



WELCOME

On behalf of everyone at The Royal Conservatory of Music, we welcome everyone visiting the TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning for the first time, as well as those of you returning for our 2020-21 concert season.

Since opening in September 2009, Koerner Hall has emerged as one of the greatest concert venues in the world today. Beloved for its acoustic excellence, it has become the venue of choice for many of the world's greatest performing artists. As COVID-19 struck the world and everything gradually stopped, we were devastated as we had to suspend the remainder of our 2019-20 concert season right before The Glenn Gould School's annual spring opera was about to open in March. We worked tirelessly to re-schedule most of the remaining concerts and are extremely grateful to everyone who chose to support our efforts by either keeping their tickets for future dates or donating the value of their tickets to us. We cannot thank you enough.

This season, we hope to bring you as many concerts as possible in Koerner Hall, Mazzoleni Concert Hall, and Temerty Theatre. We are following directions and recommendations from Ontario and Toronto Health officials, and we are adhering to health officials' maximum capacity and all recommended safety protocols, including masks and ensuring physical distancing. We thank you in advance for your trust and support, as well as understanding as programming will be shifting throughout the season based on this still changing situation.

Our diverse programming, featuring the world's very best artists and reflecting the rich diversity of our city, has brought together more than a million individuals from around the world in shared cultural experiences. It has enabled Canadian artists to launch international careers and has provided a home for many of Toronto's cultural organizations. Additionally, it has proven to be an invaluable training ground for Canada's next generation of performing artists, the gifted students of The Glenn Gould School and The Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy for Young Artists. One of the headlines in the *Independent* in the UK stated in July, "The arts are an essential service – as vital as health, education, defence," and we could not agree more.

We are committed to offering inspiring live music in a way that is safe and responsible. We hope you enjoy the performance and look forward to seeing you again throughout the season.

Dr. Peter Simon
Michael and Sonja Koerner President & CEO
The Royal Conservatory of Music

Mervon Mehta
Executive Director, Performing Arts
The Royal Conservatory of Music

Beethoven 250 Festival

ARC Ensemble (Artists of The Royal Conservatory)

Broadcast date Friday, March 12, 2021 at 8pm

Recorded in Koerner Hall on December 19, 2020

This is the 1,045th concert in Koerner Hall

ARC Ensemble (Artists of The Royal Conservatory)

Marie Bérard, violin

Erika Raum, violin

Steven Dann, viola

Julien Altmann, viola

Tom Wiebe, cello

Kevin Ahfat, piano

Monica Whicher, soprano

ALL LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN PROGRAM

Five Folk Song Arrangements: "Sunset" (from *25 Scottish Songs*) op. 108, no. 2

"Oh Thou Art the Lad of My Heart, Willy" (from *25 Scottish Songs*) op. 108, no. 11

"O Was Not I a Weary Wight!" (from *7 British Songs*) WoO 158b-3

"When My Hero in Court Appears" (from *Four English Songs*), WoO 157, no. 1

"Adieu My Lov'd Harp" (from *7 British Songs*), WoO 158b-1

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36 (arranged for piano trio by the composer)

- I. Adagio – Allegro con brio
- II. Larghetto quasi andante
- III. Scherzo, Trio
- IV. Allegro molto

String Quintet in C Major, op. 29

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio molto espressivo
- III. Scherzo, Allegro
- IV. Presto

The ARC Ensemble has long championed composers who were forgotten in the wake of political suppression, war, and the dislocation of exile. Beethoven, Classical music's most-performed composer, scarcely fits this mould, and some would argue that rather than celebrating the anniversary of his birth, our energies would be better spent commemorating (or introducing) artists whose works are less familiar. They might also suggest that round-number anniversaries, together with sesquicentennials and sestercentennials, have the net effect of shrinking the repertoire and concretizing a museum-culture, and that they are really no more than marketing opportunities. However, these objections fall away when the anniversary of a seminal figure such as Beethoven is acknowledged in a way that is both immersive and imaginative. For the present program, ARC explores some of his less familiar works, pieces that for various reasons — some obvious, others inexplicable — remain at the edge of his oeuvre.

I do wonder what Beethoven would make of his commemoration, were he able to visit the twenty-first century. How would he respond to his deification; to the thousands of recordings and performances; to the flocks of musicologists and historians picking endlessly over his sketchbooks and letters; and to the various groups — feminists, queer-theorists, German nationalists — who claim his works as expressions of their wildly disparate convictions. Although the full extent of his commercialization would take some time to fathom, I imagine he would feel flattered, vindicated perhaps, possibly even triumphant. But I am certain he would also be astonished and bewildered, even repelled.

How could he have ever imagined a technology that invisibly reproduced the performance of his music with near-perfect sonic integrity? Or a time when musicians from any country with an orchestra would be able to provide note-perfect performances of his every symphony, quartet, and sonata. And from memory. How would he react to our obsession with the musical past and our relative neglect of the musical present? What would he think of the ways in which music is now used: the rarity of domestic music-making, informal performance, and the composer-performer? Would he be able to make any sense of our atomised listening habits, of a society in which every member — while sitting, running, driving, or swimming, silent and separate, one from the other — is able to select

recordings from millions of options, each playlist individually determined, the sound injected directly into the ear by means of a small pebble?

Beethoven's folksong arrangements are part of a long tradition of domestic music-making and he composed a remarkable number of them, 179 in all, to mainly Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and English texts. They were commissioned by George Thomson of Edinburgh (1757–1851), a civil servant, a dedicated collector and publisher of Scottish songs, and a good friend of the poet Robert Burns, who supplied and corrected many of the lyrics that Thomson adopted. Ignaz Pleyel and Joseph Haydn had already provided a number of arrangements by the time Thomson approached Beethoven. His contributions were issued between 1809 and 1820, and Thomson had high hopes for their success. But sales were disappointing, and it is only during the last few decades, thanks to recordings by artists of the calibre of Sarah Walker, Janet Baker, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and Wolfgang Holzmair, that they have begun to acquire the currency they deserve.

While Beethoven's Second Symphony arrangement and the String Quintet, op. 29 demand musicians of considerable technical ability, the folksong arrangements were intended for amateurs, although their demands often exceeded the ability of contemporary players. Beethoven tartly resisted Thomson's pleas to simplify them: "I am not accustomed to retouching my compositions; I have never done so, certain of the truth that any partial change alters the character of the composition. I am sorry that you are the loser, but you cannot blame me, since it was up to you to make me better acquainted with the taste of your country and the little facility of your performers."

The settings work effectively without the violin and cello, but their addition provides the songs with a feeling of intimacy and authenticity (surprisingly perhaps), and together with the composer's ingenious introductions and postludes, these traditional songs are transformed into wonderfully effective concert fare. While Beethoven was generously rewarded for his arrangements, it is clear that he fully supported George Thomson's cultural initiative.

Before radio and recording, there were two ways of experiencing music: one either listened to a live performance or one played it oneself. To this end publishers regularly issued works in "reductions" for piano, often for four-hands, or in arrangements for chamber ensembles of various sizes and configurations. More often than not, these versions were made and published without the involvement, or even the permission, of their original creators. And while the piano trio arrangement of the Second Symphony, op. 36 is usually credited to Beethoven, the bulk of the work was almost certainly undertaken by his student and amanuensis Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven correcting and improving Ries's adaptation where he felt it necessary. Ries arranged a number of Beethoven's works without his input, notably the Third Symphony, op. 55 for Piano Quartet, and the Six String Quartets, op. 18 for Piano Trio. Ries himself was a gifted pianist and composer, and a substantial number of his own works have now been recorded.

Beethoven completed his Second Symphony in 1802 and premiered it, together with the Third Piano Concerto, op. 37 and the Oratorio, *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, op. 85, in April the following year — this behemoth of a concert also included his First Piano Concerto, op. 15. The Symphony's arrangement for piano trio was published by the Bureau des Arts et d'Industrie in 1806. Given our familiarity with Beethoven's symphonies, one might feel justified in asking why we need to hear a version whose original aims — to capitalize on Beethoven's name and to acquaint musicians with a well-received symphony — are no longer relevant. But the trio arrangement has several arguments in its favour. Firstly, when three musicians are charged with performing a work originally intended for orchestra, there is an inevitable sense of vulnerability and excitement. The string players, no longer anonymous members of a section, are now required to deliver their lines as soloists, while the pianist must provide the dynamic weight, as well as everything that cannot be accommodated by the violin and cello. These musical and technical demands can in themselves make for a compelling performance. But, more importantly, the chamber version forces one to listen to the symphony from a different perspective. Absent the elaborations of orchestration and instrumental contrast, we are able to get a closer look at the bricks and mortar of the work, and an effective arrangement, which the present piano trio certainly is, often yields something close to rediscovery.

Beethoven composed the C Major String Quintet, op. 29 in 1801, a year before the Second Symphony. It was issued in 1802, first by Breitkopf and Härtel, Leipzig, and very soon thereafter by the Viennese publishers Artaria and Mollo. This unauthorized version, "stolen by the arch-scoundrel Artaria," according to a letter from Beethoven to Breitkopf, prompted the composer to rail against the injury in a letter that appeared in the *Wiener Zeitung*: "[...] this edition is very faulty, incorrect, and utterly useless to players [...]" he complained. Such was the ungoverned and unprincipled world of nineteenth-century music-publishing, Beethoven's grievance dealing with the faults of the edition rather than any legal principle of ownership.

While the quintets of Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Schubert are now repertoire staples, Beethoven's Quintet, op. 29 is rarely programmed. Like Schubert's String Quintet, D 956, composed nearly 30 years later, this is the only string quintet that Beethoven actually conceived as such (the Quintet in C Minor, op. 104 is an arrangement of the early Piano Trio, op. 1, no. 3, while the Quintet in E flat, op. 4 is an arrangement of the Wind Octet, op. 103.) Nicknamed "Der Sturm" (The Storm) after its turbulent final movement, the quintet was composed when Beethoven's hearing, already compromised, was deteriorating. A year later he would write a letter to his brothers describing the despair, alienation, and isolation that his advancing deafness had precipitated. The letter, now known as the Heiligenstadt Testament (named after the town in which he was then living) was never sent. The Quintet's energy — its grand, questioning opening-movement, the serenading second, the emotionally enigmatic Scherzo, and the propulsive finale, with its incipient references to the Sixth Symphony — surely qualify the work for a more prominent place in the chamber repertoire.

- Simon Wynberg, 2020

TEXTS

1. "Sunset" (from *25 Scottish Songs*) op. 108, no. 2 Sir Walter Scott

The sun upon the Weirdlaw hill,
in Ettrick's vale is sinking sweet;
the westland wind is hush and still,
the lake lies sleeping at my feet.

Yet not the landscape to mine eyes
bears those bright hues that once it bore;
tho' Ev'ning, with her richest dye,
flames o'er the hills on Ettrick's shore.

With listless look along the plain,
I see Tweed's silver current glide,
And coldly mark the holy fane
Of Melrose rise in ruin'd pride.

The quiet lake, the balmy air,
The hill, the stream, the tower, the tree,
Are they still such as once they were,
Or is the dreary change in me?

Alas, the warp'd and broken board,
How can it bear the painter's dye?
The harp of strain'd and tuneless chord,
How to the minstrel's skill reply?

To aching eyes each landscape lowers,
To feverish pulse each gale blows chill:
And Araby's or Eden's bowers,
Were barren as this moorland hill.

2. "Oh Thou Art the Lad of My Heart, Willy" (from *25 Scottish Songs*) op. 108, no. 11 William Smyth

Oh! Thou art the lad of my heart, Willy,
There's love and there's life and glee,
There's a cheer in thy voice, and thy bounding step,
And there's bliss in thy blithesome e'e.
But, oh, how my heart was tried, Willy,
For little I thought to see,
That the lad who won the lasses all,
Would ever be won by me.

Adown this path we came, Willy,
T'was just at this hour of eve;
And will he or will he not, I thought,
My fluttering heart relieve?
So oft as he paused, as we saunter'd on,
T'was fear and hope and fear;
But here at the wood, as we parting stood,

T'was rapture his vows to hear!

Ah vows so soft thy vows, Willy!
Who would not, like me, be proud!
Sweet lark! with thy soaring echoing song,
Come down from thy rosy cloud.
Come down to thy nest, and tell thy mate,
But tell thy mate alone,
Thou hast seen a maid, whose heart of love,
Is merry and light as thine own.

3. “O Was Not I a Weary Wight! (Oh ono chri!)” (from *7 British Songs*) WoO 158b-3 **Anon**

O was not I a weary wight! Oh ono chri!
Maid, Wife and Widow in one night, oh ono chri!
When in my soft and yielding arms, oh ono chri!
When most I thought him free from harms, oh ono chri!

Even at the dead time of the night, oh ono chri,
They broke my bower, and flew my Knight, oh ono chri,
With ae lock o'his jet black hair, oh ono chri,
I'll tye my heart for ever mair, oh ono chri!

Nae fly-tongued youth, or flattering swain, oh ono chri,
Shall e'er untie this knot again, oh ono chri,
Thine still, dear youth, that heart shall be, oh ono chri,
Nor pant for aught save heaven and thee, oh ono chri!

4. “When My Hero in Court Appears” (from *Four English Songs*), WoO 157, no. 1 **John Gay**

When my Hero in court appears,
And stands arraign'd for his life;
Then think of poor Polly's tears;
For ah! Poor Polly's his wife.
Like the sailor he holds up his hand,
Distrest on the dashing wave.
To die a dry death at land
Is a bad a wat'ry grave:
And alas, poor Polly!
Alack and a-well a day!
Before I was in love,
Oh, ev'ry month was May.

5. “Adieu My Lov'd Harp” (from *7 British Songs*), WoO 158b-1 **Anon**

Adieu my lov'd harp, for no more shall the vale,
Re-echo thy notes as they float on the gale;
No more melting pity shall sigh o'er thy String;
Or love to thy tremblings so tenderly sing.

When battle's fell strife launch'd its thunders afar,
And valour's dark brow wore the honours of war;

'Twas thou breath'd the fame of the hero around,
And young emulation was wak'd by the sound.

Ye daughters of Erin soon comes the sad day,
When over the turf where I sleep ye shall say:
"Oh! Still is the song we repaid with a tear,
And silent the string that delighted the ear."

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