

Season Finale

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy
(1809-1847)

Ruy Blas Overture, op. 95

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Concerto for Violin in D Major, op. 61

I. Allegro ma non troppo

II. Larghetto

III. Rondo (Allegro)

Desiree Cedeno-Suarez, violin

INTERMISSION

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Cantique de Jean Racine, op. 11

Requiem, op. 48

I. Introit et Kyrie

II. Offertoire

III. Sanctus

IV. Pie Jesu

V. Agnus Dei

VI. Libera me

VII. In paradisum

Lori Bammesberger, soprano

James Sena, baritone

Colorado Springs Children's Chorale

Pikes Peak Singers; Robert Crowder, director

Summit Ensemble; Brad Petersen, director

To the Noble Artist, who, surrounded by the Baal-like worship of debased art, has been able, by his genius and science, to preserve faithfully, like another Elijah, the worship of true art, and once more accustom our ear, amid the whirl of empty, frivolous sounds, to the pure tones of sympathetic feeling and legitimate harmony: to the Great Master, who makes us conscious of the unity of his conception, through the whole maze of his creation, from the soft whispering to the mighty raging of the elements.—Inscribed in grateful remembrance of Mendelssohn by Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace on April 24, 1847.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was shockingly gifted as a child. He painted with skill, wrote flowing poetry, succeeded in sports, spoke several languages, played several instruments, and completed one of the great chamber works of the nineteenth century—his *Octet for Strings*—at the age of only sixteen. He was born into a wealthy Jewish-German family, and his talents were encouraged by his parents and, most of all, by his sister, with whom Felix would maintain the closest of friendships throughout his life. He made his concert debut in 1818, met and befriended Goethe when he was only 12, and in 1826 (a year after the *Octet*) composed his overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which established his reputation internationally. Despite all that success, it was *after* three years of study at Berlin University that he finally decided upon a career in music!

At the age of 20, Mendelssohn became a champion of the music of Bach, which had passed into obscurity throughout Europe. He led the first performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* since the composer's death in 1750. Near the end of the year, he made his first visit to England, where he was widely lauded as both pianist and composer. After touring in Scotland, he returned to the European mainland to spend two years touring Germany, Austria and Italy. He visited England again in 1832 and 1833 and became a popular guest with what would become the London Philharmonic. In 1835, he took the conducting post with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. In 1843, he established a music conservatory in Leipzig, assisted by Robert Schumann. In 1847, he made his tenth and final visit to England, where he befriended Queen Victoria and taught piano to Prince Albert. In May of that year, his beloved sister Fanny died and the shock of this loss, together with the pressure of severe overwork, led to his own death six months later.

Mendelssohn read Victor Hugo's tragic drama, *Ruy Blas*, in 1839 and is said to have hated it. Nonetheless, the drama became something of a popular favorite in much of Europe, so Mendelssohn must not have been surprised when, shortly after reading the work, he received a commission to write an overture based on it. He accepted the commission and wrote his ***Ruy Blas Overture, op. 95*** in a few short weeks. Despite his dislike for the play itself, Mendelssohn opted to capture the big ideas—great passions and irreconcilable conflicts—and created a powerful dramatic work that ranks among the most effective and frequently performed of his overtures.

Keep your eye on him; he will make the world talk about him some day.—Mozart, in a letter to his father dated 1787, after meeting Beethoven.

Beethoven was the pillar of smoke that led to the Promised Land.—Franz Liszt.

Beethoven's time was one of revolutions and wars, terror and reform, poverty and extravagance and in many ways his music reflects the turbulence of the age in which he lived. Austria was at war with Ottoman Turkey, the French were in dispute with Austria, and England with France. The fall of the Bastille in 1789 was a sign of the end of the old order, extinguished forever. The period brought wide cultural changes, changes in political philosophy and society, and in the arts. Beethoven is seen as the bridge from the restraint and preoccupation with form of the Classical era, to the wildly personalized and emotional Romantic era.

Beethoven had a remarkable musical output. Just to name a few: 32 piano sonatas, 16 string quartets, 6 piano concerti plus a fragment (of which only 5 remain in the repertoire), 10 violin sonatas, 4 cello sonatas, 172 folk song arrangements, 60 canons and “musical jokes,” at least 2 ballets, an opera (“Fidelio”), and a large number of other works for chamber ensembles, choir, voice ... *and* 9 great symphonies that still represent the highest consistent level of symphonic output by any composer in history.

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in the provincial court city of Bonn, Germany, probably on December 16, 1770. Beethoven's talent was such that, at the age of 12, he was already assistant to the organist Christian Gottlob Neefe, with whom he studied. Attempts to establish him as a prodigy in the mold of Mozart had little success, however.

In 1787 Beethoven was sent to Vienna, but his mother fell ill, and he had to return to Bonn almost immediately. She died a few months later, and in 1789 Beethoven himself requested that his alcoholic father be retired, a move that left him responsible for his two younger brothers. Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna a second time in November of 1792, in order to study with Haydn.

In 1794 French forces occupied the Rhineland; consequently, Beethoven's ties with and support from the Bonn court came to an end. His father had died a month after his departure from Bonn, and his brothers joined him in Vienna. He remained there the rest of his life, leaving only for holidays and concerts in nearby cities. His only extended journey was to Prague, Dresden, and Berlin in 1796. Beethoven never held an official position in Vienna. He supported himself by giving concerts, by teaching piano, and increasingly through the sale of his compositions. Members of the Viennese aristocracy were his steady patrons, and in 1809 three of them—Prince Kinsky, Prince Lobkowitz, and the Archduke Rudolph—even guaranteed him a yearly income with the sole condition that he remain in Vienna.

The last 30 years of Beethoven's life were shaped by a series of personal crises, the first of which was the onset of deafness. The early symptoms, noticeable to the composer already before 1800, affected him socially more than musically. His reaction was despair, resignation, and defiance. Resolving finally to “seize fate by the throat,” he emerged from the crisis with a series of triumphant works that mark the beginning of a new period in his stylistic development.

A second crisis a decade later was the breaking off of a relationship with an unnamed lady (probably Antonie Brentano, the wife of a friend) known to us as the “Immortal Beloved,” as Beethoven addressed her in a series of letters in July 1812. This was apparently the most serious of several such relationships with women who were in some way out of his reach, and its traumatic conclusion was followed by a lengthy period of resignation and reduced musical activity.

During this time Beethoven's deafness advanced to the stage that he could no longer perform publicly, and he required a slate or little notebooks (now known as “conversation books”) to communicate with visitors. The death of his brother Caspar Carl in 1815 led to a 5-year legal struggle for custody of Caspar's son Karl, then 9 years old, in whom Beethoven saw a last chance for the domestic life that had otherwise eluded him. His possessiveness of Karl provoked a final crisis in the summer of 1826, when the young man attempted suicide. Shortly thereafter, Beethoven's health began to fail, and he died on March 26, 1827 in Vienna.

Beethoven's **Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 61** suffered greatly from the lackadaisical attitude toward concerti in Beethoven's time. It was common, at that time, for orchestras to sightread accompaniments in performance, and, in this case, the soloist hadn't given much thought to Beethoven's work. On December 23, 1806, Franz Clement gave the first performance without having even seen the piece. Not surprisingly, the performance fell flat with the press, which found more interest in Clement's “entertainment” between the first two movements, in which he played a sonata of his own composition on one string with his violin upside down. The concerto fell into obscurity until Joseph Joachim revived it in a series of concerts conducted by Mendelssohn.

Beethoven was later persuaded by his publisher to write a piano concerto based upon the violin concerto, but the piano version is highly problematic, as Beethoven opted not to fill out the solo part entirely, most likely due to his dislike of rearranging his own works.

Music moves me all the more when the methods used are clear, correct, precise, and even concise.—Fauré

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) wrote those words in 1896 at the age of fifty-one. By then he had composed a quantity of orchestral music, but there were no symphonies or concertos, and none to follow. Instead, he applied his principles of clarity, precision and concision to smaller musical forms. Composition for Fauré was primarily “for music’s sake”—the pure *idea*.

Fauré was the youngest of six children and a precocious talent. When he was nine, his parents sent him to the Niedermeyer school in Paris, known for its training in church music, and that training influenced Fauré throughout his career. In 1861, Saint-Saëns arrived at the school to teach piano, broadening Fauré’s outlook with music of Wagner and Liszt, and a lifelong friendship formed between them.

Fauré started his professional career as an organist but was pulled away for service in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. After returning to church music, he was deeply moved at hearing the Wagner’s *Ring* cycle. He managed to take the best aspects of Wagner without joining the legions of Wagner imitators of the day. In 1896, he obtained a professorship of composition at the Paris Conservatory, where his influence was felt for decades through influential students like Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger. He eventually became director of the Conservatory, which proved a mixed blessing, as he found less and less time for composition. Worse yet, his hearing started to fail, forcing him to pare down his harmonic language and leaving him looking outdated and obsolete during the rush of late Impressionism and modernism that was sweeping through France.

Fauré wrote **Cantique de Jean Racine, op. 11** is for mixed chorus and piano or organ. Written by the nineteen year old composer in 1864-5, the piece won him first prize when he graduated from the Niedermeyer school. It was first performed on August 4 the following year, with accompaniment of strings. The accompaniment has also been arranged for strings and harp by John Rutter. The text, *Verbe égal au Très-Haut*, is a paraphrase by Jean Racine (*Hymnes traduites du Bréviaire romain*, 1688) of the pseudo-ambrosian hymn for Tuesday matins, *Consors paterni luminis*.

Fauré began his **Requiem, op. 48** in the summer of 1887. The original version had only five movements and premiered in that form at the Madeleine Church in Paris (where Fauré was organist) on January 16, 1888, as part of a “first-class” funeral for a wealthy parishioner. The Offertory and Libera Me were added later. In discussions with his publisher, Fauré opted for further revisions in the instrumentation. The final version, in which Fauré’s pupil Roger Ducasse may have made many of the revisions, was premiered in 1900 and the published score emerged in 1901. Fauré was candid with conductors of his Requiem, loudly stating his preference for a bright, vigorous soprano soloist as opposed to “old goats who have never known love,” and for “a soothing bass-baritone with something of the precentor in him” who can sustain “the calm and gravity the part requires.”