

## Beethoven Symphony No. 5 – May 4, 2019

### Overture to *La forza del destino*

Giuseppe Verdi  
1813 – 1901

In 1862, Giuseppe Verdi was at the zenith of his popularity, his name identified with the Risorgimento (unification of Italy) the previous year. The cry “Viva Verdi” not only hailed the composer but was also the acronym for, *Vittorio Emmanuele Rè D’Italia*, the new king. Verdi was elected as a member of Italy’s first parliament.

While his early and middle period operas all premiered in Italy, Verdi began to receive important commissions from beyond the borders, especially from the Paris Opera. Two singers on tour in Russia started the ball rolling for the composer’s first and only Russian commission. Based on a contemporary Spanish play, *La fuerza del sino* by Angel Pérez de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas, this Italian melodrama – as operas were called in Italy – fit perfectly into the cosmopolitan court of the liberal Tsar Alexander II. *La forza del destino* premiered in St. Petersburg in 1862. Verdi revised the entire opera, including the overture, for its Italian premiere in 1869.

As for the plot – an inexorable series of misfortunes pursues Don Alvaro and Leonora, whose father he has inadvertently shot while trying to elope with her. The lovers separate and attempt to find exculpation and autonomy, only to be hounded and finally defeated by fate. The Overture is replete with themes from the opera itself, outlining the inexorable course of the lovers’ destiny. The opening motive, three unison Es for the brasses followed by a repeated agitated figure in the low strings, represents fate and recurs each time destiny deals the lovers yet another blow.

In the Overture, the fate motive, whether hovering in the background or blared out by the full orchestra, haunts each theme in Verdi’s brilliant orchestral thematic summary of this long, convoluted opera.

### Violin Concerto *Orchard in Fog*

Adam Schoenberg  
b. 1980

Originally from New Salem, Massachusetts, Adam Schoenberg received his Bachelor of Music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in 2002 and his Master of Music degree in 2005 and Doctor of Musical Arts degree at The Juilliard School, where he studied with John Corigliano and Robert Beaser. A committed educator, Schoenberg is on faculty of Occidental College where he teaches composition and film scoring.

Schoenberg provided program notes for the premiere in San Diego in February 2018. It takes its name from a photograph by Adam Laipson of an apple orchard in winter, the same orchard where the composer was married. The photograph hangs in the couple’s bedroom and inspired the narrative for the Concerto. Unlike the typical concerto, *Orchard in Fog* sandwiches a fast movement between two slow ones.

Schoenberg’s musical language is neo-romantic, particularly resembling that of mid-twentieth-century composers Samuel Barber and William Schumann. It is tonal, melodic and accessible.

The Concerto is a musical portrait of an old man visiting the orchard where he was once married. The first movement, marked *Frail*, spins out a series of melancholic melodies. The violin uses a scordatura tuning, where the G string is tuned down to F. The focus is not only given to the low F, but also to the highest register of the E string. Whether the breadth of the tessitura has symbolic meaning is, of course, not clear.

Schoenberg continues the narrative program in the second movement (*Dancing*). “The old man looks back on his life and all of the beautiful, youthful moments he had with his wife.” The movement resembles the Baroque passacaglia, in which contrapuntal voices overlay a repeated melody. Here, each eight-measure repetition adds more instruments or features a different combination of instruments. Like its baroque analog, the harmonic structure remains the same through the repetitions. But towards the end of the movement, Schoenberg breaks the pattern to go into new harmonic territory. It also features the solo violin more as a member of the first violins than as a traditional soloist.

Movement III (*Farewell Song*) “gradually brings us back to the present day, and to the orchard where the old man’s journey first began. This is his farewell song to his love, and to the life that he has known. It is now time for him to leave everything behind and move into the unknown.”

### **Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67**

Ludwig van Beethoven  
1770-1827

The four most clichéd notes in classical music were once the most revolutionary. For the first time a rhythm, rather than a melody, became the main subject of a symphonic movement – and not merely as a first theme to be stated and picked up again for a while in the development and recapitulation sections. Beethoven wove the rhythm into the entire fabric of the first movement, and subsequently into the rest of the Symphony. The motive first appears as a repeated demand, subsequently expanded into a genuine melody in the first theme. It recurs as a throbbing accompaniment in bass and timpani in the second theme, all the way to the final cadence of the exposition.

Such an original symphonic structure did not come easily, especially to a composer who lacked the ever-ready melodic genius of a Mozart, Bach or Haydn who all produced copiously on demand. A collection of the composer’s sketchbooks bears witness to the lengthy and often painful gestation of some of his greatest music. The Fifth Symphony took four years to complete, between 1804 and 1808. But Beethoven also had to eat, and during those four years he also produced the Fourth Symphony, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the three String Quartets Op. 59, the Mass in C and the Violin Concerto.

The Symphony No. 5 was premiered at one of those monster public concerts common in the nineteenth century; on the program in addition were premieres of the Sixth Symphony and the Fourth Piano Concerto, the aria “*Ah! Perfido*,” the *Choral Fantasia* and several movements of the Mass in C. One can only imagine the bewilderment of the audience on its first encounter in a single evening with the “Pastorale” and the Fifth.

Because the Fifth Symphony is now so familiar, it is difficult to think of it as innovative, but it was not only the integration of the four-note rhythmic motif into the entire fabric of the first movement that was new. The second movement, *Andante con moto*, involves its own kind of

novelty. It is made up of two short juxtaposed, contrasting themes: the first in dotted rhythm in the strings, the second a slow almost military theme in the brass. Beethoven produces from the two themes a double set of variations. And it should be noted that the second theme contains within it in augmentation (in longer note values) the germinal four-note rhythm of the first movement.

For the Scherzo, Beethoven again prominently takes up the motivic rhythm in the horns, this time in augmentation. The Trio is a fugue. The repeat of the Scherzo theme is scored for clarinet and bassoon over pizzicato strings playing pianissimo.

Symphony No. 5 has frequently been referred to as a struggle from darkness to light, but it is a commonplace that has palpable grounding in truth. Not only does the symphony begin in C minor and end in C major, but there is also the magnificent transition between the third and fourth movements, a kind of sunlight breaking through the clouds with violins stammering over the timpani as it throbs out the motto. The emergence into the triumphant Finale paved the way for the symphonic writing of the future, including Beethoven's own Ninth Symphony, Mendelssohn's Third (The "Scottish") and Brahms's First.

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