

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

William Eddins, *director*

David Štech, *graduate student conductor*

Nathan Sawyer, *graduate student conductor*

Foellinger Great Hall

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

7:30 PM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Egmont, Op. 84

i. Overture: Sostenuto, ma non troppo – Allegro

Nathan Sawyer, *conductor*

IGOR STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)

Concerto in Eb "Dumbarton Oaks"

i. Tempo giusto

ii. Allegretto

iii. Con moto

David Štech, *conductor*

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
(1756-1791)

Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466

i. Allegro

ii. Romanze

iii. Rondo: Allegro assai

William Eddins, *piano*

Program Notes

Egmont, Op. 84 (Overture) – Ludwig van Beethoven

In 1809, Beethoven received a commission to compose the overture from Wolfgang von Goethe. It would be the overture to his play, Egmont. At the time, Goethe was one of Beethoven's role models as they shared in similar views of tyrants. In Egmont, the story is about rebellion against tyranny of such governments and Beethoven was not quiet about his opinion of that type of leadership; especially after Napoleon Bonaparte, who was a hero for Beethoven, became a tyrant and thus forced the composer to undedicate his third symphony to the man.

The beginning of the overture shouts tragedy with these brash minor chords in the strings and offbeat entrances of these lamentful wind solos. But the spark of rebellion begins in a fast 3/4 where the story takes off. Beethoven's usage of a brisk 3/4 calls back to his Symphony No. 3 "Eroica." Perhaps the main character, Count Egmont, reminded him of the heroic qualities fought for in that symphony.

The brash chords appear again at the onset of the second theme. They create an antecedent consequent with the woodwinds which respond cheerfully. The piece goes through a short development that is extremely repetitive with the same motives in the winds over string ostinatos. The recapitulation occurs and theme 1 and theme 2 are restated. There is a brief interlude of long held chords in the bassoons, clarinets, and oboe between two fermatas which represent the Count's solemn execution. But after the death, comes the flame of his spark of rebellion. The Victory Symphony occurs and we are in a grounded, regal common time. After all this time being in f minor, we have reached a glorious f major. Although the hero dies, his voice and passion live on to the next generations.

Concerto in Eb "Dumbarton Oaks" – Igor Stravinsky

The Concerto in E-flat, inscribed Dumbarton Oaks, 8.V.38, was commissioned by a wealthy American couple, Robert Woods Bliss and Mildred Barnes Bliss, celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary. The couple held classical music dear to their hearts. From the salon of their Parisian apartment to their Renaissance-inspired music room at their Washington, D.C. state Dumbarton Oaks, the Blisses ensured that music was given proper space in their homes, a commitment enhanced through their sponsorship of musicians and the commissioning of new works. Mildred worked with her friend Nadia Boulanger, the French composer and conductor, to arrange the contract. Boulanger conducted the first performance at Dumbarton Oaks on May 8, 1938.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) is revered as one of the most respected and influential composers of the 20th century. However, as he grew older, the fundamental basis for his compositions underwent distinct, radical, and abrupt changes. Stravinsky's output can be grouped into three boldly different periods or styles. First, his so-called "Russian" period stemmed from his interest in Russian folk stories and traditions, which brought forth *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*. These scores demanded big orchestras and were marked by the use of constantly changing and unusual rhythms. This era was followed by a severe, experimental style around WWI; by 1920, he had turned almost exclusively to "Neoclassicism," a new style that dominated his approach until around 1950. Not until the death of Arnold Schoenberg in 1951 did he turn to serialism, a compositional technique based on math, dissonance, atonality, and a rejection of harmonic and melodic beauty.

Tonight's *Concerto in Eb* lay squarely within this second period when he returned to the general principles of composition from the "classical" period: from 1750 (the death of Bach) to 1827 (the death of Beethoven). However, Stravinsky's compositions in this style also comprise neo-renaissance, neo-baroque, and even neo-romantic concepts. He took inspiration, borrowed techniques and forms, and always funneled them through his remarkable craftsmanship to produce entirely new musical ideas and procedures. Stravinsky was, by his own admission, a musical "kleptomaniac." He stole from Russian folk melodies, 18th-century Italian tunes, and Rossini operas. His lean, abstract, reductive musical mind grabbed techniques from the past and created stunning original music with them.

In the years surrounding the composition of the *Concerto in Eb*, Igor and his family were suffering from tuberculosis. Both his beloved daughter and wife died. During this period, he sought solace in Bach's music. It was "the most difficult time of my life," he later wrote. "I played Bach regularly during the composition of the *Concerto* and was greatly attracted to the 'Brandenburg' *Concertos*." Indeed, echoes of the *Brandenburgs* can be heard throughout *Dumbarton Oaks*, which can be seen as a reinvention of the Baroque concerto grosso. Thus, the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* self-consciously becomes didactic music-about-music: an essay on the art of writing a concerto in the Baroque style realized in modern harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic idioms.

It has three movements, in the typical fast-slow-fast pattern, but with the movements flowing one into the next without pause. In all three movements, short motifs are developed contrapuntally, thrown back and forth from one group of musicians to another in concerto grosso fashion, and each of the fast movements includes a fugue-like section near its conclusion. As glue between the three movements, he wrote short moments of transition, like tiny hymns of intimate contemplation. The music is spare and bustling in the Baroque manner, but the repeating bass rhythms, the shifting meters, and the syncopation are pure Stravinsky. Full of surprises and delights, always with a glint in its eye, Igor pushed the musicians to their technical limit, with awkward rhythms, sharp turns, and difficult passages.

Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466 – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

K466 is the Ur-concerto, the concerto from which every other piece for solo instrument and orchestra written for the next 200+ years owes a massive debt. When Mozart moved to Vienna in 1781 he embarked on a flurry of composition, mainly to showcase his own talents as a pianist and composer. Symphonies, strings quartets, sonatas for Piano and Violin, concert arias, various solo works for piano - all these soon flowed from his pen. But starting in February, 1784, he kicked his own ambitions into high gear. The next three years were dominated by one vehicle - the piano concerto. This was the vehicle that allowed him to combine his compositional talents and his piano skills to the fullest extent. Twelve glorious true masterpieces written between February 1784 and December 1786, and smack dab in the middle came the great D minor concerto, K466.

But why is this one, of all the Apostolic Twelve, the Ur-concerto? To answer this question one must understand Beethoven. Rumor has it that when Beethoven was ushered into Mozart's music room the elder composer asked him to play something. Beethoven sat down and played the opening movement of K491, the C minor concerto. Mozart was supposed to have said: "Not that. Anybody can play that. Play something of your own." What Beethoven played is not known, but Mozart agreed to take him as a pupil. Unfortunately, Beethoven was called back to Bonn, and by the time he returned to Vienna in 1792 Mozart was dead.

It is telling that it was one of the piano concerti that Beethoven sought to impress Mozart with. It is curious that it was K491, because that does not seem the concerto that Beethoven most favored. Or, at least, it's not the one he chose to immortalize. We suspect that Beethoven played K466 in a benefit concert for Mozart's widow, Constanza, some years later. More importantly, K466 is the one concerto that Beethoven wrote cadenzas for. Said cadenzas have become a staple of the repertoire are frequently played during K466.

That Beethoven wrote these cadenzas is an important clue. He admired the Mozart concerti, learned from them, studied them, and used them as a basis for his own concerti. Beethoven's B flat concerto is actually the first one he wrote, although it was published after the C major and therefore has the designation of concerto #2. Compare if you will the structure of Beethoven's B flat concerto with K466. The resemblance is astounding. Use of thematic material, key relationships, piano writing, and orchestral writing all bear the strongest resemblance to K466. K466 was, essentially, the template that Beethoven used for his first foray into concerto writing. And no wonder - the drama, the Sturm und Drang, the pathos of K466 must have been an incredible attraction to the man who would go on to break musical boundaries left and right.

The rest, as they say, is history. The C major (op. 15), C minor (op. 37), G major (op.58), and E flat (Emperor; op. 73), each Beethoven piano concerto redefined what was possible in this format, and those concerti in their turn became the template and/or leaping off point for all future concerti. But none of them would have been possible without the Mozart concerti, and particularly K466. This concerto was the link between giants, like speaking directly to like.

Biographies

William Eddins

William Eddins is the music director emeritus of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and a frequent guest conductor of major orchestras throughout the world. Engagements have included the New York Philharmonic, St. Louis Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of San Francisco, Boston Minnesota, Cincinnati, Atlanta, Detroit, Dallas, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Houston, as well as the Los Angeles and Buffalo Philharmonics.

Internationally, Eddins was principal guest conductor of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra (Ireland). He has also conducted the Berlin Staatskapelle, Berlin Radio Orchestra, Welsh National Opera, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, and the Lisbon Metropolitan Orchestra.

Career highlights include taking the Edmonton Symphony Orchestras to Carnegie Hall in May of 2012, conducting RAI Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale on Italian television, and leading the Natal Philharmonic on tour in South Africa with soprano Renée Fleming. Equally at home with opera, he conducted a full production of *Porgy and Bess* with Opera de Lyon both in France and the Edinburgh Festival and a revival of the production during the summer of 2010.

Mr. Eddins is an accomplished pianist and chamber musician. He regularly conducts from the piano in works by Mozart, Beethoven, Gershwin, and Ravel. He has released a compact disc recording on his own label that includes Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata and William Albright's *The Nightmare Fantasy Rag*.

Mr. Eddins has performed at the Ravinia Festival with both the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Ravinia Festival Orchestra. He has also conducted the orchestras of the Aspen Music Festival, the Hollywood Bowl, Chautauqua Festival, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago.

A native of Buffalo, New York, Mr. Eddins attended the Eastman School of Music, studying with David Effron and graduating at age eighteen. He also studied conducting with Daniel Lewis at the University of Southern California and was a founding member of the New World Symphony in Miami, Florida.

David Štech

Pianist and conductor David Štech is currently a doctoral student at the University of Illinois, where he studies conducting and collaborative piano. He is the assistant conductor of the Champaign-Urbana Symphony, associate conductor of dell'Arte Opera Ensemble in New York City, Organist/Choirmaster at St. John's Episcopal Church in Passaic, NJ, and artistic director of the New York Conducting Institute.

After studying at Northwestern University, Štech was selected to be a conducting fellow with the League of American Orchestras, the Chicago Civic Orchestra, and Chorus America. He was later invited to Tanglewood, where he was awarded the Leonard Bernstein Conducting Fellowship. There he worked closely with Kurt Masur, Christoph von Dohnányi, and Michael Morgan. Štech's other mentors include Gustav Meier, Paul Nadler, Larry Rachleff, Kirk Trevor, and he is an alumnus of the Pierre Monteux School for conductors.

Štech has since conducted The Florida Orchestra, the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic, Sarasota Opera, the New Symphony Orchestra (Bulgaria), St. Petersburg Opera, Orquestra Sinfónica Uncuyo (Argentina), Charlottesville Opera, Opera Southwest, and has served as resident conductor for the New York Composers' Collective, the Astoria Symphony in Queens, and New York Lyric Opera. As a vocal coach, he has worked at the Opera Theater of Lucca, the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, and Manhattan School of Music, where he served on the faculty for eight years.

Nathan Sawyer

Nathan Sawyer joined the master's program in Orchestral Conducting in 2020. Since his arrival, he has served as the manager of the UI Symphony Orchestra and has frequently conducted the UI Philharmonia and Illini Strings. He began his studies in New York at Houghton College and finished at Roberts Wesleyan College with his Bachelors of Science in Music Education. He has attended several conducting workshops including the International Conducting Workshop and Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria. He plans to continue his conducting studies and earn a doctorate in orchestral conducting.

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