

Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

Beethoven's Eroica Symphony

Michael Francis, *Conductor*
Natasha Paremski, *Piano*

Friday, Apr 5, 2024, Straz Center at 8:00 pm
Saturday, Apr 6, 2024, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm
Sunday, Apr 7, 2024, Ruth Eckerd Hall at 7:30 pm

John Adams
(b. 1938)

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

The Chairman Dances: Foxtrot for Orchestra 🎵

Concerto for Piano No. 2 in F major, Op.102 🎵

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Allegro

Natasha Paremski, *piano*

Intermission

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op.55

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Marcia funebre: Adagio assai
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- IV. Finale: Allegro molto

🎵 Music represented by G. Schirmer, Inc.

Natasha Paremski plays the Steinway Piano from the Music Gallery, exclusive agents for Steinway & Sons.

Media Partner

Tampa Bay Times
tampabay.com

Please scan for today's program. Also find
program notes, artist bios, videos and more.
Or visit FloridaOrchestra.org



Sponsored in part by the State of Florida through the Department of State,
Florida Arts and Culture, and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.

 **PNC BANK** Official bank of The Florida Orchestra



John Adams (1947-)

The Chairman Dances: Foxtrot for Orchestra

Duration: ca. 12 minutes

A common thread links the three works on this Hough Family Foundation Masterworks program, as each piece was in some way stimulated by the politics of its time in the United States, former Soviet Union, and Europe, respectively.

First up is John Adams, one of the most performed American composers, an artist whose stylistic diversity and freshness of sound appeals to listeners across the spectrum. But he's never backed away from challenging an audience, either through choice of subject matter or the complexity of his musical narrative.

Music fascinated Adams early on, mostly through the variety he found in his parents' record library, which ranged from Elvis to Mahler to big bands to the Indonesian islands, what he called "a huge trash bin of the whole world's recorded music." He studied composition, the clarinet and conducting at Harvard, but after hitting a dead end, moved to California, taking a job as a forklift driver.

It was in San Francisco where Adams fell under the spell of a musical movement known as Minimalism, and advocates Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass. In 1972, he found a teaching job and later landed a position as composer-in-residence for the San Francisco Symphony.

Since then, Adams has enjoyed international acclaim not only for his orchestral and chamber works but for his operas *Nixon in China*, *Death of Klinghoffer* and *Doctor Atomic*, which have filled a need in American opera houses for contemporary plots. In 2002, he won the Pulitzer Prize for *On the Transmigration of Souls*, which honored the victims of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The Chairman Dances is not actually part of *Nixon in China*, but an outtake, much like a scene from a movie that ends up on the cutting room floor. But it was too good to toss away, the composer notes:

"I started somewhat hazily working on the music, not knowing if it had the right tone, and pretty soon I realized it wouldn't work at all for the opera. It was a parody of what I imagined Chinese movie music of the '30s sounded like, a vast fantasy of a slightly ridiculous but irresistible image of a youthful Mao Tse Tung dancing the foxtrot with his mistress."

Commissioned by the Milwaukee Symphony in 1985, the piece fuses Minimalist iterations and dabs of percussion into what the composer calls a "bustling fabric of energized motives." A few minutes in, the music turns sensuous, even jazzy, propelled by insistent rhythms. Soon, all goes quiet before woodwinds and strings take up the namesake foxtrot and the work fades away to the sounds of piano, sand block, bass drum and shaker.

"This is a chance for us to listen to a great American master," says TFO Music Director Michael Francis. "It's a stunningly evocative and challenging piece of music."

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Major, Op. 102

Duration: ca. 20 minutes

Shostakovich grew up in the artistic turmoil of his native Russia, and the censorship of Stalin's regime both stirred and stifled his creativity. Only after the dictator's death in 1953 was he able to openly test the artistic climate outside socialist realism.

The trouble began in 1936, when Stalin attended a performance of the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. The Soviet newspaper *Pravda* denounced it on the grounds of "degenerate music," and censors imposed restrictions on what composers could and could not write. Shostakovich endured a series of public humiliations and was forced to apologize and write music for his ideological "captors" – or face life in the gulag. "I was near to suicide," he wrote in his memoirs. "The danger horrified me and I saw no other way out."

This context is important when listening to music of the last two decades of his life, including the *Piano Concerto No. 2*, which sounds free of any of the weight and ambiguity of so many earlier works. Written in 1957 as a 19th birthday present for his son Maxim – who would forge a distinguished career as a pianist and conductor – the concerto opens and closes with lighthearted movements that frame a lyrical middle section.

Because of its droll character, Shostakovich claimed the work lacked artistic merit, even though he performed it frequently.

However, this self-depreciation may have been his way of disarming Soviet criticism. Even so, it wasn't written as a virtuoso showpiece but as a vehicle for young Soviet pianists, and its jocular and modest technical demands were intended to encourage the development of these aspiring musicians.

The concerto is brisk, compact and transparent, and some of the simpler sections mimic the pentatonic scales of a keyboard lesson. A 4/4 march commands the opening allegro, introduced by the woodwinds and handed over to the soloist for a series of sharp, incisive attacks at lightning speed. A cadenza recaps the two main themes amid surging rhythms.

The andante is the core of the work, a tender movement that TFO Music Director Michael Francis calls "one of the most haunting, touching pieces of music you will ever hear." Muted strings play a meditative, Baroque-like theme in C minor that gives way to the light of C major. The finale appears without pause, pulsing forward on a perpetual motion cadence against pizzicato strings, echoing those scale runs every piano student had to endure.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 3 in E-Flat Major, Op. 55, Eroica

Duration: ca. 47 minutes

Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3*, the famous *Eroica*, is a watershed work in the history of music, one that transformed the nature of the symphony when it struck with the force of a boxer's jab at its premiere in April 1805. Remarkable in its originality, thematic development, dramatic impact and size, the *Third* was epic, and changed how composers viewed their craft and how listeners, well, listened.

"I am far from satisfied with my past works," Beethoven said before beginning this new work. "From today on, I shall take a new way."

Originally planned as the "Bonaparte" Symphony in tribute to Napoleon, Beethoven rededicated it in anger after the conqueror crowned himself emperor of France, but the concept of a noble hero echoes throughout the renamed *Sinfonia Eroica*. Through sheer elemental force, Beethoven carved the music into a distinct personality – a true narrative that would be embraced by composers of the Romantic era – while bending the rules of traditional sonata form.

The *Eroica* was the longest symphony up to its time, and more emotionally charged than any that came before. Introduced by two stentorian chords, the opening movement alone is gigantic – nearly 700 measures – which set new expectations for how symphonies would be cast. While Haydn and Mozart together produced nearly 150 symphonies, most major composers *after* Beethoven capped their output at less than 10, almost as if in deference to the *Eroica* model.

Beethoven pushed the boundaries of classical form further by inserting a funeral march, a radical choice. He followed with a scherzo full of optimistic energy, and a finale of 10 variations based on a theme from his own *Creatures of Prometheus*.

"The first movement is all about what a real hero is, about true heroism," says TFO Music Director Michael Francis. "The funeral march is the greatest musical outpouring of human grief. The third movement is a celebration. And the fourth movement is about Prometheus, this unbelievable power that gave us wisdom and freedom."

In the slow movement, a searing adagio in C minor, Beethoven takes us into a ghostly realm never before heard in a symphony. This dramatic section includes a fugal lament worthy of Bach, an impassioned cry that begins and ends in silence. If the original intent was to honor the death of a great man, the funeral march also speaks of anguish, as Beethoven knew he was losing his most precious gift – his hearing.

In the finale, Beethoven again tests the waters of classical-era structure by pursuing a series of variations that confounded early 19th-century listeners and critics. It would later become apparent in a logical plan as the music gathers momentum, intensifies and weaves together earlier themes into a brilliant – and heroic – coda.

With the *Eroica*, the symphony as a genre was no longer entertainment; it became a complex psychological agent, notes Antony Hopkins in his book, *The Nine Symphonies of Beethoven*.

"Conventional analysis falters in the face of this giant symphony since there is such a wealth of material," he writes. "It is as futile to try to reduce the structure to the textbook props of first and second subjects as it would be to reduce *Hamlet* to a play with only two characters."

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