PROGRAM PAGE

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONY NO. 7

Chelsea Gallo, *conductor*
Joel Vaisse, *trombone*
Ross Holcombe, *trombone*
Amanda Stewart, *trombone*

Friday, Apr 10, 2026, Straz Center at 8 pm
Saturday, Apr 11, 2026, Mahaffey Theater at 8 pm
Sunday, Apr 12, 2026, Ruth Eckerd Hall at 7:30 pm

Ferde Grofé
(1892 - 1972)

Mississippi Suite
I. *Father of Waters*
II. *Huckleberry Finn*
III. *Old Creole Days*
IV. *Mardi Gras*

Thierry Caens
(b. 1958)

Tribones for Three Trombones & Orchestra
I. *Prelude*
II. *Romance*
III. *Jota*
IV. *Finale*

Intermission

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770 - 1827)

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92
I. *Poco sostenuto - Vivace*
II. *Allegretto*
III. *Presto*
IV. *Allegro con brio*

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Ferde Grofé (1892-1972)
Mississippi Suite

What to listen for:

- Like the musical portrayals of rivers by Wagner and Smetana, Grofé's depiction of the Mississippi captures its sounds and sensations through an orchestral lens. This year marks the work's 100th anniversary.

Ferde Grofé earned his stripes in the corps of American music through works that are an indelible part of our landscape: *Grand Canyon Suite, Broadway at Night, Metropolis, Henry Ford, Knute Rockne* and *Death Valley Suite.* Along with the piece on this Masterworks program, *Mississippi Suite*, all this music was born from the soil and speaks to anyone who has lived here.

Grofé once said that he wrote not just about America, but for America: "This music is your music, and mine only in the technical sense that a copyright has been filed with my name on it."

Many Americans, however, know less about Grofé as a composer than as the arranger who fleshed out the orchestration for Gershwin's iconic *Rhapsody in Blue*. Paul Whiteman, who conducted the premier in 1924, encouraged Grofé to write music of his own, and one of his first compositions two years later was the four-movement *Mississippi Suite.* Grofé said he was inspired by the sights, sounds and sensations that percolated through and around the country's greatest river.

Alan Grofé, his grandson who lives in Lakeland, said his grandfather had a knack for programmatic music that captured the country's varied environment and topography.

"He had such a great vision of physical America," he said in a recent interview. "He took our rich physical grandeur and turned it into a vivid orchestral sound. He was able to musically paint such a vivid picture of a physical place – it could be the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, the Hudson River, or Death Valley. You can just close your eyes as you listen to one of his compositions and see it in your mind."

The titles of the suite's movements speak for themselves, as described by the composer. *Father of the Waters* portrays the upper reaches of the river; *Huckleberry Finn* mimics the prankish nature of the boy in Mark Twain's famous story; *Old Creole Days* is a lullaby and cradle song sung by slaves on plantations; and the climax, *Mardi Gras*, depicts the carnival spirit of New Orleans and completes the river's portrait.

Thierry Caens (1958-)
***Tribones* (Concerto for Three Trombones)**

What to listen for:

- In the third movement, the three players engage in a lively Spanish dance known as the *jota*.

As a listener sitting in the audience, it's always intriguing to hear a new work, more so when it features an instrument that rarely solos on stage: the trombone.

This protracted and noble member of the brass family sits at the back of the orchestra, usually hidden behind a thicket of other players. Its resonance – ranging from a rasp to a blast – helps blend the colors of the orchestra and deepens the palette in such pieces as the *Tuba mirum* from Mozart's *Requiem*, Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*, or just about anything by Bruckner.

But extended trombone solos, much less full concertos, are rare, which makes this latest Masterworks program stand out. On tap: the first American performance of *Tribones*, a Concerto for Three Trombones, by the French composer and instrumentalist Thierry Caens. Performers include TFO's Principal Trombone Joël Vaïsse and Associate Principal Trombone Ross Holcombe and guest artist Amanda Stewart, Associate Principal Trombone of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra.

“Thierry’s writing is very accessible, tonal, and fun,” Holcombe said. “This piece has soaring melodies, dance rhythms, epic climaxes and an exciting ending. olHHe strikes a great balance between his music sounding modern and fresh, but also using sounds that people are familiar with. It’s structured almost like a symphony.”

Caens scored his “sound painting” in four movements: prelude, romance, jota and finale. The opening presents a simple melody from which all the movements are built; the second section offers a gentle tune but with expressive depth; the third part makes use of a lively Spanish folk dance that serves as the traditional scherzo; and the finale is full of dazzling energy and virtuosic play among the three brass players who all the while interact with the orchestra.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No. 7 in A, Op. 92

What to listen for:

- The allegretto movement remains one of Beethoven’s greatest creations, its hypnotic and haunting theme popularized in numerous movies.

Had Beethoven composed only one symphony, and it happened to be the music contained in the Seventh, he would still be idolized today. The work doesn’t echo the heroic, fateful or universal themes of the Third, Fifth and Ninth symphonies, and it has no hidden meanings that give rise to controversy.

It does, however, knock rhythm on its ear. Because with the Seventh, Beethoven got up to dance. Even Richard Wagner, who knew a thing or two about knocking listeners on their ears, adored the symphony and called it “the apotheosis of the dance.” Since its first performance in 1813, it has stayed firmly at the center of the orchestral repertoire.

Composed in the bright key of A Major, the symphony has a *plein air* quality about it, an up-tempo feel and a sharpness that enhances its rhythmic muscle. Unlike the famous Fifth, which “recycles” musical ideas to unify the four movements, the Seventh sets each section apart with its own individual rhythmic urgencies.

The symphony commands our attention from its first powerful chord, soon followed by others that begin the longest introduction – 62 bars of *poco sostenuto* – of any symphony up to that time. A solo flute shines light on a new, rollicking tune that sets the pace for everything that follows.

At the heart of the work is the allegretto, a magnificent slow movement that mirrors the funeral march in the composer’s *Eroica* Symphony. Essentially a set of variations wrapped around a single, hypnotic motif, the music moves forward like waves on the shore, receding and crashing back again. Virgil Thomson, the American composer and critic, called this movement “the saddest, most tragic piece Beethoven ever wrote, surrounded and framed by three of the most exuberant affirmations that exist.” After its premiere in Vienna, the audience demanded it be played as a encore.

The persistence of rhythm continues in the scherzo, releasing us from our hypnotic trance, and propelling us headfirst into a manic finale of relentless energy and ebullient outbursts from the brass – a true *allegro con brio*. In his book *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*, Jan Swafford asks, “Does any other symphonic movement sweep listeners off their feet and take their breath away so literally as this one?”

Kurt Loft is a journalist and music critic who has written for various newspapers, magazines and arts groups for more than 40 years. A member of the Music Critics Association of North America, he lives in St. Petersburg.