

# Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony

**Friday, February 19, 2010** 8 pm

**Saturday, February 20, 2010** 8 pm

**Sunday, February 21, 2010** 2:30 pm

Jones Hall

**Hans Graf**, conductor

**Radu Lupu**, piano

**Rorem** Frolic

**Mendelssohn** Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt

(Calm Sea and Prosperous

Voyage), Opus 27

**Mozart** Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K.466

I Allegro

II Romance

III Allegro assai

**INTERMISSION**

**Beethoven** Symphony No. 6 in F major, Opus 68

(*Pastoral*)

I Awakening of cheerful feelings on arriving in the country:

Allegro non troppo

II Scene by the brook: Andante molto mosso

III Merry assembly of country folk: Allegro—

IV Thunderstorm: Allegro—

V Shepherd's song; Happy, grateful feelings after the storm:

Allegretto

## **FROLIC**

Ned Rorem

**Born:** Oct 23, 1923, Richmond, Indiana

**Work composed:** 1986

**Recording:** No commercial recording available

**Instrumentation:** three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano and strings

Of all the fanfares composed for the Texas and Houston sesquicentennial celebrations, Ned Rorem's *Frolic* may hold the record as the most humorous and the one that barely beat the deadline. Rorem's handwritten score indicates it was composed March 15-29, 1986, in New York and Nantucket. When finished, the score had to be rushed to Houston so that parts could be copied out for rehearsal before the April 12 premiere conducted by former music director Sergiu Comissiona.

Rorem may have been saluting Houston's Hispanic heritage with this morsel of symphonic jazz set to a

salsa beat. Once its jiggling rhythm has been set in motion by the percussion and strings, the winds and trumpets tickle the ear with a sassy Latin tune.

Roem's genius as an orchestrator comes to the fore as the percussive interludes alternate with refrains of this spicy melody, each time in a varied and increasingly colorful instrumental arrangement. The fun suddenly ends with a grand thump for the full orchestra as the piece reaches the two-minute, 15-second mark.

### **MEERESSTILLE und GLÜCKLICHE FAHRT (CALM SEA AND PROSPEROUS VOYAGE), OPUS 27**

Felix Mendelssohn

**Born:** Feb. 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany

**Died:** Nov 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany

**Work composed:** 1828; revised 1834

Mendelssohn's descriptive overture, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, stands alongside his earlier concert overture, "The Hebrides," and the preludes to Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* and Verdi's *Othello* as one of the great orchestral seascapes of 19th-century music.

Mendelssohn had two sources of inspiration for the piece: Goethe's two short poems, separately titled "Calm Sea" and "Prosperous Voyage," and the short choral/orchestral work Beethoven composed, combining the two texts into a single piece. Mendelssohn simulated several musical devices found in Beethoven's work, but he went a step beyond, omitting the text altogether and letting the orchestra convey Goethe's imagery by means of a programmatic tone poem.

Though the work has the outward appearance of a large sonata movement preceded by a lengthy slow introduction, Mendelssohn and his sister, Fanny, insisted that the near-static opening section (dominated by lower strings) conveyed the scene of a sailing ship becalmed on a windless ocean, while a long transition (signaled by the solo flute) portrayed the breeze finally catching the sails. Once the ship has gathered speed, long dissonant chords suggest images of lines straining and masts creaking as it progresses on its "prosperous voyage" to a welcoming timpani cannonade from shore batteries and a trumpet-trio reply from the ship's buglers as the vessel slides serenely into its destined port.

### **PIANO CONCERTO NO. 20 IN D MINOR, K.466**

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

**Born:** Jan 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

**Died:** Dec 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria

**Work composed:** 1785

**Recording:** Vladimir Ashkenazy, soloist and

conductor with the Philharmonia Orchestra (London/Decca)

**Instrumentation:** flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings

Minor keys are uncommon in Mozart's music, so they call attention to themselves when they appear in his major works. The D minor Piano Concerto is a striking example, not only because it is a great piece of music, but because it uses its dark, brooding tonality for purposes of high drama. Its stormy outbursts recall the hellish music at the end of *Don Giovanni*, yet its structure is intricate and thoughtfully balanced, and the concerto is rich in thematic material that is as subtle and sophisticated as anything Mozart composed.

First-hand information about the concerto comes from Mozart's father, Leopold, who traveled from Salzburg to Vienna in February 1785, to visit his son. The occasion coincided with an extraordinary series of six concerts that included the premieres of Mozart's D minor and C major (K.467) concertos, along with the celebrated "Dissonant" Quartet and several other works. Leopold Mozart's letters indicate his son wrote the concerto in less than a month and had no time to rehearse the third movement before the February 11 premiere because he was still supervising the copyists who were preparing its orchestral parts that afternoon. Nevertheless, the performance won praise, and Mozart played it at another concert four days later.

The orchestra opens the concerto with an undercurrent of unsettling syncopated rhythms and a little running figure in the bass line that suddenly bursts into a turbulent episode. The woodwinds introduce a quieter secondary theme in the related key of F major, but the frowning D minor tonality returns. When the piano begins the second exposition, it is with a new theme, preceding the restatement of all those previously heard. An extended development offers much figurative display in the solo part, culminating in a climactic cadenza.

The slow movement, a Romance full of lyrical melody, is set as a large threepart form whose central section brings on another stormy minor-mode interruption. The intricate closing rondo proceeds at a furious pace that is a challenge to soloist and orchestra alike.

## **SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN F MAJOR, OPUS 68 (PASTORAL )**

Ludwig van Beethoven

**Born:** Dec 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany

**Died:** Mar 27, 1827, Vienna, Austria

**Work composed:** 1808

**Recording:** Herbert von Karajan conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra (EMI Classics)

**Instrumentation:** piccolo, pairs of flutes, oboes,

clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets and trombones,  
timpani and strings

Heiligenstadt was not only the place where the 32-year-old Beethoven penned a despairing testament as he faced encroaching deafness.

Many years later, he revisited this village in the Viennese suburbs with his friend and biographer, Anton Schindler, and pointed out the spot where he had sketched out the "Scene at the Brook" from his famed *Pastoral* Symphony. Sketches for this gentle bucolic symphony were found as early as 1803, in the same Beethoven sketchbook as those containing ideas for the *Eroica* Symphony. But the bulk of the symphony was composed during 1808.

Set between the highly energized music of Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh symphonies, the *Pastoral* Symphony is as uncommon for its relaxed mood as for its foray into the field of descriptive "program" music. With subtitles attached to each movement reflecting the pleasures and terrors of nature and the simple joys of rural life, it was Beethoven's most overt piece of program music until he composed the ill-reputed *Wellington's Victory* four years later.

There is a curious precedent for Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony in a late 18th-century symphony, "A Musical Portrait of Nature," composed around 1784 by the minor German composer, Justin Heinrich Knecht.

It, too, contains subtitles preceding each movement and scholars speculate whether Beethoven may have known Knecht's work and adapted his ideas. Another "nature piece" scholars suspect Beethoven may have known is the piano fantasia, "Morning, Midday and Evening," composed by Mozart's friend and pupil, Franz Jacob Freistädler, in 1791. This piece contains a shepherd's yodeling song that may be the source of the cattle call Beethoven inserted into the finale of the *Pastoral* Symphony.

The truly innovative aspects of the *Pastoral* Symphony lie in its architecture. Its five-movement structure marks a significant break with the standard four-movement symphonic plan. Following his highly successful experiment in connecting the scherzo and finale of his Fifth Symphony, Beethoven connected the final three movements of this symphony into a continuous stream of music, abruptly interrupting the reprise of the Scherzo to drench his listeners in an orchestral gully-washer during the fourth-movement storm scene.

The symphony opens with a leisurely sonata movement, subtitled "Cheerful impressions upon arriving in the country." The second movement, "Scene at the Brook," finds the composer drinking in the sights and sounds of nature, to the point of

imitating bird calls in music. The Scherzo and Trio of the third movement (subtitled "Joyous Gathering of Country Folk,") represents the peasants dancing to some quite rustic tunes. The fourth-movement, "Storm Scene," is a worthy successor to the colorful storm music in the "Summer" section of Haydn's oratorio, *The Seasons*, and is a more powerful depiction of nature's fury than the storm music Rossini wrote for *The Barber of Seville* a decade later.

A sense of contentment returns in the gentle closing movement, "Shepherd's Song: Happy and Thankful Feelings after the Storm."

### **Music as Painting?**

We customarily ascribe the development of 19th century program music to the descriptive symphonies of Berlioz, the tone poems of Liszt and Strauss, the writings of Richard Wagner and the "leading motives" Wagner employed in the orchestral scores to his operas. But Mendelssohn scholar R. Larry Todd reminds us of its earlier manifestation in the concert overtures of Mendelssohn, some of Beethoven's piano sonatas and the *Pastoral* Symphony, and the theories of earlier German writers, notably Mendelssohn's acquaintance and sometime-collaborator, composer and esthetician, Adolf Bernhard Marx.

Mendelssohn's three descriptive overtures, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, and *The Hebrides*, were all originally composed in the 1820s and were published in a single volume during the following decade. Marx' treatise, *On Painting in Tonal Art (Über die Maleri in Tonkunst)* was published in 1828, immediately after the composition of *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, and Marx took note of the fact that Mendelssohn dispensed with Goethe's poetic texts and allowed music alone to describe situations and events mentioned in the poems.

Beethoven did not go quite so far in his *Pastoral* Symphony, since each of its movements contain textual subtitles guiding the listener toward the scenarios suggested by the music. But in deference to purists who argued that music by itself cannot engage in storytelling or visual representation, Beethoven warned his listeners that the movements of his symphony only expressed feelings, rather than painting musical pictures of the countryside.

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## Musician Biographies

**Hans Graf**, conductor

Known for his wide range of repertoire and creative programming, Hans Graf – the Houston Symphony’s 15th Music Director – is one of today’s most highly respected musicians. He began his tenure here on Opening Night of the 2001-2002 season.

Graf is a frequent guest with all the major North American orchestras. Recent guest engagements include appearances with The Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, the San Francisco, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Atlanta and National symphonies and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, among others. Over the past decade, he has developed a close relationship with the Boston Symphony and appears regularly with the orchestra during the subscription season and at the Tanglewood Music Festival. He made his Carnegie Hall debut with the Houston Symphony in January 2006 and returned in March 2007 to lead the Orchestra of St. Luke’s. He and the Houston Symphony present *The Planets—An HD Odyssey* at Carnegie Hall and in locations throughout Florida this month. Internationally, Graf conducts in the foremost concert halls and music festivals of Europe, Japan and Australia.

An experienced opera conductor, Graf first conducted the Vienna State Opera in 1981 and has since led productions in Berlin, Munich, Paris and Rome, including several world premieres. Recent engagements include *Parsifal* at the Zurich Opera and *Boris Godunov* at the Opera National du Rhin in Strasbourg.

Graf and the Houston Symphony have recorded Zemlinsky’s *Lyrical Symphony* and Berg’s *Three Pieces from Lyrical Suite* for Naxos and a disc of works by Bartok and Stravinsky for Koch International Classics. Other Graf recordings are on the EMI, Orfeo, CBC, Erato, Capriccio, JVC and BMG Arte Nova labels. His discography includes the works of Dutilleux, the complete symphonies of Mozart and Schubert, and the premiere recording of Zemlinsky’s opera *Es war einmal*.

Born in 1949 near Linz, Graf studied violin and piano as a child. He earned diplomas in piano and conducting from the Musikhochschule in Graz and continued his studies with Franco Ferrara, Sergiu Celibidache and Arvid Jansons. His international career was launched in 1979 when he was awarded first prize in the Karl Bohm Competition.

He has served as music director of the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra, the Calgary

Philharmonic and Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine.

In 2002, he was awarded the Chevalier de l'ordre de la Legion d'Honneur by the French government for championing French music around the world and, in 2007, the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria. Hans and Margarita Graf have homes in Salzburg and Houston. They have one daughter, Anna, who lives in Vienna.

### **Radu Lupu, piano**

Radu Lupu is considered one of the most important musicians of his generation and acknowledged as a leading interpreter of the works of Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart and Schubert.

Since winning the prestigious Van Cliburn (1966) and Leeds Piano Competitions (1969), he has regularly performed as soloist and recitalist in the musical capitals and major festivals of Europe and the United States.

His first major American appearances were in 1972 with the Cleveland Orchestra under Daniel Barenboim in New York and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra led by Carlo Maria Giulini. Concerts with the New York Philharmonic soon followed, and Lupu has since appeared with all of the foremost American orchestras. He last appeared with the Houston Symphony as part of the 2006 Mozart Festival, performing Piano Concerti Nos. 23 and 27 under the direction of Hans Graf.

Lupu has made more than 20 recordings for London/Decca, including the complete Beethoven concerti with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, the complete Mozart violin and piano sonatas with Szymon Goldberg and numerous solo recordings of Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert. His most recent London/Decca releases are of Schubert's Sonatas, D. 960 and 664, which won a Grammy® Award in 1995, and of Schumann's "Kinderszenen," "Kreisleriana" and "Humoresque," which won an Edison Award in 1995.

Born in Romania in 1945, Radu Lupu began studying the piano at age 6. He made his public debut with a complete program of his own music at 12. In 1961, he won a scholarship to the Moscow State Conservatory.

During his seven years at the Conservatory, he won first prize in the 1967 Enescu International

Competition in addition to the Van Cliburn and Leeds International competitions. In 1989, and again in 2006, he was awarded the prestigious "Abbiati" prize given by the Italian Critics' Association. He is the recipient of the 2006 Premio Internazionale Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli award.