BERKELEY SYMPHONY

JOANA CARNEIRO
MUSIC DIRECTOR

Symphonic I: Adams & Shostakovich

Thurs, Oct 5, 2017, 7p - Zellerbach Hall, Berkeley

Fri, Oct 6, 2017, 8p – Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall, San Francisco Conservatory of Music

Program Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

Symphony No. 1 in C major, Op. 21

Composed: 1799-1800
First performance: April 2, 1800, in Vienna, with the composer conducting
Duration: approximately 30 minutes
Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Summary:

- **Beethoven's First Symphony assimilates what he learned from the music scene of the time**
- **It begins to show Beethoven's innovative thinking about the genre. So, the First is ultimately his declaration of independence.**
- **A key to Beethoven's originality here is how he plays with expectations.**
- **Never forget the humor in Beethoven's music!**

Ludwig van Beethoven's symphonies are more than products of the orchestral tradition. They profoundly *defined* it—and continue to do so. The credo of musical values on which professional orchestras were founded has its roots in this canon. While the reputations of many celebrated composers ebb and flow within larger stylistic trends, Beethoven has long shaped the mainstream of concert life through his symphonies.

To get his works performed, Beethoven relied on private, ad hoc ensembles funded by aristocratic patrons or on freelance musicians gathered for concerts he himself organized to introduce his symphonies. The unprecedented technical demands of his symphonies actually helped to create the institution of the modern symphony orchestra as we know it, bringing the newly specialized role of conductor into the spotlight. Most importantly, Beethoven's cycle of nine symphonies encouraged new ways of thinking about what music was capable of expressing.

The First Symphony is a kind of summarizing portrait of a young, highly ambitious composer. Beethoven moved to Vienna when he was still in his early 20s (in 1792). That was just months after Mozart had died, and Haydn—*the* internationally recognized master composer of the era—was away on a lengthy sojourn in London, presenting the first set of his final glorious batch of symphonies. Within this context, Beethoven, a transplant from distant Bonn in the West, began to make his own contributions to the symphony.

Mozart and Haydn were by no means the only influences on Beethoven. He also took inspiration from the adventurous C.P.E. Bach (the most famous of Johann Sebastian's sons), as well as from the stirring musical style developed by composers responding to the French Revolution.

Like Brahms, Beethoven carefully paved his way into the symphonic genre, even though as a teenager in Bonn he had already tinkered with writing a symphony. The occasion he chose to premiere his First Symphony was his first major benefit concert in Vienna, on April 2, 1800—an event in which, symbolically enough, works by Mozart and Haydn were programmed alongside those of the newcomer.

The First Symphony has been called "a fitting farewell to the 18th century." But farewells can simultaneously serve as greetings. While Beethoven uses the language of the Classical style perfected by Mozart and Haydn, we already encounter characteristics that will become identifiably Beethovenian in his subsequent works.

What to listen for

The First Symphony starts with a grand slow introduction, but Beethoven already plays a game here with expectations. Usually such an opening gesture would emphasize in no uncertain terms the main key of the adventure we're embarking on. Instead, the opening measures delay the statement of C major by taking a little harmonic detour to increase the tension and suspense. Quintessential Beethoven. His procedure throughout the first movement involves similar ploys to enhance the fine-tuned Classical principles of sonata form with fresh energy. For example, Beethoven concludes the movement with an elongated coda section, this time doing exactly what those opening bars had avoided by reaffirming the home key in an especially satisfying way.

The Andante unusually combines the sonority of timpani and trumpet with lyrical winds and strings. The third movement might be labeled "Minuet," but in fact it represents Beethoven's first symphonic scherzo — music that deliberately *plays* with expectations. Where is the beat? Where is the accent going to fall? And it's arguably the most overtly original movement of the First Symphony.

Beethoven's humor is another defining element of his language that too often gets overlooked. It comes to the fore in the fourth movement. The opening echoes the playful detour of the First's beginning, as Beethoven presents step-by-step elongations of a simple rising scale, as if pretending to show us the light bulb going off in a composer's head as a theme is put together. But then the movement takes off with high-spirited energy, and the tune goes in directions no one could have predicted. The victorious resolution that ends the First underscores Beethoven's declaration of independence as a symphonist.

William Gardiner
(b. 1987)

Cello Concerto

Composed: 2017
Tonight's performance marks the world premiere.
Duration: approximately 20 minutes
In addition to solo cello, scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (2nd doubling contrabassoon), 2 horns, trumpet, 3 trombones, timpani, 2 percussionists, harp, and strings.

Summary:

- **Australian composer William Gardiner has been making a name for his imaginative instrumental works and video opera.**
- **One of these caught the attention of John Adams and Deborah O'Grady, who commissioned the Cello Concerto through their Pacific Harmony Foundation.**
- **The 20-minute Concerto, in two movements, was written specifically for Berkeley native Tessa Seymour.**
- **Gardiner's new concerto evokes "something like the feeling of being in an airplane and experiencing a momentary drop due to turbulence."**
- **The composer was also stimulated by "the inherent drama of the concerto medium—of an individual standing before a crowd."**

Tonight's program brings a thrilling opportunity that should feature regularly in the concert experience. We get to encounter a brand-new composition as it makes its passage from a composer's inspiration

and a performer's vital choices as to how to give it voice—and is presented for the first time to a live audience.

An Australian composer of music for acoustic and electronic instruments, William Gardiner studied music and law at the University of Sydney and subsequently graduated from the Yale School of Music, where his composition teachers were David Lang, Martin Bresnick, and Aaron Jay Kernis. He has also been mentored in sound engineering and electronic music composition by Ben Frost at the Greenhouse Studios in Reykjavik, Iceland (where he worked with Frost and Valgeir Sigurdsson over a three-month period last year). Gardiner additionally has a deep affinity with early music. His mother is a harpsichordist and was a pioneer of early music in Australia in the 1970s, after a period of study with Ton Koopman in Amsterdam.

Gardiner's output includes works for symphony orchestra, chamber music, and early music ensembles, but it also frequently involves electronic media and amplified instruments. His work has been performed at venues including the Melbourne Recital Centre, the Sydney Opera House, Yale University's Morse Recital Hall, National Sawdust in New York, and REDCAT Los Angeles. *ALL IS FOR THE BEST*, a video opera Gardiner co-created with Thomas Rawle, was included by the Los Angeles-based opera company The Industry as part of its 2017 "First Take" program. He was also selected as a winner of the American Composers Forum National Composition Contest in 2015, resulting in a commission to write *Chiaroscuro* for the LA-based ensemble wild Up.

John Adams came to know of Gardiner's work through hearing a recording of *Chiaroscuro.* Gardiner recalls receiving an e-mail from Adams out of the blue, "which was something I never expected to happen in my life." The Pacific Harmony Foundation, which Adams and the photographer and video artist Deborah O'Grady together founded to support contemporary artists, commissioned Gardiner to write a concerto for the cellist Tessa Seymour (a native of Berkeley currently based in London).

"I first discovered John Adams's music around the time I was beginning to compose, and it has inspired me ever since," recalls Gardiner, noting that he especially admires "the way [Adams] is able to combine an omnivorousness of musical taste with clarity and depth of expression. His works span a wider emotional gamut than is usual, but never seem to lack focus, intensity, or intentionality. He has a gift of being able to take in a fuller range of human experience, even touching on the garish or the brash, somehow without sacrificing the underlying profundity and sincerity at the core of his music."

Additional key influences include David Lang (his main compositional mentor) and fellow Bang on a Can co-founders Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe. In 2014, Gardiner was invited to be a composition fellow at the Bang on a Can Summer Festival at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. Still other models include the Italian composer Fausto Romitelli and Australia's most celebrated composer, Peter Sculthorpe. Gardiner also points to inspirations in the world of electronic music, in particular his mentorship with the Australian musician Ben Frost and his studio partner Valgeir Sigurðsson.

Describing his musical style, Gardiner says that "sonority'" and "affect" are central to what he does as a composer. "Sometimes the idea is advanced that these qualities form part of the 'surface' of a work, which can be separated from the 'deep structure' that lies underneath and is even somehow more important. I believe that I am doing my job right when the sonority or affect is completely inseparable from the essence of the work."

The Cello Concerto is Gardiner's first composition in the genre. He came to know Tessa Seymour through a mutual friend, the guitarist Jiyeon "Jiji" Kim. As to collaborating with the cellist while writing the piece, he frequently consulted with Seymour by sending excerpts via e-mail. "I know Tessa's playing well and I always felt a very strong confidence in her musicality. Through the whole process, I never felt a shred of doubt that she is capable of going wherever the music needs to go."

What to listen for

The Cello Concerto is cast in two movements, each about 10 minutes and respectively titled "A Drop" and "Ritornello." William Gardiner has dedicated the piece to its commissioners, John Adams and Deborah O'Grady, and to Tessa Seymour. He provides the following commentary on the work:

"The two musical ideas that are at the heart of this concerto—a fluttering figure that falls down and comes back up, and two notes separated by a great vertical distance—evoke a sense of kinetic energy that has, for me, emotional resonance: something like the feeling of being in an airplane and experiencing a momentary drop due to turbulence.

In writing the piece, I was also stimulated by the inherent drama of the concerto medium—of an individual standing before a crowd.

I will be forever grateful to the commissioners of this piece, John Adams and Deborah O'Grady. John Adams has himself written some of the most amazing concertos of all time, works that are not just impressive but profound."

Dmitri Shostakovich

(1906-1975)

Jazz Suite No. 1

Composed: 1934

First performance: March 24, 1934, in Leningrad

Scored for 3 saxophones (soprano, alto, and tenor), 2 trumpets, trombone, wood block, snare drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, xylophone, banjo, Hawaiian guitar, piano, violin, and double bass.

Summary:

- **Dmitri Shostakovich emerged at a very young age as a boldly adventurous composer.**
- **The Jazz Suite No. 1 from 1934 is a product of his first decade since the premiere of his First Symphony put him on the map.**
- **While he's often associated with somber, epic symphonies and emotionally wrenching string quartets, Shostakovich was keenly alert to currents in popular music and eagerly accepted a commission to write for a jazz band in this piece.**

- **The Jazz Suite No. 1 consists of three short movements—a waltz, a polka, and a foxtrot—each scored with unique chamber ensemble colors.**

Beethoven's First Symphony represents one of the most remarkable symphonic debuts in music history, but a strong contender is Dmitri Shostakovich's first contribution to the genre—arguably an even bolder declaration of genius within its context. Moreover, Shostakovich was a teenager when he wrote it (while still a student at the Leningrad Conservatory). The premiere in 1926 brought Shostakovich into the limelight.

He had come of age in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution that took place exactly a century ago. All too briefly, a period of intense creative ferment was allowed to flourish, inspiring such outpourings as the abstract painting of Kasimir Malevich and the anti-naturalist, avant-garde theater of Vsevolod Meyerhold (who would eventually become one of Stalin's countless victims—a fate Shostakovich himself narrowly escaped).

Meyerhold was particularly impressed by the young Shostakovich's First Symphony and invited him to collaborate with his theater company. Shostakovich leaped at the chance to become involved in a rush of new theatrical projects, as well as collaborations taking advantage of the new art of cinema, which remained an abiding love—and much-needed source of income during periods when he was at odds with the Soviet culture police. (Because of his father's early death in 1922, he had helped support the family by playing the piano to accompany silent films.)

All of these experiences fed into the identity Shostakovich was constructing as a composer in this early period of relative creative freedom. Significantly, the experimental, avant-garde impulse went hand-in-hand with his openness to music intended primarily for entertainment. In 1934 Shostakovich happily took on a commission to write for a jazz band in his native Leningrad (St. Petersburg). He produced a Second Suite in 1938, but that score disappeared during the Second World War and was only posthumously reconstructed in 2000.

1934 was also the year that saw the premiere of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (based on the story that was recently adapted to the film of the same name). Despite being a runaway success, Stalin's extreme displeasure when he visited a performance in 1936 led to an official condemnation of the composer as "decadent." Aesthetic choices literally became a matter of life and death.

What to listen for

The Jazz Suite No. 1 contains three short movements. The first is a catchy though moody waltz featuring the colors of trumpet, sax, and violin, sprinkled with glockenspiel in a contrasting middle section. The xylophone and banjo make appearances in the second movement, a polka, and the third ("Foxtrot") spotlights the sax, Hawaiian guitar, and trombone, with the glockenspiel again added to the mix.

Shostakovich often makes use of irony in his works in classical genres, but the touch is lighter here, hinting at a more overt humor than is typically associated with this composer.

John Adams
(b. 1947)

Fearful Symmetries

Composed: 1988
First performance: October 29, 1988, at Avery Fisher Hall, New York City, with the composer conducting the Orchestra of St Luke's
Duration: approximately 25 minutes
Scored for 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 4 saxophones, bassoon, 2 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, synthesizer, sampler, piano, and strings.

Summary:

- **Berkeley Symphony celebrates Bay Area composer John Adams's 70th birthday this year by performing one of his vintage orchestral works from 1988.**
- ***Fearful Symmetries* takes its title from a poem by William Blake, playing on ideas of musical symmetry.**
- **This music draws on the sound world Adams created for his debut opera *Nixon in China*, which had premiered the year before.**
- ***Fearful Symmetries* seems to tease and poke fun at Minimalist gestures, while at the same time celebrating the exuberance of this style.**
- **It's a classic Adams sonic landscape.**

John Adams's 70th birthday this past February has been the occasion for a remarkable range of celebrations across the music world — including the conclusion to Berkeley Symphony's season-opening concert. Somehow, amid the constant demands for interviews and his obligations as a conductor, plus his involvement with supporting emerging composers as a committed musical citizen, Adams has managed to complete a major new work for the stage: the opera *Girls of the Golden West*, which will receive its world premiere at San Francisco Opera late next month.
Such tireless creative energy has its counterpart in the very *sound* of Adams's music: those euphoric pulsations of layered textures and tracks. *Fearful Symmetries*, vintage 1980s composed when Adams

was living in Rome as an American Academy Fellow, is a marvelous example. “It’s no accident John is the most choreographed contemporary composer, because his work *is* music of action as well as contemplation. The rhythmic impulse and physical motor under way in John’s music is another thing that lifts it from university-composed academic art music into a field of thought and action in the world,” observes the director Peter Sellars, Adams’s longtime collaborator.

Fearful Symmetries dates from 1988 and the afterglow of Adams’s breakthrough debut opera, *Nixon in China*, which premiered at Houston Grand Opera in the fall of 1987. Indeed, the orchestral work shares some musical ideas with the opera’s often-excerpted *The Chairman Dances* and might be seen as a kind of “satellite work” orbiting around that world. But instead of voices playing a role, in this case the “Nixon orchestra” clearly took center stage — which the composer defines as “a kind of mutated big band, heavy on brass, winds, synthesizer, and saxophones.” To this mix he added “a keyboard sampler playing sampled percussion sounds, two horns, and a bassoon.”

Adams has long since transcended the signature techniques associated with Minimalism. In fact, he was already doing so even in this period, the heyday of his association with the movement. The brashly insistent patterns and assertive brass of *Fearful Symmetries* almost seem to tease and poke fun at Minimalist gestures, while at the same time celebrating the exuberance of this style.

What to listen for

No description can surpass the composer’s own: *Fearful Symmetries* is “a seriously aerobic piece, a Pantagruel boogie with a thrusting, grinding beat that governs at least two-thirds of its length.” Its hyperbolic treatment of symmetrical, even-numbered phrase lengths (ironically signaled by the title’s allusion to a phase from William Blake’s “The Tyger”: “What immortal hand or eye/Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?”) verges on exhilarating absurdity. Adams notes that these emphatic gestures in the score make it “more closely allied to pop and Minimalist rock.”

And there’s still another Adamsian characteristic that makes *Fearful Symmetries* especially gripping: the impression of traveling through a sonic landscape, which is a way much of Adams’s instrumental music defines its formal shape. The composer likes to suggest an analogy between musical and geographical space. “The formal idea with my music,” Adams says, “is that something appears on the event horizon, and then it increases in importance as it begins to dominate the screen, and then it passes you and it’s gone. Meanwhile, several other events have arisen and are at various stages of moving towards you.” Such landscapes, for Adams, open up into psychological dimensions. *Fearful Symmetries* not only evokes a powerful physical response: as the music progresses, it seems to open up spaces for the imagination to wander. Crevasses hide beneath craggy heights, jagged edges rip at the comforting illusion of repeated patterns.

It’s a showcase for Adams’s dazzling skills as a sonic colorist. The composer is rightfully proud of the sound world he has fashioned in *Fearful Symmetries*: “What appeals to me most about the piece is the timbre. It mixes the weight and bravura of a big band with the glittering, synthetic sheen of techno pop (samples and synthesizer) and the facility and finesse of a symphony orchestra.”

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