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SEASON 59.5

The TBSO Presents Simply Beethoven

April 9, 2021 – 8:30 p.m.

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Simply Beethoven

April 9, 2021 8:30 p.m.



Duo for Two Flutes in G major

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro con brio
Minuetto quasi Allegretto

Penelope Clarke and Doris Dungan, flute

Variations on "La ci darem la mano"

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Colleen Kennedy and Gwendolyn Buttemer, oboe;
Kristy Tucker, bassoon

String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 74 "The Harp"

Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Poco adagio - Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto
Allegretto con variazioni

Kathlyn Stevens and Madonna Lee, violin; Patrick Horn, viola;
Daniel Parker, cello



Programme Notes

Duo for two flutes in G major, WoO 26

Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Composed: 1792

First published: Berlin, 1901

Length: About 6 minutes

This charming duet is the first of Beethoven's chamber music not to include the piano and the last piece he wrote before moving to Vienna from his birthplace, Bonn. Beethoven suppressed its publication during his lifetime (hence the WoO number), but the autograph has survived. The dedication, "for friend Degenhart", indicates it was written for a law-student who was among Beethoven's close circle of friends and it is believed that the piece may have been a commission or a gift.

The Duo is in two short movements. The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, is in a three-part form. The opening is light and playful with the flutes closely intertwined, the middle shifts to a more graceful minor mode, and then the opening playfulness returns. The second movement, *Minuetto quasi Allegretto*, is also light, but more dance-like, in triple-time, featuring a minuet, a trio and a return to the opening music. Beethoven's domestic side is on show here, with communal music making the aim. It's not surprising that this piece is often played by teachers with their students during lessons, as a treat.

Variations on "La ci darem la mano" from Mozart's Don Giovanni, WoO 28

Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1795

First performance: 23 December 1797 in Vienna

First published: Leipzig, 1914

Length: About 10 minutes

In 1787, at the age of 16, Beethoven took a two-week journey from Bonn to the great musical capital of Vienna, where he was introduced and even got to play for Mozart, who after hearing him perform some flashy pieces on the piano, asked the young man to improvise on a theme chosen for him. When the improvisation ended, Mozart apparently said, "Keep your eyes on him – someday he'll give the world something to talk about." High praise, indeed! During this visit, Beethoven heard Mozart perform and might have had some composition lessons with the great musician who was in the midst of composing his opera, Don Giovanni.

Within a year of the premiere of Don Giovanni, Vienna's star oboist Joseph Triebensee produced a version of the opera for wind octet consisting of almost a third of the music. In the 18th century, composers arranged popular arias from their operas for smaller instrumental ensembles, much to the delight of their patrons. Often scored for woodwinds, these arrangements were performed at social occasions, whether indoor or outside in good weather. Beethoven was a great admirer of Mozart and took advantage of this practice in the mid-1790's, choosing to concentrate on a single duet from the opera and scoring the piece for two oboes and English horn. Tonight, we present the piece for two oboes and bassoon. The theme is politely stated at the beginning and there follows 8 variations and a coda to end. Notably, Variation 2 gives a workout for the bassoon with a very busy part in triplets; Variation 5 has a flurry of notes for the first oboe and is a real exercise in breath control; Variation 8 is flowing with a challenging accompaniment in the second oboe and the Coda features a jaunty fugue that fades to a graceful and thoughtful ending.



String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 74 “The Harp”

Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1809

Dedicated to: Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz

Length: About 32 minutes

This string quartet was written at a time of great emotional intensity for Beethoven both in his personal and professional life. In mid-May 1809 Napoleon's troops bombarded and then occupied Vienna. According to a friend, on the nights of the heaviest bombardment, the composer sought refuge in his brother Carl's cellar, covering his head with a pillow to protect his weak hearing. During the weeks of occupation, he and his fellow citizens suffered great hardships. Beethoven was despondent. His sources of income were cut off, his patrons had fled the city and his favourite parks were used as military camps. Eventually, he took refuge at the spa town of Baden, 15 miles from Vienna, where this quartet was written. However, composing did not come easily. According to his letters, Beethoven found it very difficult to compose under wartime conditions and found himself lacking the incentive to break new ground or scale new heights, so this mainly easy-going quartet was the result.

The “Harp” quartet takes its nickname from two passages in the first movement in which pizzicato arpeggios ascend through the cello, viola and 2nd violin. The first passage leads from the middle (development section) to the recapitulation of the opening material, and the other underpins the closing music.

The first movement begins with a hushed, gently dissonant introduction that generates a sense of mystery and suspense. The *Allegro* that follows has a carefree mood. Of note is the virtuosic passage for the first violin that overlays the second harping episode towards the end.

In the second movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, the music takes on added expressiveness featuring beautiful, spacious melodies with exquisite ornamentation.

The third movement, *Presto*, is strong, vigorous and full of hammering figures and driving scale passages. It has been compared to the Scherzo from Symphony No. 5 because of a similar rhythmic motif and long coda leading without pause to the finale. But instead of a finale with fireworks, Beethoven offers a theme with variations.

The last movement opening theme is graceful, and the following six variations pursue it through varied rhythmic twists. Interestingly, the odd numbered variations are strong and active, while the even numbered variations are gentle and lyrical. The final section or coda steps up the pace, leading to a brilliant conclusion.



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