Beethoven's First Piano Concerto

Saturday, November 3 – 8 pm

Jayce Ogren, conductor
Joyce Yang, piano
Whitney Leigh Sloan, soprano

Symphony Prelude, Saturday 7 pm, Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

HATZIS
The Isle is Full of Noises (13')*

BEETHOVEN
Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op.15 (38')*
Allegro con brio
Largo
Rondo: Allegro

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
***A Pastoral Symphony* (Symphony No. 3)** (34')*
Molto moderato
Lento moderato
Moderato pesante
Lento – Moderato maestoso

program subject to change
*indicates approximate performance duration

The Isle is Full of Noises
Christos Hatzis
(b. Volos, Greece, 1953)

First performed: October 15, 2013 in Montréal
This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Program note by the composer:
The Isle Is Full of Noises was commissioned by l' Orchestre symphonique de Montréal for a program consisting of compositions inspired by William Shakespeare. I chose to base mine on *The Tempest*, particularly on two memorable excerpts, one by Prospero: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep." (Act 4, Scene 1) and the following one by Caliban:

"Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that vie delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again." (Act 3, Scene 2)

Both Prospero and Caliban view reality as dream-like in this play. Their island is a magical place. Its "reality" is shaped and determined by human will, Prospero's, rather than natural law. Caliban, a rebellious and conceited creature, is promoting this reality to the unsuspecting newcomers hoping to usurp through them Prospero's magic and power. It is not surprising that, in Christian Europe of Shakespeare's time, Caliban's character became associated with the serpentine deceiver of the Biblical Eden allegory who, too, sought to corrupt the first humans by enticing them to the power of the forbidden fruit of consciousness and its power thereof, in spite of God's explicit instructions to the contrary (Prospero's character has many common features with the Elizabethan concept of God.)

It is this Biblical connection with the "isle, full of noises" which got me inspired to compose this work. The "Eden" allegory has been a subject that I keep on exploring musically and psychologically in a number of recent works. At variance with current scientific orthodoxy, I sense a different psychological pre-history for our species and use the tools of collective memory, the same tools that enable me to compose music, to trace this prehistory to its deep roots. The task is frustratingly difficult, constantly bouncing against the "hard facts" of science, but my view of reality has gradually evolved to be more similar to the one that Prospero and Caliban weave for the other characters in *The Tempest* than to the creeds of scientists—with the possible exception of some quantum physicists, whose view of reality is even more fantastic than anything Shakespeare or the Genesis authors could be accused of conjuring.

During this meditative process that composing music has become for me, it occurred to me that it may be possible to view western European music history from the classical masters to the mid-twentieth century as a continuous process of psychological regression, reaching ever deeper into our imaginal past. If this is true, then the music of this musical tradition that we all cherish is the creative by-product of this regression: it is the sonic fruit of our search for our psychic roots. Consequently, the time arrow of western music during this period of time would be a mirror reflection (an inversion) of the time arrow

of this imaginal history. Restored, it would start with relatively independent parts and end up with complex wholes, so, if we were to reconstruct a proper timeline, we would start with modernism and gradually evolve forward towards classicism. Bizarre as this may sound, it is nevertheless the stylistic timeline that I ended up following in The Isle is Full of Noises.

The work begins with primal breathing and an elemental soundscape. Musical sounds gradually emerge from the depths of the orchestral spectrum in a tonally vague language which quickly transforms into impressionistic smears reminiscent of the music of Claude Debussy, one of my favourite composers. Timbre gradually morphs into melody and harmony, but both are elusive and at first retain their identity only briefly. Finally, the main D Major theme, representing the emergence of consciousness in the metaphorical structure of my work, is first introduced by the string orchestra in an introverted but eventually more self conscious manner, persistently pulled outwardly by the exuberance of the triumphant ending— the latter representing the emergence of the perfected human in this earthly sphere of consciousness. All of these musical metaphors were recognized as functioning archetypes in the music only after the completion of the compositional process or, more correctly, close to the tail end of it. In retrospect, however, I realize that these archetypes acted as catalysts for the music all along and caused it to become what it is. One conscious influence was the music of Felix Mendelssohn, whose overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I knew would precede *The Isle is Full of Noises* in the concert of the premiere performance. Any stylistic similarity between the latter part of my work and Mendelssohn's is therefore not coincidental. Then again, I subscribe to the view that nothing ever is.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op.15
Ludwig van Beethoven
(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performed: December 18, 1795 in Vienna
Last ESO performance: February 2009

Beethoven's *First Piano Concerto* isn't – the first, that is. Because of a delay in publishing his first two concertos, there was a mix-up, and his second, more mature effort, was published as No. 1. By the time of their publication, Beethoven had lived with both works for a long time, and his feelings about them had become ambivalent. It is believed that, unlike the period of time during which the *B-flat Concerto* (published as No. 2) was written, Beethoven had been exposed to the piano concertos of Mozart when he began writing the *C Major Concerto*. The scope of the C Major work is quite different than the other. The outer movements are both far longer, and the middle movement is in the remote key of A-flat.

The influence of Mozart is apparent in the opening, where the piano is given its own theme upon its entrance, separate from the material given the orchestra. Thereafter, it is the orchestra which continues to introduce the important thematic material, but the piano builds upon and embellishes the music, driving it forward, and performing, not one or two, but three separate cadenzas.

The slow movement is a very slow Largo. Again, the piano's role is to ornament the orchestral material, and the broad artistic expressiveness shows Beethoven's embrace of the emerging Romantic mood of the day. Listen also for a dialog near the end of the movement between the piano and clarinet.

The final movement is a rondo, and the playfulness with which it should be presented is suggested by the tempo marking of Allegro scherzando. Much of the good-natured fun is found in the contrast between the movement's main theme and the contrasting secondary subjects, both rhythmically, and in contrasting keys.

Throughout his performing career, Beethoven continually wrested every dramatic and dynamic sound he could from the pianos of the day. As each newly-designed piano would expand the sonorous capabilities from the ones that had preceded it, Beethoven's music accordingly grew in size and scope as well. In his revisions of his early concertos, Beethoven rewrote the cadenzas for them, and in the case of tonight's work, it is worth noting that there is no way the pianos of the late 18th century could have performed the cadenzas you will hear tonight. He wrote them later, for pianos that were larger and sturdier than those of 1795.

A Pastoral Symphony **(Symphony No. 3)**
Ralph Vaughan Williams
(b. Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, 1872 / d. London, 1958)

First performed: January 26, 1922 in London
This is the ESO premiere of the piece

The most famous "Pastoral Symphony" is Beethoven's – an idyllic portrait of the woods and meadows to which Beethoven loved to retreat. It is a far cry from the countryside that inspired Vaughan Williams' third venture in the symphonic form. It was the ravaged and bloodied fields of France in the First World War, a psychic scar still fresh years later, that prompted the work.

Vaughan Williams was an ambulance driver during the war, and began sketching ideas for the symphony as early as 1916, when he would drive his horse-drawn vehicle to the top of a steep hill near Ecoivres and survey the landscape. Fleshed out in the years following the war, the work became multi-faceted: a bleak depiction at a blasted, formerly beautiful land; an elegy for the dead; and a meditation on a hoped-for lasting peace. Its structure is equally multi-faceted.

While in a traditional four-movement layout, the symphony's flow does not follow convention. Each movement contains the word "moderato" in its description, and while there is less variation in tempo or pace in the work as compared to a more traditionally-composed symphony, the piece seems to always be in constant motion – swaying and undulating, rather than markedly changing its rhythm. The work opens as if a gauzy curtain is drawn aside, revealing its country scene. Like much of the symphony, modal and pentatonic melodies dominate, and much of the "tension" of the music arises not from

dissonance, but from the counterpoint of separate melodic threads pitted against each other. There is turbulence in this Molto moderato movement, but it, like the strands of music themselves, tends to ebb and flow – a sense of wandering and uncertainty.

The Lento moderato second movement begins with a solo horn, and is later dominated by a beautiful solo trumpet passage – a reference to the bugle sounds from the war. The horn returns in counterpoint to a clarinet as the tender movement concludes. The third movement, Moderato pesante, is more rousing than the others, more warmly and richly scored, and dominated by a brassy, noble theme. The finale is a long elegy, and features a wordless vocal line for soprano – a voice of humanity amid the moods of peace and tension in the orchestra. This is one of Vaughan Williams' most debated scores – it eludes easy description, although the sage English musicologist Donald Tovey rightly observed, "the listener cannot miss the power behind all this massive quietness."

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