

Hear Together

2021/22 Season



EDMONTON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

BEETHOVEN, VIVALDI & SHOSTAKOVICH

Thursday, October 21 • 7:30 PM

Saturday, October 23 • 2:30 PM

Saturday, October 23 • 7:30 PM



Land Acknowledgement

The Winspear Centre and Edmonton Symphony Orchestra would like to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 Territory, a traditional meeting ground, gathering place, and traveling route for many Indigenous Peoples. We honour and recognize the rich artistic, cultural, and musical traditions of the Cree, Nakota Sioux, Metis, Dene, Saulteaux, and the many more Indigenous communities that call this land we share, home.



BEETHOVEN, VIVALDI & SHOSTAKOVICH

October 21 & 23



FEATURED MUSICIANS:



Alex Prior
Conductor



Rafael Hoekman
The Stuart & Winona Davis
Principal Cello Chair



Julie Hereish
Assistant Principal Cello

BEETHOVEN, VIVALDI & SHOSTAKOVICH

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BEETHOVEN

Egmont, Op.84: Overture

(8')*

VIVALDI

Concerto for Two Cellos in G minor, RV 531

(11')*

SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major, Op.70

(26')*

Allegro

Moderato

Presto

Largo

Allegretto

Egmont, Op.84: Overture

Ludwig van Beethoven

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performed:

- Overture first performed on its own on May 24, 1810, in Vienna.
- It was first performed with the rest of the incidental music accompanying the play on June 15, 1810, in Vienna.

Last ESO performance:

March 2016

Beethoven was routinely and often inspired by tales of those who fought for liberty, who resolutely stood against even unbeatable odds in order to defend what was right. Such was the hero of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Egmont*. Leader of the

Flemish resistance against Spain, Count Egmont was beheaded in a public square in Brussels in 1568. The tale of the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of national freedom was profoundly moving to Beethoven, who wrote incidental music for the play in 1810. When he sent Goethe a copy of his score, Beethoven remarked that his intent was to pay homage, “to that glorious Egmont whom I have reproduced in music as intense as my emotion when I read your play.”

Egmont’s fate and the oppression of the Flemish people is represented in the ominous chords which open the overture, surely one of the sternest openings ever used to that point to set the tone for a theatrical work. Through clever harmonization, the tragic transforms into the heroic before the overture moves

from its slow opening into the dramatic Allegro. Listen especially for a moment of silence with about two minutes remaining – that is the moment of Egmont’s beheading being foreshadowed in the overture.

Concerto for Two Cellos in G minor, RV 531

Antonio Vivaldi

(b. Venice, 1678 / d. Vienna, 1741)

First performed: unknown
(thought to have been composed c. 1720)

Last ESO performance: February 2005

We know of nearly 500 concertos written by Antonio Vivaldi. Of that lot, nearly 200 feature more than one instrumental soloist. It is rather remarkable that there

is only one out of all that survives for two cellos. Like so many of the others, it was written for the students of the Ospedale della Pietà, the home for foundling girls in Vivaldi's city, Venice.

While a violinist himself, Vivaldi's ear was obviously attuned to lower-pitched instruments, and the cello was a particular favourite. In combining two into this concerto, Vivaldi employed a number of different devices to allow each instrument to distinguish itself. The somber and dramatic home key of G minor lends the work a darkness at home with the lower voices.

There is both tension and foreboding in the opening measures, dominated by the two cellos. The strings which accompany add a layer of sheen above, as

the two soloists either trade off or harmonize a vigorously bowed Allegro. The mood is relieved only by the beginning of the slow movement – a more intimate-sounding section, more chamber music than orchestral. Each soloist is given phrases to begin, with the other joining in and becoming a tender duet. The sparse accompaniment gently nods the music forward, but the cellos dominate.

The final movement is set to a pace and rhythm one would expect from a finale, but again, the G minor tonality keeps the joviality in check. But the orchestral strings have more to say here, responding to the vigorously danced duets of the soloists. The music rapidly rises and falls, a melodic tide surging and retreating its dark-hued dance.

Symphony No. 9 in E-flat Major, Op.70

Dmitri Shostakovich

(b. St. Petersburg, 1906 / d. Moscow, 1975)

First performed: November 3, 1945, in Leningrad

Last ESO performance: November 2003

In separating fact from fiction regarding Dmitri Shostakovich's stormy and precarious dealings with the Stalinist regime, his Ninth Symphony holds a unique place. It followed two vast wartime symphonies, and was supposed to have been a celebratory work following the defeat of the Nazis. Yet is hardly the grand affair the Soviet government hoped it would be. Instead, it is Shostakovich's shortest symphony since the Second, and full of unusual, angular motifs and moods that have led

many to glean many different interpretations of what Shostakovich might have been “up to.”

Shostakovich began work on a ninth symphony early in 1945, when the end of the war was in sight. He told his students about his plans for a grand work, quoted in the press as saying: “We must honour with reverence the memory of the brave soldiers who have died, and glorify the heroes of our army for eternity.” The work, a worthy “ninth” to rival Beethoven’s it was said, became a much-anticipated one among the music community and the Stalinist government as well.

But something happened to make him change his mind. He scrapped everything he had written to

that point, and by the time of the actual victory over Germany that May, the work was entirely new, “... lacking all pretensions to gravity and majesty ... it was almost the antithesis of expectations,” writes Laurel E. Fay in her recent biography of Shostakovich. In his highly controversial “memoir” of Shostakovich, Solomon Volkov maintains that Shostakovich himself could not bear to write an “apotheosis of Stalin,” following the war, so he didn’t. Everyone was surprised, yet initially, the work was quite favourably received by all, including the Kremlin. It was not long, however, before second thoughts crept in, and the work was eventually excoriated for being superficial and a mockery of the victory it was supposed to have celebrated.

Since then, people have read into this unusual entry in the Shostakovich canon all manner of subtexts and allusions. Some go to the extreme of hearing a not-so-subtle mockery of Stalin throughout the piece, though its defenders during Shostakovich's life maintain it was simply an exuberant and cheeky bit of fun after so many years of darkness and trial for Russia. It begins with a gentle spoof of a classical, Haydnesque symphony, though the opening movement is dominated by a mischievous march tune, heard first in the piccolo. The Moderato second movement begins with a solo clarinet against pizzicato low strings in a sad, lonely song. Other woodwinds begin to expand the music outward as if commiserating, until another theme, set to a two-note pattern, is presented by the strings, but the mood of despair and loss is constant.

The final three movements are presented without a pause between them. The Presto third movement is a mad scamper, almost a soundtrack for a cartoon chase. It winds down, and somber brass chords usher in a Largo fourth movement dominated by a haunting bassoon recitative punctured by a second brass intrusion. The bassoon rouses the fourth movement to life, an Allegretto that restores the sense of manic energy of earlier movements. Building to a careening climax, in which the comic main theme is given a grand statement, the symphony's final, crazed moments are as unexpected as the work itself proved to be.

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