

Beethoven & Arias

Sunday, April 19 – 2 pm

José-Luis Gomez, conductor

Emily D'Angelo, mezzo-soprano (2018 Montréal International Competition Laureate)

Frédéric Payant, Baroque trumpet

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

Sunday Encore, post-performance Main Lobby with José-Luis Gomez, Emily D'Angelo & Frédéric Payant

HANDEL

Serse, HWV 40: "Frondi tenere e belle...Ombra mai fu" (4')*

HANDEL

Serse, HWV 40: "Crude furie degl'orridi abissi" (4')*

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.36 (32')*

Adagio molto – Allegro molto

Larghetto

Scherzo: Allegro

Allegro molto

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

HANDEL

Solomon, HWV 67: Arrival of the Queen of Sheba (4')*

HANDEL

Ariodante, HWV 33: "Dopo note, atra e funesta" (7')*

TORELLI

Sonata a 5 in D Major, G7 (5')*

Grave – Grave – Allegro – Grave – Allegro

ROSSINI

Il Signor Bruschino: Overture (5')*

MOZART

La clemenza di Tito, K.621: "Parto, parto, ma tu ben mio"

(6')*

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Excerpts from operas and oratorios

George Frideric Handel

(b. Halle, 1685 / d. London, 1759)

The great German Baroque master, who made most of his living in England, George Frideric Handel arrived in London in 1712, and quickly became the favourite composer to the court and among the people. He arrived principally to compose Italian operas for the English audiences, and this afternoon we present excerpts from two of them. *Serse* (also spelled *Xerxes*) dates from 1738, and was a comedy – in fact, even a parody of other operas then in fashion. It failed rather miserably, however, and today is known primarily for a particularly beautiful song, "Ombra mai fu" ("Never was the shade"), which begins the opera and which, to all intents and purposes, is a paean to a shade tree. Preceded by a brief recitative and in a slow tempo, Largo, the aria has had a life separate from the opera in both sung versions, and versions for orchestra alone. The other aria from the opera we hear today, "Crude furie deg'orridi abissi," ("O savage furies from the hideous abysses") is from the opera's final act, when Serse learns that his plans to marry Romilda have been foiled, and that his former betrothed is involved in creating his unhappy state.

NOTE: Serse is a male character, whose music is being sung by a mezzo-soprano. Castrated male singers were not only common in the Baroque, they were looked upon as the most beautiful of singers. Castrati became less common as the 19th century wore on, and today, their vocal range suits the mezzo voice. In opera, when a woman sings the part of a man, it is called a "trouser role."

Handel's opera *Ariodante* dates from four years before *Serse*. Handel had access to a fine ballet company at the time, and made full use of it in this spectacle comedic opera, the plot for which was based on the same story that provided Shakespeare his inspiration for *Much Ado About Nothing*. "Dopo notte" ("After the night") is sung by the title character (another "trouser role") as the story reaches its happy conclusion.

Italian opera ultimately went out of fashion in England, and oratorios became a draw. An oratorio has some of the same elements as opera: stories are told in music, with character parts and ensemble numbers. But oratorios were not "staged," but performed from the concert platform, and often the subjects of oratorios were sacred or religious in nature.

Solomon, which premiered in 1748, was one of Handel's most successful oratorios. The short instrumental interlude that was used between scenes of the oratorio has come to be known as *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*. Listening to the music, it is hard indeed to picture anyone "arriving" to this brisk, scurrying scene-setter, let alone a queen. More than likely, it was meant to convey the busyness of activity in anticipation of the queen's arrival, and has become known to us by a title Handel never used.

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.36

Ludwig van Beethoven

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

First performance: April 5, 1803 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: March 2019

"Dear Beethoven! You are going to Vienna in fulfillment of a wish that has long been frustrated. Mozart's genius is still in mourning and weeps for the death of its pupil. It found a refuge with the inexhaustible Haydn but no occupation; through him it wishes to form a union with another. With the help of unceasing diligence you will receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn."

Count Waldstein, November 1792

With the *Second Symphony*, begun as early as 1800 and premiered in 1803, Beethoven took several giant strides toward making the symphony the form for which he would set the new standard. Yet this was also a time of great personal strife for Beethoven. The buzzing in his ears he had been suffering with for years was now clearly becoming deafness. In 1802, in a letter addressed to his brothers Carl and Johann but which begins with the words "O ihr Menschen" ("Oh, you people"), Beethoven poured out his despair, his suffering, and his belief that his only salvation lay in his art. Known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, it is a powerful and moving document.

Yet the symphony he produced in this most dark of personal times is one with broad strokes of affirmation and humour. The slow introduction in the first movement bears the stamp of Haydn, but the woodwind colours are quite Beethovenian. The Allegro which follows begins, in the words of scholar Irving Kolodin, "hardly with a theme, certainly not a tune; it is more akin to a nuclear cell of energy with which much can and will be done."

The second movement is marked Larghetto – a tempo indication Beethoven used rarely, for particularly lovely airs. This one has the stamp of Mozart in its melodic grace, but again, the colours and increasingly chromatic harmonies that mark Beethoven's mature sound palette bubble up not infrequently in this beautiful, graceful passage.

Much is made of the third movement, as here, Beethoven finally dispenses with any pretense of a Haydn-esque Menuet movement, and for the first time, Beethoven uses the word Scherzo, literally the

Italian for “joke.” Its bizarre and sudden shifts in dynamic, in tempo, in orchestral textures, are a declamatory announcement that the Beethoven symphony as a genre has arrived. That feeling spreads into the final movement, where rich sonorities stand alongside rough and tumble humour. There are elements here that we will find in other Beethoven symphonies to come. The youthful Beethoven of the works of Bonn is now prepared to take the place for which Count Waldstein and all the others knew he was destined all those years ago.

Sonata a 5 in D Major, G7

Giuseppe Torelli

(b. Verona, 1658 / d. Bologna, 1709)

Composed: 1690

This is the first time the ESO has played a work by Giuseppe Torelli

The music lover of today, who may associate the idea of “sonata” with, for example, the keyboard works of Beethoven et al, or the solo-instrument-plus-piano works by a myriad of composers, can be forgiven by being a little befuddled by the use of the term in the case of Torelli’s *Sonata a 5*. The origins of the word “sonata” are distant and a bit muddled, and the word has been rather indiscriminately applied to a bewildering array of instrumental works. Even Torelli applied the word rather liberally in his voluminous catalog.

In five very brief movements, totaling about five minutes altogether, today’s work for strings, harpsichord and solo trumpet emphasizes the trumpet’s sparkling tone and dexterity, but also gives it a charming duet with solo cello in the middle Allegro.

Il Signor Bruschino: Overture

Gioacchino Rossini

(b. 1792 / d. 1868)

Opera first performed: January 27, 1813 in Venice

Last ESO performance of the overture: October 2008

Rossini is one of the most famous opera composers who ever lived. But *Il Signor Bruschino* is not one of his best-known works. The 1813 one-act farce about lovers and impostors was not a huge hit, but its brief, cheeky overture, complete with string players asked to tap their bows against their music stands in tempo, has lived on in the concert hall.

La clemenza di Tito, K.621: “Parto, parto, ma tu, ben mio”

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(b. Salzburg, 1756 / d. Vienna, 1791)

Opera first performed: September 6, 1791 in Prague

Last ESO performance of the aria: May 2008

La clemenza di Tito (“The Clemency of Titus”) was Mozart’s last opera, commissioned by the King of Bohemia to mark his coronation, making the subject of the opera – the noble Roman emperor Titus Vespasianus – a suitable subject. Nevertheless, Mozart’s free editing of the Metastasio story upon which it is based won him few favours in the court; however, the Bohemian public was enthusiastic (Prague had ever been favourable to Mozart’s music). Sesto, friend of Titus but in love with Vitellia (who had hoped to marry Titus), has been asked by the spurned Vitellia to murder the emperor. Besotted with her, Sesto sings “Parto, parto, ma tu, ben mio” (“I go, I go, but you, my love”) in the opera’s first act, as he reluctantly agrees to do her dread bidding.

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