ANDRIS NELSONS conducting

ALL-BEETHOVEN PROGRAM

SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN B-FLAT, OPUS 60
Adagio—Allegro vivace
Adagio
Allegro vivace
Allegro ma non troppo

{INTERMISSION}

SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN C MINOR, OPUS 67
Allegro con brio
Andante con moto
Allegro—
Allegro

SATURDAY EVENING’S PERFORMANCE OF BEETHOVEN’S SYMPHONY NO. 5 IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT FROM SEAN RUSH AND CAROL C. MCMULLEN.
TUESDAY EVENING’S PERFORMANCE OF BEETHOVEN’S SYMPHONY NO. 5 IS SUPPORTED BY A GIFT IN MEMORY OF LEE AND GERALD FLAXER.

BANK OF AMERICA AND TAKEDA PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY LIMITED ARE PROUD TO SPONSOR THE BSO’S 2018-19 SEASON.
FRIDAY-AFTERNOON CONCERT SERIES SPONSORED BY THE BROOKE FAMILY
The afternoon concert will end about 2:55, the evening concerts about 9:25.
Concertmaster Malcolm Lowe performs on a Stradivarius violin, known as the “Lafont,” generously donated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra by the O’Block Family.
First associate concertmaster Tamara Smirnova performs on a 1754 J.B. Guadagnini violin, the “ex-Zazofsky,” and James Cooke performs on a 1778 Nicolò Gagliano violin, both generously donated to the orchestra by Michael L. Nieland, M.D., in loving memory of Mischa Nieland, a member of the cello section from 1943 to 1988.
Steinway & Sons Pianos, selected exclusively for Symphony Hall.
The BSO’s Steinway & Sons pianos were purchased through a generous gift from Gabriella and Leo Beranek.
The program books for the Friday series are given in loving memory of Mrs. Hugh Bancroft by her daughters, the late Mrs. A. Werk Cook and the late Mrs. William C. Cox.
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In consideration of the performers and those around you, please turn off all electronic equipment during the performance, including tablets, cellular phones, pagers, watch alarms, messaging devices of any kind, anything that emits an audible signal, and anything that glows. Thank you for your cooperation.
Please note that the use of audio or video recording devices, or taking pictures of the artists—whether photographs or videos—is prohibited during concerts.

The Program in Brief...
Beethoven wrote his Symphony No. 4 in the summer and fall of 1806, having just completed the second version of his only opera, known in its later, final revision as Fidelio. The symphonies that bracket No. 4 are heaven-stormers: the groundbreaking Eroica, written in 1803, and the similarly innovative and spiritually intense Fifth, completed in 1808 but sketched as early as 1804. The apparent extremes of “lyrical” and “heroic” expression were continually juxtaposed in Beethoven’s works, sometimes occurring in one and the same piece. As stated in the program note, the
Fourth Symphony exemplifies the lyric perspective, sharing with the Violin Concerto and the Fourth Piano Concerto “a heightened sense of repose, a broadly lyric element, and a more spacious approach to musical architecture.” A mysterious slow introduction sets the stage for a symphony filled with strikingly Beethovenian contrasts—lyric vs. dynamic, light vs. dark, soft vs. loud—unflagging rhythmic energy, and sudden harmonic shifts. At the same time, like his Sixth (Pastoral) and Eighth symphonies, the Fourth is one of those Beethoven works that brims consistently with good cheer.

Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony remains a thing of wonder despite its familiarity. From the four-note “fate” motif of its opening, Beethoven shapes and recombines this tiny musical gesture to create the themes of all four movements of this innovative symphony. He wrote the Fifth, one of the most intense and “heroic” of his works, concurrently with the Fourth, one of his happiest. The Fifth was premiered under difficult conditions for its players and audience, as part of a tryingly long all-Beethoven concert (which also included, among other things, the premiere of the Pastoral Symphony and the first public performance of his Piano Concerto No. 4) that took place in an unheated hall on a cold Vienna evening in December 1808. But it’s neither the Fifth’s innovation nor its history that draws so many people in at first, second, or even twentieth hearing—it’s the power and inexorable forward motion of what follows those first four notes, the drama and drive that sweep the listener along through its four movements to one of the most gratifyingly triumphant conclusions in all of music.

Robert Kirzinger

Ludwig van Beethoven
Symphony No. 4 in B-flat, Opus 60
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN was baptized in Bonn (then an independent electorate) on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. He composed his Fourth Symphony during the summer and early fall of 1806, leading the first performance, a private one, at the Vienna town house of Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz in March 1807 (the “Coriolan” Overture and Piano Concerto No. 4 also receiving their premieres on that occasion), and conducting the first public performance on April 13, 1808, in Vienna at the Burgtheater.

BEETHOVEN’S FOURTH SYMPHONY IS SCORED for one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. The works Beethoven completed in the last half of 1806—the Fourth Symphony, the Violin Concerto, and the Fourth Piano Concerto among them—were finished rather rapidly by the composer following his extended struggle with the original version of his opera Fidelio, which had occupied him from the end of 1804 until April 1806. The most important orchestral work he had produced before this time was the Eroica, in which he overwhelmed his audiences with a forceful new musical language reflecting both his own inner struggles in the face of impending deafness and his response to the political atmosphere surrounding him. The next big orchestral work to embody this “heroic” style—with a striking overlay of defiance as well—would be the Fifth Symphony, which had begun to germinate in 1804, was worked out mainly in 1807, and was completed in 1808. But in the meantime, a more relaxed sort of expression began to emerge, emphasizing a heightened sense of repose, a broadly lyric element, and a more spacious approach to musical architecture. The Fourth Symphony, the Violin Concerto, and the Fourth Piano Concerto share these characteristics to varying degrees, but it is also important to realize that these works, though completed around the same time, do not represent a unilateral change of direction in Beethoven’s approach to music, but, rather, the emergence of a particular element that appeared strikingly at this time. Sketches for the Violin Concerto and the Fifth Symphony in fact occur side by side; and that the two aspects—lyric and aggressive—of Beethoven’s musical expression are not entirely separable is evident also in the fact that ideas for both the Fifth and the Pastoral symphonies appear in the Eroica sketchbook of 1803-04. These two symphonies—the one strongly assertive, the other more gentle and subdued—were not completed until 1808, two years after the Violin Concerto. And it appears that Beethoven actually interrupted work on his Fifth Symphony so that he could compose the Fourth in response to a commission from the Silesian Count Franz von Oppersdorff, whom he had met through Prince Carl von Lichnowsky, one of his most important patrons during the early years in Vienna and the joint dedicatee, together with Count Razumovsky, of the Fifth and Sixth symphonies.

So Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony partakes successfully and wonderfully of both these worlds, combining a relaxed and lyrical element with a mood of exuberantly aggressive high spirits. The key is B-flat, which suggests—insofar as we can describe the effects of different musical keys—a realm of spaciousness, relaxation, and warmth, in contrast, for example, to the “heroic” E-flat of the Third Symphony and Emperor Concerto, the “defiant” C minor of the Fifth, and the “heaven-storming” D minor of the Ninth.

Beethoven actually begins the first movement with an Adagio introduction in a mysteriously pianissimo B-flat minor, and the mystery is heightened as the music moves toward B-natural, via the enharmonic interpretation of G-flat to F-sharp, until trumpets and drums force the music back to B-flat, and to the major mode, of the Allegro
vivace. (This same gambit will be repeated on a larger scale as the music of the Allegro moves from the development into the recapitulation, at which point, once again, the timpani will play a crucial role in telling us where we belong—this time with an extended drumroll growing through twenty-two measures from a pianissimo rumble to a further nine measures of thwacking fortissimo.) Once the Allegro is underway, all is energy and motion, with even the more seemingly relaxed utterances of the woodwinds in service to the prevailing level of activity. One more word about the first movement: one wants the exposition repeat here, not just for the wonderful jolt of the first ending’s throwing us back to the home key virtually without notice, but also for the links it provides to the end of the introduction and the beginning of the coda.

The E-flat major Adagio sets a cantabile theme against a constantly pulsating accompaniment, all moving at a relaxed pace that allows for increasingly elaborate figuration in both melody and accompaniment as the movement proceeds. The second theme is a melancholy and wistful song for solo clarinet, all the more effective when it reappears following a fortissimo outburst from full orchestra. The scherzo, another study in motion, is all ups and downs. Beethoven repeats the Trio in its entirety following the scherzo da capo (a procedure he will follow again in the third movement of the Seventh Symphony). A third statement of the scherzo is cut short by an emphatic rejoinder from the horns.

The whirlwind finale (marked “Allegro ma non troppo,” “Allegro, but not too...”); the speed is built into the note values, and the proceedings shouldn’t be rushed by an overzealous conductor) is yet another exercise in energy, movement, and dynamic contrasts. Carl Maria von Weber, who didn’t much like this symphony when he was young and it was new, imagined the double bass complaining: “I have just come from the rehearsal of a Symphony by one of our newest composers; and though, as you know, I have a tolerably strong constitution, I could only just hold out, and five minutes more would have shattered my frame and burst the sinews of my life. I have been made to caper about like a wild goat, and to turn myself into a mere fiddle to execute the no-ideas of Mr. Composer.” Beethoven’s approach in this movement is wonderfully tongue-in-cheek and no-holds-barred: the solo bassoon, leading us into the recapitulation, is asked to play “dolce” (“sweetly”) when he’s probably thankful just to get the notes in, and only at the very end is there a brief moment of rest to prepare the headlong rush to the final cadence.

Marc Mandel

MARC MANDEL is Director of Program Publications of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

THE FIRST AMERICAN PERFORMANCE OF BEETHOVEN’S SYMPHONY NO. 4 was given by Theodor Eisfeld and the Philharmonic Society at the Apollo Rooms in New York on November 24, 1849.

THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES OF BEETHOVEN’S FOURTH SYMPHONY were given by Georg Henschel on December 2 and 3, 1881, during the orchestra’s inaugural season, subsequent performances being given by Wilhelm Gericke, Arthur Nikisch, Emil Paur, Karl Muck, Max Fiedler, Pierre Monteux, Serge Koussevitzky, Ernest Ansermet, Charles Munch, Eugene Ormandy, Erich Leinsdorf, William Steinberg, Seiji Ozawa, Okko Kamu, Andrew Davis, Kurt Masur, Michael Tilson Thomas, Marek Janowski, John Eliot Gardiner, Franz Welser-Möst, Leonard Slatkin, André Previn, Ilan Volkov, Bernard Haitink, Mark Elder, Julian Kuerti, James Levine, Susanna Mälkki, Leonidas Kavakos, François-Xavier Roth (April 2014), and Christoph von Dohnányi (July 24, 2015).

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

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN was born in Bonn (then an independent electorate) probably on December 16, 1770 (he was baptized on the 17th), and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. He began to sketch the Fifth Symphony in 1804, did most of the work in 1807, completed the score in the spring of 1808, and led the first performance on December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna.

THE SYMPHONY IS SCORED for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

On December 17, 1808, the Wiener Zeitung announced for the following Thursday, December 22, a benefit concert at the Theater an der Wien on behalf of and to be led by Ludwig van Beethoven, with all the selections “of his composition, entirely new, and not yet heard in public,” to begin at half-past six, and to include the following:

First Part: 1, A Symphony, entitled: “A Recollection of Country Life,” in F major (No. 5). 2, Aria. 3, Hymn with Latin text, composed in the church style with chorus and solos. 4, Pianoforte Concerto played by himself.

Second Part: 1, Grand Symphony in C minor (No. 6). 2, Sanctus with Latin text composed in the church style with chorus and solos. 3, Fantasia for Pianoforte alone. 4, Fantasia for the Pianoforte which ends with the gradual entrance of the entire orchestra and the introduction of choruses as a finale.

One witness to this event of gargantuan proportion—which lasted for about four hours in a bitterly cold, unheated
hymn—and commented on “the truth that one can easily have too much of a good thing—and still more of a loud one.” The hymn and Sanctus were drawn from Beethoven’s Mass in C, the concerto was the Fourth, and the aria was “Ah! perfido” (with a last-minute change of soloist). The solo piano fantasia was an improvisation by the composer; the concluding number was the Opus 80 Choral Fantasy (written shortly before the concert—Beethoven did not want to end the evening with the C minor symphony for fear the audience would be too tired to appreciate the last movement); the symphony listed as “No. 5” was the one actually published as the Sixth, the Pastoral; and the symphony labeled “No. 6” was the one published as the Fifth.

Beethoven was by this time one of the most important composers on the European musical scene. He had introduced himself to Viennese court hall audiences in April 1800 with a program including, besides some Mozart and Haydn, his own Septet and First Symphony; and, following the success of his ballet score The Creatures of Prometheus during the 1801-02 musical season, he began to attract the attention of foreign publishers. He was, also at that time, becoming increasingly aware of the deterioration in his hearing (the emotional outpouring known as the Heiligenstadt Testament dates from October 1802) and only first coming to grips with this problem that would ultimately affect the very nature of his music. As the 19th century’s first decade progressed, Beethoven’s music would be performed as frequently as Haydn’s and Mozart’s; his popularity in Vienna would be rivaled only by that of Haydn; and, between 1802 and 1813, he would compose six symphonies, four concertos, an opera, oratorio, and mass, a variety of chamber and piano works, incidental music, songs, and several overtures.

Beethoven composed his Third Symphony, the Eroica, between May and November 1803. From the end of 1804 until April 1806 his primary concern was his opera Leonore (which ultimately became Fidelio), and the remainder of 1806 saw work on compositions including the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony, the Violin Concerto, and the Razumovsky Quartets, Opus 59. Sketches for both the Fifth and Sixth symphonies are to be found in Beethoven’s Eroica sketchbook of 1803-04—it was absolutely typical for Beethoven to concern himself with several works at once—and, as noted above, the Fifth was completed in the spring of 1808 and given its first performance that December, on the very same, very long concert that concluded with the Choral Fantasy.

In a Boston Symphony program note many years ago, John N. Burk wrote that something in the direct impelling drive of the first movement of the C minor Symphony commanded general attention when it was new, challenged the skeptical, and soon forced its acceptance. Goethe heard it with grumbling disapproval, according to Mendelssohn, but was astonished and impressed in spite of himself. Lesueur, hidebound professor at the Conservatoire, was talked by Berlioz into breaking his vow never to listen to another note of Beethoven, and found his prejudices and resistances quite swept away. A less plausible tale reports [the famous contralto] Maria Malibran as having been thrown into convulsions by this symphony. The instances could be multiplied. There was no gainsaying that forthright, sweeping storminess.

In the language of another age, in an important review for the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung of July 4 and 11, 1810, E.T.A. Hoffmann recognized the Fifth as “one of the most important works of the master whose stature as a first-rate instrumental composer probably no one will now dispute” and, following a detailed analysis, noted its effect upon the listener:

For many people, the whole work rushes by like an ingenious rhapsody. The heart of every sensitive listener, however, will certainly be deeply and intimately moved by an enduring feeling—precisely that feeling of foreboding, indescribable longing—which remains until the final chord. Indeed, many moments will pass before he will be able to step out of the wonderful realm of the spirits where pain and bliss, taking tonal form, surrounded him. In his Eroica Symphony, Beethoven had already introduced, in the words of his biographer Maynard Solomon, “the concept of a heroic music responding to the stormy currents of contemporary history.” The shadow of Napoleon hovers over the Eroica; for the Fifth Symphony we have no such specific political connotations. But we do have, in the Fifth, and in such post-Eroica works as Fidelio and Egmont, the very clear notion of affirmation through struggle expressed in musical discourse, and perhaps in no instance more powerfully and concisely than in the Symphony No. 5.

So much that was startling in this music when it was new—the aggressive, compact language of the first movement, the soloistic writing for double basses in the third-movement Trio, the mysterious, overwhelmingly powerful transition between scherzo and finale, the introduction of trombones and piccolo into the symphony orchestra for the first time (in the final movement)—is now taken virtually for granted, given the countless performances the Fifth has had since its Vienna premiere, and given the variety of different languages music has since proved able to express. And by now, most conductors seem to realize that the first three notes of the symphony must not sound like a triplet, although just what to do with the fermata and rest following the first statement of that four-note motive sometimes seems open to argument. But there are times when Beethoven’s Fifth seems to fall from grace. Once rarely absent from a year’s concert programming, and frequently used to open or close a season, it is periodically deemed to be overplayed, or just too “popular.” But the Fifth Symphony is popular for good reason, and so
ultimately retains its important and rightful place in the repertoire. It needs, even demands, to be heard on a regular basis, representing as it does not just what music can be about, but everything that music can succeed in doing.

Marc Mandel

THE FIRST DOCUMENTED AMERICAN PERFORMANCE OF BEETHOVEN’S FIFTH SYMPHONY was given by Ureli Corelli Hill with the German Society of New York at New York’s Broadway Tabernacle on February 11, 1841.

THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE OF BEETHOVEN’S FIFTH SYMPHONY was led by Georg Henschel on December 17, 1881, in the ninth concert of the orchestra’s first season, to conclude an all-Beethoven program marking the composer’s date of birth. Subsequent BSO performances were given by Wilhelm Gericke, Arthur Nikisch, Franz Kneisel, Emil Paur, Karl Muck, Max Fiedler, Otto Urack, Henri Rabaud, Pierre Monteux, Serge Koussevitzky, Richard Burgin, Arthur Fiedler, Paul Paray, Charles Munch, Victor de Sabata, Ernest Ansermet, Erich Leinsdorf, William Steinberg, Daniel Barenboim, Max Rudolf, Eugene Ormandy, Rafael Kubelik, Hans Vonk, Klaus Tennstedt, Edo de Waart, Seiji Ozawa, Joseph Silverstein, Kurt Masur, Marek Janowski, Bernard Haitink, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, Roberto Abbado, Itzhak Perlman, Christoph von Dohnányi, Andris Nelsons (July 20, 2014), Marcelo Lehninger, and François-Xavier Roth (January 2018).

To Read and Hear More...


The First Four Notes: Beethoven’s Fifth and the Human Imagination by Matthew Guerrieri examines the impact of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 from a broad cultural perspective (Vintage paperback). Dating from the 19th century, but still crucial, is Thayer’s Life of Beethoven as revised and updated by Elliot Forbes (Princeton paperback).

Michael Steinberg’s program notes on all nine Beethoven symphonies are in his compilation volume The Symphony—a Listener’s Guide (Oxford paperback). Donald Francis Tovey’s notes on the symphonies are among his Essays in Musical Analysis (Oxford). Still worth investigating among much older books are George Grove’s classic Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies, now more than a century old (Dover paperback), and J.W.N. Sullivan’s Beethoven: His Spiritual Development, published in 1927 but still fascinating and thought-provoking not only as a reflection of its time but for what’s relevant to our own (Vintage paperback).

The Boston Symphony Orchestra recorded the complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies with Erich Leinsdorf conducting between 1962 and 1969; the recording of No. 4 is from 1966, that of No. 5 from 1968 (RCA). With Charles Munch conducting, the BSO can be heard and seen playing Beethoven’s Fourth Symphony in an April 1961 telecast from Sanders Theatre available on DVD, paired with a November 1959 Munch/BSO telecast of Beethoven’s Fifth (ICA Classics). The BSO also recorded Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 with Seiji Ozawa (in 1981 for Telarc), Rafael Kubelik (in 1973 for Deutsche Grammophon), Charles Munch (in 1955 for RCA), and Serge Koussevitzky (in 1944 for RCA). Noteworthy Beethoven symphony cycles of varying vintage include (alphabetically by conductor) Claudio Abbado’s with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon), Daniel Barenboim’s with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (Decca), John Eliot Gardiner’s with the period-instrument Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique (Deutsche Grammophon Archiv), Bernard Haitink’s live with the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live), Nikolaus Harnoncourt’s with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (Warner Classics), Philippe Herreweghe’s with the Royal Flemish Philharmonic (PentaTone), Christian Thielemann’s with the Vienna Philharmonic (Sony), and Osmo Vänskä’s with the Minnesota Orchestra (BIS). Historic recordings on various labels include studio and live renditions of the nine symphonies under the direction of Wilhelm Furtwängler (mainly with the Berlin Philharmonic and Vienna Philharmonic) and Arturo Toscanini (mainly with the NBC Symphony, though his famous BBC Symphony recordings from the mid-1930s include a very fine performance of the Symphony No. 4).

Marc Mandel

Andris Nelsons

The 2018-19 season is Andris Nelsons’ fifth as the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Ray and Maria Stata Music Director. Named Musical America’s 2018 Artist of the Year, Mr. Nelsons will lead fourteen of the BSO’s twenty-six subscription programs in 2018-19, ranging from orchestral works by Haydn, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and Copland to concerto collaborations with acclaimed soloists, as well as world and American premieres of pieces
newly commissioned by the BSO from Thomas Adès, Sebastian Currier, Andris Dzenitis, and Mark-Anthony Turnage; the continuation of his complete Shostakovich symphony cycle with the orchestra, and concert performances of Puccini’s one-act opera Suor Angelica. In summer 2015, following his first season as music director, Andris Nelsons’ contract with the BSO was extended through the 2021-22 season. In November 2017, he and the orchestra toured Japan together for the first time. In February 2018, he became Gewandhauskapellmeister of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, in which capacity he brings both orchestras together for a unique multi-dimensional alliance. Immediately following the 2018 Tanglewood season, Maestro Nelsons and the BSO made their third European tour together, playing concerts in London, Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Lucerne, Paris, and Amsterdam. Their first European tour, following the 2015 Tanglewood season, took them to major European capitals and the Lucerne, Salzburg, and Grafenegg festivals; the second, in May 2016, took them to eight cities in Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg.

The fifteenth music director in the history of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andris Nelsons made his BSO debut at Carnegie Hall in March 2011, his Tanglewood debut in July 2012, and his BSO subscription series debut in January 2013. His recordings with the BSO, all made live in concert at Symphony Hall, include the complete Brahms symphonies on BSO Classics; Grammy-winning recordings on Deutsche Grammophon of Shostakovich’s symphonies 5, 8, 9, and 10, the initial releases in a complete Shostakovich symphony cycle for that label; and a new two-disc set pairing Shostakovich’s symphonies 4 and 11, The Year 1905. Under an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, Andris Nelsons is also recording the complete Bruckner symphonies with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic.

The 2018-19 season is Maestro Nelsons’ final season as artist-in-residence at the Konzerthaus Dortmund and marks his first season as artist-in-residence at Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie. In addition, he continues his regular collaborations with the Vienna Philharmonic and Berlin Philharmonic. Throughout his career, he has also established regular collaborations with Amsterdam’s Royal Concergebouw Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and has been a regular guest at the Bayreuth Festival and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Born in Riga in 1978 into a family of musicians, Andris Nelsons began his career as a trumpeter in the Latvian National Opera Orchestra before studying conducting. He was music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra from 2008 to 2015, principal conductor of the Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie in Herford, Germany, from 2006 to 2009, and music director of Latvian National Opera from 2003 to 2007.