

**Prior Conducts Beethoven**

**Sunday, March 31 – 2 pm**

**Alexander Prior**, conductor

**John Brancy**, baritone

**Clayton Leung**, viola

Sunday Prelude, 1:15 pm, Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

Sunday Encore, post-performance, Main Lobby with Alexander Prior, John Brancy & Clayton Leung

**BRUCH**

***Romance for Viola in F Major, Op.85***

(7')\*

**SCHUBERT** (orch. Prior)

***Die Winterreise: excerpts***

(30')\*

Gute Nacht

Gefrorne Tränen

Der Lindenbaum

Wasserflut

Rückblick

Frühlingstraum

Die Krähe

Im Dorfe

Der stürmische Morgen

Das Wirtshaus

Die Nebensonnen

Der Leiermann

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

**BEETHOVEN**

***Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op.68 "Pastorale"***

(39')\*

Awakening of Happy Feelings on Arriving in the Country: Allegro ma non troppo

Scene at the Brook: Andante molto mosso

Merry Gathering of Country Folk: Allegro

Thunder, Storm: Allegro

Shepherds' Song, Happy and Grateful Feelings Following the Storm: Allegretto

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

### ***Romance for Viola in F Major, Op.85***

**Max Bruch**

(b. Cologne, 1838 / d. Friedenau, 1920)

First performed: April 25, 1911 in Berlin

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Like a lot of works by Max Bruch, his charming *Romance for Viola* was not given much attention during his lifetime. While he had a reasonably successful career as a composer, his popularity while he was alive was chiefly because of his choral works – which are rarely performed now. But toward the end of his life, he seemed to find inspiration in the viola, writing several pieces for it. There is a double concerto for viola and clarinet, as well as a set of eight pieces for viola, clarinet, and piano.

Bruch dedicated his *Romance* to the great French violist, Maurice Vieux, although it was Bruch's friend, Willy Hess, who performed the piece at its premiere. Marked *Andante con moto*, the piece begins with the viola stating the main theme, followed by an orchestral restatement. In much the same way a concerto movement might take, the solo instrument presents elaborations built around the main theme, the mood changes to a more agitated central section, featuring runs and arpeggios in the viola. The work's sweeter nature returns, the viola's taxing solo part propels the music forward, until the main theme returns to close the work in a mood of tranquility.

***Winterreise***: selections (arr. Prior)

**Franz Schubert**

(b. Vienna, 1797 / d. Vienna, 1828)

First performed: 1828 in Vienna

This is the ESO premiere of any orchestration of the songs of Franz Schubert.

Orchestras the world over have been performing the music of Schubert for two centuries. Yet the single most important segment of Schubert's output – his songs – were written for solo voice and piano, and are therefore not part of orchestral concerts. Over the course of his tragically brief life, Schubert composed nearly 800 songs. Of that tremendous output, he wrote a dozen song *cycles*.

A "cycle" can best be described as a collection of songs grouped by a unified theme, and usually settings of works by a single poet. *Winterreise* ("The Winter Journey"), composed in two parts in 1827, is a

setting of 24 poems by Wilhelm Müller (1794-1827). Schubert had previously set another cycle of Müller poems – *Die schöne Müllerin* – in 1823.

“Come over to Schober’s today and I will sing you a cycle of *schauerlicher* (“unearthly,” “spooky”) songs...They have cost me more effort than any of my other songs,” Schubert wrote to a friend about *Winterreise*. The cycle is indeed harrowing. “Müller’s wayfarer is impelled by rejection in love to dissect his innermost being,” writes scholar Susan Youens. Schubert completed the first dozen settings in February 1827, completing the other twelve by October. They were also published separately – the first in January 1828, and Schubert was making corrections to the second set right up to his death on November 19, 1828. Scored originally for tenor and piano, Schubert created transpositions for other vocal ranges as well.

Unlike a great many *lieder* (“art songs”), Schubert’s *Winterreise* gives the piano equal dramatic and musical footing as the voice. Consequently, they lend themselves well to orchestral arrangement, as the accompaniment is vital to the poetry, power, and passion of the songs. Edmonton Symphony Orchestra Chief Conductor Alexander Prior has created his own orchestral version of 12 of the 24 songs – which receive their world premiere at this performance.

Program note by Alexander Prior:

Some of you may be wondering as to why one would want to orchestrate *Winterreise*. I make orchestrations of chamber works I love fairly frequently, and I find myself wondering whether this is a good use of time; time I could use on original compositions, for example. It is certainly related to my other profession of conducting. I view the world and have viewed the world since I was three or four years old very much through the lens of the orchestra. And of course any such (orchestrational) project has to be deeply personal. It is above all a tribute, a personal offering to the great master - in this case Schubert. It’s an exhausting thing to do because one feels a tremendous sense of duty to the music. *Winterreise* is such a profound and monumental masterpiece – supreme in its humanity. That means one must approach it with the sort of respect that one approaches the most beautiful yet powerful forces in nature. (A grizzly, for example. i.e., think VERY hard before getting close. Or, if you’re sane, don’t get close!)

However it’s a very spiritually rewarding thing to do (orchestration, that is, I stay well away from the bears), as one feels one’s own person intertwine with Schubert. It’s an utterly intimate act of collegiality.

I truly spent years considering whether or not to undertake this project, but slowly a picture of just how I heard this masterpiece materialized in my mind, to the point where I had no doubt. (The doubt comes, fear not, very soon after one starts).

All my orchestrations of other composers’ works are a view of the work through my kaleidoscope. That kaleidoscope contains many individual lenses: the lens of my own orchestral style that has developed from my education, the traditions I’ve been part of, my character, my own journey as a composer; the

lens of how I interpret Schubert (which alongside the deeply personal and intimate language he spoke has a lot to do with Austrian folklore - you will hear a lot of alpine-like sounds in this arrangement); and of course my own life experiences. Indeed, I often find myself identifying fairly closely with the protagonist of *Winterreise*, though perhaps we all do - and perhaps that is the key to its success. Are we not all, at least to some degree, wandering through life just trying to bring and find happiness, bashed around, full of pure and warm love yet surrounded by austere rejection?

Finally, I would add that not every chamber work lends itself to orchestration. *Winterreise*, however, is almost a mono-opera. Its story telling powers, its long dramatic arc, its lush colours full of hints at orchestral effects that were just starting to develop at the end of Schubert's life... they call out for an orchestra. And if there's one thing that I hope to achieve, other than moving our listeners, it's to show that Schubert was a radical modernist. I think that the orchestra is the salt and pepper garnish on his music that really brings out that flavour.

### ***Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op.68 "Pastorale"***

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performed: December 22, 1808 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: February 2014

It was to the countryside that Beethoven would always turn to find solace, quietude, serenity, and replenishment for his spirit. His friend Therese von Brunsvik once said, "He loved to be alone with Nature, to make her his only confidante."

The roots of the "*Pastorale*" *Symphony* go back many years before its infamous first performance, in a cold concert hall in Vienna, near Christmas in 1808. Sketches for music that would find its way into the second movement appear in notebooks from 1803, and even then, Beethoven had a scene by a brook in mind, sketching the words, "The larger the stream the deeper the note" next to his musical musings. But Beethoven did not intend his work to be pictorial, or so programmatic that it was little more than musical illustration. While he did append the nickname to the work, it was important that the work was, "more an expression of feelings than tone painting," as he wrote on the work's title page.

While each movement is given the usual Italian tempo markings, Beethoven also included descriptors for each movement, which are useful guides for the listener. The first two movements are long and luxuriant, each built from relatively simple melodic ideas. The first movement's subtitle translates as, "Awakening of happy feelings on arriving in the country." Its measured, unhurried pace is nevertheless sun-dappled and sprightly. The long second movement has the subtitle "Scene at the brook." Not a lot actually transpires in this section, but as the music historian George Grove observed, "Only when the sameness of fields, woods, and streams become distasteful will the 'Pastoral' Symphony weary its hearers."

The final three movements blend one into the other without a pause. The third movement is the jauntiest of the entire work, a rustic dance of country folk, with unexpected key changes and clever instrumental colours. The “Thunderstorm” fourth movement is a few minutes of excitement and even fear. It is only in this short movement that piccolo and timpani are used, representing a keening wind and thunder, respectively. The storm is short-lived, and as the sun once again punctures the sky, the country folk who had been dancing only minutes before have their sense of gratitude at the storm’s passing expressed in a jovial and majestic song of thanksgiving. Ironically, the work’s first performance took place in an unheated hall on a cold Vienna December night – anything but the sunny, inviting landscape the music so vividly depicts.

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