

Season 2015/2016

Friday, 13 May 2016

Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation, 7pm

Series: For Megalomaniacs

Conductor: **Daniel Raiskin**

Soloist: **Alexei Volodin**, piano

THE BEETHOVEN MARATHON

Ludwig van Beethoven: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 19

Allegro con brio

Adagio

Rondo – Molto allegro

Duration: approx. 28 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in C major, Op. 15

Allegro con brio

Largo

Rondo – Allegro

Duration: approx. 36 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37

Allegro con brio

Largo

Rondo – Allegro

Duration: approx. 34 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven: Concert for Piano and Orchestra No. 4 in G major, Op. 58

Allegro moderato
Andante con motto
Rondo (Vivace)

Duration: approx. 34 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven: Concert for Piano and Orchestra No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 (*Emperor*)

Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso
Rondo – Allegro ma non troppo

Duration: approx. 38 minutes

Concertmasters: **Tijana Milošević** and **Miroslav Pavlović**

Once Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart laid the foundations of piano concerto literature, this genre prospered and thrived towards the end of the 19th century. While early piano concertos (and other pieces, as well) of **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) showed evident influence of Haydn and Mozart, the distinctive features of his unique style became visible starting with his Piano Concerto No 3. In the subsequent compositions of his genre, the composer established a new link between the piano, as an individual instrument, and the orchestra, which is given a very significant role, one that goes beyond its prior function of accompaniment.

Although many music scholars argue that Ludwig van Beethoven's piano concertos are not the best his oeuvre has to offer, unlike his symphonies, piano sonatas and chamber music, these pieces of music speak volumes about his peculiar stylistic development, which led the history of music to the brink of Romanticism.

When he was only 14 years old, Beethoven made his first attempts at writing a piano concert in E-flat major, of which only the solo part has survived. Several years later, he returned to composing in the same genre, this time in D major, of which only the introductory part was preserved. Beethoven started composing his first complete piano concerto, marked as No 2 in B-flat major Op. 19, in 1795, but took three years to finalise it. **Piano Concerto No 2** was premiered by the composer himself, at Vienna's Burgtheater, and was dedicated to Carl Nicklas Edler von Nickelsberg. It was published in 1801, by which time he had also published the Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, although it had been composed after the B-flat concerto. This explains the mismatch between the numeration and the chronology of creation of these two pieces, which will be performed in the order in which they were composed in this concert.

Although Beethoven referred to his piece as not one of his best, it was very well received by the audience, the concerto to a publisher. However the work was quite successful, contributing to Beethoven's ascent as one of Vienna's new musical talents of the time.

The first movement is exemplary of obvious influences of Haydn's and Mozart's tradition, and the piece has a traditional three-movement structure. The second, slow movement includes some of the typical features of Beethoven's melodic style, whereas the third is constructed like a rondo-sonata, drawing inspiration from the Viennese folklore, through its rhythm rendering the onomatopoeic images of spring.

Piano Concerto No 1 in C major, Op. 15 was written in 1798 and premiered by Beethoven himself in Prague, as part of a tour on which he asserted himself as a piano virtuoso. The Concerto in C major was Beethoven's third attempt in this genre: after the concerto in E-flat major that was never published, he completed the concerto in B-flat major in 1794, while the concerto in C major was not created until four years later. However, since the Piano Concerto in C major, Op. 15 was the first one to be published, it was accordingly enumerated.

The piece was written in a classical three-movement concerto structure. Although it still does not abandon the framework of Haydn's or Mozart's tradition in terms of style or form, it includes elements of Beethoven's idiosyncratic artistic poetics, which will be his trademark in his subsequent piano concertos. The piano solo part is brilliant and virtuosic, and obviously written with the aim to showcase the performance skills of the young composer. Still, compared to his first concerto in E-flat major, in this one Beethoven succeeded in striking a much better balance between developing the thematic content and displaying the soloist's technical capabilities.

Piano Concerto No 3 in C minor, Op. 37 was created in 1800 and was not premiered until 5 April 1803, again with Beethoven himself playing the solo piano.

The piece belongs to Beethoven's early period, in which composed music of various profiles and genres. In the forms where he extensively relied on the tradition of his predecessors Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven was reluctant to experiment, whereas in the partly unexplored areas he often employed very bold techniques and composing solutions. That is why he used quite traditional concerto structures in his first three piano concertos. Another reason to do so was certainly the fact that he had a clear purpose in mind when he wrote the concertos – for his own virtuosic solo performances, which were thus prone to constant variations and improvisations by their composer and performer. Legend has it that the solo part was not even written down ahead of the premiere performance of the Concerto No. 3. The pages of the score were mostly empty, with a few *Egyptian hieroglyphs* scribbled down to serve as clues for Beethoven. It was only when a concerto had become played frequently enough and sufficiently known to the audience that Beethoven prepared it and approved its printing, turning his focus on writing the next one. This explains the higher Opus number of the Concerto No. 3 and the fact that it was published in 1804.

Although the piece was composed very conventionally and its musical output is indicative of Mozart's heritage, Beethoven demonstrates a mature mastership of form and concept. The first movement is a classical sonata form with orchestral and solo expositions, the development, recapitulation and the coda; the second movement has three parts and the third one is a rondo, the structure of which served as a strong model to Johannes Brahms for composing his Piano Concerto No 1.

Ludwig van Beethoven's last appearance as a soloist in front of the audience, at the *An der Wien* theatre in 1808, was for the performance of his **Piano Concerto No 4** in G major, Op. 58, written in 1805-1806. That was also the last piece that Beethoven wrote for himself, while the entire preparation for the concert showed signs of disaster – the rehearsals for the excessively long and exhausting programme were not well organised, the musicians were complaining of coldness in the hall, while there were also incidents in the auditorium. Besides the poor audience reception, Beethoven also sustained financial failure, and the concerto did not achieve popularity among performers and audiences until after the composer's death. As is the case with many

significant works of music literature, this piece was discovered later by young Felix Mendelssohn in 1836. It was the first case in music literature where the soloist started the concerto before the orchestra announced the thematic material in a separate exposition. The expected strength and stunning virtuosity were replaced by lyricism and intimate performance of the soloist, as well as of the orchestra. In contrast to the brilliant nature of the first three concertos and the grandiose sound of the final *Emperor Concerto*, the Fourth is characterised by solemn, but also delicate sound in which the piano and orchestra are partners on equal terms. The *discourse* between the orchestra and the soloist in the second movement has a chamber feel to it, and brings the thematic material through unison strings alternating with delicate, barely audible solo passages, which increase in volume towards the end of the movement. The finale in rondo form is a swirl of energy and dramaturgical culmination. Even so, its sound is dignified, without exaggerated emotions and in line with the atmosphere of the entire concerto.

Inspired by works of Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven developed the classical style to its ultimate limits and advanced into Romanticism, creating his own artistic poeticism. **Piano Concerto No 5** in E-flat major, Op. 73 belongs to his middle period, also known as “heroic” and considered as the most significant period of Beethoven’s career, as it includes some of his most important works: the Third through Eighth Symphonies, the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* piano sonatas, the opera *Fidelio*, the Violin Concerto and many other compositions. Piano Concerto No 5 was written between 1809 and 1811 in Vienna, and was dedicated to Archduke Rudolf, Beethoven's patron and pupil. The first performance took place in 1811 at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, with the soloist Friedrich Schneider, whereas the Vienna debut of this piece was played by Carl Czerny a year later. The epithet of *Emperor* for this concerto was not Beethoven's own but was coined by Johann Baptist Cramer, the English publisher of the concerto, who experienced the atmosphere of the piece as imperial. The three-movement form does not diverge from the traditional concerto form. The first movement has the central place in the cycle, owing to both its form and its duration, since it lasts about twenty minutes. Instead of a classical double exposition, its opening is dominated by a monumental introduction, which represents a significant step towards Romanticism – after each of the three orchestral chords, the soloist plays a short improvisation-like passage in the cadenza form, but written down in the notes. After the orchestral exposition, the solo exposition includes an innovation compared to Classicism, typical of all his piano concertos – the third theme that belongs solely to the solo instrument. The development of the material reaches the limits of its evolution through a variation technique, rich figurations and the harmonious flow. The slow movement brings in the expected contrast of dispositions, leading without interruption into the final movement in rondo form.

Asja Radonjić