

KISHWAUKEE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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PROGRAM NOTES

by Geoffrey Decker

“Egmont” Overture, Op. 84, by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven was not in the best of health or moods when he first met the great German playwright, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Teplitz (now Teplice in the Czech Republic) in July 1812. Recently rejected by the woman with whom he thought he would join in marriage, his “Immortal Beloved,” Beethoven traveled to the spa town to take the waters. He and Goethe walked together almost every day while there and got to know one another. After returning home, Beethoven, the revolutionary free thinker, remarked to his publisher that Goethe spent too much time delighting in courtly lip service. Goethe remarked to his wife that Beethoven had an “absolutely uncontrolled personality.” So, the two great contemporaries never really got on afterwards.

It is probably a good thing that they had not met before Beethoven composed his incidental music for Goethe’s 1787 play, *Egmont*. Upon the premiere of the incidental music alongside the play in Vienna on June 15, 1810, Goethe declared Beethoven had expressed his intentions “with remarkable genius.” He might have tempered his enthusiasm after their time together in Teplitz, though.

Composed between October 1809 and June 1810, the incidental music consists of the overture we play tonight, four entractes, two songs sung by the lead actress, a melodrama, and two more orchestral pieces, the latter of which is a *Siegessymphonie*, or Victory Symphony. Certainly, the most familiar of all the music is the oft-performed overture. Representing one of the last works of Beethoven’s middle period of his musical output, it is a powerful summarization of what is to follow in the play. In short, it represents man’s heroism and victory over tyranny.

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58, by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58, was composed during 1805-06 and dedicated to his great friend and benefactor, Rudolph, Archduke of Austria and Prince Royal of Hungary and Bohemia. The work premiered first in March 1807 in a private performance alongside the composer’s Coriolan Overture, Op. 62, and Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60, at the home of Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz.

The public premiere of the Fourth Piano Concerto, with Beethoven as soloist, came more than a year later, on December 22, 1808, at Vienna’s Theater an der Wien in what can only be described as a marathon concert. It included his Choral Fantasy in C minor, Op. 80, for Piano, Vocal Soloists, Chorus and Orchestra and his Symphonies No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67, and No. 6 in F major, Op. 68!

A review of the work published shortly thereafter praised the concerto as “the most admirable, singular, artistic and complex Beethoven concerto ever.” This high praise says a lot about how the concerto was received and perceived, especially when we consider that Beethoven’s first three piano concertos and his Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61, came before.

The most noticeable difference in Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto compared to those composed previously – including the piano concertos of Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – is its highly unusual beginning with the solo piano entering without an orchestral introduction. Sadly, and despite the high praise, the work was neglected until 1836 when Felix Mendelssohn brought it back into the repertoire.

Scored for a single flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings, Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto is in three movements: Allegro molto (very fast), Andante con moto (slowly, but with motion) and Rondo: Vivace (lively rondo).

Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Strangely, out of the more than 50 symphonies he composed, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart only set two of them in a minor key, Nos. 25 and 40, and both in G minor! Was there a significance to G minor? Is the fact that all but two are in a major key due to Mozart's being of a generally positive demeanor? Who knows? What we do know is that he composed his final three symphonies, Nos. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543, 40 in G minor, K. 550, and 41 ("Jupiter") in C major, K. 551, in the unbelievably short period of just six and a half weeks between June 26 and August 10, 1788!

Many early historians believed – or, at the very least, put forth the belief – that Mozart never intended the works for performance during his lifetime but rather meant them for posterity. A letter recently discovered suggests that the 40th was performed at the home of Baron Gottfried van Swieten, one of Mozart's patrons. Sadly, it is also documented in the same letter that Mozart had to excuse himself due to the butchering the musicians were giving his work. Further evidence indicates that there were other performances of the last three symphonies given during Mozart's final three years.

Performed during his lifetime or not, Mozart's last three symphonies are among the most monumental and beloved works of the more than 600 he composed in his short life of just less than 36 years. Somewhat surprisingly, he composed them during a time of reduced income and extreme hardship. Patronage had decreased during the Austro-Turkish War and, to reduce his family's expenses, Mozart moved it from the center of Vienna to the suburb of Alsergrund. He also sought to boost his income with sojourns to Dresden, Leipzig, Frankfurt, and Berlin; and it was perhaps for these planned concerts that he rapidly produced the symphonies.

Mozart's 40th Symphony exists in two versions, another fact pointing to the work's having been performed during the composer's lifetime. The second version of the 40th Symphony is scored for a single flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, and strings and it is this version that the Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra performs this evening. The work is in four movements: Molto allegro (very fast), Andante (slow), Menuetto: Allegretto (a little fast) with Trio, and a Finale: Allegro assai (another way of indicating very fast).