

**NEWS**

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**For Immediate Release**

**Beethoven’s “Emperor” Piano Concerto welcomes guest pianist for Grand Rapids Symphony concert with guest conductor, March 18-19**

GRAND RAPIDS, MI., March 2, 2016 – Ludwig van Beethoven had meant to give his Symphony No. 3 the title “Bonaparte” for Napoleon Bonaparte. But when the French general seized power and declared himself emperor, Beethoven angrily ripped the dedication off of the score of his “Eroica” or “Heroic” Symphony No. 3.

Five years later, as Vienna was under siege from Napoleon’s armies, leading Beethoven to take refuge in his brother’s cellar, the composer completed his fifth and final piano concerto. **Beethoven’s Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 5** soon became known as the “Emperor” concerto, only in this case, the nobleman was Austrian Archduke Rudolf, Beethoven’s patron as well as his pupil.

**Grand Rapids Symphony** performs Beethoven’s noble “Emperor” Piano Concerto at 8 pm Friday and Saturday, **March 18-19** in DeVos Performance Hall. Guest pianist **Martin Helmchen** is the soloist.

The concerts in the **Richard and Helen DeVos Classical Series** welcome guest conductor **Perry So**, the seventh guest conductor of the 2015-16 season to DeVos Performance Hall. An inaugural Dudamel Conducting Fellow at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Perry So is one of eight candidates to become the next GRS music director.

The native of Hong Kong also leads the orchestra in Robert Schumann’s Symphony No. 2.

Martin Helmchen, winner of the 2001 Clara Haskil International Piano Competition at the age of 19, makes his Grand Rapids debut performing the Beethoven’s “Emperor” Concerto. The German pianist has performed with leading orchestras throughout the world including the philharmonics of Berlin, London, Vienna and New York, as well as the symphony orchestras of Boston, San Francisco and Cleveland.

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**Grand Rapids Symphony, “Beethoven’s Emperor” page 2**

Though Beethoven wrote his four earlier piano concertos for himself to perform, he composed his final piano concerto only after his hearing loss had ended his career as one of the greatest pianists of his day. Another of Beethoven’s pupils, Carl Czerny, gave the debut performance.

The music of Beethoven frequently appears on TV or in movies. Naturally, films such as ***Immortal Beloved*** use Beethoven’s music throughout. The 1994 film starring Gary Oldman as Beethoven uses the first three of the four movements of the “Emperor” Piano Concerto. Other films using the concerto include:

* ***Dead Poets Society*** (1989) uses the 2nd movement in the film starring Robin Williams as an English teacher
* ***Fearless*** (1993) uses the 3rd movement in the thriller starring Jeff Bridges as a man whose personality changes dramatically after an airplane crash
* ***Tomorrow Never Dies*** (1997) uses the 2nd movement in the action film starring Pierce Brosnan as James Bond

Robert Schumann’s **Symphony No. 2**, despite the composer’s growing mental illness, is more of a work of joyful exuberance than it is a work of the dark contrasts that balance it out.

Influenced by the music of Bach and Beethoven, Schumann had just completed a set of six organ fugues based on a musical motto fashioned from Bach’s last name just prior to composing his Symphony in C major. The motto B-flat, A, C and H (which stands for B-natural in German-speaking countries) appears in the second movement of the symphony, whose finale briefly quotes a couple of melodies by Beethoven.

Schumann’s Symphony in C major is titled No. 2, but it actually was the third symphony he composed, chronologically speaking. It was dubbed No. 2 because of the order in which his music was published.

The concerts on Friday and Saturday open with contemporary composer Guillaume Connesson’s “Supernova” from a larger work, “Cosmic Trilogy,” which the French composer describes as a “lyric symphony” that he completed in 2007.

The work is inspired by a painting of Kandinsky titled “Quelques Cercles” or “Some Circles” as well as by the popular book “A Brief History of Time” by English astrophysicist Stephen Hawking.

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**Grand Rapids Symphony, “Beethoven’s Emperor” page 3**

* Upbeat, a free, pre-concert, multi-media presentation, with guest conductor Perry So, will be held before each performance at 7 p.m. in the DeVos Place Recital Hall. Upbeat is sponsored by BDO USA.
* “Beethoven’s Emperor” will be rebroadcast on Sunday, May 15 at 1 p.m. on Blue Lake Public Radio 88.9 FM or 90.3 FM.

**Tickets**
Tickets start at $18 and are available at the **GRS box office**, weekdays 9 am -5 pm at 300 Ottawa Ave. NW, Suite 100, (located across from the Calder Plaza), or by calling 616.454.9451 x 4. (Phone orders will be charged a $2 per ticket service fee, with a $12 maximum.)

Tickets are available at the **DeVos Place box office**, weekdays 10 am - 6 pm or on the day of the concert beginning two hours prior to the performance. Tickets also may be purchased through [**Ticketmaster**](http://www.ticketmaster.com/search?tm_link=tm_homeA_header_search&user_input=Grand+Rapids+symphony&q=Grand+Rapids+symphony) at 800.982.2787, online at [**GRSymphony.org**](http://www.grsymphony.org/concert-calendar) or in person at Ticketmaster outlets at select D&W Fresh Markets, Family Fare Stores and Walmart. Tickets purchased at these locations will include a Ticketmaster service fee.

Full-time students of any age are able to purchase tickets for only **$5** on the night of the concert by enrolling in the [**GRS Student Passpor**t](http://www.grsymphony.org/student-passport) program. This is a [**MySymphony360**](http://www.grsymphony.org/mysymphony360) eligible concert.

**About the Grand Rapids Symphony**
Organized in 1930, the Grand Rapids Symphony is nationally recognized for the quality of its concerts and educational programs. Led by Music Advisor Larry Rachleff, Principal Pops Conductor Bob Bernhardt and Associate Conductor John Varineau, nine concert series are presented, featuring a wide range of music and performance styles. More than 400 performances are given each year, touching the lives of some 200,000, nearly half of whom are students, senior citizens and people with disabilities all reached through extensive education and community service programs. Affiliated organizations include the Grand Rapids Symphony Chorus; Grand Rapids Youth Symphony and Classical Orchestra; and Grand Rapids Symphony Youth Choruses. GRS sponsors the biennial GRS sponsors the biennial [**Grand Rapids Bach Festival**](http://www.grsymphony.org/grand-rapids-bach-festival) and provides the orchestra for performance by **Opera Grand Rapids** and the **Grand Rapids Ballet**. To learn more about the Grand Rapids Symphony, please visit the Grand Rapids Symphony’s website, [**GRSymphony.org**](http://www.GRSymphony.org)**.**

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