

BRONFMAN *Plays* BEETHOVEN

 CLASSICAL SERIES

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27 & 28, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

YEFIM BRONFMAN, *piano*

RICHARD WAGNER

Overture and “Venusberg Music” from *Tannhäuser*

TOBIAS PICKER

Opera Without Words

Scene I: *The Beloved*

Scene II: *The Minstrel*

Scene III: *The Idol*

Scene IV: *The Gladiator*

Scene V: *The Farewell*

Nashville Symphony co-commission

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 3 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 37

I. Allegro con brio

II. Largo

III. Rondo: Allegro

Yefim Bronfman, piano

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Tobias Picker's Opera Without Words is being recorded live for commercial release. To ensure the highest-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.

TONIGHT'S CONCERT

AT A GLANCE



RICHARD WAGNER

Overture and Venusberg Music from Tannhäuser

- Wagner was known for his groundbreaking work as a composer, as well as his massive ego, German nationalistic views, anti-Semitism, and generally unfavorable personality. He was also a highly divisive figure among composers, with some in favor of his focus on program music, and others siding with the more traditional Brahms, who advocated for a purely musical approach to composition.
- This piece is taken from Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*, which is based on the real-life 13th-century poet and musician. In the work, Tannhäuser returns to Germany after a stint in Venusberg, a magical realm named for the goddess of love. He partakes in a singing competition that ends in catastrophe and goes to the pope to beg forgiveness for his sins. In the end, both Tannhäuser and his true love Elisabeth die, but he is ultimately redeemed.
- The overture moves from the Pilgrims' Chorus, a pure and atonal song from the end of the opera, into lush chromaticism representing Venusberg's debauchery.
- Wagner's innovative use of leitmotifs has had great influence on film scores, including John Williams' *Star Wars*, in which specific characters or situations are accompanied by correlated musical themes. The author C.S. Lewis was also a known fan of Wagner's works.



TOBIAS PICKER

Opera Without Words

- American composer Tobias Picker has been called "a genuine creator" by *The New Yorker*, and *BBC Music Magazine* has hailed his "distinctively soulful style." He is equally accomplished in the worlds of opera and orchestral music.
- Picker composed his *Opera Without Words* with librettist Irene Dische's lyrics, before removing all the words to create a purely orchestral score. The music-drama represents, through five scenes, people from the composer's life. In Picker's own playful words, "I will never reveal who the characters in this work are, lest anyone I know or love feels slighted by not being included."
- Premiered by the National Symphony Orchestra in March 2016, this work is being recorded by the Nashville Symphony for future worldwide release on Naxos.

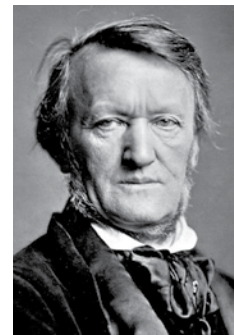


LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Piano Concerto No. 3

- Beethoven was influenced by Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, and similarities can be heard between the two works — specifically, in the continuation after the first movement's cadenza and a quote in the strings. Even so, Beethoven's signature style shines through in the pianist's dramatic runs and the surprising use of timpani.
- The concerto was supposed to premiere at Beethoven's first major public concert in 1800, but he mysteriously decided to change that plan and keep revising the work until its actual premiere in 1803, alongside his Symphony No. 2. According to his page-turner, Beethoven was still working on it even as he performed it during the premiere, with much of the pages blank or indecipherably scribbled.
- Internationally recognized as one of today's most acclaimed pianists and a 1991 recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, GRAMMY® winner Yefim Bronfman has performed with the world's major orchestras. He'll return to Nashville to perform as featured soloist on this work.

— Corinne Fombelle



RICHARD WAGNER

Born on May 22, 1813, in Leipzig, Germany; died on February 13, 1883, in Venice, Italy

Tannhäuser: Overture and Venusberg Music

Composed: 1843-45; revised 1861

First performance: Wagner's first version of *Tannhäuser* premiered on October 19, 1845, in Dresden; the revised version was first performed on March 13, 1861, in Paris.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

October 27, 1953 at War Memorial Auditorium, with Music Director Guy Taylor (Overture); October 15 & 16, 1993 at TPAC, with Music Director Kenneth Schermerhorn (Venusberg)

Estimated length: 25 minutes

T*annhäuser* was the first product of Wagner's relatively stable period of employment at the Dresden Opera, before his participation in the Revolution of 1849 would force him into exile. It also marked his first foray into medieval Germanic legend for source material.

Tannhäuser remained among Wagner's best-loved operas through much of the 19th century, cementing his reputation and wielding a strong effect on French artists in particular. It's one of the great paradoxes of Wagner's public reception — in view of the composer's notorious anti-Semitism — that Theodore Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement, claimed that a performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Paris Opera in 1895 inspired his vision of a modern Jewish state.

Wagner based his opera about the search for redemptive love on a cautionary tale from the Crusades involving a knight who seeks repentance after having sinfully indulged his senses in the dark, subterranean domain of Venus. This is the "Venusberg" where, according to medieval topography, the pagan gods were believed to have retreated in the face of Christianity. But Wagner cast his *Tannhäuser* as an outsider artist figure who yearns for full experience.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The flesh-spirit dichotomy provided Wagner with an opportunity to evoke starkly differentiated sound worlds that represent dramatic extremes of experience, encapsulated here by the Overture and Venusberg music. Opening with the chorale-like Pilgrims' Chorus, which signifies the steadfast assurance of the faithful, the Overture soon turns its focus to the anxious striving of *Tannhäuser's* existential journey — the real pilgrimage of the opera.

The orchestra swells into a triumphant full statement of the Pilgrims' Chorus and then diminishes as the penitents recede into the distance. Wagner abruptly whisks us into the erotic underworld of Venus. Her faster, highly chromatic music entices with quivering tremolos and surging rhythms — a jolt after the pilgrims' stable harmonies. *Tannhäuser's* song in praise of the goddess rings out, framing an exquisitely enchanting interlude for solo clarinet and strings. In the first version of the opera for Dresden, the Venusberg music is followed by a rousing recap of the Pilgrims' Chorus.

But Wagner remained unsatisfied with his score, periodically coming back to revise it throughout his life. For a staging of the work in Paris in 1861, the composer decided a major overhaul of the introductory scene depicting his hero's dalliance with Venus was especially important. By then, his musical technique had expanded enormously thanks to the recent composition of *Tristan und Isolde*. The rich new palette of colors and ambiguous harmonies Wagner pioneered in that score could now be applied to his more mature vision of *Tannhäuser*. The Bacchanale, a new ballet introduced as part of the revision, expands the depiction of Venus' luxurious realm devoted to the senses and their fulfillment.

Wagner refused to situate the ballet later in the opera, where Parisian convention dictated it should occur. In this revised version of the opera, the Overture instead segues directly from the Venusberg music into the Bacchanale ballet as the curtain rises. Wagner even borrows the four-note rising chromatic motif that pervaded *Tristan* as an emblem of desire. The ballet depicts

assorted classical figures— satyrs, fauns, nymphs and bacchantes — engaging in a frenzied orgy. The sequence ends with a drawn-out post-coital glow while a “rosy mist” fills the stage and a Chorus of Sirens praises the bliss of love.



TOBIAS PICKER

Born on July 18, 1954, in New York City; currently resides in Rhinebeck, New York

Opera Without Words

Described as “a genuine creator with a fertile unforced vein of invention” by *The New Yorker*, Tobias Picker has drawn performances and commissions by the world’s leading musicians, orchestras and opera houses.

Picker’s operas have been commissioned by Santa Fe Opera (*Emmeline*), Los Angeles Opera (*Fantastic Fox*), Dallas Opera (*Thérèse Raquin*), San Francisco Opera (*Dolores Claiborne*) and the Metropolitan Opera (*An American Tragedy*), as well as many other distinguished companies. Picker has additionally composed numerous symphonic works, which have been commissioned by the Chicago Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and various European orchestras, among others. In addition to three symphonies, he has composed concertos for violin, viola, cello, oboe and piano, as well as a widely toured ballet, *Awakenings*, based on the book by Oliver Sacks.

Picker’s numerous distinctions include lifetime membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and residencies with the Houston Symphony, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and the Pacific Music Festival. In 2010, he founded OPERA San Antonio and was named artistic advisor of the newly reorganized New York City Opera in 2016.

Around 16 years ago, Picker recalls, conductor Christoph Eschenbach began asking him to write

The Overture and Venusberg Music are scored for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, castanets, harp and strings.

Composed: 2015

First performance: March 10, 2016, with Christoph Eschenbach conducting the National Symphony Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These concerts mark the first performances by the Nashville Symphony.

Estimated length: 25 minutes

a new orchestral work. By then, Picker’s opera career, which he launched at Santa Fe Opera with *Emmeline* in 1996, had become his central focus. Commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, *An American Tragedy* in particular had prevented Picker from taking up Eschenbach’s request for the time-being.

The conversation was reinitiated when Eschenbach started his tenure with the National Symphony Orchestra, and eventually, *Opera Without Words* was co-commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra and Nashville Symphony. Picker wanted to write “something I could really sink my teeth into, in a way I hadn’t done before.” Eventually, he opted for a radically new form, creating a purely instrumental work that alludes to the medium of opera.

The result is a major new achievement for Picker, one that synthesizes his gifts for orchestral virtuosity and large-scale structure with the wisdom accumulated from being one of the most active opera composers on the scene today. Ultimately, explains Picker, “There’s a gap between these disparate worlds of the symphony orchestra culture and the opera culture. I’ve inhabited these two worlds for a long time and have seen how they tend to be unaware of each other. So by returning to one of those worlds now, after a hiatus of more than two decades, I want to bridge that gap for myself and, hopefully, for others by giving musicians a piece that has roots in both.”

As Picker remarks in his commentary below,

the title *Opera Without Words* is not merely a metaphor. The work was conceived as an actual opera, from which the voices and text have been withdrawn (save some of the stage directions, which are left in as instructions to the musicians). The issue at the heart of the matter here — which comes first, the words or the music? — famously underlies the whole of opera history, and it has long extended to the concert hall as well, in the form of the debate over “programmatic” versus “absolute” music.

Yet what sets Picker’s new project apart is the actual operatic inspiration for a purely orchestral score that is not a “derivative” or abridgment: Unlike the entire genre of suites drawn from pre-existing opera scores, this work is the final composition as intended by its composer. There are precedents for some aspects of the creative process Picker describes below — J.S. Bach inscribing into an instrumental score wordless “parodies” of melodies associated with particular

hymns, for example — but these are threads woven into a larger fabric. Picker himself followed a similar procedure in his Cello Concerto from 1999, into which he incorporated orchestrations of a few songs he had previously written. He’s also worked in the reverse direction: he transformed *Old and Lost Rivers* (1986), one of his most frequently performed orchestral pieces, into an aching poignant aria for his heroine in *Emmeline* (1996).

Picker approached *Opera Without Words* by contrast, as an actual, complete opera; merely by removing the text, it became an unprecedented form of music drama for orchestra. “For me, music in opera has to push the drama forward and to be the drama, not an accompaniment to words,” he says. “It must have the power to communicate the deeper emotional life of the characters; the words are just an ornament to hear the beauty of the human voice. The music should be telling the story.”

IN THE COMPOSER’S WORDS

The composer has provided the following commentary on *Opera Without Words*:

It has been said that composers can be divided into three categories: those who write for the stage, those who write concert music and those who write both. I belong to the third group. I’ve written three symphonies; four piano concertos; concertos for violin, viola, cello; tone poems; a melodrama; a large body of chamber music; two ballets; and five operas. I have seen a lot of the classical music world and have had the privilege of working with many great artists — including, over the past 30 years, Christoph Eschenbach, who invited me to compose a piece for the National Symphony Orchestra featuring soloists within the orchestra.

At first, I started thinking about a Concerto for Orchestra and found myself reviewing the differences and similarities between a concerto for an orchestra and an opera. A concerto is a composition for a solo instrument or instruments accompanied by an orchestra. An opera is a composition in which singers and musicians perform a dramatic work combining text and musical score, usually in a theatrical setting. An

“opera without words” is no more a misnomer than a “concerto for orchestra.” I concluded that there are far more similarities than differences between the two and decided to focus on those similarities by removing the singers from the opera.

I thought about composers of the past. Mendelssohn wrote *Songs Without Words* without any text in his mind whatever. There are several purely orchestral recordings of Puccini operas without words. Lorin Maazel created a version of Wagner’s *Ring* called *The “Ring” Without Words*. One of my principal teachers, Milton Babbitt, once wrote a short piece called *Phonemena* for soprano in which the singer has no words, just phonemes. He was trying to merge his own complex compositional technique with the jazz form known as scat singing. I remembered how another of my principal teachers, Elliott Carter, had introduced me to his notion of instrumentalists as “characters” or “players in a drama.”

And so I approached my first purely orchestral work in 22 years as I would an opera. I hired a librettist, Irene Dische. We had long discussions

about the characters, the role of the chorus (in this case, a double chorus), and issues of text setting and stage directions, characterization and motivation. I then set her words not to voices but to musical instruments, unfettered by considerations of vocal range and technique. When I finished the opera with words, I removed them all. I kept a separate copy so that *Opera Without Words* could (with some adjustments for the human voice) theoretically be performed as an opera with words, the original words and staging restored.

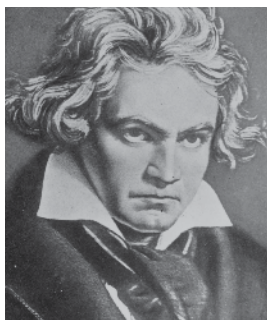
Having done away with the words and stage directions, I decided to leave in traces and artifacts of the deleted libretto. Terminology of an unusual nature (for instrumental musicians) remains. Instrumentalists are accustomed to standard terminology such as *dolce*, *espressivo*, *legato*, *staccato*, *cantabile*, etc. But in this work I added

some 75 additional terms only an opera singer is accustomed to seeing. A passage may be marked “pompous,” “doting,” “defensively,” “upbraiding,” “terrified,” “self-righteously,” even “aside to the audience,” and so on.

Opera Without Words is composed of five scenes entitled The Beloved, The Minstrel, The Idol, The Gladiator and The Farewell.

Opera Without Words is dedicated to the blessed memory of my mother, the artist Henriette Simon Picker, 1917-2016.”

Opera Without Words is scored for 3 flutes (all 3 flutes doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 2 percussionists, harp, piano (doubling celeste) and strings.



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

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

Composed: 1800 (possibly until 1803)

First performance: April 3, 1803, in Vienna, with Beethoven as the soloist

First Nashville Symphony performance: March 5 & 6, 1962, at War Memorial Auditorium, with Music Director Willis Page

Estimated length: 38 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37

Beethoven was not immune to anxiety over being original, even if the very idea of a repertoire set in stone as we know it was only beginning to emerge during his lifetime. Mozart’s trailblazing freelance career path furnished a practical model when the young Beethoven set out to make his name after settling in Vienna in 1792: the model of a celebrity pianist introducing his own concertos for the instrument. On Sunday, March 29, 1795, Beethoven made his public debut in Vienna performing a work billed as “a new concerto on the piano-forte.”

The bar had been set almost impossibly high by Mozart’s piano concertos, which cast their spell over the young German. During the same month, Beethoven performed one of his late predecessor’s

concertos (likely the D minor Concerto, K. 466, a work that deeply fascinated him). Another eight years passed before Beethoven introduced his Third Piano Concerto. The musicologist Leon Platinga has argued that the major creative effort for Op. 37 took place later than has been traditionally thought, between May 1802 and March 1803.

Mozart’s only other minor-key piano concerto, K. 491 in C minor, also loomed large in Beethoven’s imagination and has direct links to his Op. 37. A frequently retold bit of lore depicts him confessing to one of his keyboard rivals, Johann Baptist Cramer, that “we’ll never be able to do anything like that!” with reference to K. 491.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Regardless of the anecdote’s authenticity, there can be no doubt that the aura of Mozart’s dark-hued work haunted Beethoven as he was conceiving his own C-minor Concerto — nowhere more so than in the contour of the main theme announced at the start, during the extended orchestral exposition.

Yet Mozart’s model is by no means the only point of reference for the drama underlying this concerto. For all the expansiveness of the first movement, the concision of material throughout points ahead to the Fifth Symphony in the same key. Perhaps anticipating another, similar process in the Fifth, Beethoven also insinuates the terse (short-long) rhythm at the tail of his opening theme — a powerful source of momentum for what is to come — into the lyrical second theme.

Beethoven matches his inspiration from Mozart with remarkable innovations, such as the passage leading from the solo cadenza into the coda of the first movement. In lieu of the conventional reappearance of the ensemble playing the theme, we encounter an ominous sonority as the terse rhythmic idea (one well-suited to drums) is played, with barely suppressed menace, by the timpani.

Also innovative is the shift to a relatively remote key (E major) for the Largo, a movement of delicately shaded orchestration and singing pianism: here the soloist is presented as a rhapsode, as Beethoven writes music of lofty, Elysian beauty.

This is, however, the eye of Beethoven’s storm, which returns full force in the finale: a rondo propelled by a tersely angular theme, but calmed by playful episodes. An anxiously contrapuntal version of the rondo theme ressummons the Furies, while the coda presents another Beethovenian marvel of ingenious simplicity: the insistent A-flat of the main theme respelled as a decorative tic, while the theme itself is recast and speeded up to clinch the breakthrough into unalloyed C major.

In addition to solo piano, the C-minor Concerto is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horn and trumpets; timpani; and strings.

— Thomas May, the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator, is a writer and translator who covers classical and contemporary music. He blogs at memeteria.com.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



YEFIM BRONFMAN
PIANO

Internationally recognized as one of today’s most acclaimed and admired pianists, Yefim Bronfman stands among a handful of artists regularly sought by festivals, orchestras, conductors and recital series. His commanding technique, power and exceptional lyrical gifts are consistently acknowledged by the press and audiences alike.

In recognition of a relationship of more than 30 years, Bronfman will join the Israel Philharmonic

conducted by Zubin Mehta for concerts during the orchestra’s U.S. tour in the fall, including Carnegie Hall, followed by concerts in Munich, London and Vienna with the Bayerischer Rundfunk Orchestra and Mariss Jansons, another frequent partner and collaborator.

In addition to returns to the orchestras of New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington, Indianapolis and Toronto, Bronfman will tour with the Vienna Philharmonic and Andrés Orozco-Estrada in a special program celebrating his 60th birthday in the spring. In Europe he can also be heard in Berlin with the Philharmonic, as well as in recital and on tour with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Andris Nelsons. A tour in Asia with

Mozart's model is by no means the only point of reference for the drama underlying this concerto. For all the expansiveness of the first movement, the concision of material throughout points ahead to the Fifth Symphony in the same key.

the London Symphony Orchestra and Gianandrea Noseda closes his season in June.

Bronfman has also given numerous solo recitals in the leading halls of North America, Europe and the Far East, including acclaimed debuts at Carnegie Hall in 1989 and Avery Fisher Hall in 1993. In 1991 he gave a series of joint recitals with Isaac Stern in Russia, marking Bronfman's first public performances there since

his emigration to Israel at age 15. That same year, he was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, one of the highest honors given to American instrumentalists. In 2010, he was honored as the recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from Northwestern University.

Born in Tashkent in the Soviet Union, Yefim Bronfman immigrated to Israel with his family in 1973.