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 Dunnavan.

Ludwig van Beethoven
Overture to Egmont, Opus 84
ca. 8’

Alban Berg
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra
Andante – Allegretto
Allegro – Adagio
James Ehnes, violin
ca. 22’

INTERMISSION
ca. 20’

Chen Yi
Duo Ye 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’

Season Finale: James Ehnes and Beethoven’s Seventh

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

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.
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.
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 wakens 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.
had also died much too young. The untimely death ironically became a requiem for its composer, who 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.

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, 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.

**Program Notes**

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 Michaels’ *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 Guaxi 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.

**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 growing 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.*