

## WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW PARALLEL EVENTS

# 1808

## Beethoven

### Symphony No. 5



#### MUSIC

Spohr  
Clarinet Concerto No.1



#### ART

Goya  
*The Third of May, 1808*



#### LITERATURE

Blake  
*Milton*



#### HISTORY

Tsar Alexander I of Russia proclaims Finland a part of Russia.

# 1889

## R. Strauss

### Death and Transfiguration



#### MUSIC

Mahler  
*Das Lied von der Erde*



#### ART

Matisse  
*Dance (I)*



#### LITERATURE

Baum  
*The Road to Oz*



#### HISTORY

Louis Blériot is the first man to fly across the English Channel.

# 2019

## Simon

### Fate Now Conquers



#### MUSIC

Chin  
*Subito con forza*



#### ART

Plensa  
*Water's Soul*



#### LITERATURE

Erdrich  
*The Night Watchman*



#### HISTORY

The World Health Organization declares the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.

## BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH!

Ruth Reinhardt has chosen to cap her first season as Music Director with a program that bristles, like the world itself, with enormous contrasts.

While Maestro Reinhardt has breathed new life into our beloved orchestra during her inaugural season as Music Director, she has stepped aside for the season closer in order to bring a new life of her own into the world. Tonight will be a celebration of both momentous events.

Composed for the Philadelphia Orchestra's planned performance of a complete cycle of Beethoven's works during his 250th anniversary year in 2020, Carlos Simon's *Fate Now Conquers* is a contemporary reflection of the German master's Seventh Symphony. Expressively orchestrated, this compact work reimagines the rhythmic and harmonic components Beethoven used in a new context, wordlessly posing a timeless question: Do we control our fate—or does it control us? In a world grappling with uncertainty, Simon's music reminds us of the power of persistence, imagination, and the unyielding desire to create meaning—even in the midst of turmoil.

Richard Strauss explored the very same question in his master tone poem *Death and Transfiguration*. Drawing on his distinctive and freely-developing musical style, Strauss follows the thoughts of a dying man, from childhood innocence to the struggles of his manhood, and from the attainment of worldly goals to the longed-for transfiguration “from the infinite reaches of heaven.”

Beethoven's musical wrestling with fate, while unquestionably brilliant, met with a much less auspicious beginning than either of the other two works on this program. On the fated evening of the premiere in Vienna, the composer's ambition seemed to have gotten the better of him. He had programmed a marathon event lasting over four hours, in a freezing hall. Making matters worse, the woefully under-rehearsed orchestra had to restart due to a derailing mistake, only to watch in horror as Beethoven's awkward conducting led to both a toppling of lamps and the accidental smacking of an unfortunate stagehand in the face.

But great art easily overshadows such mishaps, and Beethoven's fifth symphony was quickly launched on its way to immortality.

### ***Fate Now Conquers***

**CARLOS SIMON** (1986- )

*Last performed November 12, 2022 with Kensho Watanabe conducting. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.*

Carlos Simon was born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Atlanta, GA, as the son of an African-American preacher. Gospel music was a pervasive influence in his formation as an American composer. Gospel music's improvisational aspect was especially important to him. At the age of ten, Simon began to play keyboard accompaniments in his father's church, thus formally entering into the world of gospel music. As he grew older and developed his style as a composer, classical music masters, such as Beethoven and Brahms, became definite influences as well.

Simon attended Morehouse College as well as Georgia State University, earning degrees before embarking on doctoral studies at the University of Michigan. Along the way, he attained professional experience as keyboardist and musical director for rhythm and blues artists Angie Stone and Jennifer Holliday. In 2019, with doctoral degree in hand, Simon was appointed assistant professor in Georgetown University's Department of Performing Arts. This position became a springboard for several commissions, awards and honors, notably Composer-in-Residence at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2021. Many honors and commissions for music have followed.

Simon introduces us to his *Fate Now Conquers* in the following words:

This piece was inspired by a journal entry from Ludwig van Beethoven's notebook, written in 1815:  
*Iliad. The Twenty-Second Book:*

*But Fate now conquers; I am hers; and yet not she shall share In my renown; that life is left to every noble spirit.  
And that some great deed shall beget that all lives shall inherit.*

Using the beautifully fluid harmonic structure of the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, I have composed musical gestures that are representative of the unpredictable ways of fate. Jolting stabs, coupled with an agitated groove with every persona. Frenzied arpeggios in the strings that morph into an ambiguous cloud of free-flowing running passages depict the uncertainty of life that hovers over us.

We know that Beethoven strived to overcome many obstacles in his life and documented his aspirations to prevail despite his ailments. Whatever the specific reason for including this particularly profound passage from the *Iliad*, in the end, it seems that Beethoven relinquished himself to fate. Fate now conquers.

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## ***Tod und Verklärung (Death and Transfiguration)*, TrV 158, op.24 RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)**

*Last performed May 2, 1992 with Eleazar de Carvalho conducting. This piece is scored for three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps and strings.*

When Strauss introduced his youthful Don Juan to the world, he had almost completed his next symphonic poem, *Death and Transfiguration*. Its literary connection was the outline of a poem by the composer's friend, Alexander Ritter, in which Death is conceived as both destroyer and liberator. In the poem, the dying man, racked by pain, has fitful glimpses of his childhood and youth. The ambitions and ideals of his younger years pass before him. Death, when it comes, marks the beginning of that for which he had hoped all along. Death, having delivered him

from mortality and its sufferings, turns out to be nothing less than a transfiguration – a realization, fulfillment and culmination of all those dreams and longings he had striven for in his earthly life. Stemming from Biblical sources, his personal apocalyptic visions are a part of the Judeo-Christian heritage firing Strauss's youthful imagination.

His approach to actual composition, however, was cool and detached. Claude Debussy wrote rather disparagingly of Strauss's self-admitted dependence on literary programs for his symphonic poems: "To make a symphonic poem he (Strauss) takes any idea that occurs to him, thus proving himself to be an extraordinary illusionist who could give points to the most adept of Fakirs... the frequent misunderstandings that occur between composer and listener will certainly not be dissipated by reading those little guide-books in which the letters of the alphabet represent parts of picture puzzles which you try to solve during the performance."

Debussy was right, of course. Strauss, the self-assured tone painter, joked that the discerning listener might be able to distinguish which of Don Juan's victims was a redhead or which glass of beer was a Pilsner! But the reason why his symphonic poems remain popular is not because of any graphic musical rendering of objects, character, plot or story, but because the music itself retains its own vibrancy and dramatic strength above and beyond the narrative which inspired it. There is no doubt that in the tone poems, the musical images are extraordinarily rich, colorful and evocative, with the composer revealing himself as absolute master of the resources of the post-Wagnerian romantic orchestra. In doing so, Strauss stretched symphonic form to the extent that it was malleable for his own expressive and dramatic needs, without extending or bending it so far that his tone poems become shapeless.

Debussy felt that the program behind *Death and Transfiguration* was superfluous with its "ever recurring temptation for verbose explanations. Music simple and unadorned suffices." Yet he himself could not entirely avoid a descriptive thrust when writing that the opening suggested "the atmosphere of the sepulcher in which alarming larvae appear to move," and in which "the soul engages in terrible struggles, endeavoring to free itself from the vile body which still holds it to the earth."

This opening is in fact Strauss's "De Profundis," with the first of his two principal themes emerging lugubriously from the nether regions. This later will become forceful, surging and aggressive as it wages unremitting warfare with the romantic, tenderly lyrical second theme first heard so hauntingly on the oboe. Incredible tension is generated as Strauss stretches and contrasts these themes. To be sure, there are moments of respite when the conflict is temporarily postponed. But the combat has to reach feverish depths of dissipation and dissolution before the "transfiguration" theme is finally announced. Even Debussy, ever critical of musical storytelling, here speaks of "the Transfiguration taking place before the eyes of the public, without any trickery beyond the great chords of C major. It is the key which most perfectly conveys the impression of eternity."

The conclusion does indeed have a magisterial serenity to it, as the music modulates and broadens into the final image of transfiguration, then softens to a warm glow full of peace and contentment.

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## Symphony No.5 in C minor, op.67

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1824)

Last performed January 22, 2022 with Nathaniel Efthimiou conducting. This piece is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

Perhaps the biggest challenge when listening to a live performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is to listen to it as if you're hearing it for the first time. But the effort is worth it.

At its core, Beethoven's Fifth is an experimental symphony. The opening is strange, with no clear harmony for quite some time. What key are we really in? But that question soon takes a back seat in the face of even more pressing matters. A revolutionary at heart, Beethoven eschews traditional melody to give this iconic work its distinctive sense of drama, but relies instead on visceral rhythm and imaginative structural details. In this way, he was a hundred years ahead of his time.

The famous four-note motif at the opening serves as the foundation for not just the first movement but, in fact, for the entire symphony. From it, the composer wrings every musical possibility imaginable, endowing the entire work with a stunning coherence. With the stroke of his pen, Beethoven gives history a new idea: even the most minute musical gesture can give rise to a masterpiece of enormous scope. Listen for the startling and lyrically expressive oboe cadenza (about four minutes in) that abruptly halts the torrent of rhythm. This delicious moment gives even greater meaning to the motif as it returns like a relentless hammer in the coda that follows.

In the second movement- *Andante con moto* – Beethoven elegantly spins a series of four variations on two main ideas. Violas and cellos start by venturing into an unexpected key (A-flat major), with one of the composer most memorable melodies. A contrasting, more assertive theme in an equally unexpected key (C major) is then offered by the clarinets, flute and bassoons. Beethoven masterfully weaves double variations on both of these ideas, while never losing sight of the underlying rhythmic energy of the motif from the first movement.

The third movement takes the (then) traditional idea of a dance movement and whips it up into an enigmatic *scherzo*. Opening with a mysterious arpeggio in the low strings, unison horns soon interrupt to remind us what this bold symphony is all about. Once the matter is settled, the cellos and double basses launch into a ferociously difficult bit of counterpoint with the tenacity of feral animal. Ultimately, a truncated version of the opening returns, but even softer now, setting the stage for a moment of true musical magic.

Beethoven bridges the transition into the last movement with a delicate solo passage in the first violins, supported by gently throbbing basses and timpani, and sustained pianissimo notes in the seconds and violas. Then, in one of the most unnerving and tension-building passages in all the literature, a snake-like melody slithers and builds until, in a moment of unbridled joy, the trombones, contrabassoon, and piccolo (instruments usually reserved only for the military or operas back in the day) finally make their long-awaited entrance. Echoes of "La Liberté" - a French revolutionary hymn that Beethoven certainly knew - cry out, and the whole orchestra responds with familiar music that is now made new by its context. All hints of darkness are expelled. At the end, 54 measures of emphatic C major chords mark the completion of the journey from strife to triumph.