

SYMPHONY

Triumphant

September 25, 2021

Photo: Jeffery Noble

Symphony Triumphant

Saturday, September 25, 2021 • 7:30PM

Grace Presbyterian Church

Peoria Symphony Orchestra
George Stelluto • Conductor
Kevin Murphy • Piano

Overture to "The Magic Flute," K. 620

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Concerto No. 25 for Piano and Orchestra in C Major, K. 503

Allegro maestoso
Andante
Allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Kevin Murphy • Piano

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 8 in F Major, Op. 93

Allegro vivace e con brio
Allegretto scherzando
Minuet
Allegro vivace

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

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This program is partially supported by a grant
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Kevin Murphy • Piano

Pianist Kevin Murphy, a leading figure in the classical vocal world, is Director of Coaching and Music Administration for Indiana University Opera Theater, and Professor of Music and Co-Director of the Collaborative Piano Program at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. He has served as Director of the Program for Singers at the Ravinia's Steans Music Institute since 2011, and is currently Artistic Director of the Tel Aviv Summer Opera Program in Israel. Previously, Murphy was Director of Music Administration and Casting Advisor at the New York City Opera (2008-2012) and Director of Musical Studies at the Opéra National de Paris (2006-2008).

Kevin Murphy was the first pianist and vocal coach invited by Maestro James Levine into the prestigious Lindemann Young Artist Program at the Metropolitan Opera, and from 1993 to 2006 he was an assistant conductor at the Met. As a member of the Met's music staff, Murphy played continuo harpsichord for many productions and toured Japan with the company. He also performed in Carnegie Hall with the Met Chamber ensemble and Met Orchestra, and has frequently played chamber music with members of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra.

In addition to his on- and off-stage partnership with his wife, soprano Heidi Grant Murphy, Murphy has collaborated in concert and recital with artists such as Michelle DeYoung, Bryn Terfel, Thomas Hampson, Luca Pisaroni, Emily D'Angelo, Michael Schade, Danielle de Niese, Lawrence Brownlee, Marcelo Alvarez, Nadine Sierra, Morris Robinson, Angela Brower, Iestyn Davies, Bejun Mehta, Gary Lakes, John Aler, Kathleen Battle, Nathan Gunn, Elina Garanča, Matthew Polenzani, Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Plácido Domingo, Paul Groves, Renée Fleming, Gerald Finley, Kiri Te Kanawa, Wolfgang Brendel, Christine Brewer, and Pinchas Zuckerman. He is sought after as a clinician and has taught at the San Francisco Opera's Merola Program, LA Opera, Santa Fe Opera, International Vocal Arts Institute in Israel and Italy, Glimmerglass Opera, Tanglewood, Aspen Music Festival, Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, and the Juilliard School. He has also assisted Maestro Seiji Ozawa in Japan in his Mozart/Da Ponte opera festival, and has been a guest opera coach at opera companies such as the Netherlands Opera, Hyogo Performing Arts Center, Canadian Opera Company, as well as the Ravinia Festival.

In addition to playing and teaching, Kevin Murphy has been on the podium conducting

Peoria Symphony Orchestra

September 25, 2021

George Stelluto • Conductor

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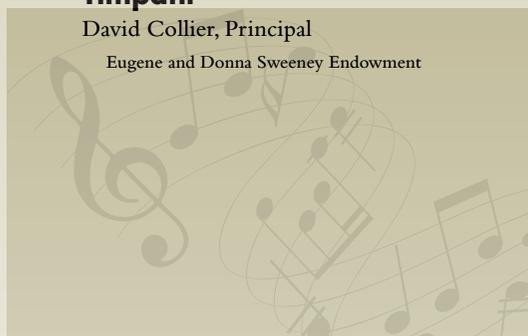
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and leading Händel's *Serse*, Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor* at Indiana University Opera Theater. This season, he will lead Indiana University's new production of Monteverdi's masterpiece, *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. Recent performances include conducting for San Francisco Opera's Merola program, Robin Guarino's production of Emmanuel Chabrier's opera, *L'Étoile*, at Cincinnati's College Conservatory of Music, and Mahler's, *Kindertotenlieder* for the Indiana University Ballet Theater.

Murphy's other chamber music and concert credits include appearances at Isaac Stern Auditorium and Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, Salzburg's Mozarteum, London's Wigmore Hall, the Edinburgh Festival, Ravinia, Tokyo's Suntory Hall, La Jolla's Summerfest, Music@Menlo, the Vin et Musique Festival in Burgundy, France, Spivey Hall in Atlanta,

Edinburgh Festival, and many other venues in the US and abroad. Murphy has appeared on *The Tonight Show* with Gary Lakes, *Good Morning America* with Cecilia Bartoli and *The Today Show* with Renée Fleming; has been featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*, in *The New York Times* and *Classical Singer*, and has recorded for the EMI, Centaur, Arabesque, and Koch labels. He is a frequent adjudicator for competitions, including the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, where he also has served as official accompanist on stage at the Met.

A native of Syracuse, New York, Kevin Murphy received his Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from Indiana University and his Master of Music in Piano Accompanying from the Curtis Institute of Music. He resides in Bloomington, Indiana with his wife, Heidi, and their four children.



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Maestro's Message

Ah my friends, where have you been for so long? Now that you're back, let us again enjoy music together—creating our own symphony triumphant! Tonight, Mozart and Beethoven treat us to their happiest and most profound, yet charming, affirmations of life. Mozart's *Magic Flute Overture* playfully reminds us of humanity's fairy-tale quest, often misguided, for wisdom and virtue, before his wonderful *Piano Concerto in C Major, K503*! The kindred spirit of his "Jupiter Symphony" and the alter ego of his ominous *C Minor Concerto K. 491*, it is joyous, intimate, celebratory, and wise. Our soloist Kevin Murphy was my first choice for this program, and I was delighted when he wanted to do the *C Major Concerto*. Kevin's own noble humanity and sense of beauty will inspire your inner Mozart. Given Kevin's astonishing opera background, you are in for an insightful discovery of Mozart's operatic mind at work in a purely instrumental genre. Opera aficionados will notice an *Idomeneo* reference in the third movement. You might also catch some ideas which inspired Beethoven in his own compositions. Beethoven—a great admirer of Mozart, and especially these Mozart works—delights us with his witty, tricky, and sometimes sarcastic *Symphony No. 8*. You will hear all kinds of little musical jokes catching you off-guard in the most charming ways. Beethoven even pokes fun at that recent invention, the metronome! All in all, this concert is meant to make you smile and be glad that you're back with us in the concert hall—which makes me smile! —G. Stelluto

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Written by Michael Allsen ©2021

The Peoria Symphony Orchestra has named this opening program of the 2021–22 season "Symphony Triumphant." After the struggles of the last year and a half, returning to the concert hall—even in a cautious way—is indeed a "triumph!" Maestro Stelluto leads a program of works by Mozart and Beethoven, opening with Mozart's brilliant *Overture to "The Magic Flute."* We then welcome pianist Kevin Murphy, who performs the *Piano Concerto No. 25*. This is one of the largest of the concertos that Mozart wrote for his own performances in Vienna, and it also seems to have been one of his personal favorites. We end with *Beethoven's Symphony No. 8*, one of the shortest of his nine symphonies, but one that includes an outsized portion of wit and good humor.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Overture to "The Magic Flute," K. 620

Mozart completed his opera The Magic Flute in September 1791, and it was performed for the first time in Vienna on September 30, 1791. Duration 7:00.

Background

Just two months before his death, Mozart completed two operas: a serious Italian work, *La clemenza di Tito (The Clemency of Titus)*, and a German Singspiel, *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)*. He collaborated with a longtime friend, Emanuel Schikaneder, a singer and leader of a traveling musical troupe, in producing *The Magic Flute* for the first time in Vienna in 1791. It was a hit, and its success was a source of pride to Mozart in his final months.

A light, German-language operatic form with spoken dialogue called "Singspiel" was immensely popular in late 18th-century Vienna. These works were often little more than musical pantomimes, featuring low comedy and vulgar language—but *The Magic Flute*

stands out among all Singspiele, both for the quality of its music and for the depth of its plot. It is often known as Mozart's "Masonic opera" because its libretto is full of symbols and ideas drawn from the rituals and philosophy of the Freemasons. Mozart and Schikaneder belonged to the same Masonic lodge in Vienna at a time when the Freemasons were increasingly persecuted by the Austrian government. *The Magic Flute* appears to be, if not exactly a Masonic propaganda piece, at least an attempt to provide some cheer to their lodge brothers. Some writers have even suggested that characters in the Singspiel are intended to portray contemporary people: in particular, the priest Sarastro representing Ignaz Born (Master of the lodge in Vienna), and the vengeful Queen of the Night representing Empress Maria Theresa (an energetic persecutor of the Freemasons).

What You'll Hear

Following his standard operating procedure in composing operas, Mozart wrote the overture to *The Magic Flute* just a few days before the first performance. It opens with a statement of three solemn chords from the trombones. The prominent use of trombones, usually reserved for church music or the most solemn operatic moments, hints that *The Magic Flute* is much more than a mere comedy. Mozart retains a subtly sacred character by setting the lighthearted main theme for the first time as a fugue in the strings. The trombone chords return again to begin a development section, which starts in a minor key, and gradually works its way back to E-flat major, for a bright recapitulation of the main theme.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Concerto No. 25 for Piano and Orchestra in C Major, K. 503

This concerto was written over a two-year period, between late 1784 and December 4, 1786. The premiere took place the next day at a public concert, with Mozart as soloist and conductor.

Duration 32:00.

Background

Mozart settled in Vienna in 1781, and his reputation and success in his early years there came largely through his performances at the homes of aristocratic patrons, as well as public "subscription" performances of his own works. Most of his piano concertos were written for his own performances. Viennese audiences demanded new concertos at every concert, and Mozart responded with an amazing series of fifteen concertos written during his first five years in Vienna. The last of these, the *Piano Concerto No. 25* of 1786, was apparently a personal favorite of Mozart's, and he performed it several times over the next few years.

The traditional view of Mozart is that he was a spontaneous genius—that brilliant works sprang fully-formed from his head. Mozart certainly had phenomenal creative powers. We have descriptions, at least from Mozart himself, of feats like composing a minuet in his head while he was writing a letter. However, Mozart was also a skillful craftsman, and many of his works were the result of a careful process of experimentation, editing, and revision. The *Piano Concerto No. 25* was one of these. Between the time he began the concerto in 1784, and the time he finished it in 1786 (about 24 hours before the first public performance), he made two substantial sets of revisions. Several important sections, including the first solo entrance, were rewritten entirely. But if you're tempted to think any less of Mozart for being less than perfect on the first pass, remember that during the two years this concerto was on the back burner, he completed over forty other works—including two operas!

What You'll Hear

The *Piano Concerto No. 25* is one of his largest piano concertos and a wonderful example of his mature musical style. The first



“KEVIN MURPHY IS IN THE VANGUARD FOR AMERICANS WHO HAVE TURNED SONG ACCOMPANIMENT INTO AN ART. THE PIANISM WAS SO ABSORBING, THE SINGER’S ENTRY SEEMED LIKE AN INTRUSION. THERE CAN BE NO FINER COMPLIMENT.”

—SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

movement (*Allegro maestoso*) begins conventionally enough, with an orchestral passage that establishes the key and lays out most of the thematic material. The piano enters with a solo introduction—at first hesitantly, but then with more confidence. This passage maneuvers the orchestra into re-introducing the main theme, a dotted figure. After

a transitional section, the piano, supported by the strings, introduces the flowing second theme. The movement continues in a traditional sonata form, but during the piano cadenza Mozart adds an orchestral background—a very unusual feature among concertos in this period. This cadenza leads to a final coda.

As in most Mozart concertos, the second movement is a lyrical slow movement (*Andante*). The orchestra introduces a gentle theme with support from the piano. When the piano takes up this theme, it is expanded and decorated. There is a brief note of tension in the middle of the movement, but the music soon glides into a final statement of the theme by the piano. A short coda brings the *Andante* to a close, and sets up the final movement (*Allegro*). This is set in Rondo form, based on a recurring dance-like theme heard first in the violins, that alternates with contrasting ideas. In this movement, the focus is almost entirely on the soloist, and the *Allegro* contains some of the flashiest solo passages of the concerto.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 8 in F Major, Op. 93

Beethoven’s eighth symphony was written in 1811-1812. The first performance took place in Vienna on February 27, 1814.

Duration 25:00.

Background

Beethoven’s eighth symphony was one of the final works of what his biographers have called the “heroic decade”—his ten years of amazing creativity between 1802 and 1812. At the beginning of this period is a revealing document known as the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” in which Beethoven comes to terms with his ever-encroaching deafness. In the face of this, the ultimate challenge to a composer, his output over the next decade was indeed heroic, resulting in the third through eighth symphonies, the “Razumovsky” quartets, the final two piano

concertos, the violin concerto, *Fidelio*, and dozens of smaller works. Marking the end of this period is a passionate three-part letter, dated July 6–7, 1812, and apparently never sent, to a woman he identifies only as his “Immortal Beloved.” Her identity has long been one of the great mysteries of Beethoven’s biography, though most scholars today have settled on two prime candidates: Antonie Brentano and Josephine Brunsvik. Both were married women with whom Beethoven was known to be friendly. Whoever the “Immortal Beloved” was, she was apparently Beethoven’s last great romantic attachment.

The eighth symphony was written in tandem with the seventh in the winter of 1811 and 1812, and they were completed within weeks of one another in the fall of 1812. They are very different works, however. The seventh is a big, sprawling, boisterous piece with vastly expanded forms in nearly every movement. In contrast, the eighth is a little jewel. One of the shortest of Beethoven’s symphonies, it returns to the more compact dimensions of Haydn and Mozart, and pays tribute at several points to 18th-century symphonic style. It also contains some of Beethoven’s most subtly comical musical moments. Years later, Hector Berlioz said of the eighth: “Naiveté, grace, gentle joy...do not exclude grandeur in the form of art which reproduces them. This symphony, then, seems wholly worthy of those that preceded and followed, and is more remarkable because it is in no way like them.” The symphony’s brightness and good humor are all the more remarkable in light of Beethoven’s troubled life at this time: almost total deafness and the end of any hope for lasting romance. This cheerful symphony was in fact completed just after a horrendous argument with his brother Johann that resulted in their lasting estrangement.

The first performance of the *Symphony No. 8* was an *Akademie*, a concert staged for Beethoven’s benefit in the Redoubtensaal, a large concert hall in Vienna’s imperial palace. The program also included repeat performances of the seventh and the shallow, but wildly popular “battle symphony” *Wellington’s Victory*, both of which had been premiered a few months earlier. Though the *Symphony No. 8* was to be the centerpiece of the concert, the new symphony was clearly upstaged by the cheesy *Wellington’s Victory*. It was received with polite applause and no more. One review of the concert said the audience: “...was not sufficiently gracious after the performance, and the applause which it received was not accompanied by that enthusiasm which distinguishes a work which gives universal delight.”

What You’ll Hear

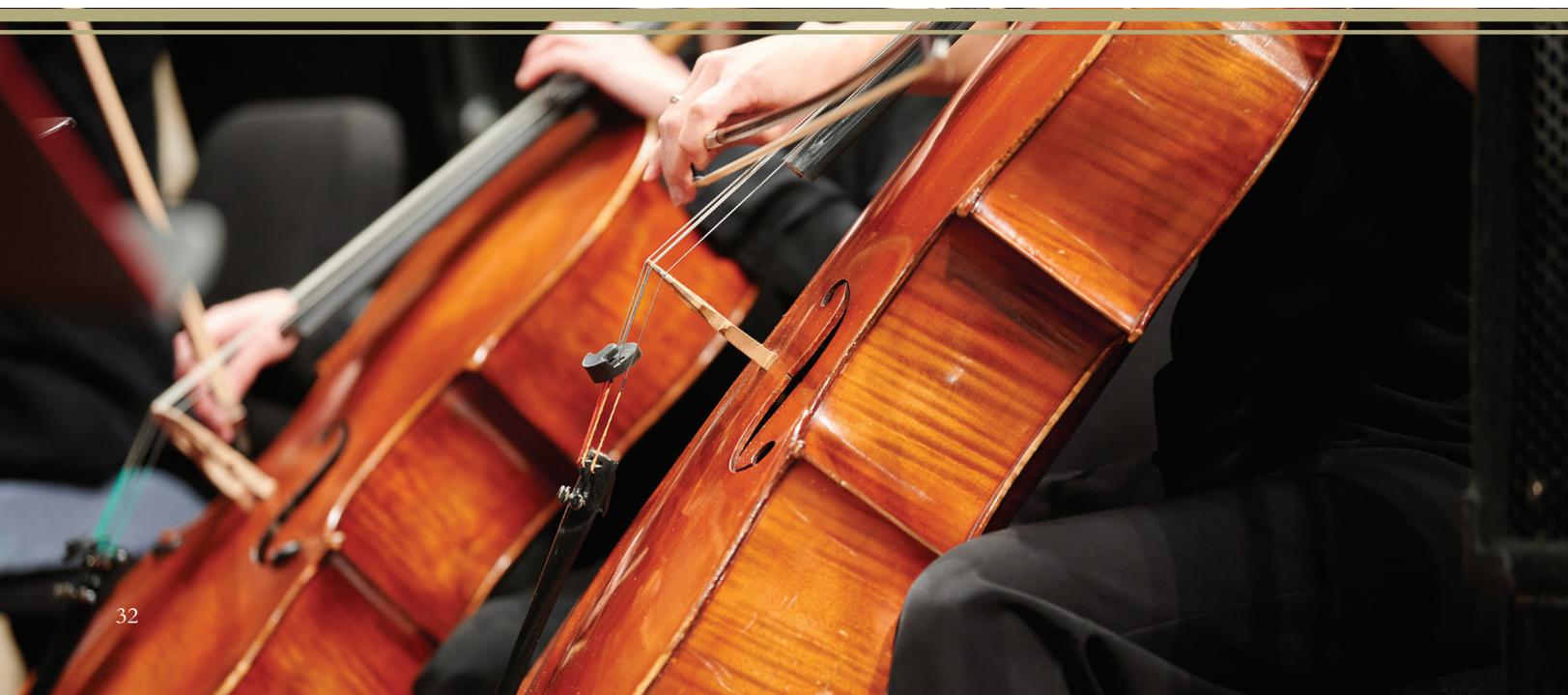
It begins with a delicious opening movement (*Allegro vivace e con brio*) set in sonata form. It is a miniature by the standards of Beethoven’s

other opening movements, but all of the necessary elements are here. The exposition begins with a bright group of main themes, and there is a brief transition that concludes with a witty little moment. (If you blink, you’ll miss it!) The bassoon is briefly left alone—like a party guest who finds himself suddenly talking away loudly during a lull in the conversation—before the strings enter with the lyrical second theme. The exposition closes with a surprisingly aggressive passage. The development is dramatic, with loud interrupting brass chords, but the drama is decidedly tongue-in-cheek. This sense of deliberately overblown drama continues in the recapitulation and coda, with several theatrical pauses for effect. The ending, however, is a droll little statement of the opening theme.

In Beethoven’s symphonies, the designation *Scherzo* came to mean a fast, light movement, but in the second movement, marked *Allegretto scherzando*, the word retains its original Italian meaning: a trifle or a joke. The movement is a joke directed at one of Beethoven’s best friends, an amateur musician and inventor named Johann Nepomuk Mälzel. Beethoven and Mälzel had worked together in perpetrating *Wellington’s Victory*, and Mälzel had recently invented the first metronome. The insistent, repeated chords heard throughout this movement are an orchestral version of a ticking metronome. There are a few contrasting episodes (breaks to rewind?), and in the end the metronome winds down, leaving the orchestra free to rush ahead into a short, blustery coda.

In most late 18th-century symphonies, the third movement was invariably a courtly *Minuet*. Beginning with his second symphony, Beethoven replaced the *Minuet* with a faster and undanceable *Scherzo*. With deliberate irony, the eighth has a *Minuet*—but this is no snooty, powdered-wig affair. Instead, it is a robust dance that seems to pay tribute to Beethoven’s former teacher, Haydn. The central trio section places a horn duet and solo clarinet above a rumbling bass line. The movement closes with a repeat of the *Minuet*.

The last movement (*Allegro vivace*) begins with a furiously rushing theme, stated at first quietly by the strings, and then shouted by the entire orchestra with oddly-placed accents. The second theme seems almost like an afterthought and is disposed of very quickly. The development section is a brief fugue that never really rises off the ground. Real development is saved for a tremendously long coda that seems like a parody of conventional Classical symphonic conclusions. The coda is usually there to reassure us that we are indeed back in the tonic key. Here, the ending overstates the point just enough to be hilarious. ♦



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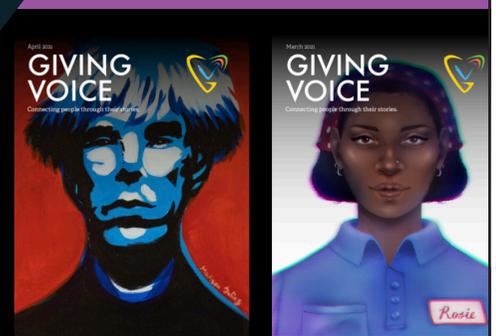
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