

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, October 7, 2010, at 8:00

Friday, October 8, 2010, at 1:30

Saturday, October 9, 2010, at 8:00

Asher Fisch Conductor

Wagner

Centennial March

Chávez

Sinfonía india (Symphony No. 2)

INTERMISSION

Beethoven

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55 (*Eroica*)

Allegro con brio

Marcia funebre: Adagio assai

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Finale: Allegro molto

These concerts are part of *Mexico in Chicago 2010*, a citywide celebration of the bicentennial of Mexico's independence and the centennial of the Mexican Revolution.

Steinway is the official piano of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Richard Wagner

Born May 22, 1813, Leipzig, Germany.

Died February 13, 1883, Venice, Italy.

Centennial March

In 1876—fifteen years before he moved here to found the Chicago Symphony—pioneering conductor Theodore Thomas served as music director of the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. As Wagner’s leading advocate in the United States, Thomas got the idea of commissioning his favorite composer to write music honoring our country’s first one hundred years.

Thomas had introduced some of Wagner’s most important works to this country—the Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* in 1866, less than a year after the world premiere of the opera in Munich (the complete opera waited another twenty years for its first American staging) and the *Meistersinger* Overture seven months later. When the critics railed against the *Tristan* prelude—the *New York Times* dismissed it as “absolutely

without significance”—Thomas only strengthened his resolve to keep programming Wagner’s music. (“I will play it till they like it,” he is reputed to have said.) On the first of his celebrated all-Wagner programs in 1872, when he led the American premiere of “The Ride of the Valkyries,” audience members stood on their chairs and cheered, swept away by music they had never heard before. After the concert, he announced that he was establishing a New York Wagner society to raise funds for the first *Ring* at Bayreuth.

Although Thomas and Wagner never met—Thomas unsuccessfully tried to visit the composer while he was in Europe during the summer of 1867—they did exchange letters. In 1871, Thomas wrote to Wagner, asking for his permission to program orchestral excerpts from *The Ring*, which was not yet finished.

COMPOSED

February–March 1876

FIRST PERFORMANCE

May 10, 1876, Philadelphia, Theodore Thomas conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

April 6, 1900, Theodore Thomas conducting, Auditorium Theatre

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and piccolo, three oboes, three clarinets, three bassoons and

contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets and bass trumpet, three trombones and tuba, timpani, triangle, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, tam-tam, strings

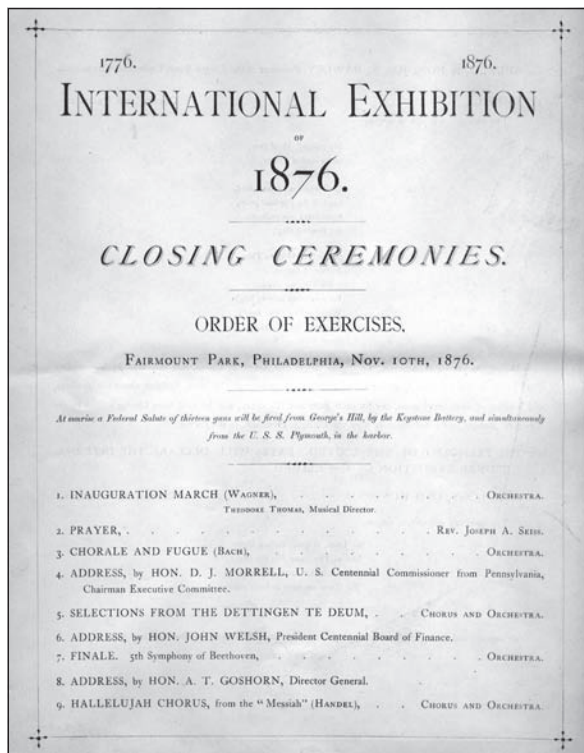
APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

12 minutes

Wagner turned him down. (He was probably nervous about American copyright laws, which didn't protect foreign composers.)

That same year, Thomas and Wagner corresponded frequently about the new march Wagner would write for a country he had never visited, but which had long intrigued him. In the early 1850s, just as he was beginning the *Ring* cycle, he said that it was his intention to “perform it only on the banks of the Mississippi.” In 1859, he made plans to spend five or six months in the U.S. the following winter, but gave up on the idea when he realized that he needed to finish writing *Tristan and Isolde* and didn't dare let anything stand in its way. After that, he mentioned coming to the U.S. less often, except as an occasional threat when he was fed up with the artistic climate in Germany, or when he suspected there was big money to be made in America. (Even as late as 1880, Wagner toyed with moving his entire family to “some climatically beneficial state of the Union,” and launching an annual Wagner festival here to replace Bayreuth—in her diary, Cosima says he was thinking about Minnesota.)

Early in 1876, Thomas wrote to Wagner, asking him to agree



Wagner's Centennial March also was the first work performed at the closing ceremonies of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition

to the American commission. Negotiations were cordial, although compromised from the start by Wagner's insistence that he be paid \$5,000, an astronomical sum at the time. Wagner based his fee—"I do not know whether it appears appropriate," he admitted—on what he had been offered for similar compositions, of which he had composed practically none, and the unrelated fact that "Mr. Verdi received circa one-half million francs from his publisher, Ricordi, for the . . . rights to his Requiem." Despite the promise of a big paycheck, Wagner found it

tough to muster much enthusiasm for the assignment; he was unused to writing music to order and for events with which he had no personal connection. On February 14, Cosima wrote in her diary: "R. still working complains of being unable to visualize anything to himself in this composition; it had been different with the *Kaisermarsch*, he says, even with *Rule Britannia*, where he had thought of a great ship, but here he can think of nothing but the 5,000 dollars he has demanded and perhaps will not get."

In March, Wagner finished the work "under great strain," as he put it, complaining that Thomas should have contacted him much earlier. "On pages 23 and 24 of the work," he continued, "I have designated the large pauses whose festiveness at the first gala performance can be enhanced by the discharge of cannons . . . in the vicinity—but some distance away." "The march immensely pleases my friends here," he concluded. It did not, however, thrill Thomas, who probably knew, even before he looked at the score when it arrived that April, that he had seriously overpaid.

The premiere took place in Philadelphia as part of the exposition opening ceremonies, before President Grant, members of Congress, and justices of the Supreme Court. The *New York Tribune* called Wagner's *Centennial March* a masterpiece and the *Herald* critic found it noble and grand. But the *New York Times* concluded that it was "altogether devoid of pomp and circumstance,"

and that its impressive orchestral writing did not make up for its "lack of thought." Wagner later confided to his friends that the best thing about the piece was his fee.

The march is indeed a curiosity in Wagner's output—the rare occasional instrumental work, made to order, from a composer otherwise known for a string of immense music dramas written essentially to please no one but himself. With its powerful main theme and elaborate *Meistersinger*-like development, Wagner's March represents him, not surprisingly, at his most grandiose and ceremonial. It is all the more astonishing, then, to realize that Wagner was at work on the Flowermaidens' delicate, otherworldly music for act 2 of *Parsifal* at the time. (He even scribbled "Amerikanisch sein wollend!"—"Wanting to be an American"—in the margin of a sketch for this *Parsifal* scene.

After the Philadelphia commission, Thomas and Wagner had no further contact. Thomas continued to champion Wagner's music—with his own orchestra, he gave the U.S. premiere of the *Siegfried Idyll* in 1878. In Chicago, he launched the Chicago Symphony's first concert with Wagner's *A Faust Overture*, led the Orchestra in the *Centennial March* several times at the World's Columbian Exposition—though just once, in 1900, on downtown concerts—and programmed Wagner's works on more than half the Orchestra's subscription programs during his fourteen seasons at the helm. ■



Carlos Chávez

Born June 13, 1899, near Mexico City, Mexico.

Died August 2, 1978, Mexico City, Mexico.

Sinfonía india (Symphony No. 2)

Musicians in the United States first learned of Carlos Chávez from Aaron Copland, who enjoyed a friendship with the Mexican composer that lasted more than half a century, during which he regularly played, conducted, and championed his colleague's music. We don't know for certain when Copland and Chávez met. (At a party given in their honor in the late seventies, Chávez said, "We met in Paris." Copland replied, "In Paris? No, in New York—I *think!*" "In '26," Chávez pronounced. "*Really?*" said Copland.) In any event, when Copland finally visited Chávez in Mexico in 1932—falling madly in love with the country and its people—he understood at once what made Chávez's music so distinctive and unassumingly right. "Mexico offers something fresh and pure and wholesome—a quality which

is deeply unconventionalized," he wrote. "The source of it is the Indian background everywhere—even in the landscape." (It was Chávez who took his New Yorker friend to the dance hall El salón México on this visit, inspiring one of Copland's most popular scores.)

Chávez was born in a suburb of Mexico City. He was not truly self-taught—he studied first with his brother and later with Manuel Ponce—but he resisted conventional training in music theory, preferring to learn by examining the scores of the great masters. At the age of twenty-one, Chávez encountered international musical modernism firsthand when he traveled to Vienna, Berlin, and Paris (where Paul Dukas urged him to become for Mexico what Falla was to Spain—a composer who creates a unique musical style

COMPOSED

1935–36

FIRST PERFORMANCE

January 23, 1936, in New York City, the composer conducting

FIRST CSO

PERFORMANCE

July 22, 1941, Ravinia, the composer conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and two piccolos, three oboes, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, two trumpets,

two trombones, percussion (Indian drum, maraca, metal rattle, soft rattle, suspended cymbal, tenor drum, snare drum, claves, xylophone, rattling string, güiro, bass drum, rasping stick), timpani, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

12 minutes

by thoroughly assimilating his native folk music). Chávez spent the winter of 1922–23 in New York City and returned again in 1926, this time to stay for two years.

Back home in Mexico, Chávez quickly became the central figure in his country's musical renaissance, and he soon was a national celebrity. He helped to establish the first permanent symphony orchestra in Mexico—the Orquesta Sinfónica de México, which he led for twenty years—and, in 1928, he became director of the National Conservatory. Chávez also was highly influential in



**Mexican writer, philosopher, and politician
José Vasconcelos**

the growing cultural transaction between the Americas, and, with fellow modernists Edgard Varèse and Henry Cowell, he founded

the Pan American Association of Composers. Chávez played the part of musical ambassador extremely well, and he regularly visited the United States, not only to see old friends such as Copland, but also to teach and to perform his music—and to make new friends for Mexican culture. (He was the guest conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on February 12 and 13, 1942, in a program that included his Concerto for Four Horns and *Sinfonía india*.)

Like the Mexican painters Diego Rivera and José Orozco, Chávez tried to create a popular art form inspired by the Indian culture of the pre-Columbian period. “For the first time in the history of art,” Rivera said, “Mexican mural painting made the masses the hero of monumental art.” Chávez’s music tried to achieve the same blend of modern and ancient (and of popularity and timelessness). In his 1958 Norton lectures, Chávez recalled the work of Rivera and his fellow muralists: “In trying to be accessible to the people, as they called it (or, as we would prefer to say, to the average audience), they did not descend to a level of vulgarity. They maintained a classic dignity, at times truly superb, and whether or not they were accessible to the ‘people,’ it is good that their work was achieved and stands for posterity.” It was with the *Sinfonía india* that Chávez came closest to achieving the muralists’ accessibility and dignity while reviving his country’s folk heritage.

Chávez had begun to incorporate Aztec elements and native Indian

music into his own work as early as 1921 with the ballet *The New Fire*, commissioned by the same José Vasconcelos who invited Rivera to participate in his program of public art. Although Chávez did not regularly use native material in his compositions, his musical language was forever marked by its influence; in the chamber piece *Xochipilli* (1940), he even went so far as to attempt “to reconstruct—as far as it is possible—the music of the ancient Mexicans.”

The *Sinfonía india* of 1936—the second of Chávez’s seven symphonies—is one of the few scores in which Chávez actually quotes Indian music; here he uses three ancient melodies—one from the Seris of Sonora; one from the Huicholes of Nayarit; and one from the Yaquis, also of Sonora. Chávez told his friend Herbert Weinstock that he picked these three because they came from the northern Pacific coast of Mexico and shared a certain unity. As he told Weinstock:

The essential characteristics of this indigenous music have been able to resist four centuries of contact with European musical

expressions. That is, while it is certain that contact with European art has produced in Mexico a *mestizo* (mixed) art in constant evolution, this has not meant the disappearance of pure indigenous art.

With its exotic colors, repetitive phrases, irregular rhythms, and driving energy—Chávez once wrote a work called *H.P.* (for horsepower)—the *Sinfonía* is decidedly non-European in sound and structure. One expansive, open-air melody at the heart of the score, however, suggests that Chávez was deeply influenced by Copland’s brand of lyricism. (Chávez gave the premiere of Copland’s *Short Symphony* in 1934, not long before he began this work, and wrote to the composer of his great admiration for such natural and unaffected music.) To recreate an ancient sound world, the *Sinfonía india* calls for a large percussion section, with modern instruments substituting for primitive Indian ones—the tenor drum for a water gourd, a soft rattle for the *tenabari* (a string of butterfly cocoons), a rattling string of hard, wooden beads for the *grijutian* (a string of deer hooves). ■



Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany.

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55 (Eroica)

The story of how the *Eroica* Symphony got its title is nearly as famous as the music itself. We know that Beethoven intended to name his third symphony for Napoleon Bonaparte and his fight against political tyranny, that he tore up the title page in a fit of rage when he learned that Napoleon had appointed himself emperor, and that he opted for the title *Sinfonia eroica* (Heroic symphony) instead. The subtexts—idealism and disillusionment, personal greed and the lust for power, the struggle between art and politics, among others—are intense, and they have come to overshadow one of the most remarkable, even revolutionary works of art we have. A century after Beethoven, Toscanini tried to restore reason, famously brushing aside a hundred years of connotations: “Some say it is Napoleon, some Hitler, some

Mussolini. For me it is simply Allegro con brio.”

Beethoven had been contemplating a symphony inspired by General Bonaparte since 1798. Most of the music was composed in the summer of 1803, only months after Beethoven wrote his most revealing nonmusical work—the Heiligenstadt Testament—a painful confirmation of worsening deafness and thoughts of suicide. It was one of the lowest points in a life that understood despair only too well. The composition of an important and substantial new symphony was Beethoven’s great rallying cry—a heroic act in itself. The first draft was probably completed by November 1803. Beethoven’s extensive sketches, nicely preserved and often studied, confirm that the new symphony gave its composer a lot of trouble. In May 1804, when the news reached Vienna that

COMPOSED

1803

FIRST PERFORMANCE

April 7, 1805, in Vienna, the composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

January 15, 1892, Theodore Thomas conducting, Auditorium Theatre

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

50 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1954 with Fritz Reiner conducting for RCA; 1973–74 and 1989, with Sir Georg Solti conducting for London



The title page for the *Eroica* Symphony, showing where Beethoven deleted the dedication to Napoleon

Napoleon had declared himself emperor, Beethoven felt betrayed. According to the account later written by his student Ferdinand Ries, when he broke the news to Beethoven, the composer “went to the table, took hold of the title page by the top, tore it in two, and threw it to the floor.”

What Ries didn't mention was that Beethoven's own motives were sometimes suspicious themselves. Although Beethoven had long intended to name the symphony after Bonaparte, he quickly dropped that plan when he learned that Prince Lobkowitz would pay him handsomely for the same honor. Later, after he had ripped up the title page, Beethoven temporarily recanted when he realized that

a Bonaparte symphony would be just the thing for his upcoming trip to Paris.

In 1806, when it came time to publish the E-flat major symphony, Beethoven suggested “*Sinfonia eroica*, composed to celebrate the memory of a great man,” without mentioning Napoleon. Beethoven's last reputed words on the subject, full of the anger and resentment he surely felt, came later, after Napoleon's victory at Jena: “It's a pity I do not understand the art of war as well as I do the art of music. I would conquer him!” History doesn't tell us what, if anything, Napoleon thought of Beethoven's music. When Cherubini, whom he did admire, once suggested that Napoleon knew no more about

music than he knew of battle, the emperor immediately stripped him of his offices and power, leaving him with virtually no income.

The *Eroica* is perhaps the first great symphony to have captured the romantic imagination. It's not as openly suggestive as the later *Pastoral*, with its bird calls and thunderstorm, nor as specific as the Ninth, with its unmistakable message of hope and freedom. But to the Viennese audience at the first performance, on April 7, 1805, Beethoven's vast and powerful first movement and the funeral march that follows must have sounded like nothing else in all music.

Never before had symphonic

today, brought certain expectations to the concert hall, and knowing the length of a piece is one of them. But Beethoven's *Allegro con brio* was longer—and bigger, in every sense—than any other symphonic movement (the first movement of Mozart's *Prague* Symphony comes the closest). It's also a question of proportion, and Beethoven's central development section, abounding in some truly monumental statements, is enormous.

It has been suggested that Beethoven was writing without themes at the beginning of the first movement; the comment is not meant disparagingly, but as proof that the essence of Beethoven's language is not melody, but tension

and movement. Donald Tovey insisted that many of Beethoven's themes "can be recognized by their bare rhythm without quoting any melody at all." The very opening of the *Eroica* consists of no more than two E-flat major chords, played forte, followed by the cellos jumping back and forth over the notes of an E-flat triad. The



The Lobkowitz Palace in Vienna; engraving by V. Reim. Prince Lobkowitz was an excellent violinist and maintained a private orchestra which gave the first performance of the *Eroica* Symphony.

music aspired to these dimensions. We're told that a man in the gallery shouted down: "I'll give another Kreutzer if the thing will only stop!" Audiences then, just as

first exceptional event comes when the cellos stumble on C-sharp, a note we never expected to hear, and one that opens unforeseen vistas only seven bars into the piece.

From there, Beethoven continues to spread his wings, even settling comfortably in the very remote key of E minor just moments before he whisks us back to the E-flat major chords with which he began.

Beethoven's writing, in the most expansive piece he had yet composed, is tight and closely unified. Although analysts often point out the unprecedented use of a new theme in the development section, it's not unique (see Mozart's Thirty-third Symphony), nor is the theme truly new.

Ries was perhaps the first person to be misled by the "premature" entry of the horn four bars before the start of the recapitulation, and he lost Beethoven's respect forever when he rushed up to tell him that the player had come in at the wrong place. It's one of Beethoven's little jokes, all the more effective for being told at a whisper. The coda is as big and important as a movement in itself, but something of this stature is needed to bring us back to earth before we move on.

The Adagio is a funeral march of measured solemnity, pushed forward by the low rumble of the basses, like the sound of muffled drums. Beethoven raised some eyebrows by placing the funeral music so early in the symphony, but this is music, not biography, and chronology is beside the point. The two interludes are particularly moving—the first because it casts a sudden ray of sunlight on the grim proceedings; the second, because it carries the single thread of melody into a vast double fugue of almost unseemly magnificence. The music

ends with some consolation, but even more grief.

Beethoven's funeral music gives way to a brilliant (though often very quiet) scherzo, just as the prisoners in *Fidelio* emerge from the dungeon into the blinding daylight. Here, the modest minuet of Haydn and Mozart has become something truly symphonic in scope.

Beethoven's finale is a set of variations on a theme he had used several times before, principally in his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*. This is an unusually complex and multifaceted piece of music. It's not just the conclusion, but the culmination, of all that came before. Beethoven begins with a simple, unattached bass line before introducing the theme itself. The variety and range of style are extraordinary: a fugue on the bass line, a virtuoso showpiece for flute, a swinging dance in G minor, an expansive hymn. Beethoven moves from one event to the next, making their connections seem not only obvious, but inevitable. Some of it is splendid solemnity, some high humor, and Beethoven touches on much in between. A magnificent coda, which continues to stake out new territory even while wrapping things up, ends with bursts of joy from the horns. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.