

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW **PARALLEL EVENTS**

1823

Beethoven

*Missa solemn*is in D major, op.123



MUSIC

Vincenzo Bellini
Oboe Concerto in
E-flat major



ART

Eugène Delacroix
*Rebecca and the
Wounded Ivanhoe*



LITERATURE

James Fenimore Cooper
The Pioneers



HISTORY

The Monroe Doctrine is introduced
by U.S. President James Monroe.

RUTH CONDUCTS BEETHOVEN'S MISSA SOLEMNIS

It's been suggested that the Beethoven's *Missa solemn*is (or "solemn mass") is the composer's most direct effort to musically depict the voice of God.

And while it's always a challenge to define or explain someone else's spiritual worldview—especially when expressed through art—Beethoven's inscription in the score offers a revealing insight:

"From the heart, may it return to the heart."

After four years of painstaking work on the composition, Beethoven inscribed these words on the completed score before presenting it, in 1823, to his patron, pupil, and friend Rudolph Johann Joseph Rainer, Archduke of Austria.

In the end, the piece was not performed in a church until three years after the composer's own death. But Beethoven made it clear to anyone who would listen that he counted it as the greatest of his compositions - and his personal favorite. In addition to the above inscription, the score is full of uncharacteristic interpretive instructions he wrote for the musicians, among them "with devotion" and "asking for inner and outer peace." Such appeals don't neatly correspond with the caricature of Beethoven as a grumpy, tortured, and self-absorbed artist that we often see in pop culture today. Yes, he may, in fact, not have been your first choice to invite to tea after church; but throughout his life his keen interest in concepts of God and spirituality were central to his reasons for making art at all.

Spirituality and faith, after all, deal primarily with the intangible and ineffable. Music is uniquely suited to plumb such depths. For Beethoven, his *Missa solemn*is was far more than a liturgical or ceremonial piece. The music is meant to move listeners beyond the moment of performance, leaving a lasting impression of reverence, awe, and moral reflection - a truly transcendent experience for both performers and audience alike.



RUTH CONDUCTS BEETHOVEN'S MISSA SOLEMNIS

Open Rehearsal: Friday, April 30, 2027

TACO Classical: Saturday, May 1, 2027

***Missa solemnis* in D major, op.123**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1824)

This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. In addition to a solo soprano, this piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, organ and strings.

In a letter dated April 18, 1824, in conjunction with its premiere performance, Beethoven wrote of his *Missa solemnis*: "My chief aim was to awaken and permanently instill spiritual feelings not only in the singers but in the listeners." This statement reveals the central purpose behind this monumental work.

Originally intended for the enthronement Mass of Archduke Rudolph of Austria in 1820, its late completion meant that the first public performance did not take place until four years later in St. Petersburg. Its first performance in a church (its intended venue) did not take place until three years after the composer's own death.

As the above letter suggests, *Missa solemnis* was a deeply personal spiritual undertaking. Though nominally Catholic, Beethoven's spirituality was shaped by both Christian theology and Enlightenment thought. He viewed God as a fatherly presence and Christ as a fellow sufferer, blending religious belief with humanistic ideals. His goal was not simply to compose an impressive mass, but to create a work with lasting spiritual impact.

In doing so, Beethoven boldly departed from traditional expectations for the concert mass. He had already transformed the sonata, symphony, and string quartet by expanding their form, scale, and expressive range, and he approached the mass with the same originality. By adding violin solo, recitative, dramatic expansions of the liturgical text, and a duration more than twice that of a typical concert mass, he once again redefined a genre.

Grand in both scale and complexity, *Missa solemnis* calls for a large orchestra and chorus, and includes extended movements that are as demanding as they are exhilarating, such as the double fugue in the *Credo*. Listen, too, for Beethoven's skill in weaving together wide-ranging elements such as chant-like passages and powerful climactic chorales to create striking but meaningful contrasts.

Perhaps the most notable and memorable aspect of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, however, is that it offers a masterclass in word painting—the use of music to express the meaning of the text. In the opening *Gloria*, rapid imitative entries and ascending lines create a musical rocket launch toward heaven. Later, the words "*Qui tollis peccata mundi*" ("Who takes away the sins of the world") appear in a slow, emotionally charged section in which the soloists and chorus exchange pleading lines as the music darkens in sorrow and supplication. In the *Sanctus*, the repeated "Holy, Holy, Holy" unfolds in sustained, resonant

chords that evoke awe and divine presence. Keep your ear attuned for these and the many more ways in which Beethoven aligns melodic contour, rhythm, dynamics, and orchestration with the meaning of the Latin text, making *Missa solemnis* one of the most vividly word-painted works in the repertoire.

All told, Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* is both a monumental achievement in musical form and a deeply personal act of spiritual expression, designed to touch the heart and mind in a way that endures long after the final note.

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