

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW PARALLEL EVENTS

1806

Beethoven

Violin Concerto



MUSIC

Weber
Concertino for Horn
and Orchestra



ART

Ingres
*Napoleon on his
Imperial Throne*



LITERATURE

Rundell
*A New System of
Domestic Cookery*



HISTORY

Noah Webster
publishes his first
dictionary.

1902

Sibelius

Symphony No.2



MUSIC

Joplin
"The Entertainer"



ART

Rodin
The Thinker



LITERATURE

Conan Doyle
*The Hound of
the Baskervilles*



HISTORY

The first Rose Bowl college
American football game.

2022

Montgomery

Overture



MUSIC

Giddens & Abels
Omar



ART

Heizer
City



LITERATURE

Allende
Violeta



HISTORY

World population reaches 8 billion.

BEETHOVEN VIOLIN CONCERTO

Lyricism, dignity, and seriousness of purpose. These words would aptly describe all three of the works on tonight's program.

Jessie Montgomery's Overture draws upon both jazz and classical harmonies, Baroque rhythmic gestures, and polyphonic tension to explore the resonant possibilities of the orchestra. Attentive listening yields an appreciation for nuanced textures that starts with unison strings, organically evolving into a fabric of unique and disparate voices, until the full range of orchestra possibilities can be imagined.

While Beethoven's Violin Concerto has come to hold a central place in the repertoire, it was not always so. Only gradually did it come to be appreciated for its genius. A work of great difficulty, it is not the showy vehicle for virtuosity that we often expect of our favorite violin concertos of the nineteenth century. But Beethoven did not treat its composition lightly; the first movement was the longest that he had composed up to that time. The second movement is a whole world unto itself - a world where time is suspended as if in a dream and the only thing that matters is the next note. And the last movement delivers a rustic dance with a brilliant coda and an ingenious close.

Sibelius, too, spent a great deal of time meticulously crafting his musical structures. And while he had no extra-musical program in mind when composing his second symphony, it so inspired the hearts of many that it became a symbol of hope for Finland during the oppressive "russification program" Finns endured from 1899-1905. Robert Kajanus, who conducted the premiere of the work with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, put it this way: "The Andante strikes one as the most broken-hearted protest against all the injustice that threatens at the present time to deprive the sun of its light and our flowers of their scent.... while the finale develops towards a triumphant conclusion intended to rouse in the listener a picture of lighter and confident prospects for the future."

BEETHOVEN VIOLIN CONCERTO

Open Rehearsal: Friday, November 21, 2025

TACO Classical: Saturday, November 22, 2025

Overture

JESSIE MONTGOMERY (1981-)

This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. This piece is scored for piccolo, flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani and strings.

This concert opens with 2024 Grammy® award-winner Jessie Montgomery's *Overture*, a one-movement work showcasing a fusion of styles from jazz harmonies to Baroque polyphony. Born and raised on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Montgomery found her calling early and has devoted her career to not only composition, but also to performance (in groups such as the Providence Quartet), advocacy for broader representation of Black and Latinx musicians in classical music, and to teaching for organizations such as Rhode Island's own Community MusicWorks.

Written during her tenure as Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Overture* opens with striking tension. Unison strings coax a theme from their instruments, conveying a sense of command rather than melody. Montgomery then examines the ensemble's resonance from multiple perspectives, from one end of the stage to the other, in a way that *The Washington Post* has aptly described as "turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life."

Violin Concerto in D major, op.61

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1824)

Last performed March 16, 2019 with Francisco Noya conducting and soloist Jennifer Frautschi. In addition to a solo violin, this piece is scored for flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

The years leading up to 1806 had not been good to Beethoven. He grappled with one challenge after another, each seriously affecting his creative life. But 1806 saw a new period of inspiration and productivity for the composer. Significant works - now central to his legacy - stemmed from his sense of renewal that year: the "Rasumovsky" quartets, the "Appassionata" piano sonata, the Fourth Symphony, and the Violin Concerto.

The concerto was written for Franz Clement, a prominent young violinist for whom Beethoven had great respect. Regardless (and true to form), Beethoven was so late in delivering the score to Clement, that the soloist practically sight-read the première performance. Ever the showman, Clement apparently further entertained the audience between movements by playing some impromptu variations - with his fiddle held upside down!

Yet despite these inauspicious beginnings, Beethoven's Violin Concerto has come to be one of the most beloved examples of the form - by both performers and audiences alike. The first movement - longer than any other he had composed to date - begins curiously with five little taps in the timpani. Like the four notes that ring throughout Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, this rhythm becomes the connective tissue of the entire concerto. The winds then offer us both the playful main theme in rich, full harmony, and (after some rising scales in the strings) a more dramatic second theme. At this point, the solo violin finally takes up the mantle and enters with a brief flourish, followed by an exploration of both ideas with a kaleidoscopic palette of figurations. A now-familiar tapping of the timpani signals the start of a grand recapitulation, which in turn sets us up for the much-anticipated cadenza. Always a moment of excitement (as audiences rarely know what the soloist will play on any given night), cadenzas provide us with a chance to hear what the soloist - unfiltered and unbound - can do with the material Beethoven has given her. After this display of virtuosity, the soloist will eventually settle back into a recognizable version of the second theme, finally closing the movement with lyricism and dignity.

In the second movement, Beethoven draws on his mastery of orchestral textures and timbres to make a straightforward theme and variations structure shimmer with ever-changing colors. In the process, the soloist waxes poetically above the fray, savoring the unique beauty of the violin's upper register, until a short cadenza leads us straight into the third movement.

The concerto's finale features a decidedly cheerful and danceable refrain with aspects of a rustic, hunting party (listen for the rousing scored horns). It is a pastoral celebration firmly rooted in the earth, bursting with arpeggios, double stops, rapid-fire scale runs, and even a few plucked notes - a delightful and satisfying contrast to the more ethereal preceding movements.

Symphony No.2 in D major, op.43

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

Last performed September 16, 2017 with James Sommerville conducting. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

At the beginning of 1901, a few months after the first European concert tour of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Sibelius, who had just lost his youngest daughter, brought his remaining family to Italy for some time to reflect and relax. Sitting in the study of a mountain villa near Venice, a literary reference suddenly came to mind, and he wrote on a sheet of paper the following vision: "Don Juan. Sitting in the twilight in my castle, a guest enters. I ask many times who he is.—No answer. I make an effort to entertain him. He remains mute. Eventually he starts singing. At this time, Don Juan notices who he is—Death." On the reverse side of the sheet, Sibelius sketched the melody that would become the D-minor bassoon theme of the second movement of his magnificent Second Symphony. Two months later, after coming face to face with some of Christianity's most iconic images in Florence, he drafted another theme above which he wrote the word "Christus." This theme also made its way into the same movement of the same piece. While we'll never know if it was his intention, these contrasting musical symbols of death and resurrection form the pillars of this beloved work. Immediately after its premiere on March 8, 1902, the symphony was appropriated as an emblem of national liberation in Finland during a particularly dark period of Russian oppression. Robert Kajanus, founder and conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, put it this way: "The Andante strikes one as the most broken-hearted protest against all the injustice that threatens at the present time to deprive the sun of its light and our flowers of their scent.... The scherzo gives a picture of frenetic preparation. Everyone piles his straw on the haystack, all fibers are strained and every second seems to last an hour. One senses in the contrasting trio section with its oboe motive in G-flat major what is at stake. The finale develops towards a triumphant conclusion intended to rouse in the listener a picture of lighter and confident prospects for the future."

Sibelius himself, however, was not prone to such programmatic interpretations of his music. He was a firm believer in the power of pure, absolute music, and insisted that his music be appreciated on those terms. But he was also a Romanticist whose aesthetic favored the sense-impressions of Symbolism and the integration of thematic material. An avid nature lover, he regularly drew inspiration from the world around him. Fjords and icy lakes seem to flow, and cold winds seem to blow, throughout his second symphony. While this may seem contradictory at first, both truths rest easily in the music of Sibelius. Though timeless, it is endowed with a mystical and organic character that sings of the Finnish landscape and its epic folklore.

The first of four movements to this symphony opens with a repeated ascending figure in the strings, based upon a three-pitch motif that will form the nucleus for several themes throughout the Symphony. It is fascinating to hear how those three simple pitches blossom into one melody after the other – each distinct yet rooted together.

The second movement (*Tempo, Andante, ma rubato*), which incorporates the music Sibelius sketched while in Italy, begins in a more somber manner than the first. The mood's intensity increases as strings and horns join in, until the inevitable climax peaks with a profound pause. The strings, then – richly divided into ten(!) parts – guide the listener to a brief and highly dramatic coda, where dark, thematic fragments are interspersed by savage trills in the winds.

Angry and restless, the perpetually moving Scherzo contrasts a startlingly and insistently chromatic bass line, machine-gun figures in the strings, and trumpet blasts with lyrical oboe melodies in the Trio. Both serve to foreshadow the triumph of the finale, which blazes, unselfconsciously, to a thrilling ending.