, or even more if I choose to concern myself with the business; they no longer make agreements with me; I state my terms and they pay up...

But in that same letter, Beethoven—then thirty years old—revealed the onset of a condition that would plague him for the remainder of his life: “But now that envious demon, my bad health, has played me a scurvy trick, namely: for the past three years my hearing has grown steadily weaker...”

Beethoven consulted with physicians in a desperate attempt to save his hearing. In April of 1802, on the advice of his doctor, Beethoven relocated to the beautiful country village of Heiligenstadt, where he remained until the early fall. During his stay in Heiligenstadt, it appears Beethoven experienced a further decline in his hearing. Beethoven was forced to confront the possibility, even the likelihood, that he would lose his hearing altogether. It was, of course, the cruelest joke fate could play upon Beethoven. He would soon become a virtuoso pianist unable to perform in public, and a composer unable to hear his own music.

“A truly miserable existence”

It is not surprising that Beethoven spent much time contemplating the meaning of his life. One of the products of this soul-searching process was the document known as the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” written in October of 1802. Addressed to his two brothers, the Testament was found among Beethoven’s papers after the composer’s death in 1827.

In the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” Beethoven confessed:

But how humiliated I have felt if somebody standing beside me heard the sound of a flute in the distance and *I heard nothing*, or if somebody heard a *shepherd sing* and again I heard nothing—Such experiences almost made me despair, and I was on the point of putting an end to my life—The only thing that held me back was *my art*. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence—a truly miserable existence...

In the decade following the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” Beethoven responded with ferocious, unflagging energy and determination. During this extraordinary period, Beethoven composed such masterpieces as the Symphonies Nos. 2-8, the Fourth and Fifth (“Emperor”) Piano Concertos, the “Razumovsky” String Quartets, the “Waldstein,” “Appassionata” and “Les Adieux” Piano Sonatas, and the composer’s only opera, *Fidelio*.

The first half of this concert features two Beethoven compositions from that remarkable, post-Heiligenstadt decade.

Overture to *Egmont*, Opus 84 (1810)

The first performances of Beethoven’s incidental music to *Egmont* took place at the Burgtheater in Vienna on June 15, 1810. The Overture to *Egmont* is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Approximate performance time of the *Egmont* Overture is nine minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: November 27, 1951, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: May 9-11, 2013, Donald Runnicles, Conductor.

Recording: Telarc CD-80358, Yoel Levi, Conductor

Beethoven maintained a lifelong admiration for the immortal German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). In February of 1811, Beethoven wrote to a friend: “If you write to Goethe about me, try to find all the words that will assure him of my deepest respect and admiration...who can ever give enough thanks to a great poet, the most precious jewel a nation can possess?” Beethoven composed several works inspired by the writings of Goethe, including songs, the incidental music to the play *Egmont* (1810), and the cantata for chorus and orchestra, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* (1815).

Beethoven composed his *Egmont* incidental music for a production of Goethe’s 1788 play at the Vienna Burgtheater. The story of *Egmont* greatly appealed to Beethoven, a tireless champion of political freedom. *Egmont* takes place in the 16th century, and concerns the oppression of the Netherlands at the hands of the Spanish dictator, the Duke of Alva. Count Egmont, a Dutch patriot, is imprisoned by the Duke, and sentenced to death. Egmont’s heroic martyrdom serves as a rallying cry for the Dutch people to defeat the Spanish invaders.

Musical Analysis

The *Egmont* Overture begins with a slow-tempo introduction (*Sostenuto ma non troppo*). A powerful orchestral chord yields to an imposing statement by the strings, to which the winds offer a subdued response. After a repeat of this sequence, the first violins quietly introduce a descending motif. This motif launches the ensuing *Allegro*, and serves as the basis for the first principal

theme, played by the cellos. The theme undergoes a powerful transformation by the orchestra. The second principal theme is in the form of an exchange between the strings and winds—a descendant of the slow-tempo introduction's opening measures. The brief development section focuses upon a portion of the cello theme. The cellos once again play that theme to launch the recapitulation. The momentum is abruptly halted by the violins' two-note descending figure, and a brief silence. The music resumes in the quietest fashion, but soon generates tremendous energy (*Allegro con brio*), culminating in the triumphant final bars.

Concerto for Piano, Violin, Cello and Orchestra in C Major, Opus 56 ("Triple") (1804)

In addition to the solo piano, violin, and cello, the "Triple" Concerto is scored for flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-six minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performances: November 16, 17 and 19, 1972, William Noll, Piano, Martin Sauser, Violin, Donovan Schumacher, Cello, Robert Shaw, Conductor.

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: May 9-11, 2013, Robert Spano, Piano, David Coucheron, Violin, Christopher Rex, Cello, Donald Runnicles, Conductor.

Beethoven began composition of his Concerto for Piano, Violin, Cello and Orchestra in late 1803, completing the work in the summer of 1804. Beethoven composed the piano part of the "Triple" Concerto for Archduke Rudolph (1788-1831), the youngest son of Emperor Leopold II. Rudolph, a longtime pupil, friend and patron of Beethoven, was the dedicatee of such pieces as the Fourth and "Emperor" Piano Concertos, the "Archduke" Piano Trio, the Piano Sonatas Opus 90 ("Les Adieux"), 106 ("Hammerklavier"), and 111, the great choral work, the *Missa solemnis*, and the *Grosse Fugue* for string quartet.

The fact that Beethoven composed the keyboard parts of both the Triple Concerto and the "Archduke" Trio for Rudolph is testament to his considerable talents as a pianist. Beethoven dedicated the "Triple" Concerto to another of his patrons, Prince Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz. The first public performance of the "Triple" Concerto took place in Vienna, in May of 1808.

Musical Analysis

I. *Allegro*— Beethoven composed the "Triple" Concerto around the same time as his path-breaking "Eroica" Symphony, Opus 55 (1803). However, the Concerto displays a far more genial and lyrical side of Beethoven's craft. The "Triple" Concerto opens with the traditional orchestral exposition of the movement's principal themes. The cellos and basses immediately present the first theme, building to the orchestra's *fortissimo* proclamation. The succeeding themes incorporate the first's dotted rhythm. The solo cello enters with a *dolce* version of

the opening theme. The violin and piano soon join their counterpart. The soloists offer elaborate versions of the principal themes, often in tandem with each other. A series of trills by the soloists yields to the orchestra's *fortissimo* close of the exposition. The solo cello inaugurates the development section. The exchanges between the trio are by turns intense and tender. The soloists' vibrant ascending and descending passages lead to the orchestra's *fortissimo* start of the recapitulation. The trio's brilliant flourishes, punctuated by the orchestra, bring the opening movement to a stirring close (*Più allegro*).

II. *Largo*—The brief slow-tempo movement begins with a passage for strings, including muted violins. The solo cello enters with a leisurely presentation of the *Largo*'s beautiful principal theme (*molto cantabile*). The theme serves as the basis for a series of tender exchanges by the soloists. A brief, vibrant passage for the solo cello serves as a bridge to the finale, which follows without pause.

III. *Rondo alla Polacca*—The solo cello introduces the central theme of the *Rondo* finale, based upon a *polonaise*, a sparkling Polish dance in triple meter. The dance returns throughout a movement notable for its high spirits, and brilliant passagework for the soloists. Toward the close of the finale, Beethoven converts the *polonaise* into a vibrant dance in duple meter (*Allegro*). A final reprise of the 3/4 *polonaise* (*Tempo I*) brings the "Triple" Concerto to a rousing conclusion.

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat Major, Opus 38, "Spring" (1841)

Robert Schumann was born in Zwickau, Germany, on June 8, 1810, and died in Endenich, Germany, on July 29, 1856. The first performance took place at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, Germany, on March 31, 1841, with Felix Mendelssohn conducting. The Symphony No. 1 is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-one minutes.

First Classical Subscription Performance: January 25, 1948, Henry Sopkin, Conductor

Most Recent Classical Subscription Performances: February 2 and 4, 2017, Jun Märkl, Conductor.

Robert and Clara

The early 1840s were glorious years for Robert Schumann. On September 12, 1840, the German composer wed his beloved Carla Wieck (1819-1896). The courtship had been a long and stressful one, as Clara's father, Friedrich Wieck, vehemently opposed any union between his daughter and Robert. But, the day after the wedding (which was also Clara's birthday), Robert was able to write the following in the couple's joint diary:

My most beloved young wife! Let me greet you with a tender kiss on this special day, the first of your womanhood, the first of your twenty-first year. The little book which I open herewith has a very particular, intimate meaning; it is to record everything that affects us together in our household and married life, our wishes, our hopes...your fair hopes and mine—may heaven bless them; your anxieties and mine...in short, all our hopes and sorrows...

Robert's union with Clara—a gifted pianist and composer—seemed to inspire his creative powers. In the year of their marriage, Robert Schumann wrote some 150 songs, including the glorious cycles *Frauenliebe und -leben* (*A Woman's Love and Life*) and *Dichterliebe* (*A Poet's Love*).

In 1841, Robert Schumann focused his energies upon orchestral music. In the early portion of that year, Schumann completed his joyous "Spring" Symphony (No. 1 in B-flat Major). Schumann then composed his *Overture, Scherzo and Finale*. In May, Schumann penned a single-movement *Fantasy in A minor* for piano and orchestra (four years later, Schumann added an *Intermezzo* and *Allegro vivace*, transforming that *Fantasy* into the magnificent three-movement A-minor Piano Concerto). In that same productive year of 1841, Schumann composed the original version of his Symphony No. 4 in D minor.

"Under the urge of spring"

Clara Schumann was a constant source of comfort and inspiration for her husband. But, the composition of the Symphony No. 1 was the product of some additional stimuli. On November 23, 1842, Schumann wrote to his friend, composer Ludwig Spohr: "I composed the symphony, so to speak, under the urge of spring which every year comes over men anew, even in full maturity."

On January 25, 1841, Clara wrote in the joint diary: "Today, Monday, Robert has nearly finished his Symphony. It was composed chiefly at night—for some nights my poor Robert has not slept on account of it. He calls it 'Spring Symphony.' A poem about Spring...was the first inspiration for this composition." The poem in question, written by Adolf Böttger, concludes with the following lines:

"O wende, wende deinen Lauf,

—Im Tale blühet Frühling auf!"

"O turn, turn aside your course,

—Spring is blossoming in the vale!"

Schumann sketched his "Spring" Symphony in the span of just four days, from January 23 to January 26, 1841, using, according to the composer, a steel pen that he found near Beethoven's grave in Vienna. Schumann completed the orchestration on February 20. Originally, the composer provided titles for each of

the Symphony's four movements: "(1) Spring's Awakening," "(2) Evening," "(3) Happy Playfellows" and "(4) Spring's Farewell." Schumann later discarded those titles.

The premiere of the "Spring" Symphony took place at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on March 31, 1841. Felix Mendelssohn, led the performance (Clara also performed on the piano at the concert). It was a fine success, with the Symphony receiving a glowing reception from the audience.

With music that is as enticing and life-affirming as its subject, the "Spring" Symphony remains one of Robert Schumann's most beloved compositions.

Musical Analysis

I. *Andante un poco maestoso; Allegro molto vivace*—The Symphony opens with a fanfare for trumpets and horns. In a letter to conductor Karl Gottfried Wilhelm Taubert, Schumann directed: "I should like the very first trumpet call to sound as though it came up from on high, like a call to wake up." The eight-note fanfare is based upon the final line of Böttger's poem, reproduced below. The added bold type corresponds to the musical emphasis Schumann suggests in his score:

"Im **Ta**-le blü-het **Früh-ling** auf!"

The orchestra repeats the fanfare motif. The slow-tempo introduction (*Andante un poco maestoso*) gathers momentum, leading to the principal *Allegro molto vivace*. Its opening theme is a lively figure, again based upon the fanfare. A more restrained, *dolce* motif, introduced by the clarinets and bassoons, serves as the second principal theme. The spirited development section concludes with a reprise of the opening fanfare. After a varied recapitulation, there is an extended coda, whose moments of repose are finally dispelled by a vibrant dash to the finish.

II. *Larghetto*—Divided first violins sing the radiant central melody of this slow-tempo movement. The melody returns in various guises, alternating with more agitated episodes. A brief coda, featuring a trombone chorale, serves as the transition to the ensuing *Scherzo*, which follows without pause.

III. *Scherzo. Molto vivace*—The *Scherzo* is based upon a brusque melody, introduced by the strings. There are two intervening *Trio* sections. The first (*Molto più vivace*) features a dialogue between strings and winds. The second *Trio* is a *perpetuum mobile* in triple time. After a final reprise of the *Scherzo*, a mysterious coda leads directly to the final movement.

IV. *Allegro animato e grazioso*—The finale begins with a grand ascending passage that recalls the Symphony's opening fanfare. After a dramatic pause, the first violins offer the finale's impish first theme. The broad second theme is based upon an eight-note figure that, again, bears a kinship to the opening fanfare. The development section concludes with a sentinel passage for horns,

followed by a cheerful flute cadenza that launches the recapitulation. A stirring coda brings the “Spring” Symphony to a bracing conclusion.