



## Beethoven's Heroic Symphony

Two 21st-century works, inspired by Beethoven and Schubert, are heard on the first half of tonight's program. After intermission, Maestro Masur conducts a watershed work in the history of classical music – Beethoven's mighty Symphony No. 3.

### RODION SHCHEDRIN

Born 16 December 1932; Moscow, Russia

#### *Beethoven's Heiligenstädter Testament:* Symphonic Fragment for Orchestra

**Composed:** 2008

**First performance:** 18 December 2008; Munich, Germany

**Last MSO performance:** MSO premiere

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes; piccolo; 2 oboes; 2 clarinets; 2 bassoons;  
3 horns; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones; timpani; strings

**Approximate duration:** 12 minutes

The prolific, prize-winning Russian composer and virtuoso pianist Rodion Shchedrin was born into a musical family: his father taught music theory and composed. Shchedrin attended the Moscow Conservatory, where he studied piano and composition. His voluminous catalog of works includes seven operas, five ballets (he married a ballerina), works for chorus and orchestra, unaccompanied choral music, six piano concertos, solo piano music, chamber music, three symphonies, five concertos for orchestra, and a host of other symphonic works that includes concertos for violin, viola, cello, oboe, and trumpet.

In 2008, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and conductor Mariss Jansons commissioned several composers to write companion pieces for Beethoven's symphonies. Shchedrin's "assignment" was Symphony No. 3. As his starting point, he took the 1802 letter from Ludwig to his brothers Karl and Johann, which we now call the "Heiligenstadt Testament." (See page 51.)

Shchedrin's "symphonic fragment" traces Beethoven's dramatic journey from darkness to light, from depression to exhilaration. The latter-day composer limits the size of the ensemble to that of Beethoven's time, but exploits the tone colors and sound possibilities of a 21st-century orchestra. "The aggressive opening chords are striking, but are quickly replaced by mysterious music. What we hear suggests a muscular straining at every sinew to release reserves of pent-up energy. This is quite a remarkable work: weighty, powerful, and highly accessible." (Michael Cookson)

**Recommended recording:** Mariss Jansons, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra  
(BR Klassik) 

## OSVALDO GOLIJOV

Born 5 December 1960; La Plata, Argentina

### *She Was Here*

- Composed:** 2008  
**First performance:** 24 April 2008; Saint Paul, Minnesota  
**Last MSO performance:** MSO premiere  
**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (2nd doubling alto flute and piccolo); oboe; English horn; 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bassett horn and bass clarinet); 2 bassoons; 2 horns; 2 trumpets; trombone; percussion (crotales, suspended cymbals, tam tam, triangle, tuned water glasses); harp; celeste; strings  
**Approximate duration:** 14 minutes

In the course of his all-too-short life, Franz Schubert penned over 600 lieder. They range in duration from single-page masterpieces – such as “Wandrer's Nachtlied,” heard here – to quarter-hour, multi-movement *scenas*. Their topics encompass the whole of human emotions. All were scored for the simple combination of voice and piano, but across the past 200 years, other composers – including Berlioz, Brahms, Britten, Liszt, Offenbach, Reger, and Webern – have taken it upon themselves to orchestrate them.

To this list, we add Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov, who turned to Schubert's songs for solace following the death of a dear friend, the British film director Anthony Minghella (*The English Patient*, et al). The soprano Dawn Upshaw – whom Golijov has called his muse, and for whom he wrote the opera *Ainadama* and the song cycle *Ayre*, among others – selected a number of lieder for him to consider. He chose the slow ones. “A haunted landscape” is how the composer described this set of four songs – but one finds release, repose, and sweetness in their aching melancholy.

*She Was Here* takes its title from the third song. According to the composer, there is no narrative through-line. Schubert's timeless melodies remain unchanged as Golijov at times evokes the harmonic language of Wagner and Mahler, of Alban Berg and Philip Glass. In all, it is an affecting journey through solitude, sorrow, reminiscences, awe, and acceptance. Ms. Upshaw sang the premiere performance with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Douglas Boyd.

**Recommended recording:** To date, no commercial recording has been made. ☹

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Baptized 17 December 1770; Bonn, Germany

Died 26 March 1827; Vienna, Austria

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

- Composed:** 1804  
**First performance:** 7 April 1805; Vienna, Austria  
**Last MSO performance:** June 2016; Carlos Kalmar, conductor  
**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes; 2 oboes; 2 clarinets; 2 bassoons; 3 horns; 2 trumpets; timpani; strings  
**Approximate duration:** 47 minutes

Beethoven spent the summer of 1802 in the village of Heiligenstadt (now part of larger Vienna). It was a musically prolific time for him, but the 31-year-old master was already aware that his hearing was beginning to deteriorate. In October, as he prepared to return to central Vienna, he carefully wrote a document to his two brothers describing his depression, but declaring he had now rejected the idea of suicide. This “Heiligenstadt Testament” is a heartbreaking testimony to the despair that frequently overtook him during this period in his life.

From that low ebb of despondency, Beethoven effected a speedy recovery through hard work, churning out his oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* in early 1803. *Fidelio*, his only opera, was written in 1804-05. Between them came the Eroica ("Heroic") Symphony, an opus Beethoven scholar Joseph Kerman has called "a watershed work, one that marks a turning point in the history of modern music." Kerman goes on to explain that Beethoven was concerned not only with the musical and technical aspects of composition, but also with conveying his own spiritual journey and growth process. This "symphonic ideal," states Kerman, "Beethoven perfected at a stroke with his Third Symphony and further celebrated with his Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth. The forcefulness, expanded range, and evident radical intent of these works sets them apart from symphonies in the 18th-century tradition."

It is well known that Beethoven took Napoleon as his inspiration for the Symphony No. 3 and later was angered and disillusioned when the revolutionary hero turned despot and had himself crowned emperor. The "Bonaparte" Symphony then became the "Sinfonia Eroica." From our 21st-century vantage point, it is easy to declare Beethoven the true hero here.

The Third Symphony as a whole – and its first two movements in particular – was on a larger scale than any instrumental work the master had yet written; it was many years before he wrote another of such dimensions. Following two strong E-flat major chords, the cellos quietly sing the waltz-like melody that will provide Beethoven with much of the musical material for this movement. Typically, Classical-era symphonies have a central development section shorter than the opening exposition. Beethoven turns this around completely, expanding on his material at great length, taking the listener in unexpected directions. A weighty and protracted funeral march in C minor makes up the second movement. Musicologists have suggested that Beethoven was here influenced by French composers of the revolutionary era, as well as by the operas of Luigi Cherubini (Beethoven's favorite living composer) and Etienne Mehul. All is not gloomy in this movement, however: Listen for a lyrical interlude in C major that soon turns triumphant. And there's even a brief fugal section.

The scherzo's softly scampering staccato strings and jaunty woodwind melodies disperse all funereal thoughts. The bold trio – with fanfares played by three horns – stands in marked contrast. The scurrying then returns, and a short, intriguing coda ends the movement. The ingenious Finale is a set of variations based on a theme Beethoven had used in his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* and in the 15 Variations, Opus 35 ("Eroica Variations") for piano. The styles range from solemn to humorous and make use of both the major and minor modes. Listen for everything from imitative counterpoint to a swaying dance, from warlike passages to an ample hymn tune. In the splendid coda, jubilant salvos from the three horns bring this history-changing work to its "heroic" conclusion.

**Recommended recording:** Mariss Jansons, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (BR Klassik) 

*Program notes by J. Mark Baker.*