



# BEETHOVEN'S FIFTH

WITH THE NASHVILLE SYMPHONY



CLASSICAL SERIES

THURS., OCTOBER 5, AT 7 PM | FRI. & SAT., OCTOBER 6 & 7, AT 8 PM | SUN., OCTOBER 8, AT 3 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

JAMES EHNES, *violin*

### CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

#### Symphony No. 5

*Nashville Symphony co-commission*

### BENJAMIN BRITTEN

#### Concerto No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 15

I. Moderato con moto

II. Vivace

III. Passacaglia: Andante lento (un poco meno mosso)

*James Ehnes, violin*

INTERMISSION

### LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

#### Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67

Allegro con Brio

Andante con moto

Allegro

Allegro

THANK YOU TO  
OUR PARTNER



SERIES PRESENTING PARTNER

*Christopher Rouse's Symphony No. 5 is being recorded live for commercial release.  
To ensure the highest-quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.*

# TONIGHT'S CONCERT

## AT A GLANCE



### CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

#### *Symphony No. 5*

- Christopher Rouse is one of America's leading composers, with numerous works and a Pulitzer Prize to his credit. The New York Philharmonic's recording of his Symphonies No. 3 and 4 was named one of NPR's Best 50 Albums of 2016.
- Co-commissioned by the Nashville Symphony, American composer Christopher Rouse's Symphony No. 5 will be performed for only the third time in Nashville and will be recorded live for future worldwide release on Naxos.
- Rouse recalls that Beethoven's Fifth was his first genuine exposure to classical music, so his own Symphony No. 5 pays tribute to this 19th-century masterpiece. In Rouse's own words: "The opening of my symphony revisits the famous four-note rhythm of Beethoven's, but the notes are quite different and things take a different turn after a few bars."



### BENJAMIN BRITTEN

#### *Violin Concerto*

- Britten composed his Violin Concerto during the Spanish Civil War and premiered it during World War II. Britten's pacifism in an era of violence strengthened his passion for composing. "It's at times like these that work is so important," he wrote just after the outbreak of World War II, "that humans can think of other things than blowing each other up."
- Britten wrote the Concerto for the Spanish expatriate violinist Antonio Brosa, whom he met in 1936, when he was invited to the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Barcelona. During that trip, Britten heard the world premiere of the elegiac Violin Concerto by the recently deceased Alban Berg — a work he found "just shattering."
- Brosa, who premiered the piece in 1940 at Carnegie Hall, noted that the Violin Concerto contains Spanish rhythmic ideas that the composer recalled from his trip to Barcelona.



### LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

#### *Symphony No. 5*

- Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 is one of the most frequently played symphonies of all time, and with good reason. The symphony and its four-note opening motif are known worldwide, appearing frequently in popular culture, from disco to rock and roll covers, to uses in film and television. The entire symphony is organically woven together with the four-note motif reappearing during later movements.
- Music critic E.T.A. Hoffmann considered Beethoven's Fifth as the pinnacle of the progression of the Austro-German tradition paved by Haydn and Mozart. Ironically, this most celebrated of classical works received a subpar premiere in December 1808, as part of a painfully long four-hour concert with less-than-stellar musicians in an unheated Viennese theater.
- The piece was written during a time of personal turmoil, as Beethoven grappled with his dwindling hearing, and took four years to complete. Though the work is written in the key of C minor, it is defined by the journey to C major that occurs in the transition into the fourth movement. This shift seems to symbolize a transformation from darkness to light, in a glorious breakthrough introduced by the timpani solo.
- The iconic opening motive (short-short-short-long) is also Morse code for the letter "V," so it was played to celebrate victories by the Allies in World War II. A recording of the first movement, directed by Otto Klemperer, was sent into space on the Golden Record aboard the Voyager.

—Corinne Fombelle & Thomas May



### CHRISTOPHER ROUSE

Born on February 15, 1949 in Baltimore, Maryland, where he currently resides

#### *Symphony No. 5*

Few American composers have been as significant as Christopher Rouse in revitalizing the appeal of orchestral music within a contemporary context. His imaginative approach to the concerto and the symphony has resulted in a substantial body of works that shows staying power, and Rouse now ranks among the most frequently performed living American composers.

Rouse's *Concert de Gaudí*, a guitar concerto written for Sharon Isbin, won the GRAMMY® Award for Best Contemporary Composition in 2002, while his Symphony No. 2 (1995) was on a recording conducted by Christoph Eschenbach with the Houston Symphony that won France's Diapason d'Or Award.

Several of his key works engage with musical icons. Rouse's Trombone Concerto, for example, was written to commemorate Leonard Bernstein in 1991, as well as to mark the New York Philharmonic's 150th anniversary. The work was awarded the 1993 Pulitzer Prize in Music and launched a prolific, ongoing series of concertos for prominent soloists that make up a large part of Rouse's catalogue. Last year saw the premiere of a new Organ Concerto by the Philadelphia Orchestra led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

Rouse, a native of Baltimore, came of age during the golden age of rock — a period when traditional orchestral music was considered a dead end by many composers setting out on a career. After studying at Oberlin College and Cornell University, he undertook private study with

Composed: 2014-15

First performance: February 9, 2017, with Jaap van Zweden conducting the Dallas Symphony Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These concerts mark the first performances by the Nashville Symphony

Estimated length: 25 minutes

the maverick composer George Crumb. Rouse himself has since gone on to become a prominent educator, teaching composition at Juilliard since 1997. (He also taught a course on the History of Rock while he was a composition professor at the Eastman School of Music.)

A long gap separates Rouse's Symphonies No. 1 and 2, composed in 1986 and 1994, from his Symphonies No. 3 and 4, composed in 2011 and 2013. The New York Philharmonic's recording of the latter two works, made under the direction of Alan Gilbert, was among NPR's choices for the Best 50 Albums of 2016.

Symphony No. 5 was commissioned by the Dallas Symphony, the Nashville Symphony and the Aspen Music Festival. In his review of the world premiere in Dallas earlier this year, critic Wayne Lee Gay noted that "with this new addition to the list, [Rouse] can stake claim to the title of the leading American symphonist of our time... As in so many great Romantic and post-Romantic symphonies of the past, grand ideas are packaged in a logical form that gives the listeners, whether or not they are consciously aware of the structure, a sense of emotional pilgrimage — of moving into a spiritual and intellectual space not on any map."

In the Symphony No. 5, Rouse makes his own relationship with the orchestral tradition a thematic focus, coming to terms with his sense of what it means to be a successor to the great composers of the past.

*In the Symphony No. 5, Rouse makes his own relationship with the orchestral tradition a thematic focus, coming to terms with his sense of what it means to be a successor to the great composers of the past.*

## IN THE COMPOSER'S WORDS

Christopher Rouse writes of his Symphony No. 5:

The first piece of “classical music” I remembering hearing — *Peter and the Wolf* doesn't count — was Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. I was 6 years old and had been listening to a great deal of early, new-at-the-time rock 'n' roll; my mother said, “That's fine, but you might like this as well.” It was a recording of the Beethoven symphony, and I remember thinking that a whole new world was opening up to me. I decided that I wanted to become a composer.

So when it came time for me to compose my own Fifth Symphony, my thoughts returned fondly to that time, and I resolved to tip my cap to Beethoven's mighty symphony. However, I wouldn't want to overstate the relationship. The opening of my symphony revisits the famous four-note rhythm of Beethoven's, but the notes are quite different, and things take a different turn after a few bars. The most extended reference is to the connective passage that links the third and fourth movements of the Beethoven: the mysterious passage for timpani over a long chord in the strings. My timpani part is identical to

Beethoven's; once again, though, what goes on around it is different.

One of Beethoven's most radical decisions in his Fifth Symphony was to return to the music of the scherzo in the midst of his finale, and this led me to ponder the structure of my own piece. The first and last movements — both allegros — are discrete entities, but the “slow movement” gives way to the scherzo, after which the slow movement returns and the scherzo once again succeeds it. This results in the blurring of lines between movements in the traditional sense.

As is often the case in my music, the language ranges freely — but I hope in an integrated way — between a dissonant language and a more consonant one. There is no programmatic element to the work, though I do hope to transport the listener through a series of emotional states, from turbulence to serenity.

*The Symphony No. 5 is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling bass flute), 3 oboes, clarinets, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussionists, 2 harps and strings.*

**Composed:** 1939; revised 1954 and 1965  
**First performance:** March 29, 1940, at Carnegie Hall, with John Barbirolli conducting and Antonio Brosa as the soloist  
**First Nashville Symphony performance:** These concerts mark the first performances by the Nashville Symphony  
**Estimated length:** 31 minutes



### BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Born on November 22, 1913, in Lowestoft, England; died on December 4, 1975, in Aldeburgh, England

#### *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 15*

In the spring of 1939, Benjamin Britten followed the example of his friend the poet W.H. Auden and left a troubled Europe for the United States. He brought along two large-scale projects still in progress: *Les Illuminations*, a song cycle based on Rimbaud's poetry, and his Violin Concerto. Only lasting a few years, this North American sojourn turned out to be remarkably productive.

Britten completed the Violin Concerto during that final summer of tense peace in 1939 — a

period which he and his lover, the tenor Peter Pears, spent visiting with such new friends as Aaron Copland. As soon as the war erupted, Copland encouraged Britten to stay in the U.S. “After all, anyone can shoot a gun,” Copland argued, “but how many people can write music like you?” Britten was unable to overcome his homesickness and decided to return to his native England in 1942.

A darkly mournful character imbues the Violin

Concerto, perhaps reflecting the composer's response to current events. He not only grieved for the defeat of the Spanish Republican cause by the Fascists — which happened while Britten was in the midst of composing — but for the larger specter of impending tragedy to which it seemed the ominous prelude. Britten remarked on the concerto's demeanor to his publisher, noting that it “is without question my best piece. It is rather serious, I'm afraid.” A few weeks after World War II had broken out, he wrote to another friend: “It is at times like these that work is so important — that humans can think of other things than blowing each other up!”

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The succession of tempos in this three-movement work is unconventional, with a fast movement at the center framed by movements of a notably serious character. The opening movement is the longest of the three and the Concerto's emotional center. Britten disclosed no external musical influences for the piece, but Brosa pointed to Spanish rhythmic ideas the composer recalled from his trip to Barcelona.

The first, heard in the opening measures, is an enigmatic motif of five notes on the timpani and serves as a kind of unifying motto for the Concerto. This gesture alludes to the famous opening of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, though with the added splash of cymbals. Britten translates this to the rest of the orchestra in unexpected ways throughout the opening movement. Over this insistent rhythm, the soloist takes flight in a long, doleful melody. Both ideas unfold for some time before a more agitated section introduces another prominent rhythmic motif and a new melody on the violin (including a rhythmic variant of the opening motif). A short development dovetails back to the opening music, but now the division of labor is redistributed, with the solo violin playing the opening motif. The eloquent coda subsides into a cadenza-like passage for the soloist set against the rhythmic motto, ending in resignation.

Restless figuration opens the scherzo-like Vivace, whose frenetic theme rises and falls. The central trio section posits a new melody before the frenzied main material returns. An outstanding example of Britten's imagination here is the

There is no program attached to the Violin Concerto, which shows an innovative approach to the form in the role Britten assigns to the soloist. It is also an astonishingly forward-looking work that points ahead to signatures of Britten's mature style. Britten wrote the Concerto for the Spanish expatriate violinist Antonio Brosa — a friend of his early composition mentor, Frank Bridge — whom Britten met in 1936, when he was invited to the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Barcelona. During that trip, Britten heard the world premiere of the elegiac Violin Concerto by the recently deceased Alban Berg — a work he found “just shattering.”

bizarre passage for tuba in tandem with a pair of chattering piccolos. An elaborately reflective violin cadenza draws on ideas from the first movement.

This leads without pause to the final movement, which centers on the theme somberly pronounced by the trombones — the first time they are put to use in the work. Formally, the finale is often described as a passacaglia, which is a harmonic sequence that continually repeats as variations unfold around it, but Britten's approach here is less strict than the Baroque model. He allows for repetitions, tonal shifts and staggered statements of the theme within a sequence of nine variations. Britten reserves some of these for the orchestra alone.

The final variation includes some of the Concerto's most expressive passages for the violin and develops into an extended coda, which takes shape as a dirge-like march. The soloist attempts to negotiate a serene resolution for all that has come before, but these impassioned pleadings lead only to ambiguity. Britten concludes with an “in-between” harmonic gesture — the violin's trill on F/F-sharp against the orchestra's indeterminate chord — that leaves the question of major or minor undecided.

*In addition to the solo violin, the Violin Concerto is scored for 3 flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 2 percussionists, harp and strings.*



## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born on December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany; died on March 26, 1827, in Vienna

**Composed:** 1804-08

**First performance:** December 22, 1808, in Vienna, with the composer conducting

**First Nashville Symphony performance:** October 26, 1948 at War Memorial Auditorium, with Music Director William Strickland

**Estimated length:** 35 minutes

**T**alk about a blockbuster evening of music history! On December 22, 1808, Beethoven presented a special concert to unveil his latest efforts (and also to raise funds to support his work). The audience in attendance that freezing night got to hear the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies performed for the first time, plus the *Choral Fantasy* (a kind of precursor to the Ninth). As if that were not enough, the lengthy program also included the Fourth Piano Concerto, excerpts from the Mass in C major, and a concert aria. The Fifth Symphony (actually mis-numbered on the program) opened the second part of the evening.

According to a brief report in Vienna's *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*: "In regard to the performances at this concert, however, the concert [sic] must be called unsatisfactory in every respect." So much for hard-to-please critics....

It's ironic that the first movement of Op. 67 is often taken to stand for the entire Fifth Symphony. A key to understanding Beethoven's genius here is to see the architecture of the whole and how it makes the finale such a pivotal part of that design.

The Fifth's iconic first four notes (or, more accurately, the first eight notes, since the "da-

da-da-dum" phrase is echoed) have opened the door to an endless realm of myth, analysis and hearsay — regardless of whether any actual "knocking" was involved. The spectrum of interpretations runs from biographical sleuthing through philosophical speculation to rigorous musicological analysis.

An example: does that famous opening's move from tense silence to a highly dramatic outburst replicate Beethoven's experience with his own worsening deafness and the will to wrest meaningful sound from the silent void? Or could the motto itself, as the composer's prodigy pupil Carl Czerny claimed, represent a transcribed yellowhammer's call, which Beethoven noticed during one of his nature walks?

All of these facets belong to the richly layered reception history of the Fifth, a piece that has even been compared to the fission of a nucleus that sets off an unstoppable chain reaction of ideas.

In *The First Four Notes*, his book on the cultural history of the Fifth Symphony, Matthew Guerrieri points out that the three shorts-plus-long rhythmic scheme of the Fifth's opening aligns with the meter of *La Marseillaise* and that the

*The Fifth's iconic first four notes (or, more accurately, the first eight notes, since the "da-da-da-dum" phrase is echoed) have opened the door to an endless realm of myth, analysis and hearsay — regardless of whether any actual "knocking" was involved.*

actual sonority of the Symphony's triumphant finale can also be linked to "the general French Revolutionary musical style — martial, strongly rhythmic, almost aggressively major-mode triadic." And even the "tragic" context of the first movement "could just as easily have found a place in the grand Fêtes of the Revolution...designed to periodically fire the public's republican enthusiasm."

Yet one of the great paradoxes of the Fifth as a whole is that Beethoven achieves his most revolutionary effects by manipulating Classical conventions: refining and exploiting the explosive potential of sonata form in the first movement, for example, with its dramatization of tension and release in purely musical terms.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**T**he intense concentration of those first four notes has enthralled generations of commentators. But it is not the only source of the opening movement's concentrated power, nor of the Fifth's power as a whole. That force also resides in the silences: in the implied uptake of breath right before the first note, and in the tense stillness separating the first and second statements of the idea. What to make of the poignant oboe solo that seems intended to delay the inevitable reprise? And what about the remarkably drawn-out coda section that leads to the shocking final chords? The coda is at least as significant as the development section, giving Beethoven extra space to ratchet up the tension even higher — and without even using the four-note motif, as he introduces a brand-new one at this point.

The Andante is a set of double variations, unfolding a series of new thoughts on its two very different main themes. The first is a serene, sinuous melody initially played by the cellos and violas (backed by plucked double basses), while the brassy, compact second theme resembles a military fanfare. We're often told that the Fifth Symphony is somehow about the "triumph" of victorious C major over tragic C minor, of light over dark. But notice what takes place within the second movement by itself, with its own eruptions of C major. However victorious, this is just one stage on the way to the finale.

It's not enough to take us out of C minor's orbit. Beethoven returns to that key in the scherzo, now finding a particularly spooky sound world that's completely different from the tense tragedy of the first movement. His "special effects" here are

musical Gothic, spine-chilling and suspenseful. The trio section gives us still another "triumphant" eruption in C major, only to die down for the unforgettable passageway from the third movement to the finale — which, as Rouse's own Symphony No. 5 shows, continues to resonate for composers today.

This transition through a bleak fog segues directly into the thrillingly climactic opening of the finale. But by starting at such a high point, Beethoven creates another challenge: how to keep going, without just repeating the same euphoric emotions? His ingenious and innovative solution is to introduce a moment of tragic reminiscence: the music of the spooky scherzo suddenly comes back, as if we haven't broken free after all. This allows Beethoven to set the stage for a return of the C major "victory" a second time, in a way that feels unforeseen.

The Fifth Symphony is inevitably bound to its era, a masterpiece of Classical style that was also a rallying cry for the emerging Romantic generation. Yet it also transcends its time — which is a good definition of what makes a "classic."

*The Fifth Symphony is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings.*

— Thomas May, the Nashville Symphony's program annotator, is a writer and translator who covers classical and contemporary music. He blogs at [memeteria.com](http://memeteria.com).

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



**JAMES EHNES**  
VIOLIN

**V**iolinist James Ehnes began his studies at age 4. By 9, he had become a protégé of the noted Canadian

violinist Francis Chaplin and made his orchestral debut with Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal when he was only 13. Ehnes graduated from The Juilliard School in 1997, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and in 2010 he was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada.

Recent and future orchestral highlights include the MET Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, London Symphony, Vienna Symphony, New York Philharmonic and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. In addition to his concerto work, he performs regularly at some of the world's leading concert halls, and as a chamber musician, he has collaborated with leading artists such as

Leif Ove Andsnes, Louis Lortie, Jan Vogler and Yo-Yo Ma.

In 2016, Ehnes undertook a cross-Canada recital tour, performing in each of the country's provinces and territories to celebrate his 40th birthday, and last year he premiered the Aaron-Jay Kernis Violin Concerto with the Toronto, Seattle and Dallas symphony orchestras.

Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including a Gramophone Award for his live recording of the Elgar Concerto with Sir Andrew Davis and the Philharmonia Orchestra. His recording of the Korngold, Barber and Walton violin concertos won a GRAMMY® Award for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance and a JUNO award for Best Classical Album of the Year. Ehnes' recent recording of the Bartók Concerti was nominated for a Gramophone Award, and other recent releases include concertos by Britten, Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian and sonatas by Debussy, Elgar and Respighi.