

Immortal Beethoven 16 & 17 January 2027

Born in Bonn, Germany, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) had hoped to study with Mozart in Vienna, but his plans changed when his mother's death and his father's alcoholism made it necessary for him to assume financial responsibility while still a teenager. However, at twenty-two he moved to Vienna, studied with Haydn (Mozart had died the previous year), and remained there until his death. He was well known as a virtuoso pianist before his increasing deafness around the age of thirty made it difficult for him to perform. Beethoven's performance as soloist at the 1808 premiere of Piano Concerto No. 4 was one of his last as a pianist. In addition to the concerto, the program included the Choral Fantasy, the premieres of the Symphonies No. 5 and No. 6, as well as solo works and excerpts of larger works. Can you imagine a twenty-first century audience sitting through a four-hour Beethoven concert as the Viennese public did that December 1808?

16 January 2027

Beethoven (1770–1827)	Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58 Allegro moderato Andante con moto Rondo (Vivace)
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Chin (b. 1961)	<i>Subito con forza</i>
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Beethoven	Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67 Allegro con brio Andante con moto Scherzo: Allegro Allegro
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Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4

It was customary for concertos to start with an orchestral exposition that states all the first-movement themes before the soloist enters and re-states the themes. Beethoven, ever the revolutionary, flaunts tradition by beginning the Fourth Concerto with a hymn-like passage played by the pianist; the orchestra repeats the chordal theme almost immediately but in a different key. A triadic secondary theme in dotted rhythm appears in the violins, imitated by oboe and then by flute. Along with the closing theme, these ideas are expanded, often by rhythmic variation. Throughout the concerto there are many solo piano passages of two-against-three notes, extended arpeggiations in the left hand, tricky passages of legato thirds, as well as double- and triple trills. In the middle of the Allegro moderato, an orchestral chord progression leads one to expect a cadenza, and the soloist begins the primary theme with passionate *fortissimo* chords, but then the orchestra reappears to play the theme while the pianist provides an exquisite accompaniment in the treble register. Later, a true cadenza allows the soloist to further expand on the themes while demonstrating her technical and artistic ability. Declamatory, unison strings play a dotted rhythm to begin the Andante con moto. The soloist quietly counters with reflective chords. A dialogue ensues between the lyrical piano part and the insistent orchestral theme, which foreshadows the fourth movement instrumental recitative in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1822–24). Beethoven indicates that the pianist should depress the *una corda* ("soft") pedal until the final measure of the movement, which segues immediately into the Rondo. The energetic rondo theme alternates between solo and orchestra. An especially lovely secondary episode contains

a sweet contrapuntal conversation between piano and winds that again foreshadows the Ninth. Beethoven has great fun altering the character of the main theme by transposing to various keys and providing variations on his idea. After another solo cadenza, the concerto ends with one last elated return to the primary theme.

Subito con forza

Unsuk Chin (b. 1961), a self-taught pianist, studied composition at Seoul National University in her native South Korea. A 1985 grant to study in Germany resulted in her working for three years with György Ligeti at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg. Now based in Germany, she credits such diverse composers as Bartók, Debussy, Webern, Xenakis, Stravinsky, and Ligeti as important influences in her compositional style. Chin's music has been performed all over the world by such eminent conductors as Gustavo Dudamel, Simon Rattle, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and Yaniv Dinur. Works include concertos for violin and for cello, opera, pieces for orchestra and voices, and electronic music. One interesting aspect of some of her vocal works is her use of anagrams, palindromes, and acrostics to inform her musical structure. Tonight's composition, *Subito con forza* (Suddenly with force), was commissioned by BBC Radio 3, the Kölner Philharmonie, and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Premiered by the latter ensemble in Amsterdam on 24 September 2020, the dedication reads, "On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth." Eerie *ppp* strings, harmonics in the violins (high overtones), sustained clarinet pitches, and intrusions from the piano and percussion, along with glimpses of Beethoven, create what could be a slasher movie soundtrack.

DID YOU KNOW? Sometimes Charles Schulz sketched actual excerpts of Beethoven's music for Schroeder to play in the Peanuts comic strip. He personally preferred the music of Brahms, but he thought that Beethoven was a funnier name

Beethoven's Symphony No. 5

Are there any more famous four notes in music than the opening of Beethoven's Fifth? Even if one doesn't hear the pitches (three repeated notes followed by a descending minor third), the rhythm alone (short-short-short-long) is instantly recognizable. After those first four notes are immediately repeated a step lower, Beethoven extends the idea and uses a horn call based on the motto to form the bridge to the more lyrical second theme, for which the four-note motto provides accompaniment. Finally, a very energetic closing theme involves multiple repetitions of the motto before the exposition is repeated. Note the effective use of silence and the dialogues between instruments. Beethoven increases the drama and tension with unexpected contrasts of dynamics. Two things you might not have previously paid attention to: (1) just as the recapitulation begins with the repeated four-note motto, there is an unexpected detour for a brief, poignant oboe solo; (2) the composer introduces an emphatic new theme in the expanded coda. The form of the Andante con moto is a double variation—two themes are varied through rhythmic modification, changes in harmony and instrumentation, and alternation of mode (major/minor). The first is a genteel theme for violas and cellos; the second theme is initially heard in clarinets, bassoons, and violins while lower strings provide a triplet accompaniment. The melody becomes a regal fanfare when the trumpets and horns take over. Listen carefully for the rhythmic four-note motto in the background. In the third movement, Scherzo: Allegro, instead of the courtly minuet and trio associated with Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven inserts a scherzo and trio (scherzo= Italian for "joke," suggesting a more light-hearted, less aristocratic movement). It begins with cellos and basses playing a "sneaky" *pianissimo* theme that outlines a minor chord. A secondary theme in the horns uses the short-short-short-long rhythm of the opening motto (old rhythm, new melody). Cellos and basses are featured again at the beginning of the trio section. When the scherzo

returns, the sneaky theme is now *pizzicato*; the horn motive is also transformed with quiet clarinets, oboe, and plucked violins. A truly stirring feature of this composition is Beethoven's segue to the finale; a sustained chord in the strings over regular timpani pulses unleashes an epic crescendo that bursts into the Allegro. Another thing to note in this perhaps too-familiar work is the repetition of the short-short-short-long theme from the scherzo; its hushed transformation is eerie, especially as it gives way to a climactic recapitulation of the triumphant first theme. The symphony is a victorious transcendence over darkness and despair.

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17 January 2027

Connesson (b. 1970)

Flammenschrift

Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73, "Emperor"
Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso
Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Beethoven

Symphony No. 7 in A Minor, Op. 92
Poco sostenuto-Vivace
Allegretto
Presto
Allegro con brio

French composer Guillaume Connesson (b. 1970) studied piano, conducting, music history, and theory at the Conservatoire National de Région de Boulogne-Billancourt. Influences include such disparate sources as Couperin, Ravel, Wagner, Stravinsky, and Messiaen as well as film composers Bernard Herrmann and John Williams. The title of tonight's work, *Flammenschrift*, is a term that originated with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Translated as "Flaming Writing" or "Letters of Fire," the composition reflects the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) associated with some of Beethoven's compositions. Sudden outbursts and juxtapositions of dynamics along with rhythmic energy create a captivating concert opener. Connesson explains his compositional motivation: "I wanted to compose a work with a fierceness that would draw a psychological portrait of Beethoven and, more generally, pay homage to the music of Germany. My portrait of Beethoven is that of a man of great anger, seething and impetuous, whose inner violence transpires in numerous works of music.... To pay homage to him, I use the same instrumental nomenclature as his Fifth Symphony but also make use of opposing factions (woodwinds versus strings), and above all rhythmical writing with numerous allusions to his works. But more generally, it is to German music in its entirety that I wanted to pay tribute with the veiled references to the compositions of Brahms and Richard Strauss at the end of the piece. . . Two themes of furious character are stated in the opening pages, while a third, less tense at the beginning (clarinets and bassoons) undergoes a great number of transformations. A fourth, more lyrical theme completes the material of the exposition. Then comes a long development, and the four themes are transmuted, recalling the sudden emergence of the major mode in the finale of Beethoven's Fifth. Following the drama comes a dance of joy." *Flammenschrift* premiered in Paris in 2012.

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor"

During a time in 1809 when Vienna was under siege and then was subsequently occupied by Napoleon's forces, Beethoven began composing what turned out to be his final piano concerto. Scholars agree that its nickname, "Emperor," did not originate with the composer. You may recall the story of Beethoven crossing out the dedication to Napoleon on his Third Symphony, *Eroica*, when the latter declared himself emperor in 1804. The premiere of the Emperor Concerto, written in the same key as *Eroica*, was delayed because of the political unrest but ultimately took place in Leipzig in 1811 with Friedrich Schneider as pianist. Beethoven's own pupil, Carl Czerny, played the Vienna premiere in 1812. (Yes, this is the same Czerny whose seemingly infinite technical exercise books have tortured every piano student for the last two centuries.) Single dramatic orchestral chords interspersed with pianistic ramblings across the span of the keyboard lead us into the initial majestic theme of the Allegro. Beethoven's gift for expanding themes is evident in the inventive ways that he plays with this primary theme, whose declamatory chords and syncopations contrast with a whimsical secondary idea that is also treated to the composer's genius for development. Near the end of the first movement, a very brief cadenza for the pianist turns into a sweet duet with the French horn, and the Allegro ends with a sense of optimism. The charming and peaceful Adagio begins with a muted orchestral theme that is later imitated by the soloist. Sluggish changes in the harmonic progression contribute to a sense of timelessness. It is hard to imagine that such serenity was created in the midst of the upheaval that Vienna and Beethoven experienced during the summer of 1809, part of which he spent in an underground shelter—proof that there can be inner calm despite outer chaos and war. A sustained horn pitch segues directly into the Rondo with the soloist playing hesitant chords, as if the pianist is improvising, trying out an idea before deciding if it will work. Later the orchestra plays those same tentative chords in the background as the soloist plays an extended trill. An ebullient mood informs the finale of the "Emperor" Concerto as once again Beethoven finds joy and transcendence despite personal circumstances or the social or political climate.

Symphony No. 7 in A Minor, Op. 92

Sketches for Symphony No. 7 date to 1811 when the composer was still searching for cures and "taking the waters" at Teplitz, a Bohemian spa. The work was well received at its December 1813 premiere. What is it about this symphony that is so enthralling? Is it the way the first theme in the oboe, immediately imitated by the flute, emerges from a forte chord played by the whole orchestra? The contrasts in volume and timbre are striking. Then there is the energy generated by the detached scales that start in the lower register and ascend repeatedly through various instruments. Also memorable is the sweet secondary theme played by the woodwinds, undergirded by repeated notes that eventually lead to the important dotted rhythm pattern on a single pitch that distinguishes the Vivace, "the movement proper." Yes! This wealth in timbre, dynamics, and thematic ideas, as well as the motific germ of a repeated pitch/rhythm occurs in a three-and-a-half-minute introduction! In the exuberant Vivace, Beethoven continues to surprise us with dialogues between various instruments as well as his creative use of rhythm as a thematic element. Dynamic contrasts that include extended crescendos, often punctuated by timpani, as well as *sforzando* (suddenly loud) chords, make the silences even more effective. Beethoven often reveals more in his silences than others express with their notes. The perennially popular Allegretto features a distinctive rhythm of long—short—short—long—long in the low strings. Although it begins in A minor and quickly introduces a solemn countermelody in the violas, the

second movement is not melancholic. As the two different themes interweave, the increased levels of dynamics and instrumentation are richly satisfying. A contrasting middle section in the major mode lends an air of optimism even as the basses continue an octave repetition of the long-short-short-long motive. Polyphony of the most delicious sort characterizes the ending of the movement. Presto provides the “scherzo” element of humor in this symphony with its lighthearted, staccato passages. A slightly slower trio section features the horns in a dignified theme that contrasts with the rollicking main section. Scherzo movements generally appear in A B A format, scherzo-trio-scherzo, but Beethoven extends this third movement to include an additional appearance of each section, A B A B A. In a brief coda, he further teases his listeners with a third entrance of the horn theme, but this is abruptly silenced by *fortissimo* chords, making way for the non-stop action of the fourth movement. The Allegro con brio lives up to its tempo marking —fast with brilliance. There are occasional passages of reduced activity where the woodwinds seem to momentarily encourage a slower meditative state, but the rest of the orchestra rushes headlong back into the frenzy. Rapidly-tongued wind passages, flurries of strings, and syncopated timpani accompaniment propel us to the end of the symphony. One understands why Richard Wagner called this music “the apotheosis of the dance.”

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DID YOU KNOW? At the premiere of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony in 1813, the audience demanded an encore of the second movement