

Program 1

Leonore Overture No. 3, Op. 72b

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Composed in 1806.

Premiered on March 29, 1806 in Vienna.

The decade (1804-1814) that Beethoven devoted to his only opera, *Fidelio*, was an unprecedented amount of time to spend perfecting such a work during the early 19th century. Given the same ten years, Rossini dispensed 31 (!) operas between 1810 and 1820, and Donizetti cranked out 35 (!!) specimens of the genre from 1827 to 1837. Even Mozart launched seven operas during his decade in Vienna. For Beethoven, however, *Fidelio* was more than just a mere theatrical diversion — it was his philosophy set to music. This story of the triumph of justice over tyranny, of love over inhumanity was a document of his faith. To present such grandiose beliefs in a work that would not fully serve them was unthinkable, and so Beethoven hammered and rewrote and changed until he was satisfied. In his book *The Interior Beethoven*, Irving Kolodin wrote, “As tended to be the life-long case with Beethoven, the overriding consideration remained: achievement of the objective. How long it might take or how much effort might be required was not merely incidental — such consideration was all but non-existent.”

The most visible remnants of Beethoven’s extensive revisions are the quartet of overtures he composed for *Fidelio*, the only instance in the history of music in which a composer generated so many curtain-raisers for a single opera. The first version of the opera, written between January 1804 and early autumn 1805, was initially titled *Leonore* after the heroine, who courageously rescues her husband from his wrongful incarceration. For that production, Beethoven wrote the Overture in C major now known as the *Leonore No. 1*, utilizing themes from the opera. The composer’s friend and early biographer Anton Schindler recorded that Beethoven rejected this first attempt after hearing it privately performed at Prince Lichnowsky’s palace before the premiere. (Another theory, supported by recent detailed examination of the paper on which the sketches for the piece were made, holds that this work was written in 1806-1807 for a projected performance of the opera in Prague which never took place, thus making *Leonore No. 1* the third of the *Fidelio* overtures.) He composed a second C major overture, *Leonore No. 2*, and this piece was used at the first performance, on November 20, 1805. (The management of Vienna’s Theatre an der Wien, site of the premiere, insisted on changing the opera’s name from *Leonore* to *Fidelio* to avoid confusion with Ferdinand Paër’s *Leonore*.) The opera foundered. Not only was the audience, largely populated by French officers of Napoleon’s army, which had invaded Vienna exactly one week earlier, unsympathetic, but there were also problems in *Fidelio*’s dramatic structure. Beethoven was encouraged by his aristocratic supporters to rework the opera and present it again. This second version, for which the magnificent *Leonore Overture No. 3* was written, was presented in Vienna on March 29, 1806, but met with only slightly more acclaim than its forerunner.

In 1814, some members of the Court Theater approached Beethoven, by then Europe’s most famous composer, about reviving *Fidelio*. The idealistic subject of the opera had never been far from his thoughts, and he agreed to the project. The libretto was revised yet again, and Beethoven rewrote all the numbers in the opera and changed their order to enhance the work’s dramatic impact. The new *Fidelio Overture*, the fourth he composed for his opera, was among the revisions. Beethoven realized that the earlier Overtures, especially the *Leonore No. 3*, simply overwhelmed what followed (“As a curtain raiser, it almost made the raising of the curtain superfluous,” judged Irving Kolodin), and, from a technical viewpoint, were in the wrong tonality to match the revised beginning of the opera. The compact *Fidelio Overture*, in E major, is now always heard to open the opera. The *Leonore No. 3* often appears between the two scenes of Act II, a practice instituted by Otto Nicolai when he produced *Fidelio* in Vienna in the early 1840s. Both are regular entries on concert programs.

The *Leonore No. 3* is one of the most magnificent overtures in the orchestral literature. It distills the essential dramatic progression of the opera into purely musical terms: the triumph of good over evil, the movement from darkness to light, from subjugation to freedom, is integral to this music. It is a musical/philosophical road Beethoven also travelled in his Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, and in this sweeping Overture it is compressed into a tonal document of staggering power. The structure of the Overture follows the basic sonata-allegro design, but adapted by Beethoven to fit the dramatic requirements of his subject. It begins with a broad, slow introduction, by turns lugubrious and threatening, during which the clarinets and bassoons intone the opening phrases of the aria Florestan sings in his dungeon prison. In a faster tempo, the violins present the arch-shaped main theme, which grows to a riveting climax before the entry of the complementary theme, a lyrical strain introduced quietly by flute and violins. The development section is filled with sudden dynamic changes and affective harmonic excursions that mirror the perilous struggles of the play. Then, in an unforgettable *coup de théâtre*, a distant trumpet call signals deliverance for Florestan and his faithful Leonore. The recapitulation of the themes glows in triumph. A jubilant coda, begun with whirling scales in the strings, brings this superb work to a stirring close.

Violin Concerto, Op. 14

Composed in 1939.

Premiered on February 7, 1941 in Philadelphia, with Albert Spalding as soloist and conducted by Eugene Ormandy.

Samuel Barber's success as one of America's greatest composers was both early and lasting. Born and raised in a small town on the outskirts of Philadelphia, he received a sound appreciation of music as a boy from his mother, a talented pianist, and from his aunt, the noted Metropolitan Opera contralto Louise Homer. In 1924, at the tender age of fourteen, he entered the first class enrolled at the Curtis Institute and received instruction in piano, voice and composition, winning the Bearn's Prize in composition in 1928. Three years later he composed the sparkling *Overture to "The School for Scandal"*, which was premiered by Alexander Smallens and the Philadelphia Orchestra in August 1933, and secured for the young composer an immediate reputation. In 1935, Barber won both the Pulitzer Scholarship and the American Prix de Rome, enabling him to study in Europe. While abroad, he conducted, gave recitals (he had an excellent and well-trained baritone voice) and met some of the most important musicians of the day, including Toscanini, who became a champion of his works. The great Italian conductor premiered both the *Essay for Orchestra* and the *Adagio for Strings* during the 1938 season of the NBC Symphony, making Barber the first American composer whose works Toscanini conducted with that ensemble.

In his 1954 study of the composer, Nathan Broder wrote as follows of the genesis of the Violin Concerto: "In the summer of 1939, after a visit to England and Scotland, Barber settled down in the village of Sils-Maria in Switzerland to work on a violin concerto, which had been commissioned by a wealthy Philadelphia merchant for a young protégé. This progressed slowly and he set off for Paris, planning to complete the work there during the fall. But he had hardly arrived in Paris when all Americans were warned to leave. He sailed for home, and word reached the ship before they arrived in New York that German troops had invaded Poland.... When the first two movements of the Violin Concerto were finished and shown to the violinist, he complained that the music was too simple and not brilliant enough for a concerto. Barber promised that the finale would provide ample opportunity to display the artist's technical powers. But when this movement was submitted, the violinist declared it too difficult. The sponsor demanded his money back, and Barber, who had already spent it in Europe, called in another violinist, Oscar Shumsky, who performed the work for the merchant and his protégé, to prove that the finale was not unplayable. The upshot of the matter was that the composer was obliged to return half the fee and the young violinist relinquished his right to the first public performances. These performances were given in 1941 by Albert Spalding with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy."

A rather different version of this story, however, was revealed in *The New York Times* of June 29, 1980 by one Herbert Baumel, a violin student at the time at the Curtis Institute, where Barber was on the faculty as professor of orchestration. According to Mr. Baumel, the violinist who remained unnamed in Nathan Broder's account was Iso Briselli, and the commissioning industrialist was soap manufacturer Samuel Fels. On seeing the score, Briselli declared the finale "unplayable" and Fels refused to pay Barber the \$500 still outstanding on the commission. A piano student, Ralph Berkowitz, asked Baumel if he could play the movement for a few friends. "I looked it over," Baumel said, "practiced it for an hour or so, and returned to the school in the afternoon to play it.... I proved to their delight that I could play it at any tempo they wanted me to. Now Barber would be able to collect the full sum." (A further addendum to this convoluted tale appeared in an article by George K. Diehl in the November 1995 issue of *The Strad*, in which the author claimed that Briselli expressed concern only about the finale's musical appropriateness, not about its technical difficulty. Briselli, a gifted violinist who appeared as soloist on numerous occasions with the Philadelphia Orchestra, played the finished Concerto privately, but never performed it in public.)

The change from the warm lyricism of the Violin Concerto's first two movements to the aggressive rhythms and strong dissonances of the finale is actually a microcosm of the stylistic evolution Barber's music underwent at the outbreak of World War II. The style of the works of the early years — the *Overture to "The School for Scandal"* (1932), the *Essay for Orchestra* (1937), the *Adagio for Strings* (1938), those pieces which established his international reputation as a 20th-century romanticist — was soon to be augmented by the more modern but expressively richer musical language of the Second Symphony (1944), the *Capricorn Concerto* (1944) and the ballet for Martha Graham, *The Serpent Heart* (1946), from which the orchestral suite *Medea* was derived.

The Concerto's opening movement, almost Brahmsian in its nostalgic songfulness, is built on two lyrical themes. The first one, presented immediately by the soloist, is an extended, arching melody; the other, initiated by the clarinet, is rhythmically animated by the use of the "Scottish snap," a short-long figure also familiar from jazz idioms. The two themes alternate throughout the remainder of the movement, which follows a broadly drawn, traditional concerto form. The expressive *cantabile* of the first movement carries into the lovely *Adagio*. The oboe intones a plangent melody as the main theme, from which the soloist spins a rhapsodic elaboration to serve as the movement's central section. The return of the main theme is entrusted to the soloist. *Moto perpetuo* — "perpetual motion" — Barber marked the finale of this Concerto, and the music more than lives up to its title. After an opening timpani flourish, the soloist introduces a fiery motive above a jabbing rhythmic accompaniment that returns, rondo-like, throughout the movement. A whirling coda of vertiginous speed and virtuosic brilliance brings this splendid Concerto to a dazzling close.

Adagio for Strings

Samuel Barber

Composed for string quartet in 1936; arranged for string orchestra in 1937.

String orchestra version premiered on November 5, 1938, conducted by Arturo Toscanini.

Samuel Barber was among those many talented American musicians who lived, studied and worked in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, not only polishing their professional skills but also proving to the world that their country had come of artistic age. Barber spent much time overseas after 1928, thanks to such emoluments as the American Prix de Rome and the Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship. In Rome he wrote a *Symphony in One Movement*, which was premiered there in 1936 and given its first American performance in Cleveland by Rodzinski early the next year. Rodzinski also played the *Symphony* at the Salzburg Festival in 1937, making it the first American work to be heard at that prestigious event. The chief conductor of the Salzburg Festival at that time was Arturo Toscanini, who was to begin his tenure with the NBC Symphony later that year. Toscanini asked Rodzinski if he could suggest an American composer whose work he might program during the coming season, and Rodzinski advised that his Italian colleague investigate the music of the 27-year-old Samuel Barber. By October, Barber had completed and submitted to Toscanini the *Essay No. 1 for Orchestra* and an arrangement for string orchestra of the slow movement from the Quartet (Op. 11, in B minor) he had written in Rome in 1936 — the *Adagio for Strings*. No reply came from Toscanini, however. The scores were returned without comment in the spring, and Barber started to cast about for other conductors who might perform them.

The following summer Barber traveled to Lake Maggiore with Gian Carlo Menotti, where Menotti was to meet Toscanini. Barber, however, refused his friend's invitation to go along for the visit to Toscanini's home. "Illness," Menotti told the conductor. "Oh," replied Toscanini, "he's perfectly well; he's just angry with me, but he has no reason to be — I'm going to do both of his pieces." True to his word, Toscanini performed the *Essay No. 1* and the *Adagio for Strings* on his November 5, 1938 broadcast with the NBC Symphony, though he did not ask to see the scores again until the day before the rehearsal — he had already memorized them. The *Adagio* was an instant success. It was the only American work that Toscanini took on his tour of South America. Sibelius praised it. The audience at its 1945 Russian premiere, in Kiev, would not leave the hall until Stokowski encoored it. It was the music broadcast from New York and London following the announcement of the death of President Roosevelt. The *Adagio for Strings*, with its plaintive melody, rich modalism, austere texture and mood of reflective introspection, is among Samuel Barber's greatest legacies, a masterwork of our time.

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed between 1804 and 1808.

Premiered on December 22, 1808 in Vienna, conducted by the composer.

Surprisingly, for this Symphony that serves as the *locus classicus* of orchestral music, little is known about its creation. There are vague hints that it may have been occasioned by an aborted love affair with either Therese von Brunswick or Giulietta Guicciardi. The theory has been advanced that it was influenced by a surge of patriotism fueled by an Austrian loss to the Napoleonic juggernaut. Even the famous remark attributed to Beethoven about the opening motive representing "Fate knocking at the door" is probably apocryphal, an invention of either Anton Schindler or Ferdinand Ries, two young men, close to the composer in his last years, who later published their often-untrustworthy reminiscences of him.

It is known that the time of the creation of the Fifth Symphony was one of intense activity for Beethoven. The four years during which the work was composed also saw the completion of a rich variety of other works: Piano Sonatas, Op. 53, 54 and 57; Fourth Piano Concerto; Fourth and Sixth Symphonies; Violin Concerto; the first two versions of *Fidelio*; Rasumovsky Quartets, Op. 59; Coriolan Overture; Mass in C major, Op. 86; and Cello Sonata No. 3, Op. 69. As was his practice with almost all of his important works, Beethoven revised and rewrote the Fifth Symphony for years.

Beethoven's remarks about this Symphony are vague and elusive rather than concrete. The compositional problems he set for himself were abstract, musico-emotional ones that were little affected by external experiences, and not accessible to translation into mere words. In one of his few comments about the Symphony, he noted that, after the creation of the theme, "begins in my head the working-out in breadth, height, and depth. Since I am aware of what I want, the fundamental idea never leaves me. It mounts, it grows. I see before my mind the picture in its whole extent, as if in a single grasp." By "picture" Beethoven meant not a visible painting, but rather an overview of the total structure of the Symphony, from its tiniest fragmentary component to the grand sweep of its total structure.

So completely did composition occupy Beethoven's thoughts that he sometimes ignored the necessities of daily life. Concern with his appearance, eating habits, cleanliness, even his conversation, all gave way before his

composing. There are many reports of his trooping the streets and woods of Vienna humming, singing, bellowing, penning a scrap of melody, and being, in general, oblivious to the people or places around him. (One suspects that his professed love of Nature grew in part from his need to find a solitary workplace free from distractions and the prying interest of his fellow Viennese.) This titanic struggle with musical tones produced such mighty monuments as the Fifth Symphony. With it, and with the Third Symphony completed only four years earlier, Beethoven launched music and art into the world of Romanticism.

In the history of music, Beethoven stands, Janus-faced, as the great colossus between two ages and two philosophies. The formal perfection of the preceding Classical period finds its greatest fulfillment in his works, which at the same time contain the taproot of the cathartic emotional experience from which grew the art of the 19th century. Beethoven himself evaluated his position as a creator in the following way: "Music is the mediator between intellectual and sensuous life ... the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend." The Fifth Symphony is indeed such a "mediator." Its message of victory through struggle, which so deeply touches both the heart and the mind, is achieved by a near-perfect balance of musical technique and passionate sentiment unsurpassed in the history of music. This Symphony was the work that won for Beethoven an international renown. Despite a few early misunderstandings due undoubtedly to its unprecedented concentration of energy, it caught on very quickly, and was soon recognized in Europe, England and America as a pathbreaking achievement. Its popularity has never waned.

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, more than any work in the musical repertory, is the archetypal example of the technique and content of the form. Its overall structure is not one of four independent essays linked simply by tonality and style, as in the typical 18th-century example, but is rather a carefully devised whole in which each of the movements serves to carry the work inexorably toward its end. The progression from minor to major, from dark to light, from conflict to resolution is at the very heart of the "meaning" of this Symphony. The triumphant, victorious nature of the final movement as the logical outcome of all that preceded it established a model for the symphonies of the Romantic era. The psychological progression toward the finale — the relentless movement toward a life-affirming close — is one of the most important technical and emotional legacies Beethoven left to his successors. Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Mahler — their symphonies are indebted to this one (and to the Ninth Symphony, as well) for the concept of how such a creation should be structured, and in what manner it should engage the listener.

The opening gesture is the most famous beginning in all of classical music. It establishes the stormy temper of the *Allegro* by presenting the germinal cell from which the entire movement grows. Though it is possible to trace this memorable four-note motive through most of the measures of the movement, the esteemed English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey pointed out that the power of the music is not contained in this fragment, but rather in the "long sentences" that Beethoven built from it. The key to appreciating Beethoven's formal structures lies in being aware of the way in which the music moves constantly from one point of arrival to the next, from one sentence to the next. It is in the careful weighting of successive climaxes through harmonic, rhythmic and instrumental resources that Beethoven created the enormous energy and seeming inevitability of this monumental movement. The gentler second theme derives from the opening motive, and gives only a brief respite in the headlong rush that hurtles through the movement. It provides the necessary contrast while doing nothing to impede the music's flow. The development section is a paragon of cohesion, logic and concision. The recapitulation roars forth after a series of breathless chords that pass from woodwinds to strings and back. The stark hammer-blows of the closing chords bring the movement to its powerful end.

The form of the second movement is a set of variations on two contrasting themes. The first theme, presented by violas and cellos, is sweet and lyrical in nature; the second, heard in horns and trumpets, is heroic. The ensuing variations on the themes alternate to produce a movement by turns gentle and majestic.

The following *Scherzo* returns the tempestuous character of the opening movement, as the four-note motto from the first movement is heard again in a brazen setting led by the horns. The *fughetta*, the "little fugue," of the central trio is initiated by the cellos and basses. The *Scherzo* returns with the mysterious tread of the plucked strings, after which the music wanes until little more than a heartbeat from the timpani remains. Then begins another accumulation of intensity, first gradually, then more quickly, as a link to the finale, which arrives with a glorious proclamation, like brilliant sun bursting through sinister clouds.

The finale, set in the triumphant key of C major, is jubilant and martial. (Robert Schumann saw here the influence of Étienne-Nicolas Méhul, one of the prominent composers of the French Revolution.) The sonata form proceeds apace. At the apex of the development, however, the mysterious end of the *Scherzo* is invoked to serve as the link to the return of the main theme in the recapitulation. It also recalls and compresses the emotional journey of the entire Symphony. The closing pages repeat the cadence chords extensively to discharge the enormous accumulated energy of the work.

Concerning the effect of the "struggle to victory" that is symbolized by the structure of the Fifth Symphony, a quote that Beethoven scribbled in a notebook of the Archduke Rudolf, one of his aristocratic piano and composition students, is pertinent. The composer wrote, "Many assert that every minor [tonality] piece must end in the minor. *Nego!* On the contrary, I find that ... the major [tonality] has a glorious effect. Joy follows sorrow, sunshine — rain. It affects me as if I were looking up to the silvery glistening of the evening star."

