



BEETHOVEN'S SEVENTH and GRIEG'S PIANO CONCERTO

Friday and Saturday, October 5-6, 2018 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, October 7, 2018 at 2 p.m.

MICHAEL STERN, *conductor*
GEORGE LI, *piano*

MICHAEL KURTH

A Thousand Words

- I. Above: Radiance
- II. Beneath: My Sinister Groove Machine
- III. Within
- IV. Beyond: We Will Puncture the Canopy of Night

GRIEG

Concerto in A Minor for Piano and Orchestra, op. 16

- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato

GEORGE LI, *piano*

INTERMISSION

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92

- I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace
- II. Allegretto
- III. Presto
- IV. Allegro con brio

The 2018/19 season is generously sponsored by
SHIRLEY and BARNETT C. HELZBERG, JR.

The Classical Series is sponsored by

MURIEL MCKRIEN
KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION

The concert weekend is sponsored by
CHARLES and VIRGINIA CLARK
KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY LEAGUE

Additional support provided by



R. Crosby Kemper, Jr. Fund



Podcast available at kcsymphony.org



In *A Thousand Words*, Michael Kurth explores how music “becomes its own experience, independent of its source.”

The four movements, inspired by a variety of sources, culminate in a celebratory carnival parade.

MICHAEL KURTH (b. 1971)

A Thousand Words (2015)

27 minutes

Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, tambourine, ratchet, triangle, tam-tam, kick drum, snare drum, hi-hat, toms, splash cymbal, suspended cymbal, cowbell, gong, bass drum, congas, brake drum, shaker, salsa bell, claves, chimes, cabasa, harp, piano, celesta and strings.

Composer Michael Kurth has been a member of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra’s bass section since 1994, and has received numerous commissions and premieres from the ASO and Music Director Robert Spano over the past several years. *A Thousand Words* premiered at Atlanta Symphony Hall on February 4, 2016. The composer notes:

Why *A Thousand Words*? The title alludes to the inherent difficulty in verbally expressing the images or memories that occupy our minds. When we remember visits to meaningful places, the images we recall are often accompanied by sensory memories and sentiments difficult to capture with words. I could share pictures of places I’ve visited or events I’ve experienced, I could try to describe them, or I could relate these things to you musically. In the absence of images or words, the music conveys the meaning, but more; the music becomes its own experience, independent of its source, like a tide pool, or a feral animal. One of my favorite authors, Richard Powers, in his novel *Orfeo* says, “Music doesn’t mean things. It is things.”

A Thousand Words is symphonic in form and has four movements:

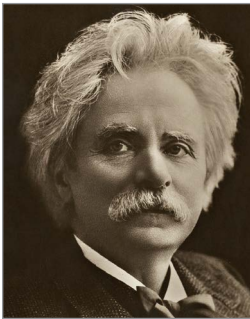
- I. Above: Radiance — The first movement was inspired by a sunrise over the Atlantic ocean on a January morning at Tybee Island. The movement lasts just about as long as it takes the sun to fully crest the horizon.
- II. Beneath: My Sinister Groove Machine — Parts of the second movement were inspired by the basalt cliffs at Reynisfjara, on the southern coast of Iceland; parts were inspired by the Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham, Alabama. Both places are eerily beautiful, and you should visit them. The music grooves in a mechanically sinister way, hence the subtitle.
- III. Within — The third movement at first appears fragile, but as it develops, it reveals its strength.
- IV. Beyond: We Will Puncture the Canopy of Night — Parts of the fourth movement were inspired by birds in flight, and also by seeing millions of stars in places where that's still possible. It ends with a joyful carnival parade.



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



@kcsymphony | #kcsymphony



After the Grieg Piano Concerto's 1869 premiere, one critic wrote that the work encompassed "all Norway in its infinite variety and unity."

The concerto, in three movements, begins with one of classical music's most famous and arresting openings. The slow-tempo second movement leads to the brilliant finale, based upon Norwegian folk dances.

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

Concerto in A Minor for Piano and Orchestra, op. 16 (1868) 30 minutes

Solo piano, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings.

Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto was the product of a particularly happy period in the Norwegian composer's life. In 1867, Grieg and his wife, Nina, were married. The following April, their daughter Alexandra was born. That summer, Edvard, Nina and Alexandra traveled to Søllerød, located near Copenhagen, staying in a rented cottage. There, Edvard composed the Piano Concerto.

The premiere took place in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869, and generally was well-received by the Norwegian press. One critic viewed the work, which incorporated Norwegian folk idioms, as presenting "all Norway in its infinite variety and unity" and compared the slow movement to "a lonely mountain-girt tarn that lies dreaming of infinity." Grieg was never totally satisfied with the concerto, and he continued to pen revisions until the time of his death. Despite

the composer's misgivings, the concerto remains one of the most popular works in the genre.

The concerto is in three movements. The first features one of classical music's most famous and dramatic openings. The second movement opens with an extended introduction spotlighting the muted strings. This precedes the entrance of the soloist, whose presence dominates the remainder of this brief and affecting slow-tempo movement. The finale begins with a short introduction that

anticipates the soloist's presentation of the main theme — a jaunty rhythmic passage based upon a Norwegian folk dance known as the halling. The flute initiates a lovely contrasting interlude, but the spirited halling motif soon returns. The closing pages present the orchestra's majestic transformation of the interlude, accompanied by the soloist's grand flourishes.

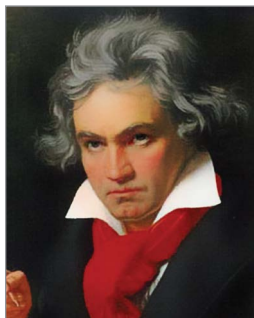
RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Grieg: Piano Concerto

Murray Perahia, *piano*

Bavarian Radio Orchestra / Colin Davis, *conductor*

Label: CBS Masterworks Catalog # 44899



Today, the Seventh Symphony is recognized as one of Beethoven's greatest creations, culminating in a blazing finale that Richard Wagner characterized as the "apotheosis of the dance."

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92 (1812)

36 minutes

2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns,
2 trumpets, timpani and strings.

Beethoven completed his Seventh Symphony in 1812. The work received its premiere on December 8, 1813, at the grand hall of the University of Vienna, as part of a concert to benefit wounded Austrian and Bavarian soldiers. Beethoven served as conductor. The concert proved to be one of the great public triumphs of the composer's career. The audience insisted upon an encore of the Seventh Symphony's Allegretto. By popular demand, the entire concert was repeated four days later, raising another 4,000 florins for the wounded soldiers.

Still, Beethoven's reliance in the work upon the briefest of rhythmic motifs — often presented with relentless and even frightening energy — inspired some negative reactions. Friederich Wieck, father of Clara Wieck Schumann, attended the first rehearsal of the symphony. Wieck recalled that the general consensus among musicians and laymen alike was Beethoven must have composed the Symphony, particularly its outer movements, in a drunken state ("trunkenen Zustände"). Carl Maria von Weber, after hearing the symphony for the first time, was reported to have exclaimed that Beethoven was now "quite ripe for the madhouse."

On the other hand, Richard Wagner, in one of the most famous appreciations of a Beethoven symphony, celebrated the finale as the "apotheosis of the dance." More than two centuries after the premiere, Beethoven's Seventh continues to amaze audiences with its dramatic fire. It remains one of the most powerful of all symphonic creations.

The symphony is in four movements. The first begins with the

most ambitious slow-tempo introduction of any Beethoven symphony. The flute offers premonitions of what emerges as the central theme, a sprightly dance in 6/8 time. The theme's dotted eighth/sixteenth/eighth-note nucleus provides the foundation for virtually all that follows in this remarkable movement. The second movement, in the character of a somber march, opens and closes with a foreboding chord. By contrast, the vibrant third-movement scherzo exhibits both extraordinary energy and power. The finale is a miraculous combination of academic structure (sonata form) and Dionysian abandon. It is not until the terse final measures that the whirlwind of activity comes to a stunning halt.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Beethoven: Symphony No. 7

Vienna Philharmonic / Carlos Kleiber, *conductor*

Label: DG The Originals Catalog # 447400

PRAISED BY THE WASHINGTON POST FOR COMBINING

“staggering technical prowess, a sense of command and depth of expression,” pianist George Li possesses brilliant virtuosity and effortless grace far beyond his years. He captured the silver medal at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition and received the 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant.



Recent and upcoming concerto highlights include performances with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, Hamburg Philharmonic with Manfred Honeck, a tour of Asia with the London Symphony Orchestra and Giandrea Noseda, St. Petersburg Philharmonic with Yuri Temirkanov, Philharmonia Orchestra with Long Yu, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lyon,

Rotterdam Philharmonic, Malmö Symphony, Verbier Festival Orchestra, DSO Berlin, Seattle Symphony, Utah Symphony, Sydney Symphony and Frankfurt Radio Symphony. He frequently appears with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra, including performances at the Paris Philharmonie, Luxembourg Philharmonie, New York’s Brooklyn Academy of Music, Graffenegg Festival and in various venues throughout Russia.

Recital highlights include performances at Carnegie Hall, Davies Hall in San Francisco, the Mariinsky Theatre, Munich’s Gasteig, the Louvre, Seoul Arts Center, Tokyo’s Asahi Hall and Musashino Hall, NCPA Beijing, Ravinia Festival, Lanaudiere Festival, Edinburgh Festival and Montreaux Festival.

An active chamber musician, Li has performed with James Ehnes, Noah Bendix-Balgley, Benjamin Beilman, Kian Soltani, Pablo Ferrandez and Daniel Lozakovich.

Li is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist. His debut album, a live recording from the Mariinsky Theatre, was released in October 2017.

Li gave his first public performance at Boston’s Steinert Hall at the age of 10, and in 2011 performed for President Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the White House. Among Li’s many honors are first prize in the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and the 2012 Gilmore Young Artist Award. He is currently in the Harvard University/New England Conservatory dual degree program, studying with Wha Kyung Byun. ■