Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Riccardo Muti Zell Music Director
Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Thursday, October 20, 2016, at 8:00
Friday, October 21, 2016, at 1:30
Saturday, October 22, 2016, at 8:00

David Afkham Conductor
Emanuel Ax Piano

Beethoven
Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op. 15
Allegro con brio
Largo
Rondo: Allegro

EMANUEL AX

INTERMISSION

Shostakovich
Symphony No. 10 in E Minor, Op. 93
Moderato
Allegro
Allegretto
Andante—Allegro

These performances are generously sponsored by the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Fund for the Canon.
The appearance of David Afkham is endowed in part by the Nuveen Investments Emerging Artist Fund.
This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
Ludwig van Beethoven
Born December 16, 1770; Bonn, Germany
Died March 26, 1827; Vienna, Austria

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op. 15

This is not Beethoven’s first piano concerto. We are usually taught that the B-flat major concerto known as no. 2 is really no. 1, but that is not entirely accurate either. Sometime in 1784, when Beethoven was only fourteen years old, he wrote a piano concerto in E-flat major. It is the sort of sprawling, self-important, and florid music that teenagers often write (assuming that they compose music at all), and it is a greater testament to the young Beethoven’s apparent virtuosity as a pianist than to his incipient talent as a composer. Although the full score is lost, we still have a copy of the piano part, including indications for orchestral cues. (The concerto was reconstructed by Willy Hess and performed for the first time in 1943.)

Jumping ahead nearly a decade, we come to the first works in the genre that Beethoven wished to acknowledge: a concerto in B-flat, probably begun before 1793, and the C major concerto on this program, which was composed in 1795. Both works were published in 1801, but in the reverse order. Although Beethoven played both of these concertos in public on several occasions, he was intensely self-critical, and, when it came time to publish them, he could think of nothing good to say about either one:

One of my first concertos [in B-flat] and therefore not one of the best of my compositions is to be published by Hofmeister, and Mollo is to publish a concerto [in C major] which indeed was written later but which also does not rank among the best of my works in this form.

By 1801, Beethoven’s style had changed dramatically. He recently had begun a third piano concerto in C minor, one of the works with which he would establish his primacy in the new century. From our viewpoint, the Third Piano Concerto does not mark a critical advance over the first two, but, for Beethoven, every step forward was important and hard won. Later generations, in fact, would lump all three concertos together as “early period” works, although that does not mean lesser Beethoven.

Beethoven apparently was more interested in the C major concerto than he let on, because he composed three cadenzas for its first movement. All three are obviously later efforts, apparently dating from 1809, the time of the Emperor Concerto—his fifth and last piano concerto.

COMPOSED
1795

FIRST PERFORMANCE
December 18, 1795; Vienna, Austria.
The composer as soloist

INSTRUMENTATION
solo piano, one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings

CADENZA
by Beethoven

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME
37 minutes

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES
March 12 & 13, 1915, Orchestra Hall. Rudolph Ganz as soloist, Frederick Stock conducting
July 12, 1964, Ravinia Festival. Ann Schein as soloist, Seiji Ozawa conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES
January 10, 11, 12 & 15, 2013, Orchestra Hall. Radu Lupu as soloist, Edo de Waart conducting
July 27, 2013, Ravinia Festival. Lang Lang as soloist, James Conlon conducting

CSO RECORDINGS
1983. Alfred Brendel as soloist, James Levine conducting. Philips
By then, Beethoven realized that his worsening deafness would soon force him off the concert stage, and he wrote out definitive versions of the cadenzas that he previously had improvised. The cadenza by Beethoven that Emanuel Ax has chosen to play at these performances is, as he says, “almost absurdly long, enormously virtuosic and difficult, and deeply inspired.” It provides, in Ax’s opinion, “the closest encounter with Beethoven’s famed ability to improvise. At several spots, one thinks that we have reached the end, only to find another twist and continuation. The very end of the cadenza is almost a joke—the pianist plays the chord to bring in the orchestra, and then has to repeat it, as if to signal that finally, it is time for everyone to play.”

It’s not difficult to understand why the concerto still held interest for Beethoven as late as 1809, for it is impressive material used with great mastery. Perhaps inspired by Mozart’s great C major concerto, which he undoubtedly knew by the time this piece was written, Beethoven works on a larger canvas here than in the B-flat concerto. (He also adds clarinets, trumpets, and timpani to the orchestra.) Beethoven begins quietly, having already learned that a soft opening is often the quickest way to capture an audience’s attention. The music is robust and energetic, despite the dynamic, and it soon bursts forth with typical Beethoven fervor. There is some characteristic horseplay with the choice of keys—the second theme begins in faraway E-flat—and Beethoven borrows from Mozart the unexpected touch of allowing the piano to enter with music the orchestra has not already presented (although, unlike Mozart, he never returns to the piano’s new theme).

The slow movement is longer than the corresponding movement of any other concerto by Beethoven, but here he has learned how to move through slow music so that it never drags; the extra length is all bonus. The leisurely coda includes a poignant conversation between the piano and the first clarinet. A look through all the Mozart and Haydn finales will not produce a jazzier ending than this boisterous rondo, full of pranks and surprises. The good time goes on for nearly six hundred measures without seeming a moment too long.

Dmitri Shostakovich
Born September 25, 1906; Saint Petersburg, Russia
Died August 9, 1975; Moscow, Russia

**Symphony No. 10 in E Minor, Op. 93**

We’re told that a recording of Mozart’s Piano Concerto no. 23 was still on the record player when Joseph Stalin died on March 5, 1953. It was the last music he listened to, and it is hard to know what this merciless leader heard in some of the most sublime and civilized music ever written. Perhaps there’s a clue in Shostakovich’s alleged words recorded in the controversial *Testimony*:

Music illuminates a person through and through, and it is also his last hope and final refuge. And even half-mad Stalin, a beast and a butcher, instinctively sensed that about music. That’s why he feared and hated it.

Shostakovich, the composer Stalin hated most, had learned, through personal grief and public humiliation, of this fear. Twice since Stalin had assumed power in the 1920s, Shostakovich felt the brutal power of Stalin’s attacks, and twice his artistic impulses had been devastated in ways scarcely equaled in any other time or place.
Stalin’s first attack, prompted by an impromptu visit to the Bolshoi Theatre performance of the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, plunged Shostakovich into a crisis of conscience, changed his career forever, and, at the same time, altered the course of Soviet music.

The popularity of his written response to Stalin’s criticism—the Fifth Symphony—and his increasing fame around the world only made Shostakovich the inevitable prime target of the intensified attack of February 10, 1948. This time, the official language of reprimand was stronger still, the accusations very specific, and the pressure to conform impossible to ignore. In response, Shostakovich not only withheld his First Violin Concerto, but he also decided to write no more symphonies during Stalin’s lifetime. (One of the major projects he did undertake was a set of twenty-four preludes and fugues for piano, inspired by a composer with no suspect political leanings and a spotless reputation—Johann Sebastian Bach.)

In March 1953, Shostakovich awoke to the news that Stalin was dead. His first professional act was to release the works he had withheld from performance; that summer he cleared his desk and began a new symphony, which he wrote at lightning speed. (Tatyana Nikolayevna, who gave the premiere of the preludes and fugues, claims that the symphony was actually begun in 1951, while he was writing the piano cycle; even so, it seems clear that he worked extensively and urgently on the symphony only after Stalin’s death.) This is music of a new beginning, at once summing up all that Shostakovich had to say in the form of a symphony, releasing everything that the years of Stalin’s oppression had buried, and anticipating a fresh and enlightened era ahead. The Tenth Symphony was performed in Leningrad in December 1953, to a mixed response. In March 1954, the Moscow branch of the Union of Soviet Composers even called a special three-day conference to debate this important symphony, already recognized as a pivotal work in the history of Soviet music. Many didn’t know how to place it within the context of social realism that had governed Soviet composers since 1932. Some were put off by its apparent pessimism. Finally, in the elaborately ambiguous language that often springs from political gatherings, a young composer, Andrei Volkonsky, pronounced the Tenth Symphony an “optimistic tragedy.”

Soviet musicians quickly noticed, in the beginning of the symphony, a strong resemblance to the opening of Liszt’s *Faust* Symphony. Shostakovich’s friend and biographer, Dmitri Rabinovich, insisted the reference was intentional. (Early in his career Shostakovich loved Liszt’s music; he later cooled—“too many notes.”) From those first strands of sound, sunken and mysterious, the music rises step by step toward a massive climax (some two-thirds of the way into a twenty-five-minute movement) and then retreats. The massive arch form, unerringly paced, is one of his finest accomplishments, and it achieves the kind of epic stature that eludes so many symphonies written in the twentieth century.

At the conference held by the Union of Soviet Composers, Shostakovich admitted that this movement didn’t realize his dream of a “real

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<th>COMPOSED</th>
<th>1953</th>
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<td>FIRST PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>December 17, 1953; Leningrad, Russia</td>
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<td>INSTRUMENTATION</td>
<td>two flutes, alto flute and piccolo, three oboes and English horn, three clarinets and E-flat clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, military drum, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone, strings</td>
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<td>APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
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<td>MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES</td>
<td>July 16, 1999, Ravinia Festival. Claus-Peter Flor conducting  December 6, 7, 8 &amp; 9, 2012, Orchestra Hall. Vasily Petrenko conducting</td>
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“symphonic allegro.” We don’t know what music Shostakovich measured his own against, but the sense of a drama unfolding, of music developing before our eyes and ears, recalls the landmarks of the classical period—the works that defined “symphonic allegro” forever.

The scherzo that follows is concentrated fury—brief and to the point. Like much of Shostakovich’s angriest music, it’s set against a relentless moto perpetuo, with screaming woodwinds, flaring brass, and abundant percussion. The ensuing Allegretto begins as a dialogue between two kinds of music—one introspective, the other more assertive and proudly bearing the composer’s musical monogram (see sidebar above). Stalin’s death freed Shostakovich to write music so personal that it bears his very signature in the notes on the page. This dialogue is interrupted twelve times by the gentle calling of the horn, a mysterious five-note summons waiting for a reply. Although it has a resemblance to the horn theme from Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*, we now know that it’s really another musical signature—that of Elmira Nazirova, an Azerbaijani pianist and composer who had studied with Shostakovich at the Moscow Conservatory, and with whom he corresponded frequently during the summer of 1953. (The notes E, A, E, D, A correspond to E, L[a], Mi, R[e], A.)

When there is no answer, the finale begins, cautiously at first and then picking up speed and courage. This movement has often puzzled listeners because it answers the severe and despairing tone of the early movements with unexpected cheerfulness. It’s this music that makes the Tenth Symphony an “optimistic tragedy.” But even the affirmative final pages, where the DSCH motto is finally pounded out by the timpani, can never entirely sweep aside all the questions and fears that have been raised before. Shostakovich’s personal triumph, however, is unequivocal, for this is the first of his symphonies that Stalin would never hear.

Phillip Huscher has been the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1987.