



Festival  
Classica



# CONCERTOS POUR PIANO DE BEETHOVEN - Part 1

Élisabeth Pion / Arion Orchestre Baroque

16th edition

31 May 2026 – 4 p.m.

Église catholique de Saint-Lambert

Saint-Lambert

In collaboration with



# Beethoven's complete piano concertos

Part one

## Program

(100 mins without intermission)

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**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)**

Piano Concerto no. 1 in C major, op. 15

I. Allegro con brio

II. Largo

III. Rondo. Allegro scherzando

**Sophie Gail (1775–1819)**

*La Sérénade*

Overture

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

Piano Concerto no. 2 in E-flat major, op. 19

I. Allegro con brio

II. Adagio

III. Rondo. Molto allegro

## Intermission

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

Piano Concerto no. 3 in C minor, op. 37

I. Allegro con brio

II. Largo

III. Rondo. Allegro - Presto

## Artists

Élisabeth Pion, pianoforte

Mathieu Lussier, direction

Arion Orchestre Baroque

# About

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Between 1795 to 1811, Beethoven introduced the world to his five piano concertos, charting a path from the classicism of Mozart to a sound uniquely his own. Arion is proud to embark on this major undertaking for piano and orchestra, with Élisabeth Pion, a musician of exceptional musical intelligence, sensitivity, and virtuosity. Performed on period instruments, the cycle opens with the first three concertos, in a concert that will lead to a forthcoming recording. Rounding out the program, Arion Orchestre Baroque will revive the music of Sophie Gail, a contemporary of Beethoven, performing the overture to her opéra-comique *La Sérénade*.

# A word from Élisabeth Pion

Pianist

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Welcome to this first part of the complete Beethoven piano concertos! My working relationship with Arion and Mathieu Lussier began in 2021, when we collaborated on two Mozart concertos. The bond strengthened in 2023 and 2024 with the “Amadeus et l’Impératrice” project, which featured works by Montgeroult and Mozart. I am absolutely delighted to again be working with this dream team. Huge thanks to Marc Boucher who had the idea—crazy but sublime, a combination of which I am particularly fond—of plunging us into the complete Beethoven piano concertos.

The first concertante part is made up of the three first concertos, signed “Der Spagnol.” Concerto no. 2 was actually written first, but we’ll nevertheless start the concert with a burst of freshness in C major with the “official” no. 1! Concertos 1 and 2 both illustrate the young Ludwig’s character, by turns mischievous (external movements) and inventive (central movements), while revealing the difficulty the young composer had in freeing himself from inherited models: we hear strong echoes of Mozart and Haydn, both in the structure of these works and the progression of musical ideas.

It was really in the third concerto that Beethoven stepped into his own skin. C minor is a key that he maintained a particular liking for all his life. Incidentally, it was his Trio no. 3 in the same key that established his compositional signature, a work that the composer himself was especially pleased with. Papa Haydn, for his part, judged it weak, despite its success with audiences and the undeniable quality of the writing (ah, Jealousy, when you get your claws into us, you don’t let go, even under the cover of wigs, powder and wrinkles, so-called signs of maturity!).

To those who would like to dive deeper into the Beethovenian universe, I strongly recommend reading Jan Swafford’s *Anguish and Triumph*.

Enjoy the musical journey, and thank you for joining us on this grand adventure.

See you soon!

Élisabeth

# Program notes

Benjamin Goron, musicologist

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At the turn of the 19th century, music in Europe was undergoing a major shift: the well-balanced classical tradition bequeathed by Haydn and Mozart was gradually opening up to the expressiveness and subjectivity of burgeoning Romanticism. At the centre of this change stands Ludwig van Beethoven, whose early orchestral works already showed signs of a transformation in musical language. The program also shines a light on a figure little known today, Sophie Gail, who was active in post-revolutionary Paris. Contrasting Vienna against Paris, tradition against renewal, this concert portrays an age of changing aesthetics.

## **Sophie Gail, feminine classical opera**

Born in 1775, Sophie Gail, stands out as one of the rare woman composers recognized in early 19th-century France. A pupil of François-Joseph Fétis and closely connected to Parisian artistic circles, she enjoyed considerable success with her *opéras comiques*, particularly *Les Deux Jaloux* and *La Sérénade*. At a time when female composers remained marginalized, the works of this contemporary of Beethoven were favourably received and regularly staged at the Opéra-Comique. The overture of *La Sérénade* is a perfect illustration of the French aesthetic of the time: formal clarity, melodic elegance, and light orchestration. She favoured tuneful, contrasting melodies entrusted to strings and woodwinds in a transparent style of writing that left little room for dramatic development, but much for narrative fluidity.

## **Beethoven's Viennese youth**

Beethoven arrived in Vienna in November 1792, aged 22, his primary purpose being to study with Haydn. He quickly gained a reputation as a talented and highly virtuosic pianist, famed for his audacious improvisations. He frequented the Viennese aristocracy, particularly the salons of Prince Lichnowsky, who supported him financially. At that time, Beethoven was still better known as a performer than as a composer, but his first published works were beginning to attract attention. While reflecting his classical influences, his writing showed glimpses of a striving for expressive and structural expansion that foretold his later work.

His first three piano concertos, composed between 1795 and 1802, were a continuation of the classical model but heralded decisive changes. Heir to Mozart's concertos, Beethoven kept the three-movement structure and the dialogue between soloist and orchestra. However, he strengthened the role of the piano, which no longer merely adorned the orchestral discourse but became a full-fledged protagonist, capable of dramatic tension and independent development.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C *major*, op. 15, was sketched out at the same time as the second, but completed five years later, in 1800. The form and spirit stay close to Haydn and Mozart, even though Beethoven beefed up the orchestra with added clarinets, trumpets, and timpani. The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, is based on classic double exposition, but the piano stands out with more assertive virtuosity and more percussive writing. The central *Largo* reveals a new expressiveness, with extended melody lines and discreet orchestral accompaniment. The final *Rondo* introduces a contrasting playful mood in which the piano lays out sparkling passages reminiscent of certain sonatas from the same period.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in E-flat major, op. 19, which actually preceded the first in its conception and first performance, shows a Beethoven still anchored in the galant style, close to Mozart's concertos, with similar orchestration. The slow movement (*Adagio*) is marked by an introspective, almost suspended, mood, heralding the composer's future lyrical explorations. The lively and witty finale plays on rhythmical surprise effects and dynamic contrasts with characteristic Beethovenian humor.

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, op. 37 marks a decisive shift. The minor key, rarely used in classical concertos, gives the work a new dramatic dimension, a colour of pathos that the composer would reprise in his *Sonata Pathétique* (1799), *Coriolan* (1807), and his Symphony no. 5 (1808). The orchestra acquires new independence: the orchestral introduction is almost symphonic in its density. The piano then enters as an opposing force, developing a tense, energetic discourse. The *Largo* brings a marked contrast with its luminous serenity and the key of E major, while the finale blends formal rigour with expressive intensity, culminating in a virtuosic coda. At the concerto's first performance, with Beethoven himself as soloist (as he was for the first two), the greatest bafflement was doubtless reserved for Ignaz von Seyfried, the pianist's page turner: "I hardly saw anything but blank pages, with at most a few totally incomprehensible hieroglyphs here and there; he played the main part almost entirely from memory." Beethoven's head must have been brimful of ideas, enabling him day after day to serve up gems that would change the face of Western music forever.

Lying between the classical heritage and the romantic shift, these first three concertos were the laboratory in which a new, transitional aesthetic was forged: forms are expanded, and the language becomes more expressive, with audacious modulations and marked contrasts. The piano is no longer content to dialogue with the orchestra in the manner of Mozart, but confronts it head-on, while the orchestra itself gains in importance and character. All these changes heralded the more dramatic, personal style of the concertos that were to follow.

# Artists

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**Élisabeth Pion**  
*Pianoforte*



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**Mathieu Lussier**  
*Direction*



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**Arion Baroque Orchestra**



# Choirs & orchestra

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## **Arion Baroque Orchestra**

### **First violins**

Jessy Dubé  
Marie Nadeau-Tremblay  
Camille Poirier-Lachance  
Sari Tsuji  
Jimin Shin  
Nadia Lesinska

### **Second violins**

Julie Rivest  
Simon Alexandre  
Mélanie De Bonville  
Franka Larichelière-Banken  
Sarah Douglass

### **Violas**

Jacques-André Houle  
Clément Bufferne  
Isabelle Douaillly-Backman  
Namgon Lee

### **Cellos**

Amanda Keesmaat  
Andrea Stewart  
Jessica Korotkin  
Simon Desbiens

### **Double basses**

Francis Palma-Pelletier  
Thibault Bertin-Maghit

### **Flutes**

Alexa Raine-Wright  
Grégoire Jeay

### **Oboes**

Daniel Lanthier  
Pablo O'Connell

### **Clarinets**

Martin Carpentier  
Karim Nasr

### **Bassoons**

François Viault  
Aaron Goler

### **Horns**

Louis-Pierre Bergeron  
Xavier Fortin

### **Trumpets**

Roman Golovanov  
Francis Pigeon

### **Timpani**

Mathieu Pouliot

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16th edition

22 May to June 14 2026

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