

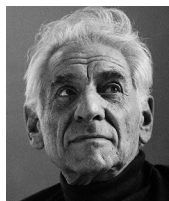
notes

September 22/23

SEASON DEBUT: BEETHOVEN & MAHLER'S 'TITAN'

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

30 SECOND NOTES: Leonard Bernstein would have turned 100 on August 25, 2018, and the musical world is celebrating that centenary with performances of compositions by America's most protean musician. The Des Moines Symphony features his music throughout the 2018-2019 season, beginning with the infectious *Candide Overture*. The concert continues with Beethoven's "*Emperor*" *Concerto*, featuring Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient Inon Barnatan, and concludes with Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 1*, about which he said, "My whole life is contained in it: I have set down there my experience and my suffering.... To write a symphony means, to me, to construct a world." 🎵



LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Born August 25, 1918 in Lawrence, Massachusetts; died October 14, 1990 in New York City.

OVERTURE TO *CANDIDE* (1956)

- First performed in a pre-Broadway tryout at Boston's Colonial Theatre on October 29, 1956; *Candide* opened at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York City on December 1, 1956.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on November 1, 1959 with Frank Noyes conducting. Six subsequent Masterworks performances occurred, most recently on February 21, 2015 with Joseph Giunta conducting. (*Duration: ca. 4 minutes*)

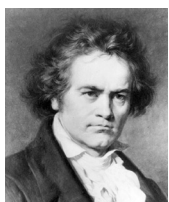
Lillian Hellman conceived a theater piece based on Voltaire's *Candide* as early as 1950, but it

was not until 1956 that the project materialized. She originally intended the work to be a play with incidental music, which she asked Leonard Bernstein to compose, but his enthusiasm for the subject was so great after re-reading Voltaire's novel that the venture swelled into a full-blown comic operetta; Tyrone Guthrie was enlisted as director and Richard Wilbur wrote most of the song lyrics. *Candide* was first seen in a pre-Broadway tryout at Boston's Colonial Theatre on October 29, 1956 (just days after Bernstein's appointment as co-music director of the New York Philharmonic had been announced for the following season), and opened at the Martin Beck Theatre in New York on December 1st.

The Overture to *Candide* was taken almost immediately into the concert hall — Bernstein conducted it with the New York Philharmonic only six weeks after the musical opened on Broadway — and it has remained one of the most popular curtain-raisers in the orchestral repertory. Its music, largely drawn from the

show, captures perfectly the wit, brilliance and slapstick tumult of Voltaire's novel. The group of first themes (the work is disposed, like many of Rossini's overtures, in sonatina form) comprises a boisterous fanfare, a quicksilver galop and a brass proclamation, used later in the show to accompany the destruction of Westphalia, the hero's home. Lyrical contrast is provided by a broad melody from the duet of Candide and his beloved Cunegonde, *Oh, Happy We*. These musical events are recounted, and the Overture ends with a whirling strain from Cunegonde's spectacular coloratura aria, *Glitter and Be Gay*.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tenor drum, triangle, glockenspiel, xylophone, harp 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. 5 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 73, "EMPEROR" (1811)

Orchestrated by Felix Weingartner (1862-1943) in 1896.

- First performed in Leipzig on November 28, 1811 with Johann Philipp Christian Schulz conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra and soloist Friedrich Schneider. (There may have been earlier performances, or private ones, but these are unconfirmed.)

- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on November 6, 1950 with Frank Noyes conducting and Claudio Arrau as soloist. Seven subsequent performances occurred, most recently on September 25 & 26, 2010 with Joseph Giunta conducting and Arnaldo Cohen as soloist.

(Duration: ca. 38 minutes)

The year 1809 was a difficult one for Vienna and for Beethoven. In May, Napoleon invaded the city with enough firepower to send the residents scurrying and Beethoven into the basement of his brother's house. The bombardment was close enough that he covered his sensitive ears with pillows to protect them from the concussion of the blasts. On July 29th, he wrote to the publisher Breitkopf und Härtel, "We have passed through a great deal of misery. I tell you that since May 4th, I have brought into the world little that is connected; only here and there a fragment. The whole course of events has affected me body and soul.... What a disturbing, wild life around me; nothing but drums, cannons, men, misery of all sorts." He bellowed his frustration at a French officer he chanced to meet: "If I were a general and knew as much about strategy as I do about counterpoint, I'd give you fellows something to think about." Austria's finances were in shambles, and the annual stipend Beethoven had been promised by several noblemen who supported his work was considerably reduced in value, placing him in a precarious pecuniary predicament. As a sturdy tree can root in flinty soil, however, a great musical work grew from these unpromising circumstances — by the end of that very year, 1809, Beethoven had completed his "*Emperor*" Concerto.

The sobriquet "Emperor" attached itself to the *E-flat Concerto* very early, though it was not of Beethoven's doing. If anything, he would have objected to the name. "Emperor" equaled

“Napoleon” for Beethoven, as for most Europeans of the time, and anyone familiar with the story of the *“Eroica” Symphony* will remember how that particular ruler had tumbled from the great composer’s esteem. “This man will trample the rights of men underfoot and become a greater tyrant than any other,” he rumbled to his young friend and pupil Ferdinand Ries. The *Concerto’s* name may have been tacked on by an early publisher or pianist because of the grand character of the work, or it may have originated with the purported exclamation during the premiere by a French officer at one particularly noble passage, “C’est l’Empereur!” The most likely explanation, however, and one ignored with a unanimity rare among musical scholars, was given by Anton Schindler, long-time friend and early biographer of Beethoven. The Viennese premiere, it seems, took place at a celebration of the Emperor’s birthday.

The *“Emperor”* is the largest in scale of all Beethoven’s concertos. It is also the last one, though he did considerable work on a sixth piano concerto in 1815 but never completed it. The *Fifth Concerto* is written in a virtuosic style that looks forward to the grand pianism of Liszt in its full chordal textures and wide dynamic range. Such prescience of piano technique is remarkable given that the modern, steel-frame concert grand was not perfected until 1825, and in this work, written sixteen years earlier, Beethoven envisioned possibilities offered only by this later, improved instrument.

The *Concerto* opens with broad chords for orchestra answered by piano before the main theme is announced by the violins. The following orchestral tutti embraces a rich variety of secondary themes leading to a repeat of all the material by the piano accompanied by the orchestra. A development ensues with “the fury of a hail-storm,” wrote the eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey. Following a

recapitulation of the themes and the sounding of a proper chord on which to launch a cadenza, Beethoven wrote into the piano part, “Do not play a cadenza, but begin immediately what follows.” At this point, he supplied a tiny, written-out solo passage that begins the coda. This being the first of his concertos that Beethoven himself would not play, he wanted to have more control over the finished product, so he prescribed exactly what the soloist was to do. With this novel device, he initiated the practice of completely writing out all solo passages that was to become the standard method used by most later composers in their concertos.

The second movement begins with a chorale for strings. Sir George Grove, founder of the renowned music encyclopedia that bears his name, dubbed this movement a sequence of “quasi-variations,” with the piano providing a coruscating filigree above the orchestral accompaniment. This *Adagio* leads directly into the finale, a vast rondo with sonata elements. The bounding ascent of the main theme is heard first from the soloist and then from the orchestra. Developmental episodes separate the returns of the theme. The closing pages include the magical sound of drum-taps accompanying the shimmering piano chords and scales, and a final brief romp to the finish.

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



GUSTAV MAHLER

**Born July 7, 1860 in
Kalischt, Bohemia;
died May 18, 1911 in
Vienna.**

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN D MAJOR, "TITAN" (1889; REV. 1896)

- First performed on November 20, 1889, conducted by the composer.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on October 17, 1970 with Willis Page conducting. Four subsequent performances occurred, most recently on October 25 & 26, 2008 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

(Duration: ca. 58 minutes)

Though he did not marry until 1902, Mahler had a healthy interest in the opposite sex, and at least three love affairs touch upon the *First Symphony*. In 1880, he conceived a short-lived but ferocious passion for Josephine Poisl, the daughter of the postmaster in his boyhood home of Iglau, and she inspired from him three songs and a cantata after Grimm, *Das klagende Lied* ("Song of Lamentation"), which contributed thematic fragments to the gestation of the *Symphony*. The second affair, which came early in 1884, was the spark that actually ignited the composition of the work. Johanne Richter possessed a numbing musical mediocrity alleviated by a pretty face, and it was because of an infatuation with this singer at the Kassel Opera, where Mahler was then conducting, that not only the *First Symphony* but also the *Songs of the Wayfarer* sprang to life. The third liaison, in 1887, came as the *Symphony* was nearing completion. Mahler revived and reworked an opera by Carl Maria von Weber called *Die drei Pintos* ("The Three Pintos," two being impostors of the title character) and was aided in the

venture by the grandson of that composer, also named Carl. During the almost daily contact with the Weber family necessitated by the preparation of the work, Mahler fell in love with Carl's wife, Marion. Mahler was serious enough to propose that he and Marion run away together, but at the last minute she had a sudden change of heart and left Mahler standing, quite literally, at the train station. The emotional turbulence of all these encounters found its way into the *First Symphony*, especially the *finale*, but, looking back in 1896, Mahler put these experiences into a better perspective. "The *Symphony*," he wrote, "begins where the love affair [with Johanne Richter] ends; it is based on the affair which preceded the *Symphony* in the emotional life of the composer. But the extrinsic experience became the occasion, not the message of the work."

The *Symphony* begins with an evocation of a verdant springtime filled with the natural call of the cuckoo (solo clarinet) and the man-made calls of the hunt (clarinets, then trumpets). The main theme, which enters softly in the cellos after the wonderfully descriptive introduction, is based on the second of the *Songs of a Wayfarer*, *Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld* ("I Crossed the Meadow this Morn"). This engaging, folk-like melody, with its characteristic interval of a descending fourth, runs through much of the *Symphony* to provide an aural link among its movements. The first movement is given over to this theme combined with the spring sounds of the introduction in a cheerful display of ebullient spirits into which creeps an occasional shudder of doubt.

The second movement, in sturdy triple meter, is a dressed-up version of the Austrian peasant dance known as the *Ländler*, a type and style that finds its way into most of Mahler's symphonies. The simple tonic-dominant accompaniment of the basses recalls the falling fourth of the opening movement, while the tune in the woodwinds resembles the *Wayfarer* song

itself. (Note particularly the little run up the scale.) The gentle trio, ushered in by solo horn, makes use of the string glissandos that were so integral a part of Mahler's orchestral technique.

The third movement begins and ends with a lugubrious, minor-mode transformation of the European folk song known most widely by its French title, *Frère Jacques*. It is heard initially in an eerie solo for muted string bass in its highest register, played above the tread of the timpani intoning the falling-fourth motive from the preceding movements. The middle of the movement contains a melody marked "*Mit Parodie*" (played "*col legno*" by the strings, i.e., tapping with the wood rather than the hair of the bow), and a simple, tender theme based on another melody from the *Wayfarer* songs, *Die zwei blauen Augen* ("The Two Blue Eyes"). The mock funeral march of this movement was inspired by a woodcut of Moritz von Schwind titled *How the Animals Bury the Hunter* from his *Munich Picture Book for Children*.

The finale, according to Bruno Walter, protégé and friend of the composer and himself a master conductor, is filled with "raging vehemence." The stormy character of the beginning is maintained for much of the movement. Throughout, themes from earlier movements are heard again, with the hunting calls of the opening introduction given special prominence. The tempest is finally blown away by a great blast from the horns ("Bells in the air!" entreats Mahler) to usher in the triumphant ending of the work, a grand affirmation of joyous celebration.

The score calls for two piccolos, four flutes, four oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, seven horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, harp and the usual strings.