ANN ARBOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Earl Lee, Music Director

BEETHOVEN
SYMPHONY NO. 5

Saturday, April 6, 2024
The Michigan Theater
8 PM

Pre-concert talk at 7 PM
Sponsored by: Rehmann

Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Earl Lee Music Director

Ludwig van Beethoven
Coriolan Overture
Beethoven Symphony No. 2
Beethoven Symphony No. 5

Earl Lee
Music
Director

Digital program booklet

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Beethoven Symphony No. 5

Saturday, April 6, 2024 at 8 PM | Michigan Theater

Earl Lee conductor

Ludwig van Beethoven *Coriolan* Overture

Tonight's performance of the overture is sponsored by Julie Wheaton in memory of Jim Wheaton.

Ludwig van Beethoven Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 36
I. Adagio molto – Allegro con brio
II. Larghetto
III. Scherzo: Allegro
IV. Allegro molto

Tonight's performance of Symphony No. 2 is sponsored by the Roof Family Foundation.

Intermission

Ludwig van Beethoven Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67
I. Allegro con brio
II. Andante con moto
III. Scherzo: Allegro
IV. Allegro – Presto

Tonight's performance of Symphony No. 5 is sponsored by the Roof Family Foundation.

Tonight's concert is supported by the Michigan Arts & Culture Council and the National Endowment for the Arts

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ASSOCIATE CONCERTMASTER
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Program notes

Ludwig van Beethoven
Coriolan Overture

Duration: About 8 minutes

Premiered: Vienna, 1807

Instrumentation: Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

"An artist is someone who has learned to trust in himself." | "Everything should be at once surprising and inevitable."

— Ludwig van Beethoven
(Born 1770, Germany; died 1827)

Overture: An introduction to a large dramatic work, such as a ballet or opera, that demands listeners' ears and sets the tone of the evening. Alternatively, these can be standalone concert works written on a subject or theme.

Beethoven is best known for his symphonies, his concertos, his overtures, quartets and sonatas. But he wasn't above composing little works out of affection or gratitude. (See the famous *Für Elise*, for example.) For the Bohemian prince Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz, Beethoven magnanimously wrote a Birthday Cantata, essentially a fancy version of "Happy Birthday," to proffer his gratitude to this particular aristocrat, who died before hearing it, alas. The count knew of the composer's appreciation, however. Long before he died, Beethoven had already dedicated many of his works to the prince, including his third, fifth and sixth symphonies as well as the work at hand, the *Coriolan* Overture.

Coriolan is a stand-alone concert work inspired by an 1802 play of the same name that had already fallen into obscurity. (Shakespeare would later pen a far more interesting take on the tale.) The overture doesn't typically introduce the play — though Prince Lobkowitz actually did hire an acting troupe for the overture's premiere — it is instead inspired by the themes and story of the play. Coriolan was a Roman general with unsuccessful political aspirations. Furious at being spurned by his own people, he turns traitor and raises an army to battle against Rome. Coriolan's own mother pleads with her son to make peace.

The overture doesn't have any lyrics and isn't an explicit retelling of the tale, but it's an easy task to trace the story in the music. After a series of harsh chords in the orchestra, the first theme sweeps along furiously in the strings. It is an aggrieved, muttering tune, choppy and broken and dramatic in C minor. Soon, however, the music softens and slows, instead of detached staccato notes, all is smooth and lyrical — this is the theme of the mother as she pleads with her son not to seek vengeance. These themes alternate throughout the overture until the opening chords return, and Coriolan's tune fades as he relents at last and falls on his own sword in penance.

The premiere took place in Lobkowitz's palace with the prince's personal orchestra performing. Lobkowitz was an accomplished violinist and cellist and singer (he had

quite the bass voice, apparently) and he spent lavishly to bring composers and performers into his orbit. Like the Medici family before him, Lobkowitz' passion for the arts has brought him his own degree of immortality, in addition to the 12 children that carried his name forward.

Furthering listening: Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58 | Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, Op. 60 | Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus,* Op. 43 | *Egmont* Overture, Op. 84 | Overture to *King Stephen*, Op. 117

Ludwig van Beethoven
Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36

Duration: About 34 minutes

Premiered: Vienna, 1803

Instrumentation: Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

"If I approach near to people a hot terror seizes upon me, and I fear being exposed to the danger that my condition might be noticed… Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life — it was only my art that held me back."

— Ludwig van Beethoven

Symphony: An elaborate orchestral composition typically broken into contrasting movements, at least one of which is typically in sonata form.

Alas, Poor Beethoven. In addition to learning that his hearing loss would be permanent, he also suffered from terrible gastric distress throughout his adult life. This, more than anything, made him irascible and irritable, cementing his reputation as a 30-year-old curmudgeon who would fly off the handle and argue ferociously over the tiniest infractions or disagreements.

Still, for all his pain and his intensity, he never lost his sense of humor. In the finale of the second symphony, Beethoven mocks himself with a musical "hiccup" or "belch," a bright little tweak in the upper strings, a groan of pain much lower, and then a scurrying apology, the likes of which he uttered often throughout the day. The sounds, even in a serious symphony, are quite funny, and the movement continues on with similar cheer. (Not everyone appreciated the levity, with one critic at the time describing the symphony as "a hideously writhing, wounded dragon that refuses to die, but writhing in its last agonies and, in the fourth movement, bleeding to death." The sourpuss.)

Historians have divided Beethoven's music into three periods: early, middle, and late. This symphony marks something of a bridge from his early period, which follows most of the conventions of the classical period of Mozart's time (emphasis on clear melody

and harmony, high contrasts in dynamics, for example), and his middle period, which is characterized by experimentation and departure from form. The second symphony begins with a slow, graceful introduction, *a la* Haydn or Mozart, before zipping off to the races for its main themes. The slow second movement is prayerful and sweet at the start but explores a vast variety of moods and affects. This first half of the symphony pushes the bounds of traditional forms in terms of length, pushing but not breaking formal conventions.

The second half is much tighter. The scherzo third movement plays hacky sack with its melodies, kicking them low to high and among different instrumental groups. There are calls in the winds and responses in the strings and vice versa. The oboe and bassoon share a duet for the middle section, creating a more rustic, folk-dance atmosphere. And then, of course, the great hiccup and chortle and carousing.

It was perhaps on account of his frustration with his physical ailments that Beethoven set little stock in his personal appearance. One English visitor wrote after a visit that the composer's "hair, which neither comb nor scissors seem to have visited for years, overshadows his broad brow in quantity and confusion to which only the snakes round a Gorgon's head offer a parallel." Beethoven also had a rather earthy habit of leaving full chamber pots under his piano and failed to bathe on a regular basis. He had the odd stint in Viennese jails for vagrancy, he once forgot to put on clothes before chiding neighbor children from his window, forever cementing a reputation for madness.

Further Listening: Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37 | Symphony No. 1 in C Major, Op. 21 | Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55

Ludwig van Beethoven

Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67

Duration: About 31 minutes

Premiered: Vienna, 1808

Instrumentation: Two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings

"Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy. Music is the electrical soil in which the spirit lives, thinks, and invents."

— Ludwig van Beethoven

Everyone knows the opening of Beethoven's fifth, but there's no consensus on where it comes from. The lofty, romantic idea is that Beethoven wrote the opening tune to represent "fate knocking at the door," as the composer's secretary suggested in a memoir. The more likely answer, according to one of the Beethoven's students, is that Beethoven owed the tune to a more natural source. The yellowhammer, a pleasant little bunting bird, was a common visitor to the parks in Vienna in which our naturalist

composer often took his walks. That bird's song isn't an exact match — there are a few too many short notes — but it's close enough that it's easy to imagine Beethoven condensing the motif for his own purposes. He certainly borrowed from tunes he heard while walking through nature for other symphonies.

Regardless of where it came from, that little "motif" (da-da-da-dum!) is a germ that infects the entire symphony, or a cell that unifies the whole. It is this economy of musical material that makes this work so easy to appreciate and experience fully, regardless of one's musical training.

After the introduction, when the first movement takes flight, it is with that little rhythmic cell repeated over and over, first as a primary theme, then in the horns as a transition. There is a more lyrical second theme in the winds and strings, but that gives way to the ferocity of the opening motif again. The second movement opens with warm serenity, but ghosts of the "fate" motif appear in the first transition and in the second theme. (Once one hears the short-short-short-long rhythmic device, it's impossible not to notice it everywhere.) Therein lies the genius of this symphony: such a simple device, transformed to adopt so many emotions and colors over the course of its 30 minutes, is truly wringing tears from a stone. The third movement, which launches with a ghostly nod to the finale of Mozart's final symphony, quickly pivots to a strident tune based on the "fate" motif. In the middle section, the trio, the rhythm is omnipresent.

Of course, the rhythmic device isn't Beethoven's only innovation here. Oh no, he also transitions directly from the third movement to the finale (typically there were breaks between movements at this time) and he invites the piccolo and contrabassoon to the finale, the first time in history these instruments are employed in a symphony: "The last movement in the symphony is with three trombones and piccolos — though not with three kettledrums, but will make more noise than six kettledrums and better noise at that," Beethoven wrote. Here, the mood transforms from aggression to pure triumph, from a dark c minor to a brilliant C Major.

Some scholars argue that the rhythmic cell is a coincidence, but after Beethoven's more expansive third and fourth symphonies, the condensed nature of the fifth suggests a deliberate scaling down of material. The composer was in his 30s and going deaf when he penned this symphony, which premiered in a mammoth, four-hour concert along with the sixth symphony and the fourth piano concerto, with Beethoven himself at the piano. In his enthusiasm while conducting, he upset several lit candles and nearly burned the concert hall to the ground.

Fortunately, fate had other plans.

Further Listening: Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37 | Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55 | Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68

Program notes author Jeremy Reynolds is the editor of Opera America Magazine *and the classical music critic at the* Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

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In memory of Bill Malila
Anonymous

In memory of Shirley Dorsey Martin, who was a wonderful supporter of the A2SO and its education programs
Thomas H. & Mary Steffek Blaske
Marilyn & Gerald Woolfolk

In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony (Dawn) Procassini
Camille Procassini

In memory of my sister-in-law, Martha Ralish
Ginny Horan

In honor of Alicia Rowe
Edward & Mona Goldman

In honor of Prof. Emeritus Peter Scott
The Huget and Scott Families

In honor of Carol Sewell for her outstanding stellar leadership as president through A2SO's turbulent times
A. Michael & Remedios Montalbo Young

In Honor of Carol A. Sewell
Ronnie Shapiro

In memory of Jerry Smith for his endless dedication for touching people's lives through music.
Vicki White

In honor of Mary Steffek Blaske
A. Michael & Remedios Montalbo Young

In memory of Charlotte Sundelson, who accomplished so much with courage, grace and kindness
Thomas H. & Mary Steffek Blaske
Ann K. Guthrie
Rod & Robin Little
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Cynthia Stewart
Lori & Jeff Zupan

In honor of Elisabeth Vanderpool, and wishing the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra a successful 2024
John M. Vanderpool

In honor of Lori Zupan's retirement after 35 years with the A2SO, and for her tireless dedication to the business of the A2SO, its musicians, audience and staff
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Podium Promise Campaign

The Podium Promise Campaign is the A2SO's initiative to endow the Music Director's position. Once fully funded, this $3 million endowment will enable the A2SO to:

- Secure and cultivate artistic leadership of the highest caliber
- Expand programming to engage a growing, diverse audience of all ages
- Attract and retain the most talented orchestral musicians in the nation.

Earl Lee was appointed Music Director of the A2SO in 2022 and this season marks his second at the podium. As the Orchestra's 14th director since its founding in 1928, Maestro Lee opens a new era of visionary leadership in the arts, culture, and community of Southeast Michigan.

Now is the time to invest in the A2SO's mission of delivering the highest quality performances of the greatest music ever written to an ever-growing audience. The following donors have contributed or pledged endowed gifts that helped us reach $1.9 million toward the Campaign goal of $3 million.

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*Deceased

We invite you to join them. Contact Jennie Balch, Director of Development at jebalch@a2so.org for ways to give.