

# Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

# Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony

Ankush Kumar Bahl, *Conductor*  
Nancy Chang, *Violin*

Saturday, January 21, 2023, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm  
Sunday, January 22, 2023, Straz Center- Ferguson Hall at 2:00 pm

**Jessie Montgomery**  
(b.1981)

**Wolfgang A. Mozart**  
(1756-1791)

**Ludwig van Beethoven**  
(1770-1827)

## Records from a Vanishing City 🎵

### Concerto for Violin No. 3 in G major, K.216

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Rondo: Allegro  
Nancy Chang, *Violin*

*Intermission*

### Symphony No. 6, Op. 68 in F major "Pastoral"

1. *Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande*
2. *Szene am Bach*
3. *Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute*
4. *Gewitter, Sturm (Thunderstorm)*
5. *Hirtengesang, frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm*

🎵 NYC Music Notation Services

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## **Jessie Montgomery (1981- )**

### ***Records from a Vanishing City (2016)***

Duration: ca. 14 minutes

Jessie Montgomery is enjoying her musical moment. The composer, violinist and activist appears everywhere these days, and her original compositions are branding themselves into the repertoire like a hot iron.

A member of the Sphinx Virtuosi – a Detroit-based ensemble made up of African-Americans and Latinos – Montgomery creates music triggered by social and racial issues, and her works offer contrast to the traditional fare on concert programs.

“Music is my connection to the world,” Montgomery writes on her website. “It guides me to understand my place in relation to others and challenges me to make clear the things I do not understand. I imagine that music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.”

One such story unfolds in *Records from a Vanishing City*, a tone poem based on music Montgomery heard growing up in Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the 1980s and 1990s. Completed in 2016, the piece reflects the kaleidoscopic culture of this vibrant part of New York, where the everyday sounds of “block parties, festivals and shindigs of every sort” still ring in Montgomery’s ears.

“Partly because my parents were artists – but also because I just couldn’t help it – I soaked up all that surrounded me: Latin jazz, alternative rock, Western classical, avant-garde jazz, poetry, and Caribbean dance music,” she said.

But what also inspired her piece was the death of a dear friend in 2015, someone she considered part of her extended family. He left her an extensive record collection, “a treasure trove of the great jazz recordings of the 1950s, 1960s and beyond,” she said. “He was mad for John Coltrane, but also Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman, as well as traditional folk artists from Africa, Asia and South America.” The richness of this music found its way into Montgomery’s composition.

“In the process of imagining this piece, a particular track on a record of music from Angola caught my ear: a traditional lullaby which is sung in call-and-response by a women’s chorus,” she said. “This lullaby rang with an uncanny familiarity in me. An adaptation of this lullaby and the rhythmic chant that follows it appears in each of the three main sections of *Records from a Vanishing City*.”

This is the third time Montgomery has appeared on a TFO program in recent years, and it won’t be the last, notes Music Director Michael Francis: “As an artist, she has a real finger on the pulse of what’s going on, a really good sense of what’s happening in our country. She has a musical viewpoint that’s unique, and so we want to look at her a little more in our concerts.”

## **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

### ***Violin Concerto No. 3 in G Major, K. 216***

Duration: ca. 24 minutes

It’s hard to imagine any work by Mozart not being dipped in perfection, but if we listen to all 626 of his published works, it becomes clear that Mozart was as much a working man as a genius.

This is hardly a criticism of the Salzburg wonder. He was composing while most others were learning to read and write, and by the age of 20, had amassed a formidable portfolio. This allows us to witness Mozart move from innocence to maturity in a very short span. In his 35 years, he progressed with a velocity – and spirit – unmatched in the history of music.

An example of this can be found in his five violin concertos, a conservative but fascinating travelogue. By comparison to the model Beethoven set down with his lone *Violin Concerto*, Mozart’s five seem but pleasantries, and certainly the *First* and *Second* are more perfume than profundity.

But the next three reveal something more. “Suddenly there is a new depth and richness to Mozart’s whole language,” the critic and musicologist Alfred Einstein said of the *Third Concerto*, adding that the *Fifth* is “unsurpassed for brilliance, tenderness and wit.” Mozart composed four of the five works in one year – 1775 – and never again returned to the form.

The *Concerto in G Major* is essentially chamber music, with pairs of flutes, oboes, horns and a small body of strings. This is music full of effervescence and elegance, the ornaments graceful, and the soloist’s lines models of good taste.

The first movement borrows a tune from an early opera by Mozart, *The Shepherd King*, and the soloist embellishes on the melody throughout. Next comes an adagio with muted and plucked strings – and flutes replacing oboes – against a serene solo line before the soloist wraps up the movement with a light cadenza. A rondo finale spins among contrasting tempos and ushers in the work's most buoyant melody, a dab or two of virtuosity on the featured fiddle, and an abrupt, almost anticlimactic end with four soft notes from the horns.

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

#### ***Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68, Pastoral***

Duration: ca. 39 minutes

If you were lucky enough to have a ticket to the concert at Vienna's Theater-an-der-Wien on Dec. 22, 1808, the stub would one day be worth a fortune at auction. It was, after all, a night unlike any, a four-hour extravaganza – in a freezing hall – that gave birth to some of music's most beloved masterpieces.

The all-Beethoven program was a marathon. On tap were the premieres of both the *Fifth* and *Sixth* symphonies, the *Fourth Piano Concerto*, excerpts from the *Mass in C*, the concert aria *Ah! Perfido*, and the freshly composed and poorly rehearsed *Choral Fantasy for Piano, Chorus and Orchestra*. Not only was Beethoven the guest of honor at his own fundraiser, he also sat at the piano – his last public appearance as a soloist before deafness made performing impossible.

Unlike the powerfully abstract symphony that preceded it, the *Symphony No. 6* is programmatic – an “extra-musical” narrative reflecting an idyllic day in the countryside. The music unfolds through an ingenious harmonic plan over five movements, as if Beethoven was not so much composing but connecting the dots of nature.

However, he didn't write the *Pastoral* in situ, and he was hardly the first to sketch nature on a musical canvas. Antonio Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, published 85 years earlier, is a brilliant bit of melodic meteorology and a chart-topper to this day. Franz Joseph Haydn wove bucolic scenes into his oratorios *Creation* and *Seasons*, and elaborate descriptive pieces were in vogue throughout Europe before Beethoven, who certainly knew of Justin Heinrich Knecht's *Pastoral Symphony* of 1785. Subtitled a *Musical Portrait of Nature*, its five movements include impressions of the countryside, river, storm and “agreeable songs” that predate Beethoven's blueprint.

The *Symphony No. 6* evokes the quiet exaltation a person feels amid fields and forests, streams and wildlife, and even a higher power capable of creating such beauty, writes Lewis Lockwood in his book *Beethoven: The Music and the Life*. “It is impregnated with a sense of communion with all that is natural and God-given in the outdoors. There is a strong religious element in Beethoven's feeling for nature.”

The symphony opens with the *Awakening of Joyful Impressions on Arriving in the Country*, and one of Beethoven's most buoyant melodies floating atop repeated rhythmic motifs. The second movement, *By the Stream*, may have influenced Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and Smetana's *Moldau* in its suggestion of a flowing brook. Listen for bird calls as the flute mimics a nightingale, the oboe a quail, and the clarinet a cuckoo.

The following scherzo in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, titled *A Happy Gathering of Peasants*, captures an ebullient country dance (undoubtedly fueled by alcohol) before *The Storm* scatters the revelers with its violent thunderclaps and torrents of wind and rain. This leads directly into the finale, a *Shepherd's Song of Thanksgiving*, which Beethoven described as “more an expression of feelings than tone painting.” The symphony ends with two bracing chords that tie everything together in the home key of F major.

After hearing this most relaxed of Beethoven's symphonies, listeners might be struck by its contrast to the tempestuous *Fifth Symphony*, which for many reflects a composer raging over his lot in life. But in his next symphony, Beethoven seems to have found solace, not in communion with people, but with the natural world.

“My unfortunate hearing does not plague me there,” Beethoven wrote in his diary. “It is as if every tree spoke to me in the country. Who can describe it? If all comes to naught the country itself remains. Surely woods, trees and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear.”

***Program notes by Kurt Loft, a St. Petersburg-based writer and former music critic for The Tampa Tribune.***