Minnesota Orchestra

John Storgårds, conductor
André Watts, piano

Friday, February 23, 2018, 8 pm  Orchestra Hall
Saturday, February 24, 2018, 8 pm  Orchestra Hall

Ludwig van Beethoven
Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, ca. 38'
Opus 73, Emperor
Allegro
Adagio un poco mosso
Rondo: Allegro
[There is no pause before final movement.]
André Watts, piano

INTERMISSION
ca. 20'

Dmitri Shostakovich
Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Opus 93
ca. 46'
Moderato
Allegro
Allegretto
Andante – Allegro

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley
Friday, February 23, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine
Saturday, February 24, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
**Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5, Emperor**

Beethoven’s last and best-known piano concerto, the Fifth, is permeated with power, nobility and energy. After a grand first movement full of wide leaps and frequent cadenzas, a reflective *Adagio* and a dance-like *Rondo* cap this touchstone of the piano literature, composed in Vienna near the time of Napoleon’s siege of the city in 1809.

**Shostakovich: Symphony No. 10**

Shostakovich’s Tenth is a work of great extremes, requiring delicate strands of sound from a massive ensemble, framing tiny movements with huge ones, communicating darkly but rising to a high-spirited conclusion. Many assumed this enigmatic symphony was a protest against Stalin and his oppression, but the composer would acknowledge only that his wish was “to portray human emotions and passions.”
Ludwig van Beethoven
Born: December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany
Died: March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria
Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 73, Emperor
Premiered: January 13, 1811

In the spring of 1809 Napoleon, intent upon consolidating his hold on Europe, went to war with Austria. He laid siege to Vienna in May, and after a brief bombardment the city surrendered to the French and was occupied through the remainder of the year. The royal family fled early in May and did not return until January 1810, but Beethoven remained behind throughout the shelling and occupation, and it was during this period that he completed his Fifth Piano Concerto.

noble and powerful
Some critics have been ready to take their cue from the French occupation and to understand the concerto as Beethoven’s response to it. But Beethoven was not swept up in the fervor of the fighting: he found the occupation a source of stress and depression. During the shelling, he hid in the basement of his brother Caspar’s house, where he wrapped his head in pillows to protect his ears. “The course of events has affected my body and soul,” he wrote to his publishers. “Life around me is wild and disturbing, nothing but drums, cannons, soldiers, misery of every sort.”

Thus the concerto Beethoven wrote during this period is noble and powerful despite the military occupation rather than because of it. In fact, Beethoven had done much of the work on the concerto before the French army entered Vienna: his earliest sketches date from February 1809, and he appears to have had the concerto largely complete by April, before the fighting began.

Beethoven’s hearing, which was deteriorating rapidly at the time he wrote this concerto, had become so weak that he knew he could not give the first performance of the work; thus it is the only piano concerto he wrote but did not premiere as soloist. That honor went instead to Archduke Rudolf, Beethoven’s patron and pupil, in a performance on January 13, 1811, at the Palace of Prince Joseph Lobkowitz in Vienna.

the music: defying expectations
Allegro. Beethoven defies expectations from the opening instant of this music. The Allegro bursts to life with a resplendent E-flat major chord for the whole orchestra, but this is not the start of

Viewed from above, pianist André Watts making his Minnesota Orchestra debut on January 31, 1964, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, performing Liszt’s First Piano Concerto under the direction of Vladimir Golschmann.
Dmitri Shostakovich
Born: September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia
Died: August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia
Symphony No. 10 in E minor, Opus 93
Premiered: December 17, 1953

hostakovich and other Russian composers were pilloried at the infamous 1948 Congress of the Union of Soviet Composers, a showcase inquisition put on by a government intent on keeping its artists on a short leash. Shostakovich was dismissed from his teaching positions and forced to read a humiliating confession. Then, as he supported his family by writing film scores and patriotic music, he privately composed the music he wanted to write and kept it back, waiting for a more liberal atmosphere. Soon after Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, he set to work on his Tenth Symphony, which was completed that October and premiered by Yevgeny Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic that December 17.

This imposing work, dark and somber, touched off a firestorm in Russia, where it was regarded as a challenge to Soviet control of Russian artists. A conference was called in Moscow in the spring of 1954 to try to come to terms with music that was so politically incorrect. After three days of debate, the conference came to a compromise approval of this music, declaring—with considerable mental gymnastics—that the Shostakovich Tenth represented “an optimistic tragedy.”

The music begins quietly and ominously, with rising and falling patterns of three notes. More animated material follows: a wistful tune for solo clarinet and a dark waltz for solo flute. Simple figures explode violently across the span of this movement, which rises to a series of craggy climaxes. After so much mighty struggle, the movement vanishes on the most expected orchestral exposition. Instead, that chord opens the way for a cadenza by the solo piano, a cadenza that the orchestra punctuates twice more with powerful chords before sweeping into the movement’s main theme and the true exposition.

adagio un poco mosso. The second movement transports us to a different world altogether. Gone is the energy of the first movement; now we seem in the midst of sylvan calm. Beethoven moves to the remote key of B major and mutes the strings, which sing the hymn-like main theme. There follow two extended variations on that rapt melody. The first, for piano over quiet accompaniment, might almost be labeled Chopinesque in its expressive freedom, while the second is for winds, embellished by the piano’s steady strands of 16ths.

rondo: allegro. The second movement concludes on a low B, and then Beethoven drops everything a half-step to B-flat. Out of that unusual change, the piano begins, very gradually, to outline a melodic idea, which struggles to take shape and direction. And suddenly it does—as if these misty imaginings have been hit with an electric current that snaps them to vibrant life as the movement’s main theme. Lyric episodes alternate with some of Beethoven’s most rhythmically energized writing: this music seems to want to dance. Near the close comes one of its most striking moments, a duet for piano and timpani, which taps out the movement’s fundamental rhythm. Then the piano leaps up to energize the full orchestra, which concludes with one final recall of the rondo theme.

a note on the title

Today we use the nickname Emperor almost reflexively—but it did not originate with the composer, and Beethoven’s denunciation of Napoleon’s self-coronation suggests that he would not have been sympathetic to it at all. It is almost certain that Beethoven never heard it applied to the concerto, and its source remains unknown.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

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S

a matter of debate

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the music: struggles, signatures and shifts

moderato. The music begins quietly and ominously, with rising and falling patterns of three notes. More animated material follows: a wistful tune for solo clarinet and a dark waltz for solo flute. Simple figures explode violently across the span of this movement, which rises to a series of craggy climaxes. After so much mighty struggle, the movement vanishes on the most
delicate strands of sound: solo piccolo, barely audible timpani rolls and widely spaced pizzicato strokes.

**allegro.** The second movement, brief and brutal, rips to life with frenzied energy and does not stop until it vanishes on a whirlwind. Listeners will detect the rising pattern of three notes that opened the first movement, but here they are spit out like bursts of machine-gun fire. Some view this movement as a musical portrait of Stalin, but the composer’s son Maxim has specifically denied this.

**allegretto.** After the fury of the second movement, the third begins almost whimsically. The violins’ opening gesture repeats the three-note phrase that underpins so much of this symphony, and we move to what is distinctive about this movement: one of the earliest appearances of Shostakovich’s musical signature in his works. High woodwinds toot out the four-note motto D/E-flat/C/B. In German notation, E-flat is S and B is H, and the resulting motto spells DSCH, the composer’s initials in their German spelling: Dmitri SCHostakovich. This musical calling card would appear in many subsequent Shostakovich works, at times seeming to be an assertion of Shostakovich’s existence and his independence. Also notable is this movement’s horn call, ringing out 12 times across its span. In this enigmatic movement, one senses a private drama being played out. The music slides into silence with lonely woodwinds chirping out the DSCH motto one final time.

**andante – allegro.** The finale opening returns to the mood of the very beginning, with somber low strings beneath lonely woodwind cries. When our sensibilities are thoroughly darkened, Shostakovich suddenly shifts gears. Solo clarinet offers a taut call to order, and the violins launch into an Allegro that pushes the symphony to an almost too conventional happy ending.

What are we to make of this conclusion, apparently shaped by the requisite high spirits of Socialist Realism? It has unsettled many listeners, who feel it a violation of the powerful music that preceded it. The source of the power of this work continues to elude our understanding, even as we are swept up in its somber strength.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo (1 flute also doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling E-flat clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone and strings

*Program notes by Eric Bromberger.*