

Program Notes

Opening Night
SUNDAY, JUNE 30



MICHAEL CHRISTIE,
Music Director

BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV, piano
with THE CMF CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto
No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73,
“Emperor”
Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso
Allegro

INTERMISSION

WEILL: Kleine
Dreigroschenopermusik
(*The Threepenny Opera*)

STEINER: “Jungle Dance” from
King Kong

RÓZSA: Concerto for String
Orchestra, Op. 17
Moderato, ma risoluto
ed energico
Lento con gran espressione
Allegro giusto

STEINER: Music from
Gone with the Wind

Behzod Abduraimov | piano

At the age of 18, Behzod achieved a sensational victory in the 2009 London International Piano Competition, winning first prize with his thrilling performance of Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3. This resulted in invitations to work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, where he gave a breathtaking performance of Saint-Saëns’ Piano Concerto No. 2. He also toured to China and Kuala Lumpur with the Sydney Symphony under Vladimir Ashkenazy to great critical acclaim. Following their successful collaboration, the two musicians appeared again as part of the 2010 Musikfest Bremen. Behzod has also appeared at the Piano Olympics in Bad Kissingen (where he won first prize) and the BOZAR in Brussels, and made a triumphant Wigmore Hall debut in May 2010.

Since his first performance as a soloist at the age of 8 with the National Symphony Orchestra of Uzbekistan, Behzod has given many concerts in the USA, Italy, Russia and Uzbekistan.

Behzod Abduraimov was born in Tashkent in 1990 and began to play the piano at the age of 5. He was a pupil of Tamara Popovich at the Uspensky State Central Lyceum in Tashkent, and currently studies at the International Center for Music at Park University, Kansas City, studying with Stanislav Ioudenitch.

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73, “Emperor”

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn-on-Rhine, Germany

Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

In May of 1809 Beethoven wrote to his publisher: “We have passed through a great deal of misery. I tell you that I have brought into the world little that is connected—only here and there a fragment. The whole course of events has affected both my body and soul ... what a destructive and desolate life surrounds me! Nothing but drums, cannons, and human suffering in every form!” Napoleon’s armies had invaded Vienna on May 12, and Beethoven’s lodgings were in the middle of the fighting. When the bombardment of the city grew too loud, the already seriously deaf composer took refuge in the basement of his brother Carl’s house and covered his head with pillows to protect what little hearing he had left. Because of unstable political and financial conditions after the Austrian surrender, the piano concerto he wrote in the midst of the French invasion was not premiered until November of 1811 in Leipzig. By then Beethoven’s hearing had deteriorated too much for him to play the solo part as he had in the premieres of his previous concertos, and the honor of that first performance went to Friedrich Schneider, a 25-year-old church organist. Three months later, in February 1812, the concerto was given its Vienna premiere by Beethoven’s student Carl Czerny. Beethoven, a staunch democrat, would have been furious if he had known that the E-flat concerto would eventually be nicknamed the “Emperor” by his friend, pianist Johann Cramer. Beethoven despised Napoleon for declaring himself Emperor of France in 1804, and hated him the more for conquering Austria, his adopted home. A friend recalled Beethoven sitting in a café shaking his fist at the back of a French officer. “If I were a general,” he muttered, “and knew as much about strategy as I do about counterpoint, I’d give you fellows something to think about.”

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This bellicose defiance seems to find its musical voice in what Maynard Solomon calls “the warlike rhythms, victory motives, thrusting melodies, and affirmative character” of the *Emperor* Concerto. The work begins with an inventive and arresting musical cannonade: the orchestra fires out three great chords from which erupt brilliant mini-cadenzas for the solo piano. The final cadenza leads directly into the striding martial opening theme of the movement. This branches out into a rich array of subordinate ideas that are subjected to typically dramatic, stormy development and dialog between piano and orchestra. Just before the coda, where the soloist was usually expected to improvise a big cadenza, Beethoven made a revolutionary break with tradition. He wrote in the score, “*Non si fa una cadenza, ma s’attacca subito il seguente*” (“Do not play a cadenza, but immediately proceed to the following”). With these fateful words he seized full compositional control of every note in the concerto and signaled the end of spontaneous improvisation in concert music. The movement proceeds with Beethoven’s own written-out cadenza, briefly treating the two principal themes and gradually bringing in the orchestra for a triumphant coda. After this, composers increasingly supplied their own cadenzas rather than leaving them to the musical whims of soloists.

The quietly lyrical second movement is a nocturne-like place of repose between the dramatic outer movements. A meditative melody sung by muted strings is decorated with garlands of variations by the solo piano. Beethoven creates one of his miraculous transitions here: as the final variation fades away, the bassoons softly sustain the home-key note of the movement; then, without any warning, the whole orchestra seems to sink down a half-step, like a faulty elevator, into the key of the finale. The piano begins playing quiet hints of the movement that is to follow, then suddenly bursts out with the ebullient, somewhat quirky opening theme of the rondo. This vigorous movement is a jig danced in army-boots: somewhat heavy-footed, but jolly and full of high spirits nonetheless. Especially inventive and (for its day) outrageous is the duet for piano and timpani just before the end that slows and fades into silence before the piano unleashes a blazing sequence of scales that lead into the final chords. After the *Emperor*, Beethoven, who was only 39 years old, never wrote another piano concerto. This is likely due to the fact that his concertos were vehicles for his career as a solo pianist, and his inability, due to deafness, to perform in public led him to concentrate on other musical genres. So we should be grateful: Beethoven’s heartbreaking loss led to the magnificent orchestral and chamber works of his last 18 years that are our priceless legacy.

Concerto for String Orchestra, Op. 17 (1943)

Miklós Rózsa

Born April 18, 1907, in Budapest, Hungary

Died July 27, 1995, in Los Angeles

Miklós Rózsa first encountered the folk music of his native Hungary during boyhood summers on his wealthy father’s estate outside Budapest. He eagerly absorbed the melodies sung by the peasants who lived in the countryside, and their influence is evident in his own music. He began studying the violin at age 5 and joined the Franz Liszt Society in high school, where he got in trouble for defending the music of two controversial Hungarian modernists, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. His father tried to steer him into a career in chemistry, but Rózsa switched to a music major after his first year at the University of Leipzig. His first formal composition, a string trio, was published while he was still at the university. He moved to Paris after graduating, and scored his first international success with the premiere of his *Theme, Variations and Finale* in 1934.

Rózsa discovered the allure of writing music for the movies when he learned that his friend Arthur Honegger had written a film score and been handsomely paid for it. He studied movies closely to learn how music fitted into the flow of the narrative, and in 1937 jumped at the chance to write the score for a romantic espionage thriller, *Knight Without Armour*, starring Marlene Dietrich and Robert Donat. The film was a hit, and Rózsa joined the staff of London Films—run by a fellow Hungarian expatriate, Alexander Korda. When Korda moved on to Hollywood, Rózsa went with him and made his way for several years as a freelance film composer in the movie capital. After he won Oscars for the scores for *Spellbound* (1945) and *A Double Life* (1948), Rózsa joined the staff of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where he worked for the next 15 years.

Meanwhile, Rózsa didn’t forsake the world of concert music. His studio contract gave him his summers free, and he used the time to write chamber music, orchestral works and concertos for famed concert artists such as Jascha Heifetz, Gregor Piatigorsky, Janos Starker and Leonard Pennario. Rózsa continued composing nearly to the end of his life, and left a body of work for both the movies and the concert hall, distinguished by its lyrical romanticism and the subtle but unmistakable lilt of Hungarian folk rhythms.

The *Concerto for String Orchestra*, written in 1943 and revised in 1957, was the first concert work Rózsa composed after emigrating to the United States, and its melodies recall his homeland with what the composer called a “Hungarian accent.” There is no trace of Rózsa’s eclectic Hollywood style here. The concerto, dedicated to his wife, is an intensely emotional and musically complex work that seems to painfully reflect on the turmoil of war that was afflicting Hungary when it was written.

Kleine Dreigroschenmusik (1929)

Kurt Weill

Born March 2, 1900, in Dessau, Germany

Died April 3, 1950, in New York City

If everyone who claims to have been in the audience at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin on the evening of August 31, 1928, had actually been there, the place would have collapsed. That night has gone down in dozens of memoirs of Berlin in the 1920s as the opening night of *Die Dreigroschenoper*—"The Threepenny Opera." No other work of art so trenchantly and brilliantly captured the mood of cynical despair in post-World War I Germany and the *demimonde* of the Weimar Republic as this collaboration of two up-and-coming young theatrical lions, Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Weill and Brecht had begun to work together in 1927. Their first collaboration, the "song play" *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, impressed Ernst Auftricht, the impresario of the Schiffbauerdamm Theater. He commissioned them to produce an adaptation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, which had just enjoyed an immensely successful revival in London. John Gay (1685-1732) wrote the libretto for the "ballad-opera" *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728. Using tunes from popular songs of the day, the opera was populated with characters from London low life, and satirized both contemporary politics and the conventions of Italian opera. Its main protagonists were the merciless highwayman Macheath and the "fallen" heroine Polly. Weill, Brecht and the poet Elizabeth Hauptmann went to work on an adaptation, but what they produced was not the simple translation Auftricht wanted; it was a whole new show. They kept only the outlines of Gay's story, overlaying it with biting modern satire augmented by Weill's songs that mixed parodies of 18th-century opera with Berlin café music and American dance-band jazz. What emerged was *The Threepenny Opera*, a bitter commentary on social and political corruption in Weimar, Germany, between the wars.

Weill's music was a brilliant marriage of the popular and the serious: arias, canons and opera-style choruses rubbed elbows with the shimmy, the foxtrot and popular dance-hall tunes. *The Threepenny Opera* was an overwhelming success; in five years' time it received more than 10,000 performances throughout Europe, and was translated into 18 languages. Weill responded to the music's popularity by extracting eight numbers in 1929 to create a concert suite, *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*, scored for the same pit-band ensemble used in the opera. First performed by the Berlin Philharmonic, the suite is a mixture of many styles: a foxtrot, a tango, the blues, mock-Baroque chorales, music-hall tunes, ballads, jazz and ragtime.

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