

Program Notes Olympia Symphony Orchestra

Ludwig van Beethoven: Egmont Overture (8 mins)

What a pleasure to contemplate and perform the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, a faulted (human!) genius whose individuality, passion and daring changed the course of music history, whose greatness still keeps him a household name and symbol of music at large 195 years after his death, and whose commitment to ideals of equality for all remains as relevant and inspiring today as ever.

The Egmont Overture is quintessential Beethoven, music imbued with stunning power, heart-wrenching drama, and such quality that it has been an audience favorite since its premier in 1810. Count Egmont (1522-1568) was a leading Netherlandic nobleman who took a heroic stand against oppression and it resulted in his execution; he did not flee when given the chance to save himself, and he faced his death with such dignity that it inspired widespread protests against Spanish rule in the Netherlands, further spreading the resistance movement at large. Goethe wrote a play in 1788 celebrating Egmont's commitment to the ideals of liberty, and Beethoven happily accepted an invitation to write incidental music to accompany a revival of the play given it aligned so well with his own political ideals.

The music begins with a representation of oppression through ferociously stark chords, showcasing Beethoven's ability to create meaning and discourse through bare musical material. The opening chord progression leads to a lamenting motive passed through the woodwinds, and the ensuing musical journey leads us through vivid scenes full of intense rhythmic vitality and singing melodies. The weight and struggles are overcome by the light and power of virtue, culminating in a glorious and joyful finale.

Astor Piazzolla: Estaciones Porteñas (29 mins)

The famous tango composer Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) is an example of how brilliant and new possibilities can arise from thinking outside the proverbial box. Born in Argentina to Italian parents then raised in New York City and studying for a time in Paris, Piazzolla initially struggled to reconcile his love for very different types of music. With tango, jazz, and Classical styles all having their own rules and traditions, the young performer and composer at first explored his identity within each style separately. The inevitable cross-pollination of influences meant he was not accepted by any of the establishments, and Piazzolla only found lasting success when he embraced his unique voice and dared to create a new style of music.

The Estaciones Porteñas, which translates as the Seasons of Buenos Aires, is a set of four pieces that Piazzolla wrote separately but occasionally performed together once all four were completed. They were originally written for his quintet which consisted of violin, piano, electric guitar, double bass and Piazzolla himself on the bandoneon, with each player also improvising percussive effects on their instruments. True to the spirit of diversity in Piazzolla's own life, the

version being performed by the OSO today is an arrangement by the composer Leonid Desyatnikov for solo violin and string orchestra which translates much of the sound effects and gritty spirit of the original through special string techniques. The arranger also includes quotes from Vivaldi's famous Four Seasons, so have fun seeing if you can find the quotes from music you may already know! Interestingly Desyatnikov referenced the different hemispheres by including music of opposite seasons in the arrangements - for example the descending violin motive representing a storm in Vivaldi's Summer is quoted in the Winter movement of the Piazzolla, and several well-known quotes of Vivaldi's Winter feature in Piazzolla's Summer. This music is an international affair through and through!

César Franck: Symphony in D minor (40 mins)

César Franck (1822-1890) was known as a devout man with "utmost humility, simplicity, reverence and industry", whose musical legacy has him regarded as among the finest of French composers. Born 200 years ago in present-day Belgium, his childhood was a difficult one due to his overbearing father's dreams of fame and wealth through his son becoming a famous performer and composer. While Franck's talent as a performer was recognised, the venture was ultimately a failure and César had to free himself from his abusive father by leaving home only with what he could carry. He began a humble life of teaching and playing organ in various church positions in Paris, and over the course of his life he became increasingly respected for his skill, particularly in improvisation and later in composition. In the 1880's he produced a number of works that are staples of the repertoire, including the Symphony in D minor, completed in 1888 and premiered in 1889 - the same year as the opening of the Eiffel Tower. Louis Vierne wrote in his memoirs that Franck showed a "constant concern for the dignity of his art, for the nobility of his mission, and for the fervent sincerity of his sermon in sound".

Franck was a great admirer of Beethoven, whose influence can be felt in the dramatic and expressive elements of the symphony. Franck had a thoroughly Romantic spirit, using beautiful melodies, distant modulations, and a cyclic structure, meaning musical motifs are repeated and transformed throughout the 3 movements of the symphony. His use of the English Horn (a lower-sounding member of the oboe family) was considered novel and controversial at the time, and it features a large brass section with two cornets being added to the traditional pair of trumpets, making for a very powerful sound. The talent and artistry of the OSO will be on full display bringing a dramatic and celebratory close to a triumphant season!