

A photograph of a man with short brown hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, holding a violin and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

BEETHOVEN'S VIOLIN CONCERTO



CLASSICAL SERIES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, AT 7 PM | FRIDAY & SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5 & 6, AT 8 PM
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, AT 3 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

JAMES EHNES, *violin*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 61

Allegro ma non troppo

Larghetto

Rondo

James Ehnes, violin

– INTERMISSION –

JOHN ADAMS

Harmonielehre

Part I

Part II: The Anfortas Wound

Part II: Meister Eckhardt and Quackie

CLASSICAL SERIES
PRESENTING PARTNER



This concert will run 1 hour, 45 minutes.

This concert will be recorded live for future release on Naxos. To ensure the best-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.

TONIGHT'S CONCERT | AT A GLANCE

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 61



- Though now considered a standard of the orchestral repertoire, the Violin Concerto got a rough start. Beethoven wrote the piece fairly quickly in 1806, completing it just two days before its premiere. According to legend, the soloist, Franz Clement, did not have time to rehearse and was said to have sight-read it.
- It would take another four or so decades before the piece began to gain popularity, due in large part to a performance by violin soloist Joseph Joachim, who was only 13 when he performed it with conductor Felix Mendelssohn in 1844.
- Though Beethoven's work from the middle period of his career is typically associated with his "heroic" style, the Violin Concerto (along his "Pastoral" Sixth Symphony, completed two years later) shows his lyrical, more contemplative side.
- The opening is unusual, with a four-beat timpani motif that recurs throughout the first movement. Beethoven sets up the piece with a lengthy orchestral introduction, and even when the violin soloist finally enters, it takes still more time before the violin plays the first theme.
- Today, this piece is considered "one of the most beautiful and beloved of all concertos," according to Beethoven biographer Jan Swafford. "Its greatness... [lays] not in its technique but in its cantabile, its singing."

JOHN ADAMS

Harmonielehre



- Now considered one of today's leading composers, John Adams wrote this work relatively early in his career, while serving as composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Symphony. Three decades later, it has already assumed its place in the canon of contemporary music. It was included in *The Guardian's* list of the 50 Greatest Symphonies, and *The New York Times* has called it "rapturous" and "incandescent."
- The title refers to a textbook written by Arnold Schoenberg, the Austrian composer who pioneered the 12-tone compositional technique during the 1920s. Adams himself had ambivalent feelings toward this towering figure of modern music, and naming the work *Harmonielehre* was a way of acknowledging Schoenberg's importance while also questioning his influence.
- The composer writes that the three-movement work "marries the developmental techniques of Minimalism with the harmonic and expressive world of fin de siècle late Romanticism," noting that "the shades of Mahler, Sibelius, Debussy and the young Schoenberg are everywhere in this strange piece."
- Dream imagery played a strong role in the piece's creation. "The pounding E-minor chords at the beginning and end of the [first] movement are the musical counterparts of a dream image I'd had shortly before starting the piece," Adams writes. "In the dream I'd watched a gigantic supertanker take off from the surface of San Francisco Bay and thrust itself into the sky like a Saturn rocket."



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born on December 16, 1770, in Bonn (in present-day Germany); died on March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61

Composed: 1806

First performance: December 23, 1806, in Vienna, with Franz Clement as the soloist

First Nashville Symphony performance:

March 18, 1952, with music director Guy Taylor and soloist Isaac Stern

Estimated length: 42 minutes

The epithet “heroic” is frequently applied to Beethoven’s middle-period style, which was inaugurated by the *Eroica* Symphony, whose Promethean power and exploration of the human soul charted a new path for symphonic music. But that wasn’t Beethoven’s only path in these years. The Violin Concerto represents a somewhat different direction that set significant precedents of its own. In this piece, as well as the Fourth Piano Concerto and the “Pastoral” Sixth Symphony, a composer celebrated for his defiant originality tempers his “heroic” vision with an outlook that veers toward greater lyricism and sustained contemplation.

In fact, the two directions literally coexist in the sketches Beethoven made for his musical ideas. The same notebook that contains jottings for the Fifth Symphony (another epitome of the heroic style) includes ones for the Violin Concerto. While the Fifth required several years to hammer into a form that satisfied Beethoven, he produced the Violin Concerto in a matter of months in 1806. Despite its swift creation, the latter creates a unique world of its own, displaying originality in different ways through the conception of the violin as solo protagonist and the use of sound color from the orchestra.

As a professional pianist, Beethoven was accustomed to writing piano concertos for his own use. By contrast, he tailored the Violin Concerto to suit a different temperament: that of Franz Clement (1780-1842), concertmaster at the Theater an der Wien,

where many of Beethoven’s works were premiered — including this piece and his only opera, *Fidelio*. Clement was known for the aristocratic delicacy and tender refinement of his style — aspects that Beethoven highlights in his writing throughout. Because of Beethoven’s delay in delivering the finished score, Clement was said to have sight-read it, and the Concerto took several decades to find its place in the repertoire. Beethoven, meanwhile, published an arrangement of the work as a piano concerto

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

A significant feature of the Violin Concerto is its reinterpretation of elements of French style, specifically the French school of violin playing established by the émigré Italian Giovanni Battista Viotti. This one of the less frequently recognized elements Beethoven used to forge his heroic style. The military and heroic gestures of music from the French Revolution left their imprint on the *Eroica*, the Fifth and *Fidelio*, but Beethoven also drew on his knowledge of the French violin school for this concerto. In his study of the Violin Concerto, Robin Stowell observes that “Beethoven’s familiarity with the compositions and playing styles of leading figures of the French violin school led to his transforming some of their idiomatic features from simple bravura to embellishments of profound musical ideas.”

This unique sound world is apparent from the very start, with the timpani — so unexpectedly! — taking the spotlight to play a motif of four beats that returns again and again in the opening movement. As the biographer Jan Swafford notes, the simplicity of this gesture “heralds a piece that is going to be made of radically simple elements: rhythms largely in quarters and eighths, most of the phrasing in four bars, flowing melodies made largely out of scales.”

The first movement’s span is vast — almost as long as an entire Classical symphony. Instead of epic adventure or drama, however, its dimensions and aura of serene lyricism invite contemplation. Beethoven draws attention to the music’s leisurely aspect by delaying the soloist’s entrance with an unusually lengthy orchestral introduction; the violin’s preliminary dalliances keep us waiting yet further before getting around to the songful first theme.

Contrasting with this spaciousness is that opening pattern of repeated beats, a tersely recurring rhythmic motif that might be heard as a relative of the fateful

“knocking” motif that opens the Fifth Symphony. Leon Plantinga, an expert on Beethoven’s concertos, observes that this gesture can be read as “a military metaphor, an emblem of struggle that illumines the joys of tranquility.” This motif, he notes, also anticipates a pivotal moment in Beethoven’s masterpiece of sacred music, the *Missa solemnis* (also in D major), “where peace is defined by the invocation of its opposite.”

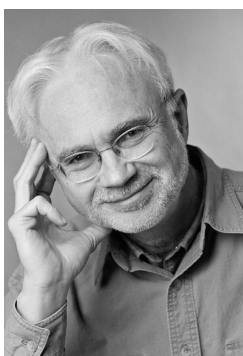
Another signature of the Violin Concerto is the prominent use of the violin’s upper register, particularly in the Larghetto. The prayerful calm of this music centers on a gentle theme in G major that reappears in different instrumental guises as a framework around which the soloist weaves rapturous decorations. Again, the music calls to mind the *Missa solemnis*, in which a solo violin in the Benedictus suggests the soul’s celestial flight and communion with the divine.

With a brief cadenza as bridge, Beethoven leads

directly into the Rondo finale, its tune modeled after a hunting call (said to have been contributed by Clement himself). This pastoral return to earth fittingly assigns the tune to the violin’s low register — in marked contrast to the stratospheric heights of the preceding movements. “Forthright good humor and uncomplicated rejoicing may rank high as human values,” writes Plantinga, “quite fit to stand together in the artistic enterprise with expressions of the most profound sort.”

Despite being composed so hastily, the Violin Concerto would become, as Swafford notes, “one of the most beautiful and beloved of all concertos. Its greatness...lay not in its technique but in its cantabile, its singing.”

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



JOHN COOLIDGE ADAMS

Born on February 15, 1947, in Worcester, Massachusetts; currently resides in Berkeley, California

Composed: 1984-85

First performance: March 21, 1985, with Edo de Waart conducting the San Francisco Symphony

First Nashville Symphony performance: March 14 & 15, 2003, with guest conductor Alasdair Neale

Estimated length: 40 minutes

Harmonielehre

John Adams, now 71, may look the part of an *éminence grise*, but he still retains a boundlessly youthful energy. He has carried forward the Yankee maverick tradition of Charles Ives. Growing up in rural New England, he has said that he absorbed “classical and popular music with little prejudice toward one at the expense of the other.”

Following a small-town upbringing and education at Harvard, Adams decided in the early 1970s to forsake the East Coast music establishment and head west to San Francisco. He immediately took to the Bay Area’s experimentalism-encouraging atmosphere, finding what he needed to discover his voice as a composer while teaching at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and serving as composer-in-residence at San Francisco Symphony from 1982 to 1985. Through these roles, Adams was in a position to curate an influential series of “new

and unusual music” concerts while also making breakthroughs of his own.

As often happens with a major creative advance, *Harmonielehre* was preceded by a sense of crisis and doubt that lingered for a year-and-a-half, grounding the composer in a depressing sense of futility just as a significant deadline loomed. Adams’ assignment was to write a major orchestral work as the culmination of his San Francisco residency. “Like a baseball player falling deeper and deeper into a self-perpetuating slump,” the composer writes in his memoir, *Hallelujah Junction*, “I began to spend the larger part of my energies analyzing why I could not produce.”

Adams recalls that Arnold Schoenberg — an artistic father figure among many of his peers at the time, and one toward whom he felt some ambivalence — appeared in one of several revealing dreams that ultimately pointed the way toward *Harmonielehre*.

*For Adams, the word *Harmonielehre* came to mean “a psychic quest for harmony.” This is what defines the work’s essential trajectory, and it likewise applies to Adams’ personal creative search during these years, which led him to this “statement of belief in the power of tonality at a time when I was uncertain about its future.”*

“Despite my respect for and even intimidation by the persona of Schoenberg,” writes Adams, “I felt it only honest to acknowledge that I profoundly disliked the sound of 12-tone music.”

Adams’ title *Harmonielehre* is an ironic homage to, and comment on, Schoenberg’s overarching importance in the debate over tonality in 20th century classical music. A German word that signifies both “harmony lesson” and a more comprehensive “theory of harmony,” *Harmonielehre* was the name Schoenberg gave to a music textbook he wrote in 1910-11. As if to help himself make sense of the move beyond traditional tonality that he was advancing at the time, Schoenberg’s extensive tome combines “philosophical and practical” perspectives, writes Allen Shawn. It reads like “a musical workshop in which everything to do with music is taken apart and examined afresh.”

For Adams, the word *Harmonielehre* came to mean “a psychic quest for harmony.” This is what defines the work’s essential trajectory, and it likewise applies to Adams’ personal creative search during these years, which led him to this “statement of belief in the power of tonality at a time when I was uncertain about its future.” The visionary director Peter Sellars, who has collaborated with the composer on all of his stage workst, points out that Adams’ personal harmonic language is thrilling because, through its “sweeps of tension,” release and “adrenaline-inspired visionary states,” it embodies a “genuinely dramatic” sensibility: “This is absolutely what you hope for in the theater.”

In fact, it was not long before he composed *Harmonielehre* that Adams had first met Sellars, who planted the idea for the composer’s debut opera, *Nixon in China*. This would become the next major work to follow *Harmonielehre*, and it further developed some of the language used in the earlier work.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Harmonielehre is a large-scale symphonic canvas that weds Minimalist techniques with the composer’s musings on the history of tonality. Its instant success helped transform Adams into a composer of international stature and proved his mastery as an orchestrator. The piece unfolds in a broad, three-part design. Characteristically, Adams evolves forms uniquely suited to his musical materials, using an arch form framed by powerful waves of energy for the first and longest part. Stark, violent chords of E minor set it in motion. These were prompted by yet another dream, recalls Adams (who was heavily influenced by Jungian psychology at the time), in which he “watched a gigantic supertanker take off from the surface of San Francisco Bay and thrust itself into the sky like a Saturn rocket.”

Along with its affirmation of tonality, *Harmonielehre*, according to Adams, “marries the developmental techniques of Minimalism with the harmonic and expressive world of *fin de siècle* late Romanticism,” which dominates the first movement’s middle part. “Shades of Mahler, Sibelius and Debussy” — and even of young Schoenberg’s late-Romantic works — hover in this soundscape.

Carl Jung also figures in the slower second part, “The Anfortas Wound,” named after the wounded knight from Arthurian legend. Anfortas represents a Jungian archetype who “symbolize[s] a condition of sickness of the soul that curses it with a feeling of impotence and depression.” Minor-key harmonies and lamenting gestures provide the backdrop for a soaring solo trumpet, one of Adams’ signature devices and a sonic emblem of the battlefield’s metaphorical reach inward. A reference to Mahler’s unfinished Tenth Symphony — and, by extension, to a turning point in the golden age of Western tonality — is embedded in the second climax that shatters this music.

In the final part, “Meister Eckhardt & Quackie,” Adams draws on feelings of renewal linked to still another dream, one he had soon after his daughter Emily was born. (Nicknamed “Quackie,” she is now active as a visual artist.) In the dream, “she rides perched on the shoulder of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhardt as they hover among the heavenly bodies like figures painted on the high ceilings of old cathedrals.” References to a gentle lullaby yield to waves of ecstatic momentum in E-flat major, an oceanic cry of joy for the creativity that has been liberated.

Harmonielehre is scored for 4 flutes (2nd, 3rd and 4th doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 4 clarinets (3rd & 4th doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani, 4 percussionists, 2 harps, piano, celesta and strings.

— *Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.*

ABOUT THE SOLOIST



JAMES EHNES
violin

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after violinists on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, he is a favorite guest of many of the world's most respected conductors, including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Marin Alsop, Sir Andrew Davis, Stéphane Denève, Sir Mark Elder, Ivan Fischer, Edward Gardner, Paavo Järvi, Gianandrea Noseda, David Robertson and Donald Runnicles. The long list of orchestras with which he has appeared includes the Boston, Chicago, London, NHK and Vienna symphony orchestras, the Los Angeles, New York, Munich and Czech philharmonic orchestras, and the Cleveland, Philadelphia, Philharmonia and DSO Berlin orchestras.

Recent and future orchestral highlights include the MET Orchestra at Carnegie Hall with Noseda, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig with Shelley, Orchestre National de France with Gardner, San Francisco Symphony with Janowski, Frankfurt Radio Symphony with Orozco-Estrada, Hong Kong Philharmonic with van Zweden and Gothenburg Symphony with Nagano, as well as his debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at Lincoln Center in spring 2019 and a recently completed yearlong residency with the Minnesota Orchestra.

In 2017, Ehnes premiered the Aaron-Jay Kernis Violin Concerto with the Toronto, Seattle and Dallas Symphony orchestras. The same year, he was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the Instrumentalist category.

Alongside his concerto work, Ehnes maintains a busy recital and chamber music schedule. In 2010, he established the Ehnes Quartet, with whom he has performed at venues including the Wigmore Hall, Auditorium du Louvre in Paris and Théâtre du Jeu de Paume in Aix, amongst others. He is also artistic director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society.

Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including a Gramophone Award for his live recording of the Elgar Concerto with Sir Andrew Davis and the Philharmonia Orchestra. His recording of the Korngold, Barber and Walton violin concertos won a GRAMMY® Award for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance and a JUNO award for Best Classical Album of the Year. Ehnes' recent recording of the Bartók Concerti was nominated for a Gramophone Award in the Concerto category.

Ehnes began violin studies at age 4, became a protégé of Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin at age 9, made his orchestral debut with Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal at age 13, and graduated from The Juilliard School in 1997, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and in 2010 was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada.

He plays the “Marsick” Stradivarius of 1715.