

Tampa Bay Times Masterworks

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3

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ORLANDO JACINTO GARCIA (b. 1954) **the impending silence (*el silencio inminente*)**

the impending silence was commissioned by The Florida Orchestra and the School of Music at Florida International University and written for The Florida Orchestra for performance during their 2019/2020 season that celebrates the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. The title is a reference to Beethoven's loss of hearing and to the composer's ongoing interest in the exploration of sound and its progression towards silence, a phenomenon somewhat analogous to what Beethoven was experiencing. In the piece, Garcia imagines how impending deafness would impact Beethoven's sonic palette if he were alive today and working with the sonic possibilities that surround us. Garcia explores harmonic fragments that are all somehow related but often fleeting and isolated. These include receding sonic explosions throughout the work. The composer's musical gestures depict what Beethoven might have encountered emotionally and physically if he were composing today and dealing with his impending silent world.

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (1844-1908) **THE GOLDEN COCKEREL (INTRODUCTION AND WEDDING MARCH)** **Duration: ca. 9 minutes**

Some composers excel at crafting tunes, while others are rhythmic innovators. Then there are those with a knack for lining up all of an orchestra's moving parts. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov had this gift, a master orchestrator who gave us works of rich, opulent coloring and Oriental exoticism, notably *Scheherazade*, the *Russian Easter Festival Overture*, and *Capriccio Espagnol*. And let's not forget his most famous nugget, *Flight of the Bumblebee*, which might pop up as an encore at your next piano recital.

Rimsky-Korsakov was a member of The Mighty Five, a group of Russian composers that included Modest Mussorgsky, Cesar Cui, Alexander Borodin, and Mily Balakirev. Their aim was a Russian nationalist tradition in music, free of the influence of Germany, France and Italy. Rimsky-Korsakov, however, was frustrated by the inconsistent skills of his friends, and was not shy in dabbling in or "correcting" their uneven or incomplete works. His fingerprints, for example, are all over Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* and *Boris Godunov*, and Borodin's *Prince Igor*. Alert listeners can hear his influence in the early compositions of two of his most famous pupils, Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

After attending the first Russian performances of Wagner's Ring cycle, Rimsky-Korsakov devoted himself to writing a dozen operas, the last being *The Golden Cockerel*. Composed in 1907 and based on a satirical poem by Pushkin, the opera involves a magic bird that sings of peace in good times and nasty things in bad times. Censors and Russian authorities saw the opera

as an insult to the state and halted productions. The first public performance was given a year after Rimsky-Korsakov's death.

Tonight you will hear the composer's concert arrangement of two short sections from the opera, the *Introduction* and *Wedding March*. The first opens with a piercing trumpet call, followed by a mysterious, whirling theme in the low strings that sets up an exotic tune from the clarinet. The music slows almost to a dirge, with plucked strings suggesting something new about to happen. This gives way to the procession, a lighthearted romp that builds a head of steam and turns into a surreal march not unlike Ravel's *La Valse*.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
PIANO CONCERTO NO. 3 IN C MINOR, OP. 37
Duration: ca. 34 minutes

Thirty-five years ago, before a performance at the University of Tampa's McKay Auditorium, Byron Janis sat down to talk about playing Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto*. Janis was soloist with the Florida Gulf Coast Symphony – now The Florida Orchestra – and had performed the work countless times over his career. He knew it from the heart, and never tired of its rumble and wonder.

“It's really the first concerto where Beethoven shakes his fist at the world,” Janis said in an interview for the *Tampa Tribune*. “It's when he leaves Mozart behind and becomes Beethoven.”

Those words stuck. Here is music of an awakening giant, a journey before him as he steps from his youthful Viennese past into uncharted territory he would view in the light of the heroic ideal. It also would reveal much about Beethoven's power in creating mood through key relationships.

“Beethoven in C minor has come to symbolize his artistic character,” writes pianist Charles Rosen, author of *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion*. “In every case, it reveals Beethoven as a Hero. C minor does not show Beethoven at his most subtle, but it does give him to us in his most extrovert form, where he seems to be most impatient of any compromise.”

What might be most remarkable about the *Third Piano Concerto* is the context in which it was composed. By 1800, the 30-year-old composer began to notice problems with his hearing and, realizing his condition was both serious and particularly cruel, given his art, he wrote to a friend: “I must confess that I am living a miserable life. For almost two years I have ceased to attend any social functions, just because I find it impossible to say to people: I am deaf. If I had any other profession it would be easier, but in my profession it is a terrible handicap.”

Beethoven revered Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 24*, also in the key of C minor, and the similarities are intended. But Beethoven – ever the protagonist of change – goes further. His concerto is more symphonic, his piano more virtuosic, his development more integrated, complex, and dramatic. With Mozart, soloist and orchestra cooperate. With Beethoven, they compete.

The *C Minor Concerto* helped usher in a Romantic-era voice, replacing the polite with the imposing and setting the stage for the soloist as a keyboard wizard. A tumultuous first movement and boisterous finale flank an exquisite largo in E major, what the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1805 described as “one of the most expressive and richly sensitive instrumental pieces ever written.” As he did later in his *Fifth Symphony*, Beethoven resolves all tension in the end, the C minor storm giving way to C major sunlight.

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)
PULCINELLA, BALLET IN ONE ACT
Duration: ca. 37 minutes

Imagine hitting three home runs to win the World Series – in your rookie year. That’s how a young Igor Stravinsky must have felt after knocking it out of the park with a trio of huge hits: *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *Rite of Spring*. Overnight, Stravinsky became the darling of the music world, and Serge Diaghilev, the impresario and founder of the *Ballets Russes* who staged Stravinsky’s three masterpieces, wanted to stay in the game.

So Diaghilev commissioned Stravinsky to write a one-act ballet based on the play *Four Identical Pulcinellas*, featuring a stock character from the *commedia dell’arte*, an early form of theater and street puppet show. Diaghilev borrowed copies of manuscripts by an 18th

century Neapolitan composer named Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, whose *Stabat Mater* and *La Serva Padrona* were performed across Europe. Pouring over the scores, Stravinsky said he “fell in love” with Pergolesi, and using a *mélange* of works – chamber music, cantatas, opera – he created what would become *Pulcinella*, his most popular neo-classic composition, with sets and costumes designed by Pablo Picasso.

Stravinsky based his work for voices and small orchestra on a set of 12 trio sonatas published in London 35 years after Pergolesi’s death. The music, however, was not by Pergolesi but a minor composer named Domenico Gallo. One likely reason for this is that Pergolesi – considered a musical genius – died in 1736 at the age of 26, cutting short a brilliant career and potential profits for sellers of sheet music. So, in the absence of more genuine works, “new” pieces by Pergolesi kept popping up throughout the 19th century, fueling the “wholesale production of false *Pergolesiana* by unscrupulous publishers,” according to the opera translator and librettist Amanda Holden.

But no matter. With *Pulcinella*, listeners are in Stravinsky’s stylized world, not Pergolesi’s. This weekend, TFO teams up with Tampa City Ballet, soprano, tenor and bass in the original one-act ballet with 21 brief sections (as opposed to the orchestral suite often performed). The ballet takes place on a street in Naples and tells of the story of Pulcinella and his estranged girlfriend, Pimpinella, who is not happy with his cheating ways. Pulcinella and his buddies create an elaborate ruse to trick her into forgiveness, and in the end the two reunite, while Pulcinella’s pals marry their own sweethearts.

Stravinsky begins with a simple tune that sounds like an 18th century dance, but isn’t, because these abrupt tempo changes, edgy harmonies and colors were unimaginable back then Stravinsky

wanted audiences to see the past through a modern lens, refocusing the music through what he called a “disequilibrium of instruments” rather than a balance of instruments.

Toward the end of his career, Stravinsky called *Pulcinella* “the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible. It was a backward look ... but it was a look in the mirror, too.”

Program notes by Kurt Loft, a freelance writer and former music critic for the Tampa Tribune.