

Chamber Orchestra

Jeffery Meyer, conductor

Ford Hall
Saturday, April 21, 2012
8:15 p.m.



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Program

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55
"Eroica"

- I. Allegro con Brio
- II. Marcia funebre
- III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace
- IV. Finale. Allegro molto

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Biographies

Jeffery Meyer

Born in Chicago, Jeffery Meyer began his musical studies as a pianist, and shortly thereafter continued on to study composition and conducting. He is the Director of Orchestras at Ithaca College School of music, and since 2002 he has been the Artistic Director of the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic in St. Petersburg, Russia one of St. Petersburg's most innovative and progressive ensembles. He has appeared with orchestras in the United States and abroad, including ensembles such as the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, Philippine Philharmonic Orchestra, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra and the Orchestra Sinfonico "Haydn" di Bolzano e Trento. In recent concert seasons, he has been seen conducting, performing as piano soloist and chamber musician, as well as conducting from the keyboard in the United States, Canada, Russia, Italy, Spain, Germany and throughout Eastern and Southeastern Asia.

Called "one of the most interesting and creatively productive conductors working in St. Petersburg" by Sergei Slonimsky, he is an active participant in the music of our time, has collaborated with dozens of composers, and commissioned and premiered numerous new works. The New York Times described his performances with the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic in its United States debut at Symphony Space's 2010 "Wall-to-Wall, Behind the Wall" Festival in New York City as "impressive", "powerful", "splendid", and "blazing." His programming has been recognized with an ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming (with the Ithaca College Symphony Orchestra), as well as the Vytautas Marijosius Memorial Award for Programming. In 2007, he made his Glinka Hall conducting debut in the final concert of the 43rd St. Petersburg "Musical Spring" International Festival, featuring works by three of St. Petersburg's most prominent composers, and in 2009, he conducted the opening concert of the 14th International Musical Olympus Festival at the Hermitage Theatre and was recently invited back to perform in the 2011 festival. He has also been featured numerous times as both a conductor and pianist as part of the "Sound Ways" International New Music Festival in St. Petersburg, Russia. He has been distinguished in several international competitions (2008 Cadaqués Orchestra Conducting Competition, 2003 Vakhtang Jordania International Conducting Competition, 2003 Beethoven Sonata International Piano Competition, Memphis, Tennessee) and was a prizewinner in the 2008 X. International Conducting Competition "Antonio Pedrotti" and the 2011 American Prize in Conducting.

As a pianist, Meyer has been in residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts, and in residence at the Aspen Festival as part of the Furious Band. He performs frequently with percussionist Paul Vaillancourt as part of the piano-percussion duo Strike, which, in January 2010, released an album of world-premiere recordings of works written for the duo on Luminescence Records, Chicago. The duo has recently appeared in the Beijing Modern Festival and at the Tianjin Conservatory in China. He has been broadcast on CBC, has recorded and performed with the Philadelphia Virtuosi (Naxos), and has been heard as a

soloist at the Aspen Festival. During the 2001-2002 academic year he lived and studied in Berlin and Leipzig as the recipient of a DAAD grant in music, during which time he wrote incidental music to David Mamet's *Duck Variations*, which was performed throughout Berlin by the theater group Heimspieltheater.

Passionate about working with young musicians and music education, Meyer has judged competitions throughout the United States, including Alaska, as well as at the Hong Kong Schools Music Festival. He has given masterclasses throughout the United States as well as Canada and Asia, and recently led conducting masterclasses at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, China. He has served on the faculties of the Icicle Creek Music Center, Dorian Keyboard Festival, Opusfest Chamber Music Festival (Philippines), Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Marrowstone Music Festival, and the LSM Academy and Festival. In the summer of 2011, he returned to China as the guest conductor of the 2011 Beijing International Composition Workshop at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, China. Upcoming events include debuts with the Sichuan Philharmonic and Hubei Symphony Orchestra (China), the Thailand Philharmonic, and guest engagements with the Meridian Symphony orchestra and Stony Brook Symphony Orchestra.

Now in its second century, the Ithaca College School of Music affirms its fundamental belief that music and the arts are essential components of the human experience. The School of Music prepares students to be world-class professionals and the music leaders of tomorrow - ready to transform individuals and communities by advancing the art of music.

Ithaca College Chamber Orchestra

Violin I

Natalie Brandt, concertmaster
Misako Sakurai
Amy Schumann
Derek Voigt
Jason Kim
Sarah Hoag
Margaret Dagon
Timna Mayer

Violin II

Bryn Digney, principal
Jenna Trunk
Claire Wilcox
Samantha Spena
Elizabeth Benz
Kristin Bakkegard
Christopher Mattaliano
Jessica Chen

Viola

Maxwell Aleman, principal
Jacquelyn Timberlake
Kate Inie-Richards
Carly Rockenhauser
Daniel Martinez

Cello

Peter Volpert, principal
Katharine McShane
Thillman Benham
Madeline Docimo
Tristan Rais-Sherman

Bass

Ethan Jodziewicz, principal
Jordan Morton
Samuel Shuhan

Flute

Corinne Shirk, principal
Elizabeth Hamilton

Oboe

Alana Rosen, principal
Elizabeth Schmitt

Clarinet

Emily Dobmeier, principal
Alyssa Barna

Bassoon

Thomas Connors, principal
Ross Triner

Horn

Emma Stuaacher, principal
Colin Speirs
Elizabeth Meade
Robert Oldroyd, assistant

Trumpet

Jenna Veverka, principal
Aaron Scoccia

Timpani

Julia Ross, principal

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat, Op.55, “Eroica”

Though there is much myth and legend surrounding the composition and premiere of Beethoven’s Third Symphony, it is a piece of such daring originality, artistic quality and musical influence that the work’s own essence overshadows even the most tantalizing of historical tidbits.

It is true that Beethoven originally intended to dedicate the symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte, believing him to be the embodiment of liberty and humanism; it is also true that the composer violently rejected his former worship of Bonaparte after the latter declared himself Emperor of France. The title page, with the tyrant’s name scratched out so completely as to rip straight through the manuscript, still exists. Beethoven’s famous exclamation upon hearing the news of Napoleon’s ascendancy, “So he is no more than a common mortal! (or something to that effect)” is eclipsed in dramatic effect and sheer moral assurance by his latter quote, a favorite of this author: “It is a pity I do not understand the art of war as I do the art of music – I would conquer him.”

Aside from the epic length of the work, many of the formal parameters were in keeping with the traditions of the era: the work is scored for a conservative orchestra comprised of strings, pairs of woodwinds, trumpets and timpani. Beethoven does allow himself a third horn, and with this trio creates remarkable sonorities and excerpts which now have become emblematic of the symphony itself. It is cast in the traditional four-movement form, complete with an opening sonata allegro, a slow movement, a scherzo, and a concluding finale.

It is within these traditional forms that Beethoven makes his unique musical mark, beginning immediately in the opening bars – in place of the standard introduction, we are confronted only with two massive chords, exploding forth from the orchestra. Beethoven gets right to his first theme, a quasi-lyrical arpeggiated figure in the cellos, propelled forward by restless strings. When this theme flirts with chromaticism already in its fifth bar, we are prepared to expect constant variation and evolution of all material to come, regardless of how simple it may seem at first blush.

The principal theme is passed around the orchestra, from strings to winds, and then we are confronted with a series of off-beat accents which becomes so pervasive as to nearly obscure the meter altogether, except that the orchestra reconstitutes itself from this fray and emerges with a glorious affirmation of the theme before moving ahead again, to a series of intertwined solos. These lyrical snippets lead in turn to a tumultuous a raucous passage for the strings amid orchestral outbursts, all to them arrive at the secondary theme, a linear motive in the winds. Yet, amid all these dramatic and diverse changes, a certain unity is felt, and nothing seems extraneous.

As the exposition comes to a close, we are met with more crashing chords and off beat accents, nimble passagework, and crisp pianissimi. The development weaves sunny openness with murky chromaticism, introverted chamber

sections with stormy statements of the principal theme. In the midst of the fracas, a fugal section even tries to break out but is overcome by grand (and increasingly dissonant) tutti chords.

What happens next is completely unorthodox, yet perfectly organic – Beethoven introduces a third theme to his sonata form, a tortured soliloquy in a minor key. From this fog the long journey to the restatement of the principal theme begins (the famous “early entrance” of the second horn is legendary).

In typical Beethovenian fashion, the recapitulation is full of more surprises, as we hear it only stay in E-flat for a few bars before shifting key and waxing rhapsodic on its principal theme. After recapping the second theme as well, the movement seems on its way to wrap up before shockingly moving from E-flat directly to D-flat major, then C major. The coda, after touching again on the third theme, reaching E-flat minor but unable to escape its minor doldrums, begins a long string of choruses on the principal theme, each more voluminous and rich than the last, until the final assertive chords, which mirror how this entire journey began.

The second movement is an expansive Marcia Funibre, opening with lamenting strings marked *sotto voce*. A plaintive oboe echoes their sorrowful refrain, but the theme finds itself ending in a major key. Warm strings try to play a homey theme, but are constantly drawn back to the darkness of the minor key by agitated accents and tortured dissonance.

From the ashes of the funeral march theme, a new theme emerges – though in C major, and upwardly aspiring, there is something fatalistic even about these tones. Still, the orchestra will not abandon this music, and soon musters it to a rousing C major climax. But, searching strings pull us down, in a 2-octave descending gesture, to the dark tones of the funeral march yet again.

Then, an interesting aside – a full-blown fugue breaks out, and it is during this fugue itself that some commentators believe one can hear the changeover, metaphorically and metaphysically speaking, from Classicism to Romanticism. On the other side of this massive fugue lay stronger dissonances and richer textures for the theme we left behind. When things seem to be reaching their obvious conclusion, Beethoven, perhaps unable to let go, leads us instead to an enigmatic A-flat major section that, for a moment, contains entirely new music. A closing theme from before is heard – it starts on a unison C, embodying both limitless possibilities and tragic oblivion – by which way will we exit? We hear C major, leading to a minor chord, only to return to C major, which decays into C minor – then a string of searching phrases and fragments, cadencing ultimately with a solitary timpani stroke. In the closing bars, the funeral theme is deconstructed, heard in incongruous fragments, like the fading memory of one who has passed. Just as it is about to slip away, an orchestral outburst rages, perhaps, against the dying of the light, all before it fades forever.

To part these clouds, a scherzo scampers onto the scene, with an energetic chordal line in the strings marked “*sempre pianissimo e staccato*”. Playful woodwind solos lead to a tutti orchestral treatment of the rollicking tune – but the real hook is the innovative trio section, where Beethoven makes use of his three horns in grand fashion. A noble, yet still jolly choral phrase becomes diverse lines, culminating in a final cadence that spans three octaves. The orchestra returns with a second section of music, but it seems only an interlude before the next horn soli. Unexpected chromaticism and irregular phrase lengths abound in this light hearted scherzo, which ends rapidly after seeming to attempt a third trio section (a technique Beethoven would employ again in his Seventh Symphony).

The Finale opens with copious amounts of Sturm und Drang, only to turn on a dime for a series of disembodied pizzicati and woodwind chirps. It is to be a variation set with which Beethoven will conclude his symphony, but this is no mere formulaic finale, but a finely chiseled orchestral statement as complex and rewarding as the opening movement.

The opening variations take us to many places – from the first few “string quartet” variants, we are trained to expect the unexpected and never start listening too passively. Into this 18th-century drawing room, uninvited guests often burst, and despite all efforts at decorum, a jig may break out. The whole orchestra states a lively “Viennese” variation replete with soaring arpeggios, um-pah bass lines, and good natured charm.

Then, things get suddenly serious – a large cadence in a minor key leads to a fugue, the first of two in this movement. The theme emerges, as if injured from this encounter, in B minor. A scampering flute solo brings it back to major tonality, and all seems well – until the whole orchestra joins up for a rambunctious “Turkish” march.

This runs the whole works out of steam, and the theme must re-start itself. It takes a few attempts to find its bearings, and while it does the second fugal sections slips in, this time in major. It all leads to the climax statement of the theme, or so we think.

The movement grinds to a halt on an unresolved harmony, but we are rewarded with the most emotionally touching variation, presented as a woodwind quintet, in a much slower tempo. The strings follow their lead, and soon this slower tempo spins out an organic extension of the theme itself. It is in this central section that the true goal lies, and interesting commentary by the composer, perhaps. The slow section, after another characteristic “left-turn”, enters a disorienting harmonic world, which begins to dissolve into nothingness before the movement’s opening explosion returns to usher in a rigorous and joyous coda.

— *program notes by Patrick Valentino*