

## **Beethoven's Eroica Symphony**

**Friday, January 10 – 7:30 pm**

**Saturday, January 11 – 8 pm**

**Daniel Raiskin**, conductor

**Charles Richard-Hamelin**, piano

Afterthoughts, Friday post-performance Main Lobby with Daniel Raiskin & Charles Richard-Hamelin

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

### **BACEWICZ**

***Sinfonietta for String Orchestra***

(11')\*

Allegro

Andante

Vivo

### **CHOPIN**

***Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op.11***

(42')\*

Allegro maestoso

Romanza: Larghetto

Rondo: Vivace

**INTERMISSION** (20 minutes)

### **BEETHOVEN**

***Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op.55 "Eroica"***

(48')\*

Allegro con brio

Marcia funèbre: Adagio assai

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Finale: Allegro molto

program subject to change

\*indicates approximate performance duration

***Sinfonietta for String Orchestra***

**Grażyna Bacewicz**

(b. Łódź, 1909 / d. Warsaw. 1969)

First performed: 1936 in Warsaw

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

The *Sinfonietta* is an early work for Bacewicz, premiered by the Polish Radio Orchestra just after her return from studies in Paris, when she was 27 years old. While one can detect whispers of past voices in the work, it is still strikingly original, dispensing with many compositional templates in favour of a playful, driving urgency in all three movements.

But if she seems secure in her abilities and vision relatively early, Bacewicz had a strong pedigree upon which to draw. Her father was a noted musician, and following her years at the Warsaw Conservatory, no less that Jan Ignaz Paderewski arranged for her to receive a stipend with which to travel to Paris, where she studied composition with Nadia Boulanger.

The *Sinfonietta* opens almost gratingly, but gives way to a breezy, mischievous cross-section of sounds and colours. Restless and rhythmic, it is held together by repeated statements of the opening dissonant fanfare. The second movement is an Andante – a haunting slow movement of lyrical intensity. The central section is slightly more propulsive, edged on by a steady rhythm, but it ebbs away again in a loose ternary form. The finale is a brief Vivace movement that tiptoes in before setting off in a whirling dance, seemingly in 3/4 time, but with many ideas flitting past as the delicate dance is capped off by a firmly stated cadence at the end.

### ***Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, Op.11***

**Fryderyk Chopin**

(b. Żelazowa Wola, Poland, 1810 / d. Paris, 1849)

First performance: October 11, 1830 in Warsaw

Last ESO performance of the original version: October 2010. The ESO performed the Balakirev orchestration of the concerto in January 2016.

Chopin composed both of his piano concertos before leaving his native Poland as a young man. They are works of youth, and moreover, they are works influenced by the bravura pianism to which he was exposed as a youth. While fed a steady diet of Bach by his teacher, Chopin's concert experiences were limited to the touring virtuosi of the day – composer/pianists such as Hummel and Kalkbrenner who toured all over Europe with their flashy showcase concertos.

So it's no wonder that Chopin's two youthful ventures into the concerto repertoire are in a similar vein. The concerto published as the first was actually written after the other; misplacing of parts of the score of the *F minor Concerto* resulted in this evening's concerto getting published first. Chopin performed the premiere at his last public appearance before leaving Poland for Paris.

In a work dominated by the piano, the orchestra at least gets the first say, introducing much of the material on which the opening movement is based. The piano enters with its own treatment of the music, then establishes itself with a plaintive song in C, although there is some lovely string writing and an effective part for bassoon. The final section of the movement brings it back to the home key; listen for some daring left-hand piano passages here.

The slow movement begins with strings and horns, but a very Chopinesque piano nocturne soon takes over. Chopin himself said the movement is, “sustained in a romantic vein, tranquil and somewhat melancholy.” A unique shift in the strings to C-sharp minor leads directly into the final movement, a rondo for which the main tune is a lively E Major theme set to a traditional Polish dance called the *krakowiak*. The whole finale is lively and full of virtuoso piano work, and a touch of humour as well. As the coda begins, it does so seemingly in the wrong key – E-flat; then it “restarts” back in the proper key and dashes to its conclusion.

### ***Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op.55 “Eroica”***

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

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

First performed: April 7, 1805 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: February 2011

The “*Eroica*” *Symphony* and Napoleon; history has them inextricably linked and, more importantly, subsequently severed. It is for the best that Beethoven would savagely remove his former idol’s name from the dedication of his *E-flat Major Symphony* – as simply “The Heroic,” it makes this towering and unprecedented work suit its epithet in its design and execution as well as its artistic association.

Music scholar Irving Kolodin posits that “Beethoven did not write the ‘*Eroica*’ because of Napoleon, but rather he found such a tribute compatible with the kind of music he had written.” Keep in mind, he further admonishes, that when Napoleon curried Beethoven’s wrath by declaring himself Emperor, the composer destroyed only the dedication, not the symphony. At twice the length of typical symphonies before it, Beethoven’s *Third* stands even today as a titanic work – how much more must its impact have been in the composer’s lifetime. It consumed much of Beethoven’s attention for most of 1803, and the beginning of 1804. At its 1805 premiere, a critic calling himself a Beethoven “admirer” wrote that he was, “obliged to confess that (I) find this work garish and bizarre.” In Prague, the city which had embraced Mozart’s class-bashing *The Marriage of Figaro* only 18 years before, the symphony was regarded as a danger to public morals, and would not be heard there for 40 years.

The symphony opens with two solidly played E-flat chords, following which the principal first theme is briefly presented in the lower strings. A dialog between violins and woodwinds creates dramatic intensity, alleviated by a gentler, more lyrical second subject. The second movement is the famous

funeral march, emerging from the lower voices in the orchestra. It is as sombre as any cortège at first, but a nobler, more ceremonial feel grows out from it. The central section, in fact, is considerably more uplifting and bright, though the mood darkens once again as the music from the opening returns.

The symphony's third movement is true to the literal meaning of the word "Scherzo" (though Beethoven does not actually term the movement in that way). It is playful, full of humour – everywhere a strident contrast to the preceding movement. The finale is a towering example of form unto itself. A free variation form, with many transitions and fugal elements, it is driven on by a dance-like melody. Its influence was profound; when Brahms' friend and biographer suggested to Brahms his use of variations in the final movement of his *Fourth Symphony* was not satisfactory, Brahms icily pointed out that it was certainly good enough for Beethoven, so it was absolutely permissible for him. The "*Eroica's*" finale is certainly an aptly heroic conclusion, a hymn to heroism – if not to a specific hero at all.

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