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SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Island Symphony Orchestra Spring Concert

Music Director: Eric R. Stewart



Featuring guest soloist, pianist, Jessica Zhao,

Grand Prize Winner of the 2023

Island Symphony Orchestra Young Performers' Competition

Sunday April 2, 2023 / 2:00 PM

St. Peter's By-the-Sea Episcopal Church, Bay Shore

Program

Richard Wagner

Overture to Tannhäuser

Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Opus 15

Performed by Young Person's Competition Winner, Jessica Zhao

Allegro con Brio

Largo

Rondo. Allegro scherzando

Intermission

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

Allegro con brio

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro

Allegro

The Island Symphony Orchestra 2023 concert season is made possible with funds from the Statewide Community Regrant Program, a regrant program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature and administered by The Huntington Arts Council, Inc.





Guest Artist, Jessica Zhao

Jessica Zhao started to learn piano at the age of 5. In 2016, she gave her first Carnegie Hall performance as a winner of the American Music Talents International Piano and String Competition. She was admitted into the Pre-College division of the Manhattan School of Music at the age of 7, where she studied with Dr. Arkady Aronov. At the age of 10, she was admitted into the Pre-College division of the Juilliard School, where she currently studies with Dr. Julian Martin. This February, She gave a solo recital in Juilliard's Paul Hall. Jessica currently attends the Portledge School in Locust Valley, where she is in 8th grade.

Music Director, Eric R. Stewart

Dr. Eric R. Stewart serves as Music Director of the Island Symphony Orchestra, Music Director of the Long Island Festival Orchestra, and Director of Orchestral Studies at Long Island University- Post. He has appeared at such venues as Carnegie Hall (Zankel Hall), the Four Seasons Centre of the Canadian Opera Company (Bradshaw Amphitheatre) and has been broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC). Also a composer, Eric's compositions are performed internationally. He was a finalist in the International Antonin Dvorak Composition Competition, as well as for the ASCAP Morton Gould Award. Born in 1985, Eric grew up in Buffalo, New York. His academic studies took place at the Peabody Conservatory of Music (B.M., M.M.) and the University of Toronto (D.M.A.).



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PROGRAM NOTES

Overture to *Tannhäuser* Richard Wagner (1813 - 1883)

Tannhäuser, Richard Wagner's fifth completed opera, was composed from 1842 and 1845, during his stint as Kapellmeister at the royal court of Saxony in Dresden. Its themes include the struggle between sacred and profane love and redemption through love. By 1845, when he completed three years of work on *Tannhäuser*, Wagner had largely abandoned the conventions of Romantic grand opera, and was well on his way to developing his own distinctive conception of music-drama. *Tannhäuser* was not an immediate hit, though the opera soon found success throughout Germany.

The work's Overture prefigures the opera not only by introducing some of the music that will be heard in the course of the opera, but also by themes of the plot itself. It became so popular as a stand-alone concert piece that Wagner prepared a sort of plot summary of the Overture, which he presented in a very long program note for a concert he conducted in Zurich in May 1873.

Wagner writes: "At first the orchestra introduces us to the Pilgrims' Chorus alone. It approaches, swells to a mighty outpouring, and finally passes into the distance. —Twilight: dying echoes of the chorus. —As night falls, magic visions show themselves. A rosy mist swirls upward, sensuously exultant sounds reach our ears, and the blurred motions of a fearsomely voluptuous dance are revealed. This is the seductive magic of the Venusberg, which appears by night to those whose souls are fired by bold, sensuous longings. Lured by the tempting visions, the slender figure of a man draws near: it is *Tannhäuser*, the minstrel of love. Proudly he sings his jubilant chant of love, exultantly and challengingly, as if to force the voluptuous magic to come to him. . . ."

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op. 15

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

Though Beethoven's C major Piano Concerto is known today as his first, it was actually the second piano concerto he composed; it was, however, the first one that he published—hence the mix-up. Beethoven began composing it in 1794, two years after he had arrived in Vienna, intending it to be a virtuoso showcase for his own piano playing. He seems to have completed an initial version of the concerto sometime in the following year shortly before premiering it himself. The concerto consists of the following movements:

Allegro con brio (C major), Largo (A-flat major), Rondo.

Allegro scherzando (C major)

As with the Piano Concerto No. 2, this concerto reflects Beethoven's assimilation of the styles of Mozart and Haydn, while its abrupt harmonic shifts demonstrate Beethoven's musical personality. It adheres to the concerto variant of sonata form and is scored for solo piano and an orchestra consisting of flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings.

The first movement unfolds over about 17 minutes. The length of the first results in part from Beethoven's elaborate solo cadenza, but also because of the symphonic treatment of the whole. Despite its unusual duration, the Allegro con brio feels compact. The characteristic reworking of motivic ideas mingles with some surprisingly singable melodies.

The Largo is an eloquent cantilena in A-flat major, whose rich ornamentation and tranquil spirit anticipate the "Emperor" Concerto. Beethoven's lovely clarinet solo contributes an intimate, chamber-music-like dialogue. The bubbly finale is among his wittiest movements. Even its subsidiary themes exude rhythmic vitality, fully realizing the scherzando instruction of Beethoven's subtitle.

Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is arguably one of the most iconic pieces of classical music ever composed, as well as one of the most iconoclastic. It has also come to represent the very essence of classical music itself. Music lovers know it backwards and forwards, and even those who have never attended an orchestra concert nonetheless recognize the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth, as it is informally known, immediately.

The fifth symphony was completed in 1808, although sketches appear as early as 1800 and more frequently in the composer's notebooks between 1804-1806. 1808 was a terrible time for Beethoven. Impending deafness frightened him to the core, the Emperor Napoleon was marching over his homeland, and his brother had married a wretched woman whom he called "Queen of the Night." Money was short. Music alone made life bearable, and through music, he became a master of his destiny. That journey is reflected in the iconic fifth. And through this, Beethoven comprehensively speaks for and to us all.

The opening begins with a thunderclap: the famous four-note motto theme, three quick Gs and a long E flat, proclaimed fortissimo. Momentum generated by the repetition of the first three notes is dramatically halted in an extended fourth tone. The composer holds us breathless and then insistently repeats the three notes on a lower tone and again holds us tight on the fourth. After this unbelievable introduction, Beethoven unleashes a movement unlike any other in his time. From the opening kernel, he developed a symphonic masterpiece, demonstrating a new symphonic principal: the potential of a single gesture to generate an enormous piece. Rhythms are torrential, but the single focus on the motto insists upon that underlying idea. Sometimes the idea screams, sometimes whispers or pants in the depths of the orchestra, but it is unstoppable. A lyrical second theme introduced by French horn is beautiful but overwhelmed by the rage and insistence of the opening grip. A turbulent development continues the obsession with the opening motto, not uttered in tight integration. Within a traditional recapitulation, Beethoven stops the action with an expressive oboe cadenza, and then he moves us into a long coda, hammering the motto again and again into our soul.

His second movement, *Andante con moto*, spins a series of four variations on two main ideas. Violas and cellos first sing a richly declaimed song before clarinets, flute and bassoons chant a sturdier, more assertive idea. Although writing double variations on these two ideas, Beethoven cannot resist allowing rhythmic allusions to the opening cell to persist.

The third movement, *Allegro*, is a scherzo rather than a traditional minuet and trio. Ominously, hushed cellos and basses restlessly stir the first musical ideas before French horns emerge with a strong theme, again referencing the opening idea. Themes spar back and forth. A dramatic pianissimo section, underscored by muttering timpani, charges the atmosphere before an extended crescendo moves directly to the brilliant finale.

The fourth movement ratchets up instrumental color by the addition of piccolo, contrabassoon and three trombones. (This was the first time trombones appeared in a symphony orchestra.) A panoply of themes occupies the enlarged canvas and palette. Trombones are invoked to lead the extroverted march-like theme, which sets the stage for the greater dimensions. While the contrabassoon adds depth, the piccolo provides glitter. Within the exuberant mood, Beethoven leads us to his triumphant coda, now stressing the light of C Major for 54 measures.

We are provided a window into what was yet to come from the Beethoven sound, as well as his conviction that music was a critical and elevating force for life. “Beethoven broke all the rules and turned out pieces of breathtaking rightness. He had the real goods, the stuff from Heaven, the power to make you feel at the finish: Something is right with the world.” (Leonard Bernstein)

Program notes for Beethoven’s 5th Symphony collated from notes by Marianne Williams Tobias and Elizabeth Schwartz

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- John Eyre has performed as a baritone with the St. Bartholomew's Church (Park Ave., NYC) professional choir, where a different oratorio was performed each week. He has sung roles with various Long Island opera companies, and was Baritone Soloist at Church of the Ascension (Rockville Centre) for 8 1/2 years.



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— Hans Christian Andersen

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