

jun 16, 17

Season Finale: James Ehnes and Beethoven's Seventh

Minnesota Orchestra

Sir Andrew Davis, conductor

James Ehnes, violin

Friday, June 16, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, June 17, 2023, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

*With these concerts we honor the memory of **C. Curtis Dunn**.*

Ludwig van Beethoven	Overture to <i>Egmont</i> , Opus 84	ca. 8'
Alban Berg	Concerto for Violin and Orchestra Andante - Allegretto Allegro - Adagio <i>James Ehnes, violin</i>	ca. 22'
I N T E R M I S S I O N		ca. 20'
Chen Yi	<i>Duo Ye</i> for Chamber Orchestra	ca. 8'
Ludwig van Beethoven	Symphony No. 7 in A major, Opus 92 Poco sostenuto - Vivace Allegretto Presto Allegro con brio	ca. 42'

pre-concert

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and James Ehnes
Friday, June 16, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine
Saturday, June 17, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

thank you

These concerts are co-sponsored by Dr. Stanley M. and Luella G. Goldberg and Cynthia and Jay Ihlenfeld.

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#), including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.



Sir Andrew Davis, conductor

Across a career spanning more than 40 years, English conductor Sir Andrew Davis has been the musical and artistic leader at several of the world's most distinguished opera and symphonic institutions including Lyric Opera of Chicago, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Toronto Symphony. In addition, he holds the honorary title of conductor emeritus from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. One of today's most acclaimed conductors, he has led virtually all of the world's major orchestras and opera companies and conducted at numerous major festivals. These concerts mark his first appearances with the Minnesota Orchestra since his debut in 1976. In the

2022-23 season, Davis conducts his own adaptation of Handel's *Messiah* with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. The season also sees a return to the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Lyric Opera of Chicago. His other engagements include concerts with the City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Detroit Opera. His vast discography includes Grammy-nominated recordings with the Toronto Symphony, BBC Symphony and BBC Philharmonic. In 1992, he was named a Commander of the British Empire. More: opus3artists.com, sirandrewdavis.com.



James Ehnes, violin

Canadian violinist 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 has performed with many top ensembles including the Boston, Chicago, London, NHK and Vienna symphonies; the Los Angeles and New York philharmonics; and the Cleveland, Philadelphia and DSO Berlin orchestras. This season he serves as the National Arts Centre of Canada's artist in residence, performs with orchestras from London and Berlin to Seattle and Toronto, and tours the U.S. with the Ehnes Quartet. This year marks three decades since his Minnesota Orchestra debut at Symphony Ball in 1993, the year after he won the FRIENDS of the Minnesota Orchestra Young Artists Competition; he last appeared at Orchestra Hall in a broadcast-only performance in March 2021. A dedicated recitalist and chamber musician, he has collaborated with numerous musicians at the world's top festivals and venues, and he serves as the artistic director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society. His extensive recording catalogue has won many awards, including Grammys in 2008 and 2019. At the 2021 Gramophone Awards he was named Artist of the Year. More: jamesehnes.com, intermusica.com.

one-minute notes

Beethoven: Overture to *Egmont*; Symphony No. 7

Beethoven's music for the play *Egmont*, centered on the Dutch freedom fighter Count Lamoral van Egmont, begins solemnly, proceeds into an allegro section of high drama and ends with the joy of Egmont's victory. The composer's lively Seventh Symphony constructs a series of astonishing musical moments from short, simple figures. The second movement, based on a repeating rhythm, has been an audience favorite since its premiere two centuries ago.

Berg: Violin Concerto

Berg poured his feelings for the young actress Manon Gropius—and his grief over her death—into this remarkable concerto, notable for its melding of 20th-century serialism with lyricism, folk music and a Bach chorale. The first movement offers a portrait of carefree Manon, while the second brings the catastrophe that kills her; the music comes to terms with that loss as she achieves transfiguration in the close.

Yi: *Duo Ye*

Duo Ye is based on a traditional song and dance performed by the Dong minority of China's Guangxi province. Music of high energy, it draws on melodies and techniques from Chinese opera, folk songs and percussion ensembles.



Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770,
Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827,
Vienna, Austria

Overture to *Egmont*

Premiered: June 15, 1810

When, in 1809, Ludwig van Beethoven was asked to contribute incidental music to accompany a performance of Goethe's play *Egmont*, he responded enthusiastically. Goethe was one of his three favorite authors (Schiller and Homer were the other two), and *Egmont* embodied virtually all the themes and principles Beethoven most cherished: freedom, courage, brotherly love, defiance of tyranny and heroic struggle. The first complete performance of Beethoven's music with the play took place at the Vienna Hoftheater on June 15, 1810.

the story

The events of the play are set against the background of the Dutch struggle for political independence from Spain in the 16th century. Phillip II of Spain sent the notorious Duke of Alva to subdue the restless Dutch. One of his first targets was the popular hero and freedom fighter Count Lamoral van Egmont, who was imprisoned and sentenced to death for "treason."

In the gray light of dawn before his execution Egmont dreams of his beloved Clara, who appears before him as the Goddess of Freedom, proclaiming that his death will spur the populace to overthrow the Spanish tyrants. She places a laurel wreath of victory on his head and vanishes. A drum roll awakens Egmont; he is led to his execution, but with head held high and with renewed spiritual strength, he sounds the call to arms in a stirring oration. It concludes: "Stride forth, brave people! The goddess of victory leads you on. Like the sea bursting through your dikes, you must burst and overwhelm the ramparts of tyranny, drown it, and sweep it from the land it has usurped....Friends, take heart! Behind you are your parents, your wives, your children!...Guard your sacred heritage! And to defend all you hold most dear, fall joyful, as I do before you now!"

the music

The slow introduction begins with a solemn pronouncement in big blocks of rich orchestral sound, alternating with gentle, comforting tones of the woodwinds. This gesture of opposites

can be regarded as the synthesis of the whole play, with its alternating moods of oppression and supplication. The main *Allegro* section is infused with high drama, surging passions and a pervasive restlessness. The joyous conclusion is a reflection of Egmont's stirring speech—preceded by a two-note figure in the violins, which some believe represents the slice of the guillotine blade or the drop of the trap door on the gallows. What follows is specifically designated the "Victory Symphony" as called for in Goethe's text. Beethoven responded to Goethe's poetic metaphor of the bursting dike with a musical equivalent that begins softly, quivering excitedly, growing irresistibly stronger until the music fairly explodes in a powerful surge of joy and jubilation.

Egmont's death—on June 5, 1568—was not in vain: in 1648, the United States of the Netherlands were recognized by Phillip IV of Spain as an independent state.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Program note by **Robert Markow**.



Alban Berg

Born: February 9, 1885,
Vienna, Austria

Died: December 24, 1935,
Vienna, Austria

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

Premiered: April 19, 1936

In the winter of 1935 Alban Berg turned 50, a momentous occasion for anyone. Life was full, and he was very busy. He spent that winter working on the orchestration of his opera *Lulu*, completed in short score the previous year, and January brought the welcome news that the American violinist Louis Krasner (who would eventually become concertmaster of the Minnesota Orchestra, which was then known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra) had commissioned a violin concerto from him. And then came a string of catastrophes.

"to the memory of an angel"

On April 22, Manon Gropius died. The 18-year-old Manon—daughter of architect Walter Gropius and Alma Mahler Gropius (Gustav Mahler's widow)—had been a promising actress when she contracted polio the year before. Berg was close friends with Walter and Alma and cared deeply about Manon as well, and—

overwhelmed by her death—he laid aside his work on *Lulu*, took up the proposed commission and set to work.

Normally one of the slowest of composers, Berg now worked very quickly. He had sketched the concerto by July 12 and completed the full score a month later, on August 11. Even the composer was amazed by the speed with which this music had come to life. To Krasner he wrote: “I am more surprised at this than even you will be. I was keen on it as I have never been before in my life, and must add that the work gave me more and more joy. I hope—no, I have the confident belief—that I have succeeded.” The completed score bore two inscriptions. It is dedicated to Krasner, but Berg specified that this music had been written “To the Memory of an Angel.”

And then, amidst this sense of joyful completion came a hideous complication. Berg had composed the concerto at his summer retreat on the Wörthersee in central Austria, and while on a picnic sometime that August he was stung at the base of his spine by an insect. From childhood, Berg had been particularly vulnerable to allergies and reactions, and his response to the bite was severe. He developed an infection (foolishly, Berg and his wife tried to lance the abscess themselves, using a pair of scissors), and his condition worsened steadily. Seriously ill and in pain, Berg returned to Vienna that fall. He was able to attend a performance of orchestral excerpts from *Lulu* on December 11, but within weeks he was overwhelmed by infection and died on Christmas Eve. What began as a requiem for a young woman who died an untimely death ironically became a requiem for its composer, who had also died much too young.

emotion and ingenuity

One of the finest violin concertos of the 20th century, this music appeals on many levels: for the ingenuity of its construction on serial procedures, for Berg’s ability to find within these procedures consistent tonal bases for his music, and for his musical quotations from unexpected sources. At an immediate level, this concerto can be understood as Berg’s devastated reaction to the death of Manon Gropius, and in fact the concerto seems to “tell” that story. The first movement offers a portrait of Manon—young, carefree, dancing—while the second brings the catastrophe that kills her; the music then comes to terms with that loss as Manon achieves transfiguration in the quiet closing pages.

At a technical level, this music is absolutely ingenious, and it is astonishing that music so complex could have been composed so quickly. Berg’s fundamental 12-tone row, introduced by the rising solo violin in the 15th measure, is particularly fertile. It consists of a series of four interlocked triads (G minor, D major, A minor, E major) and concludes with three whole steps. The root notes of those triads (G-D-A-E) are the notes sounded on the open

strings of the violin, and Berg hints at the tonal foundations of his theme by having the solo violinist rock up and back across the instrument’s open strings at the very beginning.

The structure of the concerto is quite clear. It is in two movements, each one divided into two sections which are played without pause. The opening movement is in a slow-fast sequence, while the latter movement reverses this to bring the concerto to a solemn close.

the music: ingenious and moving

andante – allegretto. The *Andante* portion of the first movement functions as an introduction (Berg calls it a *Praeludium*); the opening—with its hints of what is to come—gives way to the solo violin’s presentation of the row, which is then extended in several different episodes. A pair of dancing clarinets leads us directly into the second portion, marked *Allegretto*, the most carefree part of the concerto; Berg takes this opening figure through passages marked *scherzando*, *wienerisch* (in Viennese style), and *rustico*. In the course of the *Allegretto*, Berg makes the first of his unexpected quotations: a solo horn “sings” an old folksong from Carinthia, a region of southern Austria (it includes the Wörthersee, where Berg had the summerhouse in which he wrote this concerto). Berg marks this simple little tune, which dances along dotted rhythms, *come una pastorale*, and it appears to have had private meaning for him. (Indeed, there are unexpected levels of private significance in this concerto—reference to initials, names and numbers so personal to the composer that this concerto becomes virtually a summing-up of his own life, as well as being a tribute to another.) After all its dancing energy, this movement comes to a sudden close.

allegro – adagio. The second movement explodes to life. The first portion, marked *Allegro* and cast in the form of an accompanied cadenza, is the most overtly virtuosic music in the concerto. As it proceeds, an ominous rhythm—dotted and forceful—begins to intrude. Finally this rises up to become a strident outburst (in the score, Berg stresses that this is the *Höhepunkt*—“climax”—of the movement), and clearly it marks the death of Manon. Quickly this falls away, and in the numbed aftermath the music proceeds directly into the concluding *Adagio*.

At this point comes the concerto’s most striking moment and its biggest surprise (even Berg was surprised by what happened here). That summer, he had been studying Bach chorales, and to his amazement he discovered that the last four notes of his row (the whole steps) were the same four notes that begin the chorale *Es ist genug* (“It is enough”), from Bach’s Cantata No. 60, *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort*. This severe melody—which Bach had borrowed from its original composer, Johann Ahle—and its text of farewell to earthly existence perfectly captured the mood of

mourning and acceptance that Berg had intended for the close of his concerto. Now he, in turn, borrows that theme for his own purposes. Berg presents the chorale, marked *doloroso*, with his own harmonization, then offers variations and fuses it with the Carinthian folksong. The concerto fades into silence on one final recall of the simple open-string figuration with which it began.

Berg's Violin Concerto was quickly heard around the world, with performances in London, Vienna, Paris, Boston and New York. Yet its composer never heard a note of it. Louis Krasner gave the premiere in Barcelona on April 19, 1936, four months after Berg's death and almost exactly one year to the day after Manon's death.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling alto saxophone), bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, bass trombone, tuba, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, high gong, low tamtam, triangle, timpani, harp and strings

Program notes by **Eric Bromberger**.



Chen Yi

Born: April 4, 1953,
Guangzhou, China

Duo Ye

Premiered: February 10, 1986

The mixing of classical music practices and Indigenous or folk tunes has produced great works ranging from Fred Onovwerosuoke's *Piano Etudes in African Rhythm* to Brent Michael Davids' *Fluting Around* and Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Rhythmically and sonically, contemporary Chinese-American composer Chen Yi's *Duo Ye* shares musical DNA with these works. A beautiful honesty and ear for cultural details is always present when the composer of such a work is inspired by their own culture, and for *Duo Ye*, Chen—her family name in the Chinese convention—found beauty in an age-old traditional song and dance of the Dong minority in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region of her native China.

In the 1980s, along with a group of fellow student composers during her master's studies at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, Chen traveled to the Guangxi district of the Dong and Yao minorities, studying the people's various social and

cultural practices. This moment left a warm impression on her and prompted a musical response. Chen's *Duo Ye* originated as a prize-winning solo piano piece, then was expanded into a chamber orchestra version on a commission from the China Record Company.

Chen, like her siblings, started her musical training at the young age of 3. She began her journey on piano before switching to violin at age 4. Her training included memorizing as well as singing repertoire by well-known European composers of the 1700s and 1800s. During China's Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, Chen and her siblings were brought to a countryside work camp where she could only play "revolutionary songs" on her violin. Soon afterwards, she became concertmaster at the Peking Opera, then began her post-secondary studies at the Central Conservatory of Music, earning bachelor's and master's degrees. During this time, an important aspect of her musical development included summer studies of traditional Chinese folk music. Her additional training at Columbia University in New York paved the way to joining the faculty at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, and eventually becoming the Lorena Cravens/Millsap/Missouri Distinguished Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance.

Duo Ye was composed in 1985. Written for a smaller-scale chamber orchestra, it features a smaller-than-typical woodwind section, one horn representing the brass, a handful of percussion instruments and strings. It begins with a bold, downward declaration in a middle register. This statement reflects the performance practice of the traditional Dong minority dance. In this dance, people encircle a bonfire and dance with slow steps in one direction. A lead singer, often the village tribune, sings improvised gestures with the chorus of dancers responding with "Ya Duo Ye" (which, in this context, are vocalized syllables that have no meaning). The upper strings and the oboe begin the declaration, with a response by low winds, percussion and low strings. This opening material then, in various ways, informs the sonic environment of the rest of the piece.

As the music intensifies and the rhythms develop and unfold into exciting juxtapositions and prostrations, Chen brings in lengthier, soloistic *Adagio* passages that seem to quietly extend the beginning declaration. This reflection also seems personal and intimate—it is music that could possibly serve as Chen's own inner gratitude for bearing witness to such a welcoming, exciting, communal indigenous artistic practice that was birthed in her native China.

Instrumentation: flute, oboe, clarinet, E-flat clarinet, bassoon, horn, snare drum, suspended cymbal, gong, 4 tom-toms, vibraphone and strings

Program note by **Anthony R. Green**.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Opus 92

Premiered: December 8, 1813

Beethoven turned 40 in December 1810, and things were going very well. True, his hearing had deteriorated to the point where he was virtually deaf, but he was still riding that white-hot explosion of creativity that has become known, for better or worse, as his “heroic” style.

re-imagining music

Over the decade-long span of that style, 1803 to 1813, Beethoven essentially re-imagined music and its possibilities. The works that crystallized the heroic style—the *Eroica* and the Fifth Symphony—unleashed a level of violence and darkness previously unknown in music and then triumphed over them. In these symphonies, music became a matter not of polite discourse but of conflict, struggle and resolution.

In the fall of 1811, Beethoven began a new symphony, his Seventh, which would differ sharply from those two famous predecessors. Gone is the sense of cataclysmic struggle and hard-won victory. Instead, this music is infused from its first instant with a mood of pure celebration. There had never been music like this before, nor has there been since: few works in the classical repertoire match the energy found in this kinetic symphony. Much has been made (correctly) of Beethoven’s ability to transform small bits of theme into massive symphonic structures, but here he begins not so much with theme as with rhythm: tiny figures, almost scraps of rhythm. Gradually he releases the energy locked up in these small figures and from them creates one of the mightiest symphonies ever written.

the symphony: small ideas transformed

poco sostenuto–vivace. The first movement opens with a slow introduction so long that it almost becomes a separate movement of its own. Tremendous chords punctuate the slow beginning, which gives way to a poised duet for oboes. The real effect of this long *Poco sostenuto*, however, is to coil the energy that will be unleashed in the true first movement, and Beethoven conveys this rhythmically: the meter of the introduction is a rock-solid (even square) 4/4, but the main body of the movement, marked *Vivace*, transforms this into a light-footed 6/8. This *Vivace* begins in what seems a most unpromising manner, however, as woodwinds toot out a simple dotted 6/8 rhythm and the solo flute announces the first theme. This simple dotted rhythm saturates virtually every measure of the movement, as theme, as accompaniment, as motor rhythm, always hammering into our consciousness. At

the climax, horns sail majestically to the close as the orchestra thunders out that rhythm one final time.

allegretto. The second movement, in A minor, is one of Beethoven’s most famous slow movements, but the debate continues as to whether it really is a slow movement. Beethoven could not decide whether to mark it *Andante*, a walking tempo, or *Allegretto*, a moderately fast pace. He finally decided on the latter, though the actual pulse is somewhere between those two. This movement too is built on a short rhythmic pattern, in this case the first five notes: long-short-short-long-long—and this pattern repeats here almost as obsessively as the pattern of the first movement. The opening sounds like a series of static chords—the theme itself occurs quietly inside those chords—and Beethoven simply repeats this theme, varying it as it proceeds. The central episode in A major moves gracefully along smoothly-flowing triplets before a little fugato on the opening rhythms builds to a great climax. The movement winds down on the woodwinds’ almost skeletal reprise of the fundamental rhythm.

presto. The scherzo explodes to life on a theme full of grace notes, powerful accents, flying staccatos and timpani explosions. This alternates with a trio section for winds reportedly based on an old pilgrims’ hymn, though no one, it seems, has been able to identify that hymn exactly. Beethoven offers a second repeat of the trio, then seems about to offer a third before five abrupt chords drive the movement to its close.

allegro con brio. These chords set the stage for the finale, again built on the near-obsessive treatment of a short rhythmic pattern, in this case the movement’s opening four-note fanfare. This pattern punctuates the entire movement: it shapes the beginning of the main theme, and its stinging accents thrust the music forward continuously as this movement almost boils over with energy. The ending is remarkable: above growling cellos and basses (which rock along on a two-note ostinato for 28 measures), the opening theme drives to a climax that Beethoven marks *fff*, a dynamic marking he almost never used. This conclusion is virtually Bacchanalian in its wild power. No matter how many times we’ve heard it, it remains one of the most exciting moments in all of classical music. Beethoven led the first performance of the Seventh Symphony in Vienna on December 8, 1813—a huge success, with the audience demanding that the second movement be repeated.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Program note by **Eric Bromberger.**