

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2023-2024 Grand Classics Series

October 27, 2023

RUDOLF BUCHBINDER, PIANO AND LEADER

Ludwig van Beethoven Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra
in B-flat major, Op. 19
I. Allegro con brio
II. Adagio
III. Rondo: Molto allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven Concerto No. 4 for Piano and Orchestra
in G major, Op. 58
I. Allegro moderato
II. Andante con moto —
III. Rondo: Vivace

Intermission

Ludwig van Beethoven Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra
in C minor, Op. 37
I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo: Allegro

CLEF NOTE
CONVERSATION
with Associate Conductor Jacob Joyce
Friday at 7:05 P.M.
Heinz Hall Stage

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra in B-flat major, Op. 19 (1794-1795)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born: December 16, 1770 in Bonn; died March 26, 1827 in Vienna

PREMIERE OF WORK

- March 29, 1795; Burgtheater in Vienna; Ludwig van Beethoven, leader

PSO PREMIERE

- April 17, 1959; Syria Mosque; William Steinberg, conductor; Anton Kuerti, soloist

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- March 4, 2018; Heinz Hall; **Manfred Honeck**, conductor; Benjamin Grosvenor, soloist

INSTRUMENTATION

- Flute, two oboes, E-flat clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, and strings

DURATION

- 31 minutes

In November 1792, the 22-year-old Ludwig van Beethoven, full of talent and promise, arrived in Vienna. So undeniable was the genius he had already demonstrated in a sizeable amount of piano music, numerous chamber works, cantatas on the death of Emperor Joseph II and the accession of Leopold II, and the score for a ballet that the Elector of Bonn, his hometown, underwrote the trip to the Habsburg Imperial city, then the musical capital of Europe, to help further the young musician's career (and the Elector's prestige). Despite the Elector's patronage, however, Beethoven's professional ambitions consumed any thoughts of returning to the provincial city of his birth, and, when his alcoholic father died in December, he severed for good his ties with Bonn in favor of the stimulating artistic atmosphere of Vienna.

The occasion of Beethoven's first Viennese public appearance was a pair of concerts — "A Grand Musical Academy, with more than 150 participants," trumpeted the program in Italian and German — on March 29, 1795 at the Burgtheater whose proceeds were to benefit the Widows' Fund of the Artists' Society. It is likely that Antonio Salieri, Beethoven's teacher at the time, had a hand in arranging the affair, since the music of one Antonio Cordellieri, another of his pupils, shared the bill. Beethoven chose for the occasion a piano concerto in B-flat major he had been working on for several months, but which was still incomplete only days before the concert. In his reminiscences of the composer, Franz Wegeler recalled, "Not until the afternoon of the second day before the concert did he write the rondo, and then while suffering from a pretty severe colic which frequently afflicted him. I relieved him with simple remedies so far as I could. In the anteroom sat copyists to whom he handed sheet after sheet as soon as they were finished being written." The work was completed just in time for the performance. It proved to be a fine success ("he gained the unanimous applause of the audience," reported the *Wiener Zeitung*), and did much to further Beethoven's dual reputation as performer and composer. For a concert in Prague three years later, the Concerto was extensively revised, and it is this version that is known today. The original one has vanished.

Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto is a product of the Classical age, not just in date but also in technique, expression and attitude. Still to come were the heaven-storming sublimities of his later works, but he could no more know what form those still-to-be-written works would take than tell the future in any other way. A traditional device — one greatly favored by Mozart — is used to open the Concerto: a forceful fanfare motive immediately balanced by a suave lyrical phrase. These two melodic fragments are spun out at length to produce the orchestral introduction. The piano joins in for a brief transition to the re-presentation of the principal thematic motives, applying brilliant decorative filigree as the movement unfolds. The sweet second theme is sung by the

orchestra alone, but the soloist quickly resumes playing to supply commentary on this new melody. An orchestral interlude leads to the development section, based largely on transformations of the principal theme's lyrical motive. The recapitulation proceeds apace, and includes an extended cadenza. (Beethoven composed cadenzas for his first four concertos between 1804 and 1809.) A brief orchestral thought ends the movement.

The touching second movement is less an exercise in rigorous, abstract form than a lengthy song of rich texture and operatic sentiment. The wonderfully inventive piano figurations surrounding the melody are ample reminder that Beethoven was one of the finest keyboard improvisers of his day, a master of embellishment and piano style.

The finale is a rondo based on a bounding theme announced immediately by the soloist. Even at that early stage in Beethoven's career, it is amazing how he was able to extend and manipulate this simple, folk-like tune with seemingly limitless creativity. Though his music was soon to explore unprecedented areas of expression and technique, this Concerto stands at the end of an era, paying its debt to the composer's great forebears and announcing in conventional terms the arrival of a musician who was soon to change forever the art of music.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 4 for Piano and Orchestra in B-flat major, Op. 19 (1804-1806)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born; December 16, 1770 in Bonn; died March 26, 1827 in Vienna

PREMIERE OF WORK

- March 5, 1807; Vienna; Ludwig van Beethoven, leader

PSO PREMIERE

- January 18, 1901; Carnegie Music Hall; Victor Herbert, conductor; Erno Dohnanyi

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- June 10, 2018; Heinz Hall; **Manfred Honeck**, conductor; Juho Pohjonen, soloist

INSTRUMENTATION

- Flute, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

DURATION

- 35 minutes

The Napoleonic juggernaut twice overran the city of Vienna. The first occupation began on November 13, 1805, less than a month after the Austrian armies had been soundly trounced by the French legions at the Battle of Ulm on October 20th. Though the entry into Vienna was peaceful, the Viennese had to pay dearly for the earlier defeat in punishing taxes, restricted freedoms, and inadequate food supplies. On December 28th, following Napoleon's fearsome victory at Austerlitz that forced the Austrian government into capitulation, the Little General left Vienna. He returned in May 1809, this time with cannon and cavalry sufficient to subdue the city by force, creating conditions that were worse than those during the previous occupation. As part of his booty and in an attempt to ally the royal houses of France and Austria, Napoleon married Marie Louise, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Austrian Emperor Franz. She became the successor to his first wife, Josephine, whom he divorced because she was unable to bear a child. It was to be five years — 1814 — before the Corsican was finally defeated and Emperor Franz returned to Vienna, riding triumphantly through the streets of the city on a huge, white Lipizzaner.

Such soul-troubling times would seem to be antithetical to the production of great art, yet for Beethoven, that ferocious libertarian, those years were the most productive of his life. Hardly had he begun one work before another appeared on his desk, and his friends recalled that he labored on several scores simultaneously during this period. Sketches for many of the works appear intertwined in his notebooks, and an exact chronology for most of the works from 1805 to 1810 is impossible. So close were the dates of completion of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, for example, that their numbers were reversed when they were given their premieres on the same giant concert

as the Fourth Concerto. Between *Fidelio*, which was in its last week of rehearsal when Napoleon entered Vienna in 1805, and the music for *Egmont*, finished shortly after the second invasion, Beethoven composed the following major works: “Appassionata” Sonata, Op. 57; Violin Concerto; Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos; three Quartets of Op. 59; *Leonore Overture No. 3*; *Coriolan Overture*; Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies; two Piano Trios (Op. 70); “Les Adieux” Sonata, Op. 81a; and many smaller songs, chamber works and piano compositions. It is a stunning record of accomplishment virtually unmatched in the history of music.

The poetic mood of the Fourth Concerto is established at the outset by a hushed, prefatory phrase for the soloist. The form of the movement, vast yet intimate, begins to unfold with the ensuing orchestral introduction, which presents the rich thematic material: pregnant main theme, with its small intervals and repeated notes; secondary themes — a melancholy strain with an arch shape and a grand melody with wide leaps; and closing theme of descending scales. The soloist re-enters to enrich the themes with elaborate figurations. The central development section is haunted by the rhythmic figuration of the main theme (three short notes and an accented note). The recapitulation returns the themes and allows an opportunity for a cadenza before a glistening coda closes the movement. The second movement starkly opposes two musical forces — the stern, unison summons of the strings and the gentle, touching replies of the piano, which eventually subdue the orchestra. A high-spirited rondo-finale is launched by the strings to bring the Concerto to a stirring close.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra in C minor, Op. 37 (1797-1803)

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

- Born; December 16, 1770 in Bonn; died March 26, 1827 in Vienna

PREMIERE OF WORK

- April 4, 1803; Wein; Ludwig van Beethoven, leader

PSO PREMIERE

- October 25, 1946; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor; Claudio Arrau, soloist

PSO LAST PERFORMANCE

- February 25, 2018; Heinz Hall; **Manfred Honeck**, conductor; Yefim Bronfman, soloist

INSTRUMENTATION

- Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinet, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, percussion, and strings

DURATION

- 37 minutes

By 1803, Emanuel Schickaneder, the colorful character who figured so prominently in the closing pages of Mozart's life as the librettist and producer of *The Magic Flute*, had taken over the management of Vienna's Theater-an-der-Wien. His house was locked in a fierce competitive battle with the court subsidized Kärntnertortheater, run by Baron Peter von Braun. When von Braun hired the distinguished Luigi Cherubini as resident composer, Schickaneder felt obliged to counter with his own music master, and he approached Beethoven with an offer. Beethoven, who had felt the need to write for the stage for some time, accepted gladly — especially since the job carried free lodgings in the theater as part of the compensation. He and Schickaneder dutifully plowed through a small library of possibilities for an operatic subject, but none inspired Beethoven until he took up work on *Fidelio* late in 1803. In the meantime, Beethoven took advantage of his theatrical connection to put some of his instrumental works on display. Since opera was forbidden in Catholic countries during Lent at that time, the Theater-an-der-Wien was available for concerts in the early spring, and Beethoven scheduled such an event during April 1803. It had been fully three years since he last presented a concert entirely of his own orchestral music, and he had several scores that were awaiting their first presentations, including the Second Symphony, the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and the Third Piano Concerto. He programmed all of these,

and, for good measure, tossed in the First Symphony, which had been premiered at his concert three years earlier.

Beethoven proceeded enthusiastically with plans for the concert, working right up to the last minute putting finishing touches on the new compositions. (His pupil Ferdinand Ries found him in bed writing trombone parts for the oratorio only three hours before the rehearsal began.) He had only a single rehearsal on the concert day for this wealth of unfamiliar music, and public and critical response to the concert was lukewarm, undoubtedly due in large part to the inadequate performance. Beethoven, however, was delighted to have played his music for the Viennese public, and he was well on his way to becoming recognized more for his ability as a composer than as a pianist.

The Third Concerto's first movement opens with the longest introductory orchestral *tutti* in Beethoven's concertos. The strings in unison present the main theme; the lyrical second theme is sung by violins and clarinet in a contrasting major mode. The closely reasoned development section grows inexorably from thematic fragments heard in the exposition. The recapitulation begins with a forceful restatement of the main theme by the full orchestra. The second movement is a nocturne of tender sentiments and quiet moods. Though analysis reveals its form to be a three-part structure (A–B–A), it is in spirit simply an extended song — a marvelous juxtaposition of hymnal tranquility and sensuous operatic love scene. The traditional, Classical rondo was a form of simple, high spirits meant to send the audience away in a bubbling mood. Mozart, in his incomparable late concertos, had begun to explore the emotional depth possible with the rondo, and in this Third Concerto, Beethoven continued that search. He incorporated elements of sonata design into the finale to lend it additional weight, even inserting a fugal passage in the second episode. Only in the closing pages is the dark world of C minor abandoned for a vivacious romp through C major to close this wonderful work of Beethoven's early maturity.

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