

Program Notes by Ken Meltzer

OVERTURE TO *EGMONT*, OPUS 84

Composed in 1810

The first performances of Beethoven's incidental music to *Egmont* took place at the Burgtheater in Vienna on June 15, 1810.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770

Died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827

The first performance of this work by the Charlotte Symphony took place on February 21, 1936 with Guillermo S. de Roxlo conducting at Alexander Graham Middle School. The thirteenth and most recent performance took place on February 18, 2011 at Carmel Country Club with Jacomo Rafael Bairos conducting.

Ludwig van Beethoven maintained a lifelong admiration for the immortal German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). In February of 1811, Beethoven wrote to a friend: "If you write to Goethe about me, try to find all the words that will assure him of my deepest respect and admiration...who can ever give enough thanks to a great poet, the most precious jewel a nation can possess?" Beethoven composed several works inspired by the writings of Goethe, including numerous songs, the incidental music to the play *Egmont* (1809-1810), and the cantata for chorus and orchestra, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* (1815).

Beethoven composed his incidental music to *Egmont* for a production of Goethe's play at the Vienna Burgtheater. The story of *Egmont* concerns the oppression of the Netherlands at the hands of the Spanish dictator, the Duke of Alva. Count Egmont is a Dutch patriot whose heroic death inspires the defeat of the Spanish, and freedom for his people. Beethoven's dramatic Overture foreshadows the course of Goethe's fiery drama.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Duration: ca. 9 minutes

BRANDENBURG CONCERTO NO. 4, G MAJOR, BWV 1049

Composed in 1721

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born in Eisenach, Germany, on March 21, 1685

Died in Leipzig, Germany, on July 28, 1750

The first performance of this work by the Charlotte Symphony took place on March 22 & 23, 1972 with Jacques Brouman at Ovens Auditorium and on the campus of Wingate

University. The third and most recent performance set took place February 18, 20 & 23, 1997 with Janna Hymes-Bianchi conducting at Davidson College Presbyterian Church, Matthews Methodist Church and Temple Beth El.

In 1717, Johann Sebastian Bach began his seven-year tenure as Kappellmeister to Prince Leopold in the German town of Cöthen, located some sixty miles north of Weimar. Prince Leopold was a talented musician (Bach described him as “a gracious prince, a lover and connoisseur of music”). The Prince hoped to duplicate in Cöthen the superb court music establishments he encountered during his studies throughout Europe. Thanks to the patronage of Prince Leopold, Bach was able to compose for several of Europe’s finest instrumentalists.

Prince Leopold’s court was Calvinist. And so, Bach’s duties did not include the composition of liturgical music. Instead, Bach’s Cöthen years resulted in an extraordinary outpouring of instrumental creations. Solo compositions during this remarkable Cöthen period include the *Orgelbüchlein*, the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Two and Three-Part Inventions*, the *English and French Suites* for harpsichord, the *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*, and the *Suites for Solo Cello*. During his Cöthen tenure, Bach also composed stunning ensemble works, including his *Four Orchestral Suites* and the *Six Brandenburg Concertos*.

In the winter of 1718-19, Bach traveled to Berlin. There, he purchased a superb new harpsichord, the creation of Michael Mietke, the instrument maker at the court of Berlin from 1697 until his death in 1719. It was during this journey that Bach probably first met the Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, the youngest son of the “Great Elector,” Frederick William. The Margrave offered Bach a commission to compose a series of works. Two years later, Bach presented the Margrave with scores he entitled, “Six Concerts Avec plusieurs Instruments,” (“Six Concertos with Several Instruments”).

It appears that the Margrave never heard the magnificent works that ultimately became known as the *Brandenburg Concertos*. The Margrave employed a small ensemble of musicians, too few to encompass all the parts of the Six Concertos. Scholars believe that Bach originally composed these works not for the Margrave, but for performance at various concerts by the excellent musicians in the service of Prince Leopold in Cöthen. Bach presented these completed, independent works as a collection to fulfill the Margrave’s commission.

Bach’s *Six Brandenburg Concertos*, along with such works as the composer's *Four Orchestral Suites* and George Frideric Handel’s twelve *Concerti Grossi*, Opus 6, represent the pinnacle of Baroque orchestral writing.

Bach probably composed his *Fourth Brandenburg Concerto* as a vehicle to display the talents of Joseph Spiess, the premier violinist of Prince Leopold’s orchestra. The two solo flutes immediately present the playful main theme of the opening *Allegro*. The middle section features impressive virtuoso display for the solo violin. The movement concludes with a reprise of the opening section. The central *Andante* features a melancholy, undulating theme. The *Andante* is notable for its constant juxtaposition of *piano* and *forte* dynamics and solo and *tutti* instrumental forces. A brief ascending and descending solo flute passage and two ensemble chords lead to the final movement (*Presto*). The viola initiates a fugue. Once again, the solo violin is prominently featured in dazzling technical display.

The score calls for two solo flutes, solo violin, continuo and strings.

Duration: ca. 17 minutes

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN C MINOR, OPUS 67

Composed in 1808

Premiered in Vienna on December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien, with the composer conducting

The first performance of this work by the Charlotte Symphony took place on October 25, 1935 with Guillermo S. de Roxlo conducting at Alexander Graham Middle School. The fifteenth and most recent performance set took place on February 20 & 21, 2009 with Christof Perick conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

Beethoven's immortal Fifth Symphony is music that continues to astonish listeners with its elemental power, taut drama, and, above all else, a sense of absolute inevitability. And yet, there was nothing inevitable about the process of the work's creation. The composition of the Fifth Symphony took place over a span of approximately four years (1804-1808). During that time, Beethoven wrote and rewrote passages, filling sketchbook upon sketchbook with ideas for the Symphony.

Beethoven finally completed his Fifth Symphony in the spring of 1808. The Fifth received its premiere at a December 22, 1808 concert, sponsored by the composer, and held at the Vienna Theater an der Wien. Beethoven served as both conductor and pianist in a marathon program, featuring almost four hours of his music.

Perhaps a music lover who had access to a time machine might choose this concert as his first destination. Imagine the opportunity to witness Beethoven performing several of his greatest masterworks! By all accounts, however, the event was far from a triumph. A lack of sufficient rehearsal time, coupled with Beethoven's failings as a conductor, led to performances that were haphazard at best, and disasters at worst. Further, the audience endured this marathon concert—held in the dead of winter—in an unheated theater.

Today, of course, the Beethoven Fifth maintains its status as one of the greatest and most popular Symphonies. However, the extraordinary power and revolutionary nature of the Beethoven Fifth at first inspired confusion, awe, and even fear on the part of some music lovers.

In his *Memoirs*, Hector Berlioz recalled an 1828 performance of the Beethoven Fifth in Paris, attended by one of the young French composer's teachers at the Conservatoire, Jean-François Lesueur. After the concert, Berlioz rushed to Lesueur, anxious to learn his professor's opinion:

I went striding up and down the passage with flushed cheeks. "Well, dear master?"... "Hush! I want air; I must go outside. It is incredible, wonderful! It stirred and affected and disturbed me to such a degree that

when I came out of the box and tried to put on my hat I could not find my own head! Do not speak to me until tomorrow.”...

The next day I rushed off to his house, and we at once fell to talking about the masterpiece which had stirred us so deeply...It was easy to see that I was talking to a quite different being from the man of the day before, and that the subject was painful to him. But I persisted until Lesueur, after again admitting how deeply the symphony had affected him, shook his head with a curious smile, and said, “All the same, such music ought not to be written.” To which I replied, “Don’t be afraid, dear master, there will never be too much of it.”

The Fifth Symphony’s furious opening movement (*Allegro con brio*) begins with a proclamation of the famous “short-short-short-long” motif—the seed from which the entire work will grow (Anton Schindler quoted the composer as describing this passage in the following manner: “Thus fate knocks at the door!” The authenticity of this quote has long been a subject of dispute). The second movement (*Andante con moto*) is in the form of variations on two themes, the latter incorporating the central four-note motif. The third-movement Scherzo (*Allegro*) proceeds to a breathtaking transitional passage, in which the timpani softly repeats the four-note motif. The first violins intone echoes of the Scherzo, as the orchestra moves inexorably to the glorious finale (*Allegro*), which follows without pause. Now, the central motif is transformed into a triumphant celebration, reinforced by the introduction of piccolo, contrabassoon, and trombones—all making their first appearance in a Beethoven Symphony. A quiet reprise of the Scherzo resolves to the work’s glorious, *presto* conclusion, where all is bathed in the brightest sunlight.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

Duration: ca. 31 minutes