

# notes

March 24/25

## BEETHOVEN 7: APOTHEOSIS OF THE DANCE

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

**30 SECOND NOTES:** *BRIO*, which composer Augusta Read Thomas said is imbued with a “sense of dance, caprice, effervescence and optimism,” was commissioned in honor of Carolyn (Kay) Bucksbaum for premiere at this concert. Beethoven created a sensation as both composer and virtuoso when he premiered his *Piano Concerto No. 1* in Vienna in December 1795. The noted Czech composer Václav Tomášek said, “His grand style of playing had an extraordinary effect on me. I felt so shaken that for several days I could not bring myself to touch the piano.” Joseph Giunta chose the theme and title of this concert from Richard Wagner’s estimation of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7* as “the Apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect.” 🎵



### AUGUSTA READ THOMAS

Born April 24, 1964 in  
Glen Cove, New York;  
now living in Chicago,  
Illinois.

### BRIO FOR ORCHESTRA

• **World Premiere: first performances at these concerts on March 24 & 25, 2018.**

(Duration: c. 11 minutes)

A Music from the Heartland commission by the **Des Moines Symphony** –  
**Joseph Giunta**, Music Director & Conductor

Dedicated to **Carolyn (Kay) Bucksbaum** –  
Arts Devotee, Innovator and Philanthropist

A gift from her son and daughter  
**John Bucksbaum** and **Ann Bucksbaum  
Friedman**

Augusta Read Thomas admits a virtual predestination to compose: “I’ve always had an obsession with music. It was my retreat, my friend when I was younger, and my parents nurtured it.” She started to learn the piano when she was “about four years old,” and first tried composing a couple of years later: “I was always writing music. The pieces were terrible, of course, but I never stopped. The first thing I wrote that I felt was respectable enough — it was a terrible piece because I was very young — was for two trumpets and piano and band, and we performed it in my school when I was in eighth grade. [She had also taken up trumpet.] I’d written many things prior to that, but that was the first ‘big’ performance that I received.” Thomas did her undergraduate work in composition at Northwestern University on a full scholarship, and undertook her advanced studies at Yale. In 1989, she received a fellowship from Rotary International to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London, from which she

received an Advanced Course Diploma in 1989. Her composition teachers have included Jacob Druckman, M. William Karlins and Alan Stout. Thomas taught at the Eastman School of Music from 1993 to 2001, was Wyatt Professor of Music at Northwestern University from 2001 until 2006, and in July 2011 became University Professor of Composition at the University of Chicago, a position selected for internationally recognized eminence; she is just the sixteenth person honored with that title and one of only seven currently on the UC faculty.

Thomas' works have been performed by the world's leading orchestras, ensembles and soloists, and she has received fellowships, grants and awards from the L'Ecole Normale de Fontainebleau (France), ASCAP, BMI, Tanglewood Music Center, Aspen Music Festival, June in Buffalo Composers Conference, Gaudeamus Foundation (The Netherlands), Harvard University, American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Endowment for the Arts, Columbia University, Chamber Music America and many other noted institutions and organizations; in 2009 she was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters. From 1997 to 2006, Thomas was the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony, which commissioned seven major compositions from her, the last of which, *Astral Canticle*, a double concerto for flute, violin and orchestra, was one of two finalists for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Music. In 2016, she received the Lancaster Symphony Composer's Award, the oldest award of its kind in the country honoring contemporary composers.

The composer wrote, "*BRIO* for Orchestra, a 'Music from the Heartland' commission by the Des Moines Symphony, Joseph Giunta, Music Director and Conductor, is dedicated to Carolyn (Kay) Bucksbaum — arts devotee, innovator, philanthropist and dear friend — and was

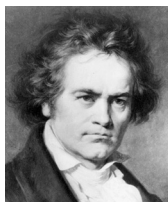
commissioned as a gift from her son and daughter, John Bucksbaum and Ann Bucksbaum Friedman.

"Kay Bucksbaum is radiant, elegant, brilliant, expressive, graceful, fun, beautiful, generous, sophisticated and positive. I am humbled by this opportunity to compose an orchestral work in her honor for its world premiere on Maestro Giunta's 'Apotheosis of the Dance' concert. The *Webster's Dictionary* definition of the noun *brio* reads in part: 'Let's give this celebration the brio it deserves! — vigor, vivacity, gusto, verve, zest, enthusiasm, vitality, dynamism, animation, spirit, energy; informal pep, vim, get-up-and-go.' The title *BRIO* hopefully captures the spirit of Kay's magnificence, twinkle and positive energy.

"I care about craft, clarity and passion. My works are organic and, at every level, concerned with transformations and connections. The carefully sculpted musical materials of *BRIO* are agile and energized, and their flexibility allows a way to braid harmonic, rhythmic and contrapuntal elements that are constantly transformed — at times whimsical and light, at times jazzy, at times layered and reverberating. Across *BRIO*'s 11-minute duration, it unfolds a labyrinth of musical interrelationships and connections that showcase the musicians of the Des Moines Symphony in a virtuosic display of rhythmic agility, counterpoint, skill, energy, dynamic range, clarity and majesty. Throughout the kaleidoscopic journey, the work passes through many lively and colorful episodes and, via an extended, gradual *crescendo*, reaches a full-throttle, sparkling intensity — imagine a coiled spring releasing its energy to continuously propel the musical discourse. Vivid, clangorous, brassy, and blazing, *BRIO* culminates in music of enthusiastic, intrepid (almost Stravinsky-like) spirits while never losing its sense of dance, caprice, effervescence and optimism.

“Music’s eternal quality is its capacity for change, transformation and renewal. No one composer, musical style, school of thought, technical practice or historical period can claim a monopoly on music’s truths. Commissioning new art is leap-of-faith! The commissioner does not know what they will receive. I feel profoundly fortunate for the investments made by Ann, John, Joe, and the orchestra’s musicians in my work, and I devoted my strongest, most focused efforts to composing *BRIO* in honor of Kay.”

**The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.**



## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

**Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn;  
died March 26, 1827 in Vienna.**

### **PIANO CONCERTO NO. 1 IN C MAJOR, OP. 15 (1795, REVISED 1800)**

- First performed on December 18, 1795 in Vienna, with the composer as soloist.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on October 13, 1973 with Willis Page conducting and James Fields as soloist. Three subsequent performances occurred, most recently on April 19 & 20, 1997 with Joseph Giunta conducting and Navah Perlman as soloist.

*(Duration: ca. 36 minutes)*

“His genius, his magnetic personality were acknowledged by all, and there was, besides, a gaiety and animation about the young Beethoven that people found immensely attractive. The troubles of boyhood were behind him: his father had died very shortly after his departure from Bonn, and by 1795 his brothers were established in Vienna, Caspar Karl as a musician, Johann as an apothecary. During his first few months in the capital, he had indeed been desperately poor, depending very largely on the small salary allowed him by the Elector of Bonn. But that was all over now. He had no responsibilities, and his music was bringing in enough to keep him in something like affluence. He had a servant, for a short time he even had a horse; he bought smart clothes, he learned to dance (though not with much success), and there is even mention of his wearing a wig! We must not allow our picture of the later Beethoven to throw its dark colors over these years of his early triumphs. He was a young giant exulting in his strength and his success, and a youthful confidence gave him a buoyancy that was both attractive and infectious. Even in 1791, before he left Bonn, Carl Junker could describe him as ‘this amiable, lighthearted man.’ And in Vienna he had much to raise his spirits and nothing (at first) to depress them.”

Peter Latham painted this cheerful picture of the young Beethoven as Vienna knew him during his twenties, the years before his deafness, his recurring illnesses and his titanic struggles with his mature compositions had produced the familiar, dour figure of his later years. Beethoven came to Vienna for good in 1792, having made an unsuccessful foray in 1787, and quickly attracted attention for his piano playing, at which he bested such local keyboard luminaries as Daniel Steibelt and Joseph Wölffl to become the rage of the music-mad Austrian capital. His appeal was in an almost untamed, passionate, novel quality in

both his manner of performance and his personality, characteristics that first intrigued and then captivated those who heard him. Václav Tomášek, an important Czech composer who heard Beethoven play the *C Major Concerto* in Prague in 1798, wrote, “His grand style of playing had an extraordinary effect on me. I felt so shaken that for several days I could not bring myself to touch the piano.”

Beethoven, largely self-taught as a pianist, did not follow in the model of sparkling technical perfection for which Mozart, who died only a few months before Beethoven’s arrival, was well remembered in Vienna. He was vastly more impetuous and less precise at the keyboard, as Harold Schonberg described him in his fascinating study of *The Great Pianists*: “[His playing] was overwhelming not so much because Beethoven was a great virtuoso (which he probably wasn’t), but because he had an ocean-like surge and depth that made all other playing sound like the trickle of a rivulet.... No piano was safe with Beethoven. There is plenty of evidence that Beethoven was a most lively figure at the keyboard, just as he was on the podium.... Czerny, who hailed Beethoven’s ‘titanic execution,’ apologizes for his messiness [i.e., snapping strings and breaking hammers] by saying that he demanded too much from the pianos then being made. Which is very true; and which is also a polite way of saying that Beethoven banged the hell out of the piano.”

Beethoven composed the first four of his five mature piano concertos for his own concerts. (Two juvenile essays in the genre are discounted in the numbering.) Both the *Concerto No. 1 in C Major* and the *Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major* were composed in 1795, the *Second* probably premiered at the Burgtheater on March 29th and the *First* at a concert under Joseph Haydn’s direction on December 18th; both works were revised before their publication in 1801.

Beethoven’s *C Major Concerto* sprang from the rich Viennese musical tradition of Haydn and Mozart, with which he was intimately acquainted: he had taken some composition lessons with Haydn soon after his arrival, and he had profound affection for and knowledge of Mozart’s work. At a performance of Mozart’s *C Minor Piano Concerto (K. 491)*, he whispered to his companion, John Cramer, “Cramer, Cramer! We shall never be able to do anything like that!”

The opening movement of the *First Piano Concerto* is indebted to Mozart for its handling of the concerto-sonata form, for its technique of orchestration, and for the manner in which piano and orchestra are integrated. Beethoven added to these quintessential qualities of the Classical concerto a wider-ranging harmony, a more openly virtuosic role for the soloist and a certain emotional weight characteristic of his large works. The second movement is a richly colored song with an important part for the solo clarinet. The rondo-finale is written in an infectious manner reminiscent of Haydn, brimming with high spirits and good humor.

**The score calls for flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani, and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.**

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

### SYMPHONY NO. 7 IN A MAJOR, OP. 92 (1813)

- First performed on December 8, 1813 in Vienna, under the composer’s direction.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on January 14, 1962 with Frank Noyes conducting. Six subsequent performances occurred, most recently on March 7 & 8, 2009 with Joseph Giunta conducting. (*Duration: ca. 36 minutes*)

In the autumn of 1813, Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, the inventor of the metronome, approached Beethoven with the proposal that the two organize a concert to benefit the soldiers wounded at the recent Battle of Hanau — with, perhaps, two or three repetitions of the concert to benefit themselves. Beethoven was eager to have his as-yet-unheard *A Major Symphony* of the preceding year performed, and thought the financial reward worth the trouble, so he agreed. The concert consisted of this “Entirely New Symphony” by Beethoven, marches by Dussek and Pleyel performed on a “Mechanical Trumpeter” fabricated by Mälzel, and an orchestral arrangement of *Wellington’s Victory*, a piece Beethoven had concocted the previous summer for yet another of Mälzel’s musical machines, the clangorous “Panharmonicon.” The evening was such a success that Beethoven’s first biographer, Anton Schindler, reported, “All persons, however they had previously dissented from his music, now agreed to award him his laurels.”

The orchestra for that important occasion included some of the most distinguished musicians and composers of the day: Spohr, Schuppanzigh, Dragonetti, Meyerbeer, Hummel and Salieri all lent their talents. Spohr, who played among the violins, left an account of Beethoven as conductor. “Beethoven had accustomed himself to indicate expression to the orchestra by all manner of singular bodily movements,” wrote Spohr. “So often as a *sforzando* [a sudden, strong attack] occurred, he thrust apart his arms, which he had previously crossed upon his breast. At *piano* [soft] he crouched down lower and lower as he desired the degree of softness. If a *crescendo* [gradually louder] then entered, he slowly rose again, and at the entrance of the *forte* [loud] jumped into the air. Sometimes, too, he unconsciously shouted to strengthen the *forte*.”

The *Seventh Symphony* is a magnificent creation in which Beethoven displayed several technical innovations that were to have a profound influence on the music of the 19th century: he expanded the scope of symphonic structure through the use of more distant tonal areas; he brought an unprecedented richness and range to the orchestral palette; and he gave a new awareness of rhythm as the vitalizing force in music. It is particularly the last of these characteristics that most immediately affects the listener, and to which commentators have consistently turned to explain the vibrant power of the work. Perhaps the most famous such observation about the *Seventh Symphony* is that of Richard Wagner, who called the work “the Apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect ... the loftiest deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal world of tone.” Couching his observation in less highfalutin language, John N. Burk believed that its rhythm gave this work a feeling of immense grandeur incommensurate with its relatively short length. “Beethoven,” Burk explained, “seems to have built up this impression by willfully driving a single rhythmic figure through each movement, until the music attains (particularly in the body of the first movement and in the *Finale*) a swift propulsion, an effect of cumulative growth which is akin to extraordinary size.”

A slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, opens the *Symphony*. This initial section employs two themes: the first, majestic and unadorned, is passed down through the winds while being punctuated by long, rising scales in the strings; the second is a graceful melody for oboe. The transition to the main part of the first movement is accomplished by the superbly controlled reiteration of a single pitch. This device not only connects the introduction with the exposition but also establishes the dactylic rhythm that dominates the movement.

The *Allegretto* scored such a success at its premiere that it was immediately encored, a phenomenon virtually unprecedented for a slow movement. Indeed, this music was so popular that it was used to replace the brief slow movement of the *Eighth Symphony* at several performances during Beethoven's lifetime. In form, the movement is a series of variations on the heartbeat rhythm of its opening measures. In spirit, however, it is more closely allied to the austere chaconne of the *Baroque* era than to the light, figural variations of *Classicism*.

The third movement, a study in contrasts of sonority and dynamics, is built on the formal model of the scherzo, but expanded to include a repetition of the horn-dominated *Trio* (Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo).

In the sonata-form finale, Beethoven not only produced music of virtually unmatched rhythmic energy ("a triumph of Bacchic fury," in the words of Sir Donald Tovey), but did it in such a manner as to exceed the climaxes of the earlier

movements and make it the goal toward which they had all been aimed. So intoxicating is this music that some of Beethoven's contemporaries were sure he had composed it in a drunken frenzy. An encounter with the *Seventh Symphony* is a heady experience. Klaus G. Roy, the distinguished musicologist and program annotator for The Cleveland Orchestra, wrote, "Many a listener has come away from a hearing of this *Symphony* in a state of being punch-drunk. Yet it is an intoxication without a hangover, a dope-like exhilaration without decadence." To which the composer's own words may be added. "I am Bacchus incarnate," boasted Beethoven, "appointed to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow.... He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world."

**The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and the usual strings.**