



BEETHOVEN'S BIRTHDAY BASH

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21 & 22, AT 8 PM

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, AT 2 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

BARRY DOUGLAS, *piano*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72A - **14 minutes**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 1 in C major for Piano
and Orchestra, Op. 15 - **36 minutes**

Allegro con brio

Largo

Rondo: Allegro

Barry Douglas, piano

- INTERMISSION -

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 3 in E-Flat major,
Op. 55, "Eroica" - **47 minutes**

Allegro con brio

Marcia funebre: Adagio assai

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Finale: Allegro molto

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*This concert will last 2 hours and 10 minutes,
including a 20-minute intermission.*

*This concert is being recorded for future
broadcast. To ensure the highest-quality
recording, please keep noise to a minimum.*

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Part of what enabled Beethoven to become “Beethoven” – the larger-than-life figure we know today – was the fact that he lived through an era of dynamic transformation. According to John Clubbe in his brand-new biography of the composer, the decades from 1790 to 1810 “appeared to mark the beginning of a new stage” in human history.... Poets and musicians differentiated and refined the inner life.” It was precisely during these decades that Beethoven set out from his native Bonn to settle in Vienna and composed many of the works for which he is still best known. The three pieces we hear on this program all date from these years. The First Piano Concerto (in fact, the second to be completed) reminds us of Beethoven’s roots in the Classical style forged by the geniuses he was up against – Mozart and Haydn – while also revealing the uniqueness of his approach. The name he gave to his Third Symphony, *Eroica*, is typically used to describe the “heroic” style that Beethoven went on to forge – not from scratch, to be sure, but through a profoundly personal and at times revolutionary rethinking of what he had learned from his predecessors. This style is inherently theatrical, conveying a sense of individual struggle and triumph – as Beethoven’s only opera, *Fidelio*, explicitly stages.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72a

Born on December 16, 1770,
in Bonn, Germany

Died on March 26, 1827,
in Vienna

Composed:
1804-06

Estimated
length:
14 minutes



First performance:
March 29, 1806, at the Theater
an der Wien in Vienna

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**
April 29, 1947, with music
director William Strickland

Beethoven’s only opera dramatizes a regime based on cruelty and injustice being toppled through the power of courageous love. It has lost none of its urgency as societies careen from crisis to crisis. Merely performing *Fidelio* can signal an implicit political or social critique, for the walled grimness of its prison setting has remained distressingly relevant. With the slightest of allegorical touches, *Fidelio* can seem convincingly “about” the Third Reich, the Soviet gulag or the most contemporary permutations of the fascist impulse.

The story of *Fidelio* is straightforward. Set in a prison outside Seville, it centers around

the heroic plan of a noblewoman, Leonore, to search for her husband, Florestan, who has been “disappeared” as a political prisoner. His actual crime is never specified, but it clearly has to do with his opposition to the unjust policies of the prison governor, Don Pizarro, who has placed him in solitary confinement in the lowest dungeon out of revenge. Using the assumed identity “Fidelio,” Leonore disguises herself as a man to gain access to the prison. In the end, Pizarro’s atrocities are uncovered and Florestan and his fellow prisoners are freed.

Beethoven referred to *Fidelio* as his “child of sorrow” because it cost him so much struggle

to write — for the story meant so much to him. But it was also troublesome because Beethoven, not a man easily given to compromise, had to accommodate the practical necessities of the theater. The first version of the opera, given on November 20, 1805 (the year the *Eroica* was introduced to the public) was a failure. Beethoven quickly withdrew it but introduced a tighter, revised version the following spring. The overture we hear was intended for that production. Beethoven wrote still another overture a couple years later for a production in Prague that never materialized. Finally, in 1814 he created the version of the opera that became most widely known, changing its name from *Leonore* to *Fidelio*, and writing a much more compact, brisk overture.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Leonore No. 3 turned out to be, paradoxically, *too* dramatic for the opera house. Adopting the “heroic” manner of the recent *Eroica*, it encapsulates the very soul of the drama in purely instrumental terms and thus, Beethoven came to realize, overwhelms the ensuing opera instead of preparing for it. Gustav Mahler conducted a celebrated production that ingeniously made a place for the *Leonore* No. 3 during the scene change before the triumphant finale in which the prisoners are liberated. In any case, it has

long been a concert favorite as a symphonic counterpart to the idealism expressed in the opera.

The slow introduction descends — literally, in a stepwise motion at the beginning — into the despairing depths of the dungeon where Florestan languishes but has a vision of hope that his wife will save him. The musical material is essentially taken from the point of view of Florestan, who can be seen as an alter ego for Beethoven (who was imprisoned, in his own way, by deafness). Both muscular and nimble, the main theme of the Allegro is Beethoven at his most dramatic.

The hope anticipated earlier in the music returns, but so do the shadows, eventually leading to an extraordinary climactic moment in which the atmosphere suddenly changes. As he does in the opera itself, Beethoven uses a trumpet fanfare to symbolize the abrupt end of Pizarro’s corrupt power and the prisoners’ coming liberation. In the final pages, Beethoven achieves a remarkable effect by overlaying a series of patterns that scurry through the strings. These build tension to an unbearable level before the dam bursts and the full ensemble joins in unstoppable, joyous excitement.

The Leonore Overture No. 3 is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 4 horns; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones; timpani and strings.

Concerto No. 1 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 15

Composed: c. 1795, with later revisions before publication in 1801

Estimated length: 36 minutes

First performance:

Possibly during Beethoven’s first public concert in Vienna, on March 29, 1795

First Nashville Symphony performance:

January 31–February 2, 1980, with guest conductor Jorge Mester and soloist Lydia Artymiw

As far back as his teenage years in Bonn, we can find evidence of Beethoven’s preoccupation with the concerto genre. He tried his hand at composing a piano concerto that, technically speaking, is the chronological

“No. 1” (only a piano score survives), and the work that officially became known as the Piano Concerto No. 2 (Op. 17) has its origins in the Bonn years as well. At this very time, Mozart was producing his famous series of piano

concertos in Vienna. For Mozart, keyboard concertos provided much-needed income to support his new freelance career and kept his name before the public. When Beethoven resettled in 1792 in the “land of the clavier,” as his predecessor once described Vienna, he would repeat that pattern, relying on his talents as a keyboard performer to build a reputation.

Contemporary diarists recorded the spellbinding effect of Beethoven’s performances in intimate recital-improvisations, which often resulted in snapped strings and splintered hammers, given the more delicate instruments available at the time — Beethoven was continually in search of a more expressive, more robust keyboard.

Carl Czerny, a freakishly young prodigy when Beethoven took him on as a pupil, later recalled the charismatic impact made by his famous improvisations: “There was something wonderful in his expression in addition to the beauty and originality of his ideas and his spirited style of playing them.” Czerny added that Beethoven “would burst into loud laughter and banter his hearers” after seeing how his playing had brought many of them to tears. His fans became eager bystanders during the keyboard duels to which Beethoven challenged his rivals.

As had been the case with Mozart, the concerto format proved useful to Beethoven because it showcased his art not just as a composer, but also as a performer — at least before his deafness reached the point when he could no longer function as a concert pianist. He was the soloist for four of his five piano concertos. The first three of these, in particular, incorporate many of the tricks of the trade Beethoven had learned from Mozart — along with several strategies learned from his teacher Haydn (a teacher with whom the student had a rapport that notoriously lacked harmony).

It’s tempting to accuse Beethoven (and, some decades later, Chopin) of deliberately setting out to confuse posterity, since in each case their “First Piano Concerto” was chronologically

the second to be composed. Though he had completed his Concerto No. 2 in B-flat prior to this one, Beethoven made a savvy choice to hold off on publishing it so that the more overtly brilliant Concerto in C major would be his first publication in the genre — and make it clear that he was the real heir to Mozart, a dazzling new talent to whom attention must be paid.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

In the lengthy opening movement, Beethoven makes sure to evoke the poised grandeur of Mozart’s C major concertos, but he cleverly teases us with a deceptively quiet initial statement of the first theme. The militaristic pomp and march-like character of the first and third themes, emphasized by assertive trumpets and drums, make them close cousins. A lyrical second theme intervenes, but Beethoven has another trick in store: he makes us wait until the solo piano partners with the orchestra before allowing us to hear this melody unfold to completion. In other words, nothing will be rote or predictable here. At the same time, it’s a good way of indicating how Beethoven is thinking big in this first movement, creating architecture on the grand scale.

The soloist’s entrance is strangely oblique. In his fascinating study of all the Beethoven concertos, the musicologist Leon Plantinga points out that, throughout this entire movement, the piano comments and elaborates on the first theme but never actually *quite* plays the theme itself. Characterizing the rapport Beethoven sets up between the soloist and orchestra, he writes: “It is as if the mass of the orchestra is easily roused to overt, forceful action, while its leader favors a more nuanced, artful approach.”

Beethoven takes the section in which these themes are developed as an occasion for a genuinely unusual harmonic odyssey, a fantasy of hushed suspense that continually reveals new angles on what had seemed such

obvious and straightforward material. This culminates in a notoriously tricky right-hand octave sweep down the keyboard to launch the reprise. Here, and in an enormous alternative cadenza Beethoven later penned, we can probably obtain a good impression of what one of his wildly ranging improvisations must have sounded like.

The Largo showcases Beethoven's undeniable gift for serene melody — its delivery and ornamentation are also important components of the virtuoso's toolkit — and settles in a reposeful A-flat major far afield from the busy C major of the outer movements. Though he lightens the orchestral texture (no flutes or oboes, let alone trumpets and drums), Beethoven actually generates a new sound world, thanks in part to the solo clarinet's role as a soulful partner for the piano's rhapsodic meditations. This movement demands the utmost in what Czerny described as Beethoven's "cantabile expression" and "refined tone and elegant delivery."

If Beethoven puts his own stamp on Mozart's archetypal concerto in the first two movements, the finale represents an extreme take on Haydn's vigorously earthy humor. Listen for the contrasting central episode, a very scenic detour in A minor full of interesting new flavors. As for the main rondo tune itself, a catchy ear worm, Beethoven restates its three reappearances with delightfully engaging theatricality — above all, before his final orchestral statement of this tune, when the soloist strays into nearby but dangerously dissonant B major, as if trying to get everybody in trouble before the flute gingerly leads everyone back to the sure path of C major. In the coda, Beethoven unexpectedly introduces a brief spell of wistful nostalgia — only to pull the carpet out from underneath such indulgence with a final orchestral flourish.

In addition to solo piano, the Concerto is scored for flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.



BARRY DOUGLAS

piano

Barry Douglas has established a major international career since winning the Gold Medal at the 1986 Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition. As artistic director of the chamber orchestra Camerata Ireland and the Clondeboy Festival, he continues to celebrate his Irish heritage while also maintaining a busy international touring schedule that has included appearances with major orchestras around the world.

Career highlights include recital tours in the United Kingdom and U.S. and new collaborations with both the Endellion String Quartet and the Borodin Quartet, as well performances of Tchaikovsky with the RTE Orchestra (Dublin), Ulster Orchestra (Belfast), London Symphony Orchestra and St. Petersburg Philharmonic, all marking the 30th anniversary of his Tchaikovsky International Competition win.

An exclusive Chandos recording artist, Douglas has released critically acclaimed recordings of all of Brahms' solo piano works, as well as the solo piano works of both Schubert and Tchaikovsky. He has also released two albums that feature his own arrangements of Irish folk music.

Douglas founded Camerata Ireland in 1999 to celebrate and nurture the very best of young musicians from both Northern and the Republic of Ireland. In addition to striving for musical excellence, one of the orchestra's aims is to further the peace process in Ireland by promoting dialogue and collaboration through its musical education programs. He regularly tours with the ensemble throughout the world and visited the U.S. in the spring of 2018.

Douglas received the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the 2002 New Year's Honours List for services to music.

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55 “Eroica”

Composed: 1802-04

Estimated length: 47 minutes

First performance:

In the summer of 1804, in a private performance at the estate of Beethoven's patron Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, to whom he dedicated the work. The first official public performance followed in Vienna on April 7, 1805.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

November 29, 1949,
with music director
William Strickland

The *Eroica* is rightly described as a giant advance in the history of Western music. But along with its central historical significance in claiming a lofty new position for symphonic music, the *Eroica* is closely connected to the personal breakthrough it represents in Beethoven's own life. The music is part of his creative response to the profound crisis of his early 30s, shortly after the turn of the 19th century. What Beethoven probably hoped was a passing phase of troubled hearing, which had been tormenting him for several years, in fact marked the onset of permanent deafness, an appalling nightmare for an active musician. In the summer of 1802, doctor's orders were to take it easy and spend some time in Heiligenstadt, then a distant suburb, peacefully removed from the hectic pace of Vienna. The promised cure, however, didn't happen, and Beethoven's despair led him to contemplate suicide.

The so-called Heiligenstadt Testament is the moving confessional letter that the composer penned in the form of a will that autumn. Beethoven recounts in it the reasons for his depression, how he had felt the need to keep his growing deafness hidden from the world and was misunderstood as “misanthropic” by nature. He then explains his determination to continue living, prompted by an overpowering conviction of artistic mission: “It seemed impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt called upon me to produce, and so I endured this wretched

existence.” This renewed sense of purpose went hand in hand with a desire to forge what Beethoven was calling “a new path” in music.

This new attitude bore fruit in the Third Symphony, which soon absorbed Beethoven. Almost everything about this symphony indicates that the stakes have been raised to a higher level. Its only “traditional” aspect is the instrumentation, which calls on the standard forces used by Mozart and Haydn in their mature symphonies, with the exception of three horns instead of two. What are some examples of this sea change? They extend from the large-scale architecture of the work, which dramatically expands the dimensions of the symphony, to shocking shifts in harmonic thought and an intensification of familiar devices, such as changes in volume.

A quick word on the famous French connection: the story goes that Beethoven's admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte as a heroic force for revolutionary change soured when the French leader had himself crowned emperor in December 1804. Yet while the idealistic Beethoven abhorred tyranny and did in fact violently scratch out his original dedication from the title page of the score, he hadn't categorically ruled out the practical advantages of such a dedication (at the time he was considering resettling in Paris). In the end, he published the work as a “Heroic Symphony” (*Sinfonia Eroica*), which was “composed to celebrate the memory of a great man.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

All manner of imagery has been invoked to get to the heart of this urgent music. The first movement has been said to suggest scenarios ranging from a metaphoric battlefield (with the assertive opening chords as “cannon shots,” etc.) to the tireless energy of early industrialism. What is unmistakable is the driving, epic force that resonates. The famous “surprise” note of C-sharp (outside the home key of E-flat major), which appears when the cellos come to rest as they state the first theme, is an emblem for this musical eagerness to encounter experience head on, no matter where it leads.

And this certainly includes pain along with joy, although the music as a whole seems to be reaching for an optimistic outlook. Unlike the Fifth Symphony, which achieves drama via intense compression, the *Eroica* uses expansion to convey this sense of experience: through distant keys, a plenitude of thematic material and a swelling of the form traditionally used for the opening movement of a Classical symphony. The thrilling coda, for example, is no longer a quick wrap-up, but an enormous counterweight to the development of ideas preceding it.

Beethoven writes a monumental funeral march rather than a lyrical slow movement, a meditation on death to follow the epic life journey of the opening movement. Mahler would later turn to this as a template for some of the marches in his own symphonies. Here, Beethoven balances public mourning against private grief. Notice the “personal” sound of the oboe, highlighted as a leading character in each of the four movements, set against the more formal public rhetoric of the strings.

Where Beethoven introduced pain into the surging course of the first movement, he reverses the pattern here: a bright streak of hope intrudes (again, introduced by the oboe) before the march returns to its tragic C minor,

now unfolding in a fugue of overpowering majesty. The final pages of the march are almost cinematic, as Beethoven suggests an individual mourner breaking down, unable to go on, while the crowd eventually proceeds.

In place of a classical minuet, the Scherzo brings a return to the surging life force of the first movement, yet on a more elementary level. Beethoven focuses on the inherent tension — and playfulness — of pairs of chords jostling against a backdrop of triple meter. The reason behind his choice of three horns becomes apparent when that section gets its spotlight in the echoing calls of the trio.

Capping the *Eroica* is a marvelously innovative final movement made up of variations: not only on a theme (the tune introduced a few minutes in by the oboe), but on the simpler bass line underpinning it as well, which we hear as a sort of teasing prelude. Beethoven had used the theme in several earlier compositions, including a ballet titled *The Creatures of Prometheus*, and that mythological reference adds yet another dimension to the *Eroica*. Some see the defiant god Prometheus, who endured terrible suffering to bring humanity enlightenment, as the true hero of the work. Beethoven reconsiders this previously used musical material in the light of the “new path” we have heard throughout the *Eroica*. This unassuming tune is revealed to contain enormous potential, from the chattering virtuosity of the flute to the nobly triumphant climax for the entire orchestra, which wells into a frightening reminiscence of the tragic depths of the Funeral March. In his ingenious transformations, Beethoven uncovers the creative self as the true hero of the music.

The Eroica is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons; 3 horns; 2 trumpets; timpani and strings.

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.