

**SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**

January 16, 17, and 18, 2009

**BEETHOVEN**      **Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Opus 15**  
Allegro con brio  
Largo  
Rondo: Allegro scherzando

INTERMISSION

**BEETHOVEN**      **Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, Opus 60**  
Adagio; Allegro vivace  
Adagio  
Allegro vivace  
Allegro ma non troppo

**BEETHOVEN**      ***Leonore* Overture No. 3, Opus 72a**

## **Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Opus 15**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

Just as Brahms was haunted by the example of Beethoven's nine symphonies, Beethoven had a few ghosts of his own to contend with. One of them was the spectre of Mozart's twenty-seven piano concertos, for Mozart had raised the piano concerto from a mere entertainment vehicle to the sophisticated and expressive form in which he composed some of his greatest music. Beethoven, who knew how good those concertos were, recognized that any concerto he wrote would have to meet that standard. Once, after hearing a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto in C Minor, Beethoven turned to his friend Johann Baptist Cramer and despaired: "Cramer! Cramer! We shall never be able to do anything like that!" Beethoven had arrived in Vienna in 1792, the year after Mozart's death, and had quickly established a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. It was expected that the young composer-pianist would write concertos for his own use in Vienna, but—overpowered by Mozart's example—Beethoven struggled with his first two piano concertos for several years, and after they were finished he was defensive about them, disparaging them as "not among my best work." Even as he was being lionized by Viennese nobility, Beethoven remained sensitive when it came to the piano concerto.

As might be expected, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 shows the influence of Mozart's piano concertos: the form and orchestration (flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trumpets, horns, plus timpani and strings) are right out of Mozart's final works in this form. Yet the touch of the young Beethoven is evident throughout. The marking for the first movement—*Allegro con brio*—was a great favorite of the young composer: he used it for the first movement of the *Eroica* and Fifth Symphonies and many other works in these years. The music begins very quietly with the simplest of figures, and seconds later this same figure thunders to life with all the power one expects from Beethoven. The exposition offers a second subject, a flowing melody for violins, before the piano enters with new material of its own, but even this is accompanied by the orchestra's explosive opening figure. The writing for piano in this movement is graceful and accomplished, but—as in Mozart's concertos—not particularly virtuosic: the emphasis is on musical values as an end in themselves rather than on virtuoso display. Beethoven does offer the soloist an extended cadenza just before the close.

The piano opens the Largo with that movement's main idea, melodic and also extremely ornate; the solo clarinet assumes an important role in this movement with a part so expressive that at moments this music is reminiscent of the Mozart Clarinet Concerto. Solo piano also opens the concluding Allegro scherzando, and its lively rondo tune is quickly answered by the boisterous orchestra. This finale is full of energy, and along the way Beethoven gives the soloist two brief cadenzas.

A NOTE ON THE DATE AND NUMBER: The date of the first performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 1 is uncertain. It could have come as early as 1795, when Haydn may have conducted it (with Beethoven as soloist) on a Vienna concert that included some of the symphonies the older composer had just brought back from England; other sources place the premiere as late as 1798. Equally uncertain is the date of composition. Beethoven worked on his first two concertos simultaneously, and some scholars believe that what we call the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major was completed first, making the Concerto in C Major Beethoven's second work in this form. And if one counts the apprentice Piano Concerto in E-flat Major that Beethoven wrote at age 14, the present concerto is actually his third. Beethoven worked a long time before he had a work he felt comfortable enough with to publish as *his Piano Concerto No. 1*.

### **Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, Opus 60**

Over the second half of 1803, Beethoven composed his Third Symphony ("*Eroica*"), and that white-hot symphony redefined what music might be. No longer was it a polite entertainment form—now it became a vehicle for the most serious and dramatic expression. Even as he was revising the *Eroica*, Beethoven began to have ideas for a new symphony, of similar scope and set in C minor, and he made some sketches for it. But he set these plans aside to take on another musical project based on the idea of heroism: the opera *Leonore* (later renamed *Fidelio*). *Leonore* occupied Beethoven for nearly two years, and it was not until 1806 that he had seen the opera through its premiere and revision.

In the summer of 1806 Beethoven accompanied his patron Prince Karl Lichnowsky to the prince's summer palace at Troppau in Silesia. That September, composer and prince paid a visit to the nearby castle of another nobleman, Count Franz von Oppersdorff. The count was a

musical enthusiast almost without equal: he maintained a private orchestra at his castle and would hire new staff for the castle only if they played an instrument and could also play in his orchestra. During that visit, the orchestra performed Beethoven's Second Symphony, and the count commissioned a new symphony from the composer: Beethoven would receive 500 florins, and in return Oppersdorff would get the dedication, the first performance, and exclusive rights to the music for six months. Beethoven returned to Lichnowsky's palace and set to work on the symphony, but he did not use his sketches for a symphony in C minor. Instead, he composed his Fourth Symphony from completely new material.

Beethoven's business dealings could sometimes be slippery, and so they were now. The composer got his 500 florins, but all Oppersdorff got in return was the dedication—Beethoven went ahead and had the Fourth Symphony premiered in Vienna on March 7, 1807, at a private concert that also saw the premiere of the *Coriolan* Overture and the Fourth Piano Concerto. Only after the Fourth Symphony had been premiered did Beethoven return to the sketches for a symphony in C minor he had made right after completing the *Eroica*. We know it today as the famous Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, begun before but completed after the Fourth Symphony.

The Fourth Symphony has inevitably been overshadowed by the titanic symphonies on either side of it, a relationship best captured in Schumann's oft-quoted description of the Fourth as "a slender Greek maiden between two Nordic giants." The Fourth does seem at first a relaxation, a retreat from the path blazed by the *Eroica*. Some have been ready to consider the Fourth a regression, and others have specifically identified the influence of Haydn on it: the symphony opens with the sort of slow introduction Haydn often used, it has a minuet for its third movement, and it employs the smallest orchestra of any Beethoven symphony (it has only one flute part). But Beethoven's Fourth Symphony is only superficially Haydnesque, and we need to be careful not to underestimate this music—the Fourth has a concentrated structure and enough energy that it achieves some of the same things as the Fifth, though without the darkness at the heart of that mighty symphony.

The originality of the Fourth Symphony is evident from its first instant—the key signature may say B-flat major, but the symphony opens in B-flat minor. Everything about this *Adagio* introduction feels strange. Not only is it in the wrong key, but soon it seems to be in no clear key at all. It is hard to make out any thematic material or direction. And the pace of this uncertainty

is very slow—in his study of Beethoven’s symphonies, Richard Osborne quotes Carl Maria von Weber’s derisive review of this opening: “Every quarter of an hour we hear three or four notes. It is exciting!” Yet Beethoven knows what he’s about, and he does the same thing in the introduction to his String Quartet in C Major, Opus 59, No. 3, written at exactly the same time: both works begin in a tonal fog, but those mists blow away with the arrival of the main body of the movement, marked *Allegro vivace* in both symphony and quartet.

That transition is done beautifully in the Fourth Symphony. As the music approaches the *Allegro vivace*, huge chords lash it forward, and when the main theme leaps out brightly, we recognize it as simply a speeded-up version of the slow introduction. That shape, so tentative at the very beginning, takes a variety of hard-edged forms in the main body of the movement: it becomes the second theme as well, presented by bassoon and other solo woodwinds, and it also forms an accompaniment figure, chirping along happily in the background. This is a substantial movement (much longer than the first movement of the Fifth), and it drives to a powerful close.

The Adagio may be just as original. It opens not with a theme but with an accompaniment: the second violins’ dotted rhythms (outlining the interval of a fourth) will tap into our consciousness all the way through this movement. First violins sing the main theme, which Beethoven takes care to mark *cantabile*. Hector Berlioz’s comments on this melody may seem a little over the top, but they do speak to its air of great calm: “the being who wrote such a marvel of inspiration as this movement was not a man. Such must be the song of the Archangel Michael as he contemplates the world’s uprising to the threshold of the empyrean.” The second subject, of Italianate ease, arrives in the solo clarinet and preserves some of this same atmosphere. Throughout, Beethoven continually reminds the orchestra to play not just *cantabile* but also *espressivo*, *dolce*, and *legato*. At the close, solo timpani very quietly taps out the movement’s accompaniment rhythm one final time before the movement concludes on two surprisingly fierce chords.

Beethoven may have marked the third movement *Minuetto*, but that was a misjudgment. This is in every way a scherzo: its outer sections are full of rough edges and blistering energy, and its witty trio is built on a rustic woodwind tune spiced with saucy interjections from the violins. This movement has an unusual structure: Beethoven brings the trio back for a second appearance (the structure is ABABA) and drives it to a fun close—two horns attempt a fanfare of

their own but are cut off when Beethoven brings down the guillotine blade of the full orchestra.

Out of that emphatic ending, the finale bursts to life, and it goes like a rocket. This movement may be in sonata form, but it feels like a perpetual-motion with a basic pulse of racing sixteenth-notes that hardly ever lets up. There is some relaxed secondary material along the way, but even this is at high speed, and finally the movement races to a grand pause. Out of that silence Beethoven slows the movement almost to a crawl (the perpetual-motion theme feels as if it has become stuck in glue), then suddenly releases it, and lower strings rush the symphony to its powerful concluding chords.

### **Leonore Overture No. 3, Opus 72a**

No other work gave Beethoven more trouble than his only opera, *Leonore*, which he retitled *Fidelio* during its final revision. This tale of political idealism, resistance to tyranny, and marital fidelity comes to a climax when the heroine Leonore prepares to sacrifice her life to protect her imprisoned husband Florestan from the evil Pizarro; the couple is saved at the last minute by the arrival of the good minister Don Fernando, who has Pizarro arrested. Beethoven's problems with the opera, which occupied him over a span of eleven years and took him through three different versions, are reflected in his problems devising a suitable overture: *Fidelio* is doubtless the only opera in existence to have four different overtures.

Some chronology is necessary here, for the territory is confusing. Shortly after composing the *Eroica* in 1803, Beethoven set to work on this opera, which took two years to complete. *Leonore* (Beethoven's preferred title) was premiered in Vienna in November 1805 and on that occasion was prefaced by what we now know as the *Leonore* Overture No. 2. This version of the opera was not a success, and Beethoven revised it, trimming the number of acts from three to two. The overture had proven particularly difficult for the players, and for the premiere of the revised version in March 1806 Beethoven completely re-wrote it; this is the version known as *Leonore* Overture No. 3. What about *Leonore* Overture No. 1? That was apparently composed for a planned production in Prague in 1807 that never took place. The manuscript for this overture was discovered after the composer's death and published in 1838 with the absurdly high opus number of 138 (which in fact is Beethoven's last opus number).

In all three of the *Leonore* overtures, Beethoven faced what was essentially a dramatic

rather than a musical problem—he composed an overture based on music that accompanies the dramatic events of the opera’s final act: Leonore’s willingness to sacrifice herself, the last-minute arrival of Don Fernando, and the arrest of Pizarro. This is powerful material, but it is far in the future when Act I opens with much more innocent activity—the frothy infatuation of the young Marzellina with the new jailer’s assistant. Any of these violently dramatic overtures is wrong as an introduction to so light a beginning to the opera, and when the powerful *Leonore* Overture No. 3 is used to open the opera, it “annihilates the first act,” in Donald Francis Tovey’s wonderful phrase.

Beethoven was aware of this problem. When he made his final revisions of the opera in 1814 (re-naming it *Fidelio* at that time), he composed the *Fidelio* Overture as the fourth—and most successful—of his overtures to this opera. A conventional curtain raiser, full of thrust and noble sentiment, it makes no use of musical material from the opera itself, and perhaps for this reason it has become a successful opening to the first act. However, many subsequent opera conductors (Mahler and Toscanini among them) have felt that the *Leonore* Overture No. 3 was too good to lose and performed it as an introduction to the opera’s final scene, where it comes just after the fortuitous arrival of Don Fernando and just before the release of Florestan. In that position, the overture’s fiercely dramatic character makes good sense.

In the concert hall, of course, none of this matters, and the music can be taken on its own terms. The *Leonore* Overture No. 3 has become one of Beethoven’s most popular overtures, preserving some of the high drama of the opera and treating it in taut sonata form. The overture’s slow introduction opens with descending phrases (mirroring Florestan’s descent into the dark dungeon?), and woodwinds soon echo a phrase from his great aria at the beginning of Act II, *In des Lebens Frühlingstagen*, a sad account of how far he has fallen from his happy early life. Gradually the introduction grows more animated and settles into the *Allegro*, where the rising-and-falling melody in C major becomes the main idea for the overture; Beethoven quickly syncopates this idea, and that rhythmic kick will animate much of the overture. There is gentler secondary material, but this too grows more turbulent (this overture never relaxes for very long). Matters reach a climax, and Beethoven breaks off the development with another quotation from the opera—the off-stage trumpet that heralds the dramatic arrival of Don Fernando in Act II. The coda brings one of the most famous (and difficult) passages in the orchestra repertory: all by

themselves, a handful of violins (“due o tre violini,” says Beethoven in the score) race ahead over a sequence of rising scales. They are gradually joined by players from the other string sections and then from the full orchestra as Beethoven drives to a heroic close, well-suited to this tale of the triumph of good over evil.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger

## **WHY THIS PROGRAM; WHY THESE PIECES?**

### **January 9th-11<sup>th</sup>, and January 16<sup>th</sup>-18, 2009:-**

Because the Beethoven Festival of two orchestral concert programs was planned as a unified presentation, Jahja Ling has discussed the entire festival to echo that approach. He began by saying, “Well, simply, the Symphonies 1 and 4 are not played often enough, and the same can be said for the First Piano Concerto, whose slow movement is so beautiful and under-rated (like the rest of the piece). I learned it first as a pianist when I was 10 or 11 years old, and, of course, I have always loved the piece. Even though it is not one of the later, more profound works of the composer, Beethoven’s revolutionary spirit can be heard sneaking into it. The same can be said of the First Symphony. The “Choral Fantasy” can be seen even more clearly as highly original, if not overtly revolutionary, but is usually overshadowed by program-makers by other great Beethoven choral works, especially the Ninth Symphony.” Peter Eros led the orchestra’s first playing of the “Choral Fantasy” during the 1978-79 season, with Yefim Bronfman at the piano. Yoav Talmi led the most recent performance here, with the young Gustavo Romero at the piano, during the 1995-96 season.

Maestro Ling chose his planned Beethoven Festival to open with the master’s “Triple” Concerto, last played at these concerts under the direction of Kristjjan Jarvi during the 2003-04 season. Earl Bernard Murray led the orchestra’s first presentation of this concerto during the 1965-66 season. Noting that Beethoven was always experimenting with forms, drama in music and anything else he could find to put into his scores, Jahja Ling thought hard but could not come up with a significant concerto by a different composer for the same three instruments. But hopefully having three master soloists AND the San Diego Master Chorale on one concert will be satisfying for Symphony Hall patrons! Maestro Ling noted that this first concert of the

Festival opens and closes in “Wonderful C-major.”

Earl Murray also conducted the orchestra when the First Symphony was initially played here, during the 1959-60 season. In the 1995-96 season, Christof Perick conducted its most recent local outing.

It might be surprising to note that Arthur Fiedler conducted the orchestra when it first played Beethoven’s First Piano Concerto. Hiro Imamura was the soloist then, during the 1965 summer season. Seven subsequent seasons featured the work, most recently in 1994-95, when Emanuel Ax was the soloist and Yoav Talmi conducted. Robert Shaw led the orchestra in the summer season of 1958, when the Fourth Symphony was heard for the first time at these concerts. Yoav Talmi conducted the orchestra when it was heard most recently here, during the 1991-92 season.

Maestro Ling commented that the beginning of the Beethoven Fourth Symphony seems to anticipate the mood of the beginning of the Third *Leonore* Overture, heard one after another on the same program. However, the somber beginnings give way to exuberance in both pieces, with that same revolutionary Beethoven fervor broadly apparent in the symphony as well as the overtly revolutionary theme of the opera prelude.

Nino Marcelli conducted the Third *Leonore* Overture with the pre-war San Diego Symphony in 1936. In 1952, Fabien Sevitzky led it with the contemporary SDSO in its initial playing of the piece. All told, it has been featured on these programs 12 times over the years, most recently in the 1994-95 season, when Yoav Talmi led it.

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