



BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY



Friday, November 3, 2023
Alpharetta First United Methodist Church



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BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH SYMPHONY

Friday, November 3, 2023

Alpharetta First United Methodist Church

69 N. Main Street, Alpharetta

Dr. Grant Gilman, *conductor*

Jonathan Shaw, *horn*

Tyler Smith, *horn*

Jake Wadsworth, *horn*

Cal Hughes, *horn*

Alpharetta Symphony

Please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices.

Blue Cathedral

Jennifer Higdon

(b. 1962)

Konzertstück for Four Horns and Orchestra, op. 86

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)

I. Lebhaft

II. Romanze. Ziemlich langsam

III. Sehr lebhaft

Jonathan Shaw, *horn*

Tyler Smith, *horn*

Jake Wadsworth, *horn*

Cal Hughes, *horn*

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, op. 67

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante con moto

III. Scherzo: Allegro

IV. Allegro-Presto

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ABOUT THE SOLOISTS



Cal Hughes, *horn*

Cal Hughes is a lifelong musician studying Horn Performance at the University of Georgia with Dr. Jean Martin-Williams and Dr. James Naigus. Cal regularly performs with the UGA Symphony Orchestra and Wind Ensemble. During that time, he has had the opportunity to play many standard works for wind ensemble, orchestra, and opera. For solo performance, Cal has studied a wide variety of genres including Baroque, Romantic, 20th Century, Blues/Jazz, and Modern. He plans to graduate in the spring of 2024 and will continue studying music pursuing his Master's Degree.



Jonathan Shaw, *horn*

Jonathan Shaw has been with the Alpharetta Symphony since 2021, playing the likes of Hanson, Dvořák, Saint Saëns, and Williams. He earned his BM at Reinhardt University studying with Helen Werling, Dr. Candace Neal, and Dr. Peter Riggs. Shaw will be making his soloist debut performing Schumann's *Konzertstück*.



Tyler Smith, *horn*

Tyler Smith is a hornist from Cherokee County, Georgia and has been teaching and performing in the area for more than a decade. He attended Reinhardt University and graduated in 2013 with a degree in Music Education and Performance.

In addition to the Alpharetta Symphony, Tyler performs regularly with several local ensembles such as the Atlanta Horn Club, Red Top Brass Quintet, AP Winds, and the Georgia Wind Symphony.



Jake Wadsworth, *horn*

Jake Wadsworth is a dedicated musician, educator, and pursuer of art. In the past, Jake has worked with notable performers and pedagogues such as James Naigus, Jean Martin-Williams, Phillip Smith, and many others.

Currently, Jake is a student at the University of Georgia where he studies music performance and music theory. In his studies, Jake has had the pleasure of working with UGA's top-performing ensembles including the Symphony Orchestra and the Wind Ensemble. This also coincides with his work in local schools teaching masterclasses and lessons on playing the horn. Since joining the Alpharetta Symphony in 2021, he has played works by Saint-Saens, Dvorak, Williams, and Tchaikovsky. He intends to graduate in the Fall of 2024 and pursue a Master's degree.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

***Blue Cathedral* by Jennifer Higdon**

“Blue...like the sky. Where all possibilities soar. Cathedrals...a place of thought, growth, spiritual expression...serving as a symbolic doorway in to and out of this world. Blue represents all potential and the progression of journeys. Cathedrals represent a place of beginnings, endings, solitude, fellowship, contemplation, knowledge and growth. As I was writing this piece, I found myself imagining a journey through a glass cathedral in the sky. Because the walls would be transparent, I saw the image of clouds and blueness permeating from the outside of this church. In my mind’s eye the listener would enter from the back of the sanctuary, floating along the corridor amongst giant crystal pillars, moving in a contemplative stance. The stained glass windows’ figures would start moving with song, singing a heavenly music. The listener would float down the aisle, slowly moving upward at first and then progressing at a quicker pace, rising towards an immense ceiling which would open to the sky...as this journey progressed, the speed of the traveler would increase, rushing forward and upward. I wanted to create the sensation of contemplation and quiet peace at the beginning, moving towards the feeling of celebration and ecstatic expansion of the soul, all the while singing along with that heavenly music.”

– Jennifer Higdon

Higdon, who spent her first ten years in Atlanta before her family relocated to Tennessee, came to classical music as a bit of a late bloomer. Her father had taken care to expose his children to different types of art, but her formative musical experience was through the rock and folk music of the 1960’s. She joined the band in high school as a percussionist and not long afterwards, she taught herself how to play the flute. Within a few years, she went on to study flute performance at Bowling Green University, took an interest in composition, and met Robert Spano, conductor of the Atlanta Symphony and a visiting professor, who became a champion of her music in the American orchestral community. In these early years, Higdon felt a lot of trepidation stating, “I didn’t know any basic theory, how to spell a chord, what intervals were, and I had zero keyboard skills. I basically started from the very, very beginning. Most of the people I started school with were far more advanced than I was, and I had an extraordinary amount of catching up to do.” Despite this late start, she went on to earn an Artist’s Diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music, followed by a Master of Arts and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania where she studied with the composer George Crumb. She also served as a professor of compositional studies at Curtis from 1994-2021.

Higdon has received commissions for a multitude of major symphonic orchestras that include the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. She has served as Composer-in-Residence for the Philadelphia Orchestra and others, such as the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and the Music Academy of the West. She has received three Grammy Awards for her Percussion Concerto in 2010, her Viola Concerto, in 2018, and her Harp Concerto in 2020 respectively. She also received a Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2010 for her impressive Violin Concerto.

Her music is sometimes considered neo-romantic, following an emotional journey that is “intuitive” or “instinctive” instead of adhering to strict traditional forms and structures. Influenced by the pop music of her youth, she also finds that nature (specifically the wide, open spaces of the Tennessee countryside and mountains) influence her music. Her pieces are tonal, but without a specific key, allowing for sudden harmonic shifts; and her works tend to be rhythmically intricate while maintaining lyric melodies. *Blue Cathedral* is a one movement tone poem, commissioned in 2000 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Curtis Institute of Music, but with the recent passing of her beloved younger brother, the work took on a more transcendent and personal journey. Higdon writes, “I began writing this piece at a unique juncture in my life and found myself pondering the question of what makes a life. The recent loss of my younger brother, Andrew Blue, made me reflect on the amazing journeys that we all make in our lives, crossing paths with so many individuals singularly and collectively, learning and growing each step of the way. This piece represents the expression of the individual and the group...our inner travels and the places our souls carry us, the lessons we learn, and the growth we experience.” The work opens and closes with bells and chimes, gently, calmly, and reflectively, setting a church-like space. A tender adagio for strings opens the conversation between the flute and clarinet. As a “tribute to my brother, I feature solos for the clarinet (the instrument he played) and the flute (the instrument I play). Because I am the older sibling, it is the flute that appears first in this dialog.” The piece intensifies and goes through a dark turn. Higdon explained, “I was kind of ticked off. Part of mourning is anger.” Finding lightness and optimism, the music continues through layers of rhythmic momentum before the string adagio returns and “the two instruments continue their dialogue, but it is the flute that drops out and the clarinet that continues on in the upward progressing journey.” In a review for *The Baltimore Sun*, Tim Smith said, “The music seems to emit and reflect light as it moves from stillness to exuberance and back again, tapering off ethereally. If you didn’t know the personal story behind it, the music could still touch your heart; when you do know that story, it can touch your soul.”

***Konzertstück, Op. 86* by Robert Schumann**

Schumann was highly imaginative, feeding his passion for poetry, fantasy, and music in nearly everything that he produced. However, Anthony Tommasini, music critic for *The New York Times* writes, “Schumann’s life and work were defined by emotional problems and mental illness that began in his youth...Even in early letters and diaries he described hearing music and voices, experiences that both enthralled and overwhelmed him. Schumann described himself as having two personalities, two complementary internal characters: Florestan, who was impetuous, passionate, and hotheaded; and Eusebius, who was dreamy, wistful, and tender. He wrote important critical pieces in the form of dialogues between the two. Though this division within his psyche originated as literary conceit, it can be seen as an early manifestation of mental disorder that would eventually cause Schumann misery and drive him to attempt suicide.”

At the age of 18, after the sudden and traumatic death of his father, Schumann relocated to Leipzig in order to study law, a subject on which he was rather indifferent. It was not long before he had abandoned his university path in favor of piano studies with Friedrich Wieck. Wieck’s nine-year old daughter, Clara, was just beginning her studies in composition and orchestration, as he groomed her for her inevitable and successful career as a concert pianist. To the great disappointment of her father, who tried to prevent the union, Clara and Robert developed a romance as she grew,

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eventually tying the knot when she came of age in 1840. In 1831, while studying with Wieck, Schumann developed a lame/stiff finger in his right hand, effectively ending his career as a pianist, and shifting his focus to composition and critical writing. As a critic Schumann strove to counter the rising influence of Italian opera and “empty virtuosic display”, he wanted to “bring the poetry of [German] art into honor once again.” By the 1840’s, his mental instability had caused some of his compositions to become erratic as he systematically moved from one genre to the next. In 1853, as Schumann’s mental state was taking a turn for the worst, Johannes Brahms, a young and promising composer, moved into the Schumann household, instantly forging a bond with the couple. Just months later, Schumann attempted suicide prompting doctors to admit him to an asylum where he remained until his death in 1856.

Schumann, like many composers of the time looked up to the larger-than-life Beethoven; he was both an inspiration to composers and an intimidating genius to surpass. Schumann took on the challenge, composing in various phases, focusing on each particular genre to the point of exhaustion. Early in his career, he focused on piano works; around the time of his wedding, he was composing lieder in high quantity; and in the 1840’s, he was focusing on chamber music and orchestral works. His *Konzertstück*, written in 1849, is a mixture of the last two genres. This slightly condensed concerto for 4 horns is a lush quartet between the soloists in the midst of a dense orchestral score. Tommasini writes that, “The orchestrations, even after Schumann made extensive revisions, can seem thick and heavy.” While certainly true in this piece, the composer balances this rich texture with lyrical phrasing and lively themes, not to mention plenty of virtuosity from the soloists, making this piece a true showcase for the instrument.

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, op. 67 by Ludwig van Beethoven

“Beethoven’s music discloses to us the realm of the colossal and the immeasurable. Beams of incandescent light shoot through the deep night of this realm, and we become conscious of enormous shadows; shadows that, in the ponderous weight of their alternating ebb and flow, ever-more-narrowly constrain, and, ultimately, annihilate us—without, however, annihilating that pain of infinite yearning upon which each and every pleasure that has fleetingly come into its own in the exultation of melody founders and then perishes, and it is only in virtue of this pain—this pain of mingled love, hope, and joy that is intrinsically consumptive but not destructive, this pain that strives to tear our breast asunder in a full-voiced concord of all the passions—that we survive the ordeal as enraptured communicants with the great beyond!”

Describing Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67*, E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote those words in 1810 (two years after the premier) as part of his review that catapulted the Fifth Symphony into international and historical renown. Maynard Solomon, famed Beethoven scholar, writes, “After some initial resistance to its unheralded rhythmic concentration, economy of thematic material, and startling innovations—the unexpected oboe cadenza in the first movement, the addition of piccolo and double bassoon to the winds, the “spectral” effects of the double basses in the scherzo and the finale—the Fifth Symphony came to be regarded as the quintessential Beethoven symphony, revealing new layers of meaning to each successive generation.” Today, it is hard to imagine just how shocking the Fifth Symphony would have been to the premier audience in 1808; from its explosive opening to its triumphant end, Beethoven broke rule after rule, revolutionizing the Classical symphonic form for future composers and opening the door to the Romantic period.

The premier took place on December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna, it was freezing outside, but it wasn't much warmer inside. Beethoven had planned a four-hour showcase of his music, after just one rehearsal, performed by a thrown together orchestra, of whatever musicians were not fighting in the Napoleonic wars. The program began with the Sixth Symphony, then the aria and scene "Ah! Perfido", the Gloria from the Mass in C Major, followed by the Piano Concerto No.4 with Beethoven as the soloist. Nearly two hours in, the audience was finally subjected to the Fifth Symphony, the Sanctus from the Mass in C Major, a piano improvisation (again with Beethoven on the ivories), concluding with the Choral Fantasy (reportedly, Beethoven stopped halfway through due to a mistake and made the performers start over from the beginning...with repeats!). Even for audiences of the day, that was a bit much. One audience member reportedly was going to leave in the middle, but he was in Beethoven's line of sight, so he didn't dare! When you consider the conditions and the rest of the program, it is easier to understand why it took a review two years after the premier to recognize the extraordinary brilliance of the Fifth Symphony.

The famous opening motive's origin and/or meaning is as mysterious as its indefinite harmony. The most infamous story comes from one of Beethoven's students, Anton Schindler, whose accounts are not always trustworthy; he claims that the composer described the opening with the words, "Thus Fate knocks at the door!". Another student, Carl Czerny, a much more reliable source, claimed that Beethoven was inspired by the birdsong of a Yellow Hammer Bird as he was walking around Vienna. As for the entire Symphony's program or meaning, Beethoven left no indication. One comment may indicate a connection to antique tragedy, but there is nothing concrete. Several people throughout the years have tried to explain the work in a political or militaristic light; after all, Beethoven's patriotic and anti-French sentiments were very strong at the time. There is no evidence to prove that Beethoven was not influenced by the political climate of the day. In fact, Sir Elliot Gardiner has come across some French Revolutionary songs, one of which sounds extraordinarily like the theme of the fourth movement; that being said, there is also no evidence that Beethoven would have heard this rebellion hymn and chose to quote it. As the work clearly struggles throughout, full of nervous, frantic energy in one moment, then heroic victory in the next; the triumphant finale as the piece turns from C minor to C major could very easily be seen as a "triumph of good over evil". In 1945, Virgil Thomson offered an insightful perspective in the New York Herald Tribune:

"There is no intrinsic reason, in this work or in any other, for considering contrast to mean conflict. The expression of strength, even of rudeness, in one chief theme of a piece and of pathos or tenderness in another does not mean that there is a war going on between the two sentiments...And I cannot find in the last movement of it, for all its triumphal trumpets, any representation, thematic or otherwise, of the victory of either sentiment. I find, rather, an apotheosis, in which the two are transformed into a third expression, which is one of optimism and confidence, a glorious but still dynamic serenity. Neither assertiveness nor lyricism wins; they simply decide to cooperate. [...] This is no picture of military victory. It is the purest Hegelian dialectic, by which thesis and antithesis unite to form a third element, or synthesis."

Perhaps the Fifth Symphony could be Beethoven's expression of his struggle through hearing loss, the biggest influence on his daily life. He struggled constantly through false hope and anxiety as the condition temporarily improved and then got worse; through resignation and determination to overcome the disability, then the devastating reality of social situations for which he desperately yearned. Perhaps the

triumph of the fourth movement is a synthesis: peace in resignation, acceptance; or perhaps the victory over deafness only possible in his imagination. The transformations of the ever-present rhythmic opening motive, the emotional ambiguity heard throughout the piece, the modulation between opposing keys, the echoes of previous themes, could all be a representation of his own personal struggle within. Even the oboe cadenza in the first movement, truly striking in its sadness, could be a recollection of the devastating pivotal moment for the composer when his friend Ferdinand Ries, “called his attention to a shepherd who was piping very agreeably in the woods...For half an hour Beethoven could hear nothing...he became extremely quiet and morose.”

It is a misconception that Beethoven was deaf for the majority of his career, in reality, his hearing loss was gradual and a bit intermittent at times. In 1796, at the age of 26, he began to experience the first symptoms; in this first stage, Beethoven was experiencing constant tinnitus, the inability to hear high pitches, distant or soft sounds, and loud noises actually caused pain! But he was already a firmly established and incredibly successful composer as detailed in a letter to his friend Franz Wegeler, “My compositions bring me in a good deal; and I may say that I am offered more commissions than it is possible for me to carry out. Moreover, for every composition I can count on six or seven publishers, and even more, if I want them; people no longer come to an arrangement with me, I state my price and they pay.” However, by 1801-2 the problem had grown depressingly persistent (aggravated by false hope and damaging treatments), even provoking thoughts of suicide. In a particular low moment, Beethoven wrote the following in his Heiglstadt Testament:

“For six years now I have been hopelessly afflicted, made worse by senseless physicians, from year to year deceived with hopes of improvement, finally compelled to face the prospect of a lasting malady (whose cure will take years or, perhaps, be impossible). Though born with a fiery, active temperament, even susceptible to the diversions of society, I was soon compelled to withdraw myself, to live life alone. If at times I tried to forget all this, oh how harshly was I flung back by the doubly sad experience of my bad hearing. Yet it was impossible for me to say to people, “Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf.” Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed.”

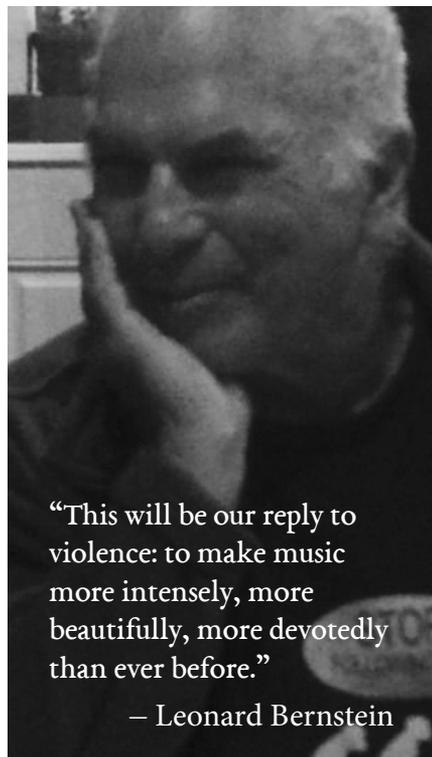
He lived in constant anxiety and solitude. In 1804, his friend Stephan von Breuning wrote to their mutual friend, Franz Wegeler, “You cannot believe dear Wegeler, what an indescribable—I should say terrifying—impression the waning of his hearing has had upon him...He has become very withdrawn and often mistrustful of his best friends, and irresolute in many things!” But it seems that there were some improvements after Beethoven finally found a decent physician, who at the least did not cause more harm with ridiculous treatments; a neighbor and friend who lived in the same building between 1803 to 1806, often dining with Beethoven reported that, “No physical ill had then afflicted him; no loss of the sense which is peculiarly indispensable to the musician had darkened his life.” And even Ferdinand Ries, who shared one of the composer’s darkest moments in 1802, when the composer could not hear the shepherd playing in the distance, believed that during this period “the trouble soon disappeared again”. In 1806 (not long before he would write the Fifth Symphony), on a sketch of the “Razumovsky” quartets, Beethoven wrote, “Let your deafness no longer be a secret—even in art.”; as Solomon states, it was as if, “Beethoven had come to terms with his deafness”.

By 1808, the hearing loss had progressed to the point that the concert at which the Fifth Symphony premiered was also his last performance as a concert soloist. After this, the deafness progressed more quickly, some say he was completely deaf by 1812 or 1814, but he could still just barely hear a little bit of music in his right ear until 1817, after that he could no longer even hear speech when shouted into an ear trumpet, and he shut himself off from society almost entirely. Insightfully, Solomon writes, “Deafness did not impair and indeed may even have heightened his abilities as a composer, perhaps by its exclusion of piano virtuosity as a competing outlet for his creativity, perhaps by permitting a total concentration upon composition within a world of increasing auditory seclusion. In his deaf world, Beethoven could experiment with new forms of experience [...] free, like a dreamer, to combine and recombine the stuff of reality, in accordance with his desires, into previously undreamed-of forms and structures. [...] The onset of his deafness was the painful chrysalis within which his “heroic” style came to maturity.”

Perhaps his disability was really a kind of super-power...

— Missy Mahon

Missy Mahon writes all of the program notes for the Alpharetta Symphony and she has been a part of the Symphony since 2017. Missy has a Master's degree in Musicology from Temple University and a Bachelor's degree in Flute Performance from Columbus State University.



“This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.”

— Leonard Bernstein

On October 7, 2023, a dear member of our Alpharetta Symphony family lost his father, Amitai Ben Zvi, in the attacks that occurred in Israel.

We would like to honor his memory today. May his memory be for a blessing.



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Robert Barnes

Bassoon

Avishay Ben-Zvi
Randy Wilbur
Erin Anderson

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Russel Williamson *
Brian Hedrick
Christi Lenz
In memory of Tom Jones
Joel Margolies

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Geary Newman *
Paul Fletcher
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Scott Moninger
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Tuba

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Percussion

Bryan Wysocki *
Jordan Benafort
Noah Samuelson **

Harp

Tyler Hartley

* Concertmaster

* Principal

** Assistant Principal

** Acting

All other musicians listed in alphabetical order after the section principal.