

OPENING GALA: PASTORAL

7:30PM

FRIDAY 13 OCTOBER 2023

REARDON THEATRE



Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770 – 1827)

Symphony No. 6 in F major “Pastoral”, Op. 68 (arr. Fischer)

1. *Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande. Allegro ma non troppo*
2. *Szene am Bach. Andante molto mosso*
3. *Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute. Allegro*
4. *Gewitter, Sturm. Allegro*
5. *Hirtengesang. Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm. Allegretto*

Zoë Black *Violin*

Sarah Curro *Violin*

Caroline Henbest *Viola*

Molly Collier-O’Boyle *Viola*

Michelle Wood *Cello*

Noah Lawrence *Cello*

Though raised a Roman Catholic and holding a firm belief in God, Beethoven was not devout in the conventional sense and rarely went to church. His mature religious views formed in the freethinking zeitgeist of the Enlightenment, drawing on a wide range of sources, from classical antiquity to Hindu theology, and of course he saw music itself as a kind of portal to the divine. But most of all, with his advancing deafness and withdrawal from social life, Beethoven found communion in nature – “In the woods I am blessed. ... No one can love the country as I love it. ... Every tree seems to speak to me, saying, ‘Holy! Holy!’”

Of all Beethoven’s works, the Pastoral Symphony most completely expresses his love and reverence for the natural world. While sketches reveal the music had been taking shape in his mind since at least 1803, Beethoven composed the lion’s share of the symphony in 1808. The premiere was given at the infamous four-hour concert held in the unheated Theater an der Wien on 22 December 1808. Not all the responses to that first performance were overly positive, but one glowing review did appear from the German organist and composer Michael Gotthard Fischer, whose arrangement of the symphony for string sextet we hear this evening.

In Beethoven’s own words, the symphony opens with an “awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside”, though beneath the harmonious springs lie deep wells of longing. The beguilingly amorous Andante follows (“Scene by the stream”), the work’s longest and most leisurely movement. At the end of the stream, a “jolly gathering of countryfolk” enter the scene, their wild and earthy dancing suddenly cut short by the breaking of a thunderstorm, symbolised in one of Beethoven’s most elementally powerful creations. As the clouds recede, we reach the ecstatic repose of the finale, an outpouring of “happy and grateful emotions” in the guise of a shepherd’s song, at once simple and transcendent. © Douglas Rutherford, 2023

Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841 – 1904)

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A major, Op. 81

1. Allegro ma non tanto

2. Dumka. Andante con moto – Vivace (quasi l'istesso tempo) – Tempo I

3. Scherzo (Furiant). Molto vivace – Trio. Poco tranquillo – Da capo

4. Finale. Allegro – Tranquillo – Tempo I

Zoë Black *Violin*

Sarah Curro *Violin*

Caroline Henbest *Viola*

Michelle Wood *Cello*

Caroline Almonte *Piano*

Despite being less popular than some of his other chamber works, Dvořák's Second Piano Quintet is widely held to be a masterpiece in the form, alongside the piano quintets of Schumann, Brahms and Shostakovich. British scholar Alex Robertson called it "simply one of the most perfect chamber music works in existence. ... The melodies are of the greatest beauty and freshness, and a joyous springtime happiness flows through the music."

Inspiration for the work came in 1887 from a reassessment Dvořák decided to make of his youthful First Piano Quintet, which he had destroyed soon after its premiere some fifteen years earlier – a casualty of his tendency for creative self-criticism and perfectionism. Luckily, the pianist at that first performance had saved his part, and in a letter asking for him to send it, Dvořák wrote, "These days, I like to take a look at some of my old sins every now and again..."

The quintet begins with a stormy, quasi-symphonic Allegro, full of radiant, heartfelt melodies and lush instrumental colours. The second movement is one of Dvořák's characteristic *dumky* (a kind of Slavic ballad) which, like so much of the composer's music, contains an entrancing mixture of bittersweet lyricism and dance-like rhythmic energy. The jaunty scherzo also has its roots in Slavic folk music, this time the Bohemian *furiant* – originally a wild, off-kilter dance, but here striking a slightly more civilised pose, at least at first. The finale, though fundamentally playful and jubilant, is driven by a frenetic energy and sharp swings of mood. Near the very end, Dvořák momentarily transcends the frenzy in a moment of idyllic, quasi-religious exaltation, before an electrifying bolt to the finish-line. © Douglas Rutherford, 2023