



KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY

Classical Series

Saturday, February 6, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.
Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts
Michael Stern, conductor

GEORGE WALKER

Lyric for Strings

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Sinfonia for String Orchestra, after String Quartet

(arr. Drew)

No. 8, op. 110

I. Largo

II. Allegro molto

III. Allegretto

IV. Largo

V. Largo

All movements performed without pause

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Grosse Fuge in B-flat Major, op. 133

(arr. Weingartner)

The 2020/21 Season is generously sponsored by
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Orchestra Roster

MICHAEL STERN, *Music Director*

JASON SEBER, *David T. Beals III Associate Conductor*

FIRST VIOLINS

Sunho Kim, *Acting Concertmaster*

Miller Nichols Chair

Stirling Trent,

Acting Associate Concertmaster

Chiafei Lin,

Acting Assistant Concertmaster

Gregory Sandomirsky ‡

Associate Concertmaster Emeritus

Anne-Marie Brown

Betty Chen

Anthony DeMarco

Susan Goldenberg*

Tomoko Iguchi

Dorris Dai Janssen

Vladimir Rykov

Alex Shum*

SECOND VIOLINS

Tamamo Someya Gibbs, *Principal*

Kristin Velicer, *Acting Associate Principal*

Minhye Helena Choi,

Acting Assistant Principal

Nancy Beckmann

Mary Garcia Grant

Kevin Hao ‡

Kazato Inouye

Rena Ishii

Stephanie Larsen

Francesca Manheim

VIOLAS

Matthew Sinno, *Acting Principal*

Jessica Nance, *Acting Associate Principal*

Duke Lee, *Acting Assistant Principal*

Kent Brauning

Sean Brumble

Marvin Gruenbaum

Jenifer Houck

Jesse Yukimura

CELLOS

Mark Gibbs, *Principal*

Robert A. Kipp Chair

Susie Yang, *Associate Principal*

Richard Hill Chair

Alexander East, *Assistant Principal*

Maria Crosby

John Eadie

Lawrence Figg

Rung Lee*

Meredith McCook

Allen Probus

DOUBLE BASSES

Jeffrey Kail, *Principal*

Evan Halloin, *Associate Principal*

Brandon Mason ‡

Caleb Quillen

Richard Ryan

Nash Tomey

FLUTES

Michael Gordon, *Principal*

Marylou and John Dodds Turner Chair

Shannon Finney, *Associate Principal*

Kayla Burggraf

PICCOLO

Kayla Burggraf

OBOES

Kristina Fulton, *Principal*

Shirley Bush Helzberg Chair

Alison Chung, *Associate Principal*

CLARINETS

Raymond Santos, *Principal*

Bill and Peggy Lyons Chair

Silvio Guitian, *Associate Principal*

John Klinghammer

E-FLAT CLARINET

Silvio Guitian

BASS CLARINET

John Klinghammer

BASSOONS

Ann Bilderback, *Principal*

Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Chair

Thomas DeWitt, *Associate Principal*

Maxwell Pipinich

CONTRABASSOON

Thomas DeWitt

HORNS

Alberto Suarez, *Principal*

Landon and Sarah Rowland Chair

David Sullivan, *Associate Principal*

Elizabeth Gray

David Gamble

Stephen Multer,

Associate Principal Emeritus

TRUMPETS

Julian Kaplan, *Principal*

James B. and Annabel Nutter Chair

Steven Franklin, *Associate Principal*

Brian Rood ‡

TROMBONES

Roger Oyster, *Principal*

Porter Wyatt Henderson,

Associate Principal

Adam Rainey

BASS TROMBONE

Adam Rainey

TUBA

Joe LeFevre, *Principal*

Frank Byrne Chair

TIMPANI

Timothy Jepson, *Principal*

Michael and Susan Newburger Chair

PERCUSSION

Josh Jones^, *Principal*

David Yoon, *Associate Principal*

HARP

Katherine Siochi, *Principal*

LIBRARIANS

Elena Lence Talley, *Principal*

Fabrice Curtis

* Non-Rotating Musician

^ New Member

‡ On Leave of Absence



GEORGE WALKER

Lyric for Strings (1946)

6 minutes

In 1996, George Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for Music for *Lilacs*, a work for soprano and orchestra that sets a poem by Walt Whitman. The poem, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” was written as an elegy for Abraham Lincoln following his assassination in 1865.

Decades before composing *Lilacs*, Walker wrote another elegiac work that was to become his best-known and most frequently performed piece. It began as a string quartet written in 1946, when Walker was just 24 years old. The quartet was written a year after the death of his grandmother, a significant influence in his life who lost her husband to a sale of enslaved people and herself escaped from enslavement. Shortly after the quartet’s premiere, Walker arranged the slow movement for string orchestra, added the title “Lament” and dedicated it as an elegy “to my grandmother.” Eventually retitled *Lyric for Strings*, it became one of the most frequently performed orchestral pieces by a living American composer during his lifetime. He always referred to it as “my grandmother’s piece.”

Expressive and evocative, *Lyric for Strings* often draws comparisons with Samuel Barber’s *Adagio for Strings*, another emotional work for string orchestra that began life as a string quartet and was written by a Curtis Institute of Music graduate. But Walker’s piece stands on its own merits and in its own distinctive style. The melodies are often carried by the violas and cellos, lending a deep richness to the sound. The harmonies derive their character from mode mixture, an alternation between major and minor scales that adds to the yearning beauty of the long melodic lines. The low strings interrupt the sustained texture at the work’s climax with jabbing interjections. The primary melody returns to bring the piece to a serene conclusion and fades to silence. *AJH*

GEORGE WALKER

(1922-2018)

An American composer, pianist and organist, George Walker was a trailblazing Black musician in many different ways. He was:

- one of the first Black graduates from the Curtis Institute of Music,
- the first Black instrumentalist to perform at Manhattan’s Town Hall,
- the first Black instrumentalist to perform as a soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra,
- the first Black instrumentalist to be signed to a major music management company,
- the first Black person to receive a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Eastman School of Music,
- and, in 1996, the first Black composer to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music, for *Lilacs*.



Walker studied composition with Rosario Scalero, who also taught Samuel Barber, and Nadia Boulanger, who taught many of the leading composers of the 20th century. In addition to his doctorate from Eastman, he also earned two Artist Diplomas in piano (from Curtis and Eastman). His compositions display influences from some of his favorite composers to perform, including Chopin, Brahms and Beethoven. He also found inspiration in jazz, folk songs, spirituals and hymns. Walker continued to compose well into his 90s, eventually writing around 100 works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, organ, voice and chorus. *AJH*



DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Sinfonia for String Orchestra, after String Quartet No. 8, op. 110 (1960) (arr. Drew) 25 minutes

In the summer of 1960, Shostakovich visited Dresden, Germany to compose music for a film that documented Dresden's destruction during World War II. Even fifteen years after the fact, seeing the "frightful and senseless destruction" made "a terrific impact" on Shostakovich, as he recalled later. It inspired him to compose his Eighth String Quartet, a work more than 20 minutes in length, in just three days. He dedicated the quartet "in memory of the victims of fascism and war." On another occasion later in his life, however, he also stated "I dedicated it to myself," a possible indication of veiled musical references to his own suffering at the hands of the totalitarian government of the Soviet Union. The quartet contains multiple quotations from and allusions to other works by the composer, including his first and fifth symphonies, first cello concerto, second piano trio and the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.

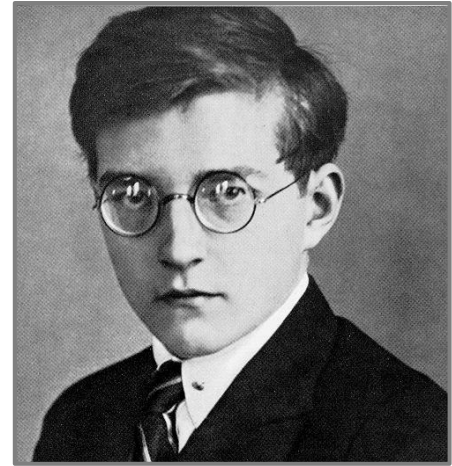
When the Borodin String Quartet first played the piece for Shostakovich, at his home, they were hoping for feedback on their performance. But they reported that Shostakovich was overwhelmed by emotion, buried his face in his hands and wept as they played. When the musicians finished the piece, they quietly packed up their instruments and departed.

The quartet is written in five movements that follow each other without pause, and makes prominent use of Shostakovich's musical "signature," DSCH. In German, the note E-flat is written as "Es" (pronounced like the letter S), and B-natural is written as H. Shostakovich's name, transliterated into German, begins with S, C and H, and so DSCH is a motif that spells out his first initial and the first three letters of his last name. This motif — D, E-flat, C, B — appears in every movement of the quartet (and is introduced by each instrument in turn at the very beginning), as well as a wide variety of his other compositions.

In 1967 Rudolf Barshai, a friend of Shostakovich from his time teaching at the Moscow Conservatory, arranged the quartet (written for two violins, viola and cello) for a full string orchestra, with Shostakovich's approval. A few years later, bassist Lucas Drew also arranged the work for string orchestra, the version performed on this program. The string-orchestra treatment heightens and amplifies the deep emotion heard throughout the piece. *AJH*

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906-1975)

Born in Saint Petersburg in 1906, Dmitri Shostakovich is a major composer of the 20th century, both for his more than 200 compositions and for his historical importance as an artist working under government oppression in the Soviet Union. His early compositional career was aided by the conductors Bruno Walter and Leopold Stokowski, who championed and performed his First Symphony in Berlin and Philadelphia respectively. However he was denounced by the Soviet government in 1936 for his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, which state media described as a “deliberately dissonant, muddled stream of sounds ... [that] quacks, hoots, pants and gasps.” The Chairman of the USSR State Committee on Culture instructed him to “reject formalist errors and in his art attain something that could be understood by the broad masses.”



In subsequent years, he focused on film music, which Stalin enjoyed, and works like the Fifth and Seventh symphonies that received official commendation for their musical conservatism and Soviet character. He was denounced again, along with many other composers, in 1948, but Stalin’s death in 1953 reenergized Shostakovich’s creative life and led to notable works including his Tenth Symphony. The degree to which he agreed with the government’s “just criticism,” as the Fifth Symphony’s subtitle states, or opposed it in subtle and disguised references in his music, is still debated today.

Shostakovich is best known for his fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets, as well as a set of 24 preludes and fugues (an homage to Bach) and a considerable amount of film music. *AJH*

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**
***Grosse Fuge* (1826) (arr. Weingartner)**
16 minutes

The third of our string-orchestra pieces today to begin life as a string quartet, Beethoven’s *Grosse Fuge* (“Great” or “Grand” Fugue) was originally written as the final movement of his Thirteenth String Quartet. When it was first performed, the other movements were received enthusiastically (two were even encored), but the fugue was disliked and even condemned by the audience and the critics. Beethoven’s publisher thought that this huge double fugue, longer than the other five movements of the quartet put together, would hurt the marketability of the piece and asked him to write a different finale. The typically stubborn Beethoven surprisingly agreed. The replacement movement was to be the last composition he would ever write. The first edition

of the quartet was published two months after his death, as op. 130, and the *Grosse Fuge* was published separately as op. 133.

The *Grosse Fuge* has been described in, shall we say, a wide variety of ways. A reviewer who attended the premiere wrote that it was “incomprehensible” and “a confusion of Babel.” Composer and violinist Louis Spohr described it, as well as Beethoven’s other late quartets, as “indecipherable, uncorrected horror.” Other writers have called it “inaccessible,” “eccentric,” “filled with paradoxes,” and even “Armageddon.” One critic and musicologist has written that the piece “stands out as the most problematic single work in Beethoven’s output and ... doubtless in the entire literature of music.”

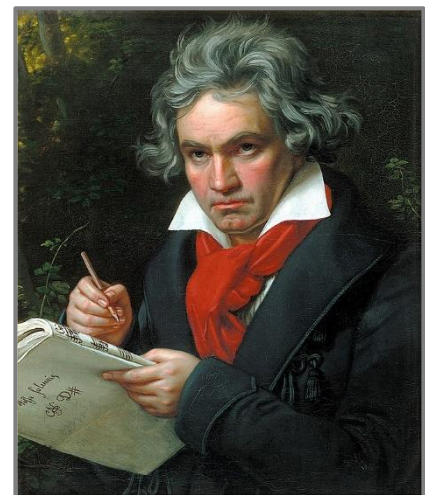
On the other hand, Mark Steinberg, of the Brentano String Quartet, says it is “one of the great artistic testaments to the human capacity for meaning in the face of the threat of chaos.” Musicologist Leonard Ratner states, “More than anything else in music ... it justifies the ways of God to men.” Igor Stravinsky wrote of it as “an absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever,” and said it “now seems to me the most perfect miracle in music ... I love it beyond everything.”

The central motif of the fugue, which appears at the beginning following several bars of octave Gs, is an ascending eight-note chromatic subject, with as many notes that do not “belong” in the key as those that do. The second subject of the fugue is characterized by dramatic leaps followed by falling seconds. A third motif, serving as the primary theme of the Andante section, is a lyrical melody in running sixteenth notes. Toward the end of the piece, fragments of the subjects and their variations appear and disappear, punctuated by momentary silences. A restatement of the original subject leads to the coda, gathering energy until the first subject is played again, this time in repeated triplets underneath the first violin’s high restatement of a variation of the second subject, with an unambiguous B-flat major ending. *AJH*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

How best to describe Ludwig van Beethoven? Revolutionary, difficult, genius, cantankerous, virtuoso, hot-tempered, giant, temperamental, superstar, volatile, brilliant, irritable, visionary ... most certainly a fascinating and very complicated man.

Born in Bonn, Germany, in 1770, probably on December 16, Ludwig was named after his Kapellmeister (court music director) grandfather. Ludwig’s father, Johann van Beethoven, was a court musician who hoped to garner fame and fortune by touring young Ludwig as a Mozartean child prodigy. Although talented as a young pianist, Ludwig’s rough instruction by his father and difficult family circumstances precluded realization of Johann’s dreams for his son.



The Beethoven household was not serene. Johann was an alcoholic and the chaos of his disease took a toll on the growing family. Of the seven children born to Johann and Maria Magdalena Keverich, only the second-born Ludwig and two younger brothers, Kaspar Anton Karl and Nikolaus Johann, survived infancy. Malnutrition and chronic illness were increasingly common companions to the harsh treatment Ludwig received at the hands of his father.

Ludwig's formal education was short, ending at age 10. He struggled with math and spelling his entire life. His early keyboard, violin and viola studies led to instruction by court organist Christian Gottlob Neefe. This spurred an interest in composition, resulting in Beethoven's first published work, a set of keyboard variations. He became an unpaid assistant organist to Neefe at age 11 and began receiving a wage at age 13. Neefe wrote, "If he continues in the same manner he started, he is sure to become a second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart."

Bonn's Elector Maximilian Francis encouraged and subsidized Beethoven's ambitions by underwriting travel to Vienna where the young composer hoped to study with Mozart, though there is scant and likely apocryphal evidence the two musicians ever met. Beethoven's sojourn was cut short in May 1787 when news of his mother's illness reached him and he quickly returned to Bonn. Her death in July 1787 caused his father's drinking to further spiral out of control and the teenage Ludwig was forced to assume duties as head of the household.

The ensuing five years in Bonn were a time of tremendous growth and developing maturity for Beethoven. He composed a substantial number of works (unpublished and listed without opus numbers) that reflected his advancing abilities and range. His keyboard skills rapidly evolved, establishing the foundation for his formidable improvisational capability. It is likely that he met Franz Joseph Haydn in 1790 as Haydn stopped in Bonn on his way to London. Mozart's death in 1791 sealed the end of Beethoven's youthful ambition to study with his erstwhile role model. When Haydn returned to Vienna in 1792, it seems certain that arrangements were made then for Beethoven to study with the eminent composer.

The Elector again granted Beethoven leave to go to Vienna and provided him with a scholarship. Beethoven left Bonn in November 1792, never to return. The youth immersed himself in studies with Haydn, violin instruction with Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and even occasional lessons in vocal composition with Antonio Salieri. At this heady time, Beethoven was making his reputation as a piano virtuoso, playing in the salons of the nobility and building renown for his ability to improvise.

Beethoven continued composing during these early years in Vienna but waited until 1795 to issue his opus 1, a set of three piano trios. They were a commercial and artistic success, encouraging the headstrong young musician to follow his muse. A steady stream of music followed: cello sonatas, violin sonatas, piano sonatas, trios, piano concerti, his first symphony and more.

Although an urban dweller in Vienna, Beethoven loved the great outdoors. He regularly walked in the woods around Vienna and even contemplated moving to a more rural setting. Beethoven's secretary and biographer Anton Schindler noted that the great composer was fascinated by nature's elemental power and often enthusiastically spoke at length about nature.



Amid his many triumphs rose the specter of incipient deafness. In the famous *Heiligenstadt Testament*, a letter Beethoven wrote to his brothers in 1802 but never sent (it was discovered among his papers at his death in 1827), he detailed the anguish of his affliction and how he resolved to continue living solely because of music. The ironic tragedy of a composer going deaf is not unique (William Boyce, Bedřich Smetana, Gabriel Fauré and Ralph Vaughan Williams all suffered profound hearing loss) but Beethoven's calamity has held a special place in the public imagination for two centuries. His conversation books, where visitors wrote their side of the conversation to which Beethoven replied aloud, are distinctive evidence of the reluctant accommodation necessary in his situation.

As the years went by, Beethoven's deafness and thorny personality caused ever-growing isolation. His overall compositional output dwindled but he labored over massive works, including the *Missa solemnis*, *Diabelli Variations*, "Hammerklavier" Sonata, and most notably his Ninth Symphony, which premiered to wild approval in Vienna on May 7, 1824. Violinist Joseph Böhm noted:

Beethoven himself conducted, that is, he stood in front of a conductor's stand and threw himself back and forth like a madman. At one moment he stretched to his full height, at the next he crouched down to the floor, he flailed about with his hands and feet as though he wanted to play all the instruments and sing all the chorus parts.

Fortunately, the musicians had been cautioned beforehand to follow the beat provided by Michael Umlauf, the concertmaster. When the audience applauded, Beethoven couldn't hear the ovation and stood with his back to the crowd. Famously, the alto soloist Caroline Unger turned Beethoven to the audience so he could see the massive acclaim for his music.

Beethoven's already poor health declined as he composed his famous late string quartets. An open coach ride in December 1826 brought on a case of pneumonia that eventually led to his death on March 26, 1827.

By some accounts, 20,000 mourners were in attendance at Beethoven's funeral. Austrian poet and dramatist Franz Grillparzer wrote the funeral oration, which recounts Beethoven's heroic status:

He was an artist indeed, and who can stand out beside him? As the Behemoth storms through the seas, he sped through the boundaries of his art. ... [H]e traversed everything, grasped everything. Whoever comes after him will not follow in his footsteps, he must begin anew, for this innovator has finished his life's work at the limits of art.

ETW

Program notes written by AJ Harbison (AJH) and Eric T. Williams (ETW).