

# CHARLOTTESVILLE SYMPHONY

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

## PROGRAM NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER 23 & 24, 2017

### A WELCOME FROM THE NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR

Our opening weekend, and the other programs on this inaugural season, are built on ideas, sounds, impulses. Those ideas are expressed in the works of composers of different decades and centuries, hopefully providing a richer and more illuminating combined experience than any single work can. Composers of our time use a broad diversity of sounds, techniques and even instruments, so their works consistently make for an interesting sonic menu. Most importantly, these composers live in our world, and react to events and to truths that we, too, have experienced, and I find they can speak to our current reality in an irreplaceable way. Meanwhile, the classics are classics for a reason, and always reward repeated visits, especially when heard in new contexts.

We wanted to start the season with a program that shows off the visceral thrill of orchestral music. The Adams and Beethoven works both do that, and in some ways these two very different pieces are distant cousins; they are both driven by a motor rhythm and both emphasize the note A. Most importantly, both works are interested in making maximal use of repeated rhythmic figures. Within this framework, Adams finds variety through rhythmic addition and variation, while Beethoven creates variety with harmonic and melodic variation. Indeed, much of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is more rhythmically minimalist than *Short Ride*! Of course, they are also worlds apart in many ways and require very different performing mindsets. I've always wanted to hear these two works together to see how they inform each other, and I am glad for the chance to do so with the Charlottesville Symphony.

This weekend and this season, collectively and individually, the virtuosity of the Charlottesville Symphony will be on full display. It will be a real treat to get to know the artistry of Shawn Earle, and later Rachel Duncan as we hear them in concerti that are the peaks of the classical repertoire for their instruments. And the whole orchestra shows its chops right off the bat in the *Short Ride*, and in the Beethoven symphony as well.

I'm so excited to be starting this journey together, and I'll be curious to hear your reactions. Let's get going!

– Benjamin Rous

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### ***Short Ride in a Fast Machine: Fanfare for Orchestra***

**John Adams**

**Born 15 February, 1947 in Worcester, Massachusetts**

**Currently residing in San Francisco**

*Approximate duration 4 minutes*

*“You know how it is when someone asks you to ride in a terrific sports car, and then you wish you hadn’t?”*

*– John Adams*

How short is the ride? About four minutes. How fast is the machine? That depends on your resting heart rate.

Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* is the second of *Two Fanfares for Orchestra* written in 1986. The first, *Tromba Lontana*, was commissioned by the Houston Symphony in celebration of the Texas Sesquicentennial. *Short Ride* was commissioned by the Great Woods Festival in Mansfield, Massachusetts to celebrate its first concert. Michael Tilson Thomas conducted the Pittsburgh Symphony in the premiere on 13 June, 1986. These two brief works are paired in publication, but rarely performed together. Adams has described himself as having two contrasting sides to his personality, one melancholic, the other antic. His two fanfares reflect that dichotomy. *Short Ride* is his antic self: exuberant, energetic and upbeat. It has become Adams' most frequently performed composition – which is saying something, because this is a composer whose music shows up as frequently as any living American.

### **About the composer**

Adams is a native of Worcester, Massachusetts who has lived in San Francisco for more than forty years. He established his reputation as a minimalist, although to pigeonhole him thus does injustice to the imagination, humor and instrumental color that characterize his works. Thirty years ago, he achieved a major career milestone with the highly acclaimed premiere of *Nixon in China* which was introduced in conjunction with the opening of Houston's Wortham Center in 1987. Adams followed with a second opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, in 1991. The San Francisco Opera premiered his *Dr. Atomic* in 2005; the Metropolitan Opera's production in 2008 was featured at one of its popular Live in HD cinema broadcasts. Adams's most recent opera, *A Flowering Tree*, was premiered in Vienna in 2006.

In addition, Adams has composed a number of important orchestral scores. Early works like *Common Tones in Simple Time* (1979), *Shaker Loops* (1983), and *Fearful Symmetries* (1988) helped to place him at the forefront of minimalism. More recent works have revealed Adams' increasing interest in counterpoint, chromaticism and electronica. His 1993 Violin Concerto is arguably the most successful American violin concerto since Samuel Barber's. *On the Transmigration of Souls* for orchestra, chorus, children's chorus and pre-recorded sound (2002) was Adams' memorial to those who lost their lives at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. It involves computer sound files operated from a central mixing board in addition to conventional acoustical sounds. *Transmigration* earned Adams the 2003 Pulitzer Prize in Music and three Grammys. *Dharma at Big Sur* (2003) is scored for electric violin and orchestra. His ongoing concern with social justice and political issues is reflected in the oratorio *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, which Gustavo Dudamel, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Master Chorale introduced in 2012.

### **An early fanfare becomes an orchestral staple**

*Short Ride* reflects Adams' earlier style. It is rhythmically driven, sounding initially repetitive and minimalist. Actually, the syncopations and emphases are tricky and complex, demanding extraordinary precision from conductor and instrumentalists. The orchestral color palette reflects both popular culture (through the optional use of two evenly-matched synthesizers) and marching band sonorities (through strong reliance on the brass and percussion to carry the musical

argument). Adams studied clarinet with his father and played in his share of marching bands while he was a student. The synthesis of popular and classical music is a thread that has remained constant in his compositions. Their fusion in *Short Ride* has made it a modern American classic.

Adams scored *Short Ride* for two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, four clarinets in A and B-flat, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns in F, four trumpets in C, three trombones, tuba, timpani, a large percussion battery [high, medium and low wood blocks, pedal bass drum, snare drum, large bass drum, glockenspiel, crotales, suspended cymbal, sizzle cymbal, bass drum, tambourine, large tam tam, triangle, and xylophone], two synthesizers and strings.

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## **Concerto in A major for clarinet and orchestra, K. 622**

**Wolfgang Amadè Mozart**

**Born 27 January, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria**

**Died 5 December, 1791 in Vienna**

*Approximate duration 25 minutes*

- The first great clarinet concerto
- A reduced orchestra gives this work a chamber music quality
- Mozart reserved the key of A major for works of transparent joy

Completed in autumn 1791 only weeks before Mozart's premature death, the Clarinet Concerto was his last concerto for any instrument. Certainly it is his greatest for winds, on a level with the magnificent mature piano concertos. K. 622 was also the composer's last completed composition except for the Masonic Cantata, K. 623 from November 1791. The Requiem, K. 626, remained unfinished at his death.

Mozart came of age writing for the court ensemble maintained by the Archbishop of Salzburg, which did not include clarinets. He first discovered the instrument in 1777 and 1778 during visits to Mannheim, a political and cultural center that boasted one of Europe's finest orchestras in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Mozart was delighted with the clarinet's creamy, sweet timbre. He was equally impressed by its suave presence as both ensemble and solo instrument. From Mannheim, he wrote to his father Leopold in December, 1778, "Ah, if only we [the Salzburg orchestra] had clarinets too! You cannot imagine the glorious effect of a symphony with flutes, oboes and clarinets."

By the time Wolfgang moved permanently to Vienna in 1781, clarinets were becoming more common. Mozart almost certainly met Anton Stadler (1753-1812) during his first months in the capital. By then, both Anton Stadler and his brother Johann – also a fine clarinetist – were permanent members of the imperial court orchestra as well as the Emperor's *Harmonie* [wind band]. Anton Stadler was widely regarded as the finest player of his day. He and Mozart were bound not only by music, but also by their involvement in Masonry. Both were members of Vienna's Beneficence Lodge. Stadler played Mozart's Masonic works there regularly; they also played chamber music together in private gatherings. By 1787, Mozart's letters mention Stadler as if he were one of his inner circle.

We have Stadler to thank for Mozart's three chamber works with clarinet: the splendid Quintet for piano and winds, K. 452; the so-called *Kegelstatt* Trio for clarinet, viola and piano, K.

498; and the lovely Quintet for clarinet and strings, K. 581. Stadler was also the intended player for the glorious clarinet *obbligato* part in arias from *La clemenza di Tito*. Stadler's most enduring legacy, however, is surely the magnificent concerto that Mr. Earle performs with our orchestra.

The instrument Mozart had in mind was actually the basset clarinet, a type of clarinet that evolved about 1770 with a range slightly lower than that of the modern clarinet. Stadler was a specialist in this lower range, known as *chalumeau*. (The term is still used to describe the lowest register of the clarinet.) When Mozart's concerto was published, the clarinet part was altered in order to facilitate performance on the modern instrument that Mr. Earle plays.

As one might expect, the concerto focuses on the soloist's beauty of sound. While the full orchestral complement includes flutes, bassoons and horns, Mozart tends to limit the accompaniment of the solo passages to strings, lending a chamber music intimacy to the work. The other woodwinds join for the full orchestral *tutti*, which constitute some of Mozart's most sophisticated symphonic writing. There are no provisions for solo cadenzas, although there is ample opportunity for the soloist to display a brilliant technique, particularly in the lively finale. Finally, the selection of A major as the key for this work is significant, for all Mozart's compositions in A share a transparency of texture and sheer loveliness of melody that places them in a special category of their own.

The score calls for pairs of flutes, bassoons and horns, solo clarinet and strings.

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## **Symphony No.7 in A major, Op. 92**

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

**Born 16 December, 1770 in Bonn, Germany**

**Died 26 March, 1827 in Vienna, Austria**

*Approximate duration 36 minutes*

*. . . ripe for the madhouse.*

– Carl Maria von Weber on Beethoven, after hearing Beethoven's Seventh

*. . . the apotheosis of the dance.*

– Richard Wagner on Beethoven's Seventh

*You can chase a Beethoven symphony all your life and never catch up.*

– André Previn

## **The Napoleon effect: French music and a martial stamp**

The Seventh Symphony falls into what Beethoven's biographer Maynard Solomon calls "the heroic decade." During this period – roughly from the "Eroica" Symphony through the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies – Beethoven wrote major compositions in a grand style that melded elements of the Viennese symphonic tradition (whose heir, via Mozart and Haydn, he obviously was) and the French orchestral style. Best embodied in the works of Étienne-Nicolas Méhul, French music of this era frequently bore a martial stamp.

Among Beethoven's orchestral works, the Fifth Symphony is the easiest one in which to discern French "military" motifs, but the Seventh Symphony in its day was strongly associated with the victory over Napoleon. The English Duke of Wellington won a decisive battle with the French in Vitoria, Spain on 21 June, 1813. He was able to seize San Sebastián and invade France. Although

Elba, the “Hundred Days,” and Waterloo still lay ahead, Austria and Prussia were as elated as England, knowing that the tide had turned against the French Emperor.

Beethoven had suffered greatly during the French occupation of Vienna in 1803. When news of the Vitoria battle reached the Austrian capital, its citizens erupted in jubilant celebration. Beethoven’s response was *Wellingtons Sieg, oder die Schlacht bei Vittoria* [“Wellington’s Victory, or the Battle of Vitoria,” also known simply as “Battle Symphony”]. Published as Beethoven’s Opus 91, this programmatic movement gave free rein to his patriotism. The Battle Symphony is roughly contemporary with Beethoven’s Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. The Seventh Symphony and the ‘Battle Symphony’ were introduced in Vienna within five days of each other in December, 1813. Not surprisingly, the vastly higher musical quality of the Seventh Symphony earned it a more prominent place in public affection than the jingoistic *Wellington’s Victory*.

### **Beethoven’s ‘other’ pastoral symphony?**

Among Beethoven’s heroic works, the Seventh Symphony holds the distinction of being resolutely upbeat. Public, aggressive, decisive in its gestures and filled with boundless enthusiasm, this is one of Beethoven’s most gregarious and optimistic compositions. Op. 92 opens with the lengthiest slow introduction of any Beethoven symphony. Music historian J.W.N. Sullivan has written:

The great introduction to the first movement seems to convey the awakening and murmuring of the multitudinous life of an immense forest. Much more than in the Pastoral symphony do we feel here in the presence of Nature itself. It is life, life in every form, not merely human life, of which the exultation is here expressed.

That spirit of exultation bursts forth in the ensuing *Allegro*, whose pronounced dotted rhythm dominates the entire fabric of the movement.

### **A 19<sup>th</sup>-century “top 40” hit**

The slow movement *Allegretto* enjoyed enormous popularity in the nineteenth century, and proved to be one of Beethoven’s most influential compositions. Essentially a march, it is closely related to the funeral march slow movement of the “Eroica” Symphony. Among other similarities, it switches back and forth between the parallel major and minor (in this case A major and A minor), and features triplet accompaniment in the contrasting trio sections. Beethoven emphasizes the string section in the minor sections and the woodwinds in the A-major parts. Combining elements of rondo, march and variation, he spins a remarkable tale from the simplest of means. The superimposition of two motives -- a single repeated note and a simple accompaniment in counterpoint -- constitute virtually the entire fabric. Writer Richard Osborne refers to its “astonishing sparseness of sound,” and notes the mysterious bookend A minor chords that open and close the movement.

Beethoven’s scherzo is a vibrant *Presto* in F major, the only instance in the nine symphonies where he strays from the tonic for this movement. By expanding the conventional tripartite form (with contrasting middle section in D major) to an A-B-A-B-A structure, he increases the length and scope of the scherzo, endowing it with psychological weight proportional to that of the other

three movements. He closes with a jubilant *Allegro con brio*, an overwhelmingly optimistic movement that captivates us with its distinctive flourish in its opening measures and a compelling rhythmic drive throughout. Indeed, rhythm is the most memorable feature of the Seventh Symphony, delivering Beethoven's personality more convincingly than his melodies do in this work, and setting in relief the understated calm of the slow movement.

Beethoven's score calls for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings.



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