

PROGRAM NOTES by ERIC BROMBERGER

Egmont Overture, Opus 84

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

In 1809 Beethoven was invited to contribute incidental music to a revival of Goethe's tragedy *Egmont* at the Vienna Burgtheater. The motives of the theater's managers were clear: the French occupation of Vienna had just ended, and they wanted to celebrate their own freedom with a production of a play that told of resistance to political oppression. Beethoven had found the French occupation very difficult (he had hid in the basement of his brother's house with a pillow wrapped around his head during the French bombardment), and he was delighted to write the incidental music, which consists of an overture and nine other movements, including songs, entr'actes, a melodrama, and a concluding victory symphony.

But *Egmont* appealed to Beethoven for reasons deeper than its relevance to the French occupation of his adopted city. Goethe's tragedy tells of the heroic resistance to the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands by Count Egmont, who is imprisoned by the evil Duke Alva. When a rescue attempt by Egmont's lover Clärchen fails, she poisons herself, but Egmont goes to the gallows confident of the ultimate triumph of his cause. The themes of an imprisoned hero, a faithful woman willing to make sacrifices for love and political ideals, and the resistance to tyranny are of course those of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*, and while the endings of *Egmont* and *Fidelio* are quite different, Beethoven must have found Goethe's play close to his own heart.

The complete incidental music is seldom heard today, but the overture has become one of Beethoven's most famous. It does not, however, attempt to tell the story of the play, and listeners should not search for a musical depiction of events. A powerful slow introduction gives way to a tentative, falling string figure—gradually the strength coiled up in this simple theme-shape is unleashed, and the dramatic overture rushes ahead at the *Allegro*. This music is full of energy, and at moments Beethoven subtly shifts the pulse of his 3/4 meter to make it feel like 6/8. The ominous chords of the opening return to usher in the brilliant close, where music that will reappear in the *Symphony of Victory* (the tenth and final movement of the incidental music) symbolizes the ultimate victory of Egmont's cause.

luscinia

TINA TALLON

Born January 6, 1990, Baltimore, Maryland

“luscinia” is the genus portion of the scientific name for the common nightingale, *Luscinia megarhynchos*. Nightingales are small birds found primarily throughout Europe and Asia, and are known for their highly varied song, which is often sung at night. They have been referenced throughout literature, music, and visual art for centuries, though perhaps one of the nightingale’s most well-known appearances is in the tale of Philomel, found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Ovid writes of a young woman who is raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who then cuts out her tongue to prevent her from identifying him as the perpetrator. Unable to speak, she weaves a tapestry depicting her assault and sends it to her sister Procne, who hatches a plan to exact revenge. After discovering this plan, Tereus chases Procne and Philomel into the forest, where they escape by being turned into birds - Procne into a swallow, and Philomel into a nightingale. For many artists, the nightingale’s song has often had melancholy connotations, presumably due in some part to Ovid’s story; however, in a somewhat cruelly ironic twist, modern ornithologists have found that it is usually only the male nightingale that actually sings (as is the case with many species of birds).

This piece incorporates live electronic processing, which involves both the generation of new sounds in response to the orchestra and live modification of what the orchestra is playing. This allows for the seamless integration of the acoustic and electronic elements of the piece, and in some cases, they may be indistinguishable. One of the most important aspects of the processing of the orchestra allows for the production of vocal sounds using the spectral profiles of the music that the orchestra is playing. In this way, the orchestra is able to give voice to those who have historically been silenced. In fact, *luscinia* is, most of all, a meditation on silence (albeit not a peaceful, pastoral one).

Anyone who has paid attention to the news as of late knows that we are currently experiencing a watershed moment with respect to societal conversations surrounding sexual assault. Though I began work on this piece many months prior to the Harvey Weinstein investigation (and the many others that have followed), I hope that someday soon, situations such as the impetus for this piece will no longer be commonplace. While many composers hope that

their music stays relevant long after its premiere, I can say with certainty that I sincerely hope that this piece does not. It is time for change, and it is time for action.

I am immensely grateful to all of the people who contributed their stories to the electronic component of this piece, and to Maestro Schick and the orchestra for their trust and adventurousness in bringing it off of the page. I am also grateful to the Nee family for supporting this commission (and emerging composers in general), and for their belief in the importance of the creation of new music.

Violin Concerto, Opus 23 “Concentric Paths”

THOMAS ADÈS

Born March 1, 1971, London

Thomas Adès composed his *Violin Concerto* in 2005, shortly after completing his opera *The Tempest*. The concerto had been jointly commissioned by the Berlin Festspiele and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and violinist Anthony Marwood gave the world premiere in Berlin on September 4, 2005, with the composer conducting. Marwood and Adès were again the principals at the American premiere, given with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Disney Hall on February 10, 2006. The concerto is scored for an orchestra of almost Mozartean proportions: pairs of woodwinds and trumpets, three horns, trombone, tuba, percussion, and strings.

Adès gave his *Violin Concerto* the subtitle “Concentric Paths,” and he provided a concise program note, worth quoting in detail:

This concerto has three movements, like most, but it is really more of a triptych, as the middle one is the largest. It is the “slow” movement, built from two large, and very many small, independent cycles, which overlap and clash, sometimes violently, in their motion towards resolution.

The outer movements too are circular in design, the first fast, with sheets of unstable harmony in different orbits, the third playful, at ease, with stable cycles moving in harmony at different rates.

That notes hints at the circularity of this music, of its “concentric paths,” and the three movements have titles—*Rings*, *Paths*, and *Rounds*—that might suggest circular or repetitive motion (rather than the linearity of traditional sonata form). But audiences approaching this music for

the first time might do better to regard “Concentric Paths” as Adès’ own compositional metaphor and instead listen to this music for the things that are a part of every good violin concerto: drama, color, a sense of motion, and the brilliance of the solo part.

Shortest of the three movements, the opening *Rings* gets off to an intense, if at first quiet, beginning with the solo violin’s swirling, murmuring, rocking textures. Quickly the music climbs into the violin’s highest range with the solo part now glistening high above the orchestra. It is altogether typical of Adès that at the climax of this movement he can simultaneously mark the solo part both quadruple *forte* and *molto cantabile*.

Longest of the three movements, the central *Paths* is also the most impressive. Adès casts it as a chaconne, a variation-form movement based on a repeating ground bass. The opening marking is *Pesante* (“heavy”), and textures here feel almost skeletal: the orchestra lashes out with widely-separated chords, great strikes of crunchy sound, and against this solemn chordal progression the solo violin begins its journey. That journey is intense, and the solo part unfolds with such complexity that at several places the composer provides alternate versions to simplify the writing. At the center of the movement comes a long interlude marked *Giusto con moto*, built largely on falling lines that seem to cascade downward slowly—at one point here Adès asks the horn section to produce a “penetrating forced sound.” The violin soloist returns, and the music rises to a fierce climax, then slips into silence.

Adès himself described the final movement, *Rounds*, as “playful” and compared it to the rondo movements that conclude many concertos. The opening is marked by the sound of percussion instruments, which provide a rhythmic punctuation beneath the solo part. That punctuation is complex—the meter changes every measure—and quickly we feel that the violin is performing a slinky dance over spiky accompaniment. But as the movement progresses, full of changing meters and sharp sounds, a strange thing happens: the solo violin begins to sing music of an utterly lyrical and straightforward loveliness. Soloist and orchestra almost inhabit different worlds here, so different is their music. The music seems to reach a moment of emotional stasis, then races to the brutal concluding chord.

It should be noted that the writing for violin in this concerto is of stupefying difficulty. Anthony Marwood confessed that when he first saw the score, he felt that parts of it were unplayable—only his desire not to be remembered as the one who said this concerto was

“unplayable” forced him to master its challenges. Much of this music is written at the upper limit of the violin’s range (sometimes beyond that), and the violinist must move instantaneously from the very top of the instrument’s range to the very bottom, master its complex chording and rhythmic intricacies, cut through the sound of the orchestra, and still be able to sustain the concerto’s long, lyric lines. Despite these difficulties, Adès’ *Violin Concerto* has proven popular: it has been widely performed and has now been recorded three times.

Je vivoie liement/Liement me deport

GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT

Born c. 1300, Reims, France

Died April 13, 1377, Reims, France

Arr. Felipe Rossi

The following program note has been supplied by the arranger.

Felipe Rossi’s *Mutual Magical Hue* [an anagram of Guillaume de Machaut]: Translation of Machaut's virelai “Je vivoie liement / Liement me deport” for solo soprano, solo violin and chamber orchestra

It is crucial to remember that Guillaume de Machaut comes from a time before the distinction between composer and poet crystallized into the form familiar today. As a poet who set his own texts to music and a composer who established new standards for the art of musical depiction, the figure of Machaut not only bears the seal of an epoch, but also represents a fascinating testimony to the way in which such generic distinctions are often revealed to be artificial when examined closely. Machaut's oeuvre is a site of constant and recursive translation, and it is this feature of his work to which *Mutual Magical Hue* primarily responds. This piece offers an environment wherein the musical and the poetic intermingle and inform each other in the personages of its two soloists, one who declaims poetry musically and one who performs music poetically. It is an anagram of the composer's name. It is a world full of orchestral intricacies and love for fiddles. It is an homage to 14th-century courtly love and a humble attempt to render it legible in the age of Tinder. This piece stands at a considerable remove from the dance music of the troubadour that supplied Machaut with source materials, but it is an attempt to reimagine and reinvigorate them in a way that – hopefully -- does justice to the kind of artwork that develops through multiple forms of interaction, from the most unanimous to the most

Je vivroie liement

[original old French]

Je vivroie liement,
Douce creature,
Se vous saviés vraiment,
Qu'en vous fust parfaitement ma cure.
Dame de meintieng joli,
Plaisant, nette et pure,
Souvent me fait dire 'ai mi!'
Li maus que j'endure
Pur vous servir loyaument.
Et soié seüre
Que je ne puis nullement
Vivre einssi, se longuement
Me dure.

Car vous m'estes sans mercy
Et sans pité dure.
et s'avés le cuer de mi
Mis en tel ardure
Qu'il morra certainement
De mort trop obscure,
Se pour son aligement
Merci n'est procheinement
Meüre

I should lead a happy life

[translated by F. Rossi]

I should lead a happy life,
sweet creature,
if only you truly realized
that you were the cause of all
my concern.
Lady of cheerful bearing,
pleasing, bright and pure,
often the woe I suffer
to serve you loyally
makes me say 'alas!'
And you may be sure

that I can in no wise
go on living like this, if it lasts
any longer.
For you are merciless to me
and pitilessly obdurate,
and have put such longing
into my heart
that it will certainly die
a most dismal death,
unless for its relief
your mercy is soon
ready.

Gloria

FRANCIS POULENC

Born January 7, 1899, Paris

Died January 30, 1963, Paris

Francis Poulenc was raised a Roman Catholic, but very early in life he fell away from the church. Then in the summer of 1935 came one of those life-changing experiences: his close friend, the composer Pierre-Octave Ferroud, was killed in an automobile accident in Hungary. Badly shaken, Poulenc made a pilgrimage to the village of Rocamadour in southern France, where a chapel dedicated to the Black Virgin sits atop a hill. Poulenc himself explained its impact on him: "As I meditated on the fragility of our human frame, I was drawn once more to the life of the spirit. Rocamadour had the effect of restoring me to the faith of my childhood." Poulenc immediately composed his *Litanies à la vierge noire* for women's voices and organ and followed that with a number of other liturgical settings across the remainder of his life.

One of the greatest of these was the result of a commission from the Koussevitzky Foundation in the late 1950s. Their first suggestion that he write a symphony was quickly rebuffed, nor was their follow-up request for a concerto any more appealing to the composer. At that point the Foundation told Poulenc that he could compose anything he wanted to, and he chose to set part of the Mass text. Poulenc did most of the work on what would be the *Gloria* during the second half of 1959, completing the short score that December and the orchestration in July 1960. Poulenc flew to Boston for the premiere, which was delayed a day when that city was incapacitated by a massive snowstorm. The premiere took place on January 20, 1961, by Charles Munch and the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Adele Addison as soprano soloist.

Poulenc was delighted by the performance, and the *Gloria* has become one of his best-known works. Unfortunately, it was also one of his last: he died two years later at age 64.

Hearing this music without knowing its text, one would hardly guess that it is a setting of a sacred text. Poulenc's music for the *Gloria* is neither ceremonial nor solemn nor particularly dignified. On the contrary, at some points it is so lighthearted that it has been accused of frivolity. In response to such criticism, Poulenc said: "The second movement caused a scandal; I wonder why? I was simply thinking, in writing it, of the Gozzoli frescoes in which the angels stick out their tongues; I was thinking also of the famous Benedictines whom I saw playing soccer one day." This is precisely the charm of the *Gloria*, which features gorgeous melodies, piquant harmonies (the opening chord, for example), and rhythmic energy. Poulenc's setting makes clear that he did not feel one need be solemn to praise God.

The *Gloria* text comes from the second part of the Roman Catholic Mass; Poulenc scores his setting for soprano soloist (who sings in three of the six movements), chorus, and orchestra. The opening *Gloria*, majestic and slightly dissonant, sets the mood of ebullient praise. The energetic *Laudamus te* is in ternary form; Poulenc marks its beginning "Very fast and joyous," and this frames a solemn *Gratias*. The soprano solo enters at the *Domine Deus*, her voice floating beautifully above the subdued chorus and orchestra. The bubbling *Domine fili unigenite* is full of vitality—again, Poulenc instructs that it should be "Very fast and joyous." The mood changes sharply at the *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei*, longest and most solemn section of the *Gloria*, where the soprano's jagged melodic line soars high above the accompaniment. Spirited entrances by the tenors and mezzo-sopranos open the concluding *Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris*, which is based partially on themes and rhythms from the opening movement. A strident climax leads to the return of the soprano soloist and a conclusion ("Extraordinarily calm," specifies Poulenc) that fades into silence on a final *Amen*.