

Westminster Conservatory at Nassau

May 20, 2021

Dezheng Ping, violin
Larissa Korkina, piano

Program Notes

Beethoven – Coriolan Overture, op. 62

Beethoven was inspired to compose this concert overture after reading the play *Coriolan*, which was written in 1804 by his Viennese friend playwright Henrich Joseph von Collin.

Collin's *Coriolan*, the brilliant Roman general, is depicted as an enlightened hero pitted against a world of ignorance. This characterization seems to have resonated deeply for the composer, as he often thought about himself in the same light. Writing in 1807 Beethoven approached his concert overture in a very Romantic way. It took only three weeks to compose this masterpiece of musical invention, a highly original and groundbreaking piece. The overture begins with three resolute chords suggesting Coriolan's power, aggression, and controlled anger. Beethoven chose the key of C minor, the key of "passionate rebellion" and the same key as the Fifth Symphony as well as some of Beethoven's other most intense and dramatic works. The contrasting second theme represents Coriolan's mother, Volumnia. It is in E-flat and is softer-edged, really beautiful, and displaying great lyricism. The coda depicts Volumnia's last pleas to her son. The final theme moves back to C minor and dissolves into "a dark haze, fading to uneasy silence." Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* is one of the great Romantic pieces in music.

Beethoven – Romance No. 2 in F major, op. 50

Beethoven completed the *Romance No. 1* in 1798, publishing it seven years later in 1805. The composer dedicated this lyrical and stately piece to the violin virtuoso Ignaz Schuppanzigh.

Beethoven demonstrates features of both the French tradition of "Romance," especially appropriate for a concerto slow movement, and the German "Romanze," a song-like instrumental work. Another influence is the "Romance" slow movement from Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466*. *Romance No. 2* is in the form of a rondo with contrasting episodes. It combines stateliness and sentiment in equal measure, maintaining throughout a balance between the soloist, who leads, and the orchestral accompaniment, which responds. The main melody is vocally conceived, like an instrumental aria. It makes a dramatic and passionate move toward D minor, followed by the final abbreviated statement of the theme. A short coda concludes the work intimately. Some listeners hear a melancholy of lost love, a languorous melody of romance, while others hear a more philosophical musing, poetic and contemplative.

Beethoven – Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*, op. 43

The Creatures of Prometheus marked Beethoven's introduction to the Viennese stage, but was actually the composer's second excursion into the field of ballet, after *A Knights' Ballet* of 1791. The idea for *The Creatures of Prometheus* came from the celebrated Neapolitan choreographer, dancer, and producer Salvatore Vigano, a nephew of composer Luigi Boccherini.

This allegorical ballet is based on the myth of Prometheus, who was severely punished for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humans. The ballet depicts his death, rebirth, and the subsequent celebration by his creatures. The ballet opened on March 28, 1801 and continued for 28 performances. The work plays an important role in illustrating Beethoven's self-proclaimed "new artistic path," involving the symbolism of heroism, and the composer's own struggle against his physical suffering and increasing deafness. Only the overture, which focuses on the ballet's concluding section, has survived in the concert hall. The overture is symphonic in nature, freely using sonata form, and is highly dramatic with bold changes of key and dynamics. After a slow introduction an energetic first theme is introduced, first quietly and then in a dramatic blaze of color that is a flurry of scales. The second theme is more delicate. The brilliant allegro section, bristling with energy, often is said to represent Prometheus fleeing from the heaven after stealing fire from the gods.