

## WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW PARALLEL EVENTS

# 1808

## Beethoven

Symphony No.6 (*Pastoral*)



### MUSIC

Louis Spohr  
Clarinet Concerto No.1



### ART

François Gérard  
*Portrait of Talleyrand*



### LITERATURE

William Blake  
*Milton*



### HISTORY

The Peninsular War begins as citizens of Spain begin uprising against the French occupiers.

# 1931

## Barber

*The School for Scandal: Overture*



### MUSIC

Ruth Crawford Seeger  
String Quartet



### ART

Salvador Dalí  
*The Persistence of Memory*



### LITERATURE

Ödön von Horváth  
*Tales from the Vienna Woods*



### HISTORY

Empire State Building opens in New York City, becoming the world's tallest skyscraper and a symbol of modern ambition.

# 2026

## Eric Nathan

Violin Concerto



### MUSIC

Tansy Davies  
*The Passion of Mary Magdalene*



### ART

Igshaan Adams  
*A Rose for Selfhood*



### LITERATURE

Caro Claire Burke  
*Yesteryear*



### HISTORY

The United States of America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence.

## BEETHOVEN'S "PASTORAL"

Tonight's concert marks the first to feature the work of Eric Nathan in his new role as Composer in Residence for the RI Phil. For this joyous and momentous occasion, Eric offers us a musical vision that celebrates the ineffable ways in which we, both as individuals and as a society, overcome challenges. In this, his first violin concerto, the soloist embodies our own personal struggles to understand, appreciate, and work in tandem with the world in which we find ourselves (embodied by the orchestra). When done well, the end result is an achievement of things previously deemed impossible.

If Beethoven were looking over Eric's shoulder as he composed this new work over the past spring and summer, the master would certainly have given more than a few knowing nods. Both nature and individual struggle were perpetual themes and sources of inspiration for Beethoven - a fact that is on full display in his dramatic "Pastoral" symphony. This work is full of musical depictions of nature - and the folks who relish and revel in it - even when its power becomes ominous and threatening.

Barber, for his part, tended to delve more into the challenges that society itself, rather than nature, poses. But nature certainly played its part along the way. It was during a youthful summer full of long hikes through the Italian countryside with his close friend (and fellow composer) Gian Carlo Menotti that Barber developed a penchant for what would become his signature compositional style: lyrical, emotional works rife with wit, energy, and wry irony. All of this can be heard - and even felt - in the gem that is his *School for Scandal* Overture. Where Nathan and Beethoven grapple with how we interact with the world around us, Barber focuses on the (often ridiculous) way we interact with ourselves. In the end, though, both reveal something very important about what it means to be human.



### ***The School for Scandal: Overture, op.5***

**SAMUEL BARBER** (1910-1981)

*Last performed September 26, 2009. This piece is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings.*

From the opening dissonance of Barber's *School for Scandal* Overture, a tone is set for not only this particular piece, but for a body of work that would define Barber's iconic style throughout his prolific career: a lyrical elegance infused with rhythmic energy and brilliant contrasts.

His first large orchestral work, written as a graduation thesis project while he was a student at the newly formed Curtis Institute of Music, *School for Scandal* Overture earned the 21-year-old Barber a prestigious prize from Columbia University, thus solidifying his standing as a bright new star on the American classical music scene.

Despite its title, *School for Scandal* Overture was never meant to serve as the opener for a stage production. Instead, it is a complete musical encapsulation of the ribald lampoon of 18th century British societal norms that is Richard Sheridan's play of the same name. In Sheridan's play, a sincere

but naive love between two young characters is saved in the nick of time from the salacious designs of their bumbling superiors. Like an Amy Sherman-Palladino script, the pace of Sheridan's witty dialogue is both rapid and scintillating ("Those who gossip are as important as those who create it"), leaving the audience fairly breathless by the end. Barber, ever the lover of great literature, with tastes both refined and eclectic, sought to evoke, in his words, "a musical reflection of the play's spirit." After a helter-skelter fanfare in which E-flat minor collides with D major, you will hear an equally exciting exposition, followed by a witty and frenetic musical conversation of imitative counterpoint. The second theme, representing the character of Lady Scandal (not to be confused with Lady Sneerwell!), is introduced by a sentimental oboe. Symphonic sparkle, embellished by sassy figurations which tease the moods and modes on the fly, ensue. Listen also for lovely, lyrical phrases in the strings, balanced by expressive moments for the solo clarinet and English horn. In the coda, the first theme erupts into a sparking fugue and, as is the case in Sheridan's original, it is all over too quickly.

### **Violin Concerto ("The Mountains We Climb")**

**ERIC NATHAN** (1983-)

*This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. In addition to a solo violin, this piece is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, clarinet, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.*

Notes by the composer:

I began composing this work at the start of the new year at a mountaintop residency in Italy. As I composed, I looked out at another mountain across the valley, framed by my window. I was struck by how the landscape shifted dramatically from day to day: from tranquil to stormy, from rolling pastures to an austere blanket of windswept snow. The mountain was immovable yet these changes in the environment had an outsize impact on the world it seemed to anchor.

On New Year's Eve, I spent the evening with two refugee poets from Ukraine, who have made that mountaintop their new home since the start of the war in their country. As the new year arrived, I went to the piano and searched for a song to play that we all knew. I chose "Amazing Grace." After I finished, one of them quietly recited the final lyric aloud: "was blind, but now I see." We sat with those words. I told them I hoped the new year would bring them home. A few days later, I penned my first notes.

The central idea of my Violin Concerto is the ascent of a mountain. This climb is both literal and symbolic, representing a striving to surmount challenges greater than oneself. The orchestra gives voice to the mountain, a monumental force composed of a multitude, with which the lone soloist is put into dialogue. The conductor evokes sounds of the natural world through sweeping gestures, sending waves of sound across the stage that take us outside of the concert hall.

This concerto differs from many canonical concertos of the past in that its three movements follow a single dramatic arc with one set of themes that evolve over its span. The movements are titled Act I, Act II, and Act III, each a new scene in an unfolding narrative.

Act I begins with the introduction of the two central motives of the work: the stable interval of a perfect fifth, beginning first as a drone and later turning into a melodic leap; and the unstable half-step, the smallest building block of music that can tilt the music from major to minor, a seismic harmonic shift. Both work together to create harmonies that move in and out of focus, guiding the emotional landscape and evoking the blues in a distant way: a tradition that holds grief and hope in the same breath, joining major and minor together at once. The music begins with a sacred expansiveness and continues through varied sonic terrain.

Act II begins in a darker place. The soloist enters and begins a lamenting dialogue with three muted violins in the orchestra that gradually draws the full string orchestra into weeping song. The soloist climbs toward the summit step-by-step up a sonic staircase laid out by the orchestra.

Act III begins atop the mountain. We hear an oboe begin to sing a melody that the solo violin ultimately fully embraces in the final cadenza. Something gradually comes into focus for the soloist and audience together, shining new light on what came before.

Tonight's world premiere has special meaning for me. Yevgeny Kutik came to America as a young refugee from Belarus and grew up in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts, a landscape I know well having spent my summers at Tanglewood since I was a child, a place where I met Norman Solomon. Ruth Reinhardt, who leads tonight's performance, lives in the Swiss Alps, and has spoken to me of how much those mountains mean to her.

The concerto was commissioned at the behest of Norman Solomon and grew into a collaborative enterprise: a consortium of three violinists and eight orchestras premiering the work across the United States, each bringing their own interpretation to the climb, and by doing so, joining together as a larger community. Each soloist's voice has found its way into the score.

This concerto was commissioned by Norman Solomon, M.D. and co-commissioned by the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Montgomery Symphony Orchestra, Boise Philharmonic, Bay Atlantic Symphony,

Friends of Chamber Music and Two Rivers Chamber Orchestra, Stanford Symphony Orchestra, and Hopkins Symphony Orchestra. It is dedicated to violinists Yevgeny Kutik, Curtis Stewart and Stefan Jackiw, who will give the premiere performances, and to Norman Solomon, M.D., with gratitude.

-Eric Nathan

## **Symphony No.6 in F major, op.68 (*Pastoral*)**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN** (1770-1824)

*Last performed October 17, 2015 with Larry Rachleff conducting. This piece is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani and strings.*

Forever struggling with a declining sense of hearing and other physical ailments, Beethoven certainly had his own symbolic mountains to climb. But it was always in nature that he would find a reprieve from these challenges – a reprieve that allowed him the ability to glean inspiration from its healing solace.

Generally speaking, Beethoven was not one to add any sort of program notes to his own works. He was adamant that the work spoke for itself. But in the case of his Sixth Symphony, he made an exception. Musicians for the 1808 premiere at the Theater an der Wein read the following notes written directly into the score:

“Pastoral Symphony, or recollections of country life — more an expression of feeling than painting.”

“I. Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside”

“II. Scene by the Brook”

“III. Merry Gathering of Country Folk”

“IV. Thunder, Storm”

“V. Shepherd’s song. Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm”

This rare inclusion of descriptive words in his score reflects the fact that Beethoven’s relationship with the natural world was not a casual one. He would walk for hours through the countryside around Vienna — through forests, along streams, across fields — and he kept notes. In his sketchbooks, he wrote things like: “In the forest — I am happy — the trees speak through you — O God! — how glorious.”

It's fortunate that, at that point in his life, Beethoven could perceive the language of the trees, as the songs of the birds had long since been silenced for him.

In the end, what Beethoven's Pastoral symphony captures is less the sound of nature itself, but more the memory of it, the longing for it — a reconstruction made by a mind that knew exactly what it was losing. His sketchbooks from the period show that ideas for the symphony appeared as early as 1803 or before, years ahead of the 1808 completion. The work was not a sudden inspiration but a long accumulation — summer walks folded into musical notation, gradually finding their form.

It's worth noting that Beethoven's scoring choices here are deliberate almost to the point of being architectural. For the first three movements, the orchestra is relatively small — winds, horns, and strings, with no trumpets, timpani, or trombones. The sound is transparent, airy. Such a scoring choice gives Beethoven the freedom to deliberately mimic the amateurish playing of village musicians in the third movement: an oboe enters a beat "late", an inept bassoon player seems capable of playing no more than two notes (which the celli and violas later mock). These people are much more intent on having a good time than polishing their technique.

And then, mid-celebration, the storm begins. There is no transition, no preparation. One moment the oboes are dancing; the next, something heavy settles in the bass and the sky changes. Timpani, trumpets, two trombones, and piccolo, all enter at once for the first time. The effect is a tonal sky change. When the storm passes and movement five begins, the orchestra retreats to something softer again.

It's also important to note that the newly-invented clarinet - an instrument often associated with intimacy and human presence - is the warm center of this symphony. It carries the bird calls in movement two, initiates the calm at the opening of movement five, and delivers the most personal moment in the work: a brief solo in the middle of the finale, quiet and unhurried, that sounds like a man alone in a forest at the end of a long day.