LUDVIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Leonore Overture No. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 27, 1827. He began composing Fidelio (under the title Leonore) in 1804, but only after several revisions and a change of title, to Fidelio, in 1814, did it finally hold the stage. The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

ABOUT THE MUSIC
Beethoven’s struggles with musical drama in his single completed opera are well documented not only in the different versions of the opera itself (the earliest of which has been recorded, as Leonore, along with the definitive Fidelio) but also in the overtures—no fewer than four!—that Beethoven composed for his work. Of these, three are called “Leonore Overtures,” according to the title that Beethoven preferred, and the fourth is called simply the Fidelio Overture.

Beethoven wrote what we now call No. 3 for a revised version of the opera given in March 1806. But he eventually chose to replace it; the problem with the overture when connected to the opera is that it is too powerful, utterly overwhelming the light-hearted opening scene. It remains one of the most dramatic and exciting overtures ever written.

Beginning with a slow introduction that slips surprisingly from the tonic C major to a dark B minor and then to A-flat (where Beethoven briefly quotes the aria of the political prisoner Florestan), it takes some time for Beethoven to return to his home key for the Allegro and the main body of the movement. The Allegro presents music of tense excitement not found in the opera itself, then modulates to a bright E major for the secondary theme (Florestan’s aria again, stated by clarinet). The taut development climaxes in a climactic gesture borrowed from the opera—an offstage trumpet signaling the arrival of help and the downfall of the villainous Don Pizarro’s murderous intentions. This short orchestral work brilliantly encapsulates the dramatic thrust of Beethoven’s sole opera.
MATTHEW BROWNE  
\textit{The Course of Empire} Symphony No. 1  
[First Symphony Project World Premiere]

Matt Browne was born in Burlington, Vermont on November 16th, 1988 and lives in New York. The \textit{Course of Empire}, his first symphony, was commissioned by the Santa Rosa Symphony and the Eugene Symphony, with funding from four patron households from each of the symphonies, including Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong. The four-year "First Symphony Project" commissions four young American composers, of which Matt Browne is the first, to compose their first full-fledged symphony. These are the first performances. The score bears the dedication "to my roommate, landlord and grandmother Helen Brenner." The score calls for three each of flutes doubling piccolos, oboes with English horn, clarinets with bass clarinet and e-flat clarinet, bassoons with contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, three percussion, harp, piano, and strings.

\textbf{ABOUT THE MUSIC}

Matt Browne has composed orchestral works, tone poems and concertos, with catchy titles that signal something about the mood and character of a work: \textit{How the Solar System Was Won}, \textit{Barnstorming Season}, \textit{Cabinet of Curiosities} (a concerto for four saxophones and orchestra), among others. His work also includes a number of pieces for wind ensemble, chamber music of various kinds, including a subset featuring the saxophone, and vocal music including a one-act "anti-opera" with the appealing title \textit{Better Than It Sounds}.

Browne earned his Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and his Doctor of Musical Arts in composition at the University of Michigan. His principal teachers have included Michael Daugherty, Kristin Kuster and Carter Pann.

The title of his symphony, \textit{The Course of Empire}, evokes the westward drive of the United States in the 19th century and more particularly a series of five landscape paintings by Thomas Cole (1801-1848), regarded as the founder of the Hudson River School. In the mid-1830s he painted a series of five allegorical landscapes in which a mountain of a particularly identifiable shape appears, while the remainder of each painting passes through a series of changes over time, from the simple landscape, through habitation and growth of an urban environment, to ultimate decay. Each of the paintings, in sequence, is the subject of a single movement of the work, which Browne describes in his program note.

Commentary by Matt Browne:

Cole’s \textit{The Course of Empire} has been seen as a critical response to the election of populist president Andrew Jackson just a few years prior. He drew direct inspiration from Lord Byron’s Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, specifically:

\begin{quote}
There is the moral of all human tales;  
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past.  
First Freedom and then Glory—when that fails,  
Wealth, vice, corruption—barbarism at last.  
And History, with all her volumes vast,  
Hath but one page.
\end{quote}

The symphony is in five movements, each one corresponding to a painting. In it there are several musical motives analogous to themes in the paintings, all tied together by an expansive and imposing minor 7th interval heard in each movement, representing the large boulder atop a mountain seen in every painting, itself representing fate and inevitability.
Ascension, after Cole’s The Savage State, depicts a wild landscape inhabited by hunter-gatherers at daybreak just as a morning storm has blown over. The music captures both the grandiose and magical nature of a sunrise over an untouched earth, as well as the feverish efforts by early humans to carve out a place in the world for themselves, represented by a deer hunt. The large boulder sitting atop a mountain in the distance overlooks the scene.

Pastorale, after Cole’s The Pastoral or Arcadian State, is depicted in a peaceful morning far into the future, as the land has been settled and cultivated. The scene is carefree and in harmony with nature.

Apotheosis, after Cole’s The Consummation of Empire, shows an expansive and ostentatious city, covered with grandiose marble statues, arches and fountains. The scene is the largest of the five paintings, and takes place at midday, during what appears to be a decadent parade attended by the city’s immense crowds. The boulder once prominent in the earlier scenes is now pushed far off into the background. The music charges along confidently, but is eventually overcome with a soft, contemplative meditation. This, however, is short lived and we quickly return to the assertively patriotic revelry as we race to what appears to be a rousing finale.

Hubris, after Cole’s Destruction, follows directly and abruptly after Apotheosis’ attempted happy ending. It begins with frightening drums, and dissonant calls of the fate motive from the brass. A terrifying afternoon tempest roars as an invading force burns the city to the ground in a violent sacking. The music, just as these scenes throughout history are, is relentless.

Ephemera, after Cole’s Desolation, emerges from the rubble with a lonely viola tune, eventually and cautiously joined by other string sections, accompanied sparsely by meandering twinkles in the harp, piano and percussion. Occasionally, we hear a distant conversation between two birds across the scene. Here we see the remains of the city, having been abandoned long ago and now being reclaimed by nature. We are in the early evening, and see the moon’s reflection glistening softly on the still water. The music is numb, desolate, at times pained, but eventually settles into a resolute and calm reprise of the sunrise theme falling gently into the music with which the symphony began. We hear a distant memory of Calon Lân in the piano, one or two unrequited bird calls, and a few more utterances of the “boulder” motive, once again prominent in the scene. Though now it no longer strikes us as grandiose and commanding, it is simply there.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF
Piano Concerto No. 3

Sergei Vassilievich Rachmaninoff was born at Semyonovo, district of Starorusky, Russia, on April 1, 1873, and died in Beverly Hills, California, on March 28, 1943. He composed his Piano Concerto No. 3 during the summer of 1909, in preparation for an American tour and played the first performance at the New Theatre in New York on that November 28, with the New York Symphony Society, conducted by Walter Damrosch. In addition to the solo piano, the score calls for two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, side drum, cymbals, bass drum and strings.

ABOUT THE MUSIC
When Rachmaninoff came to write his Third Piano Concerto, he had a far different problem from the one that had faced him when composing the Second. At the time he started the earlier concerto, there was a question whether he would ever compose again. His confidence and self-esteem had been shattered by the catastrophic premiere of his First Symphony in 1897. Only after extensive counseling sessions, partly under hypnosis, was he able to compose—and the result was the Second Concerto, which was instantly established as an audience favorite.
By 1909, when he began work on the Third, he had to compete with his younger self. He spent the summer planning his first American tour, of which the culminating event took place in New York City on November 28, when he premiered the new piano concerto, which he played three times in six weeks with two different orchestras. It was considered a qualified success—respected, though by no means the instant hit of the previous concerto.

Everyone mentioned its difficulty. Of course, Rachmaninoff wrote it for himself, one of the most gifted keyboard artists of all time. Yet he begins quietly, with a muted muttering in the strings of a subdued march character and then a long, simple melody presented in bare octaves in the piano. Like so many Russian tunes and so many of Rachmaninoff’s, this one circles round and round through a limited space. He insisted that this was an original tune, though musicologist Joseph Yasser found a marked similarity with an old Russian monastic chant, which the composer might have heard as a boy. In any case, its essential Russianness is palpable.

The orchestra takes over the theme while the piano begins rapid figuration to a solo climax and preparation for the second theme, a dialogue between soloist and orchestra emphasizing a rhythmic motif that soon appears in a leisurely, romantic cantabile melody sung by the piano. A literal restatement of the concerto’s opening bars marks the beginning of the development, which culminates in a gigantic solo cadenza which takes the place of the normal recapitulation, commenting in extenso on the motivic figures of first the principal theme, then the secondary theme; after its close, only a brief reference to both themes suffices to bring the movement to a close.

The slow movement, entitled Intermezzo, seems to start in a “normal” key, A major (the dominant of D minor) with a brief languishing figure in the strings that generates an elegiac mood. But the piano enters explosively to break the mood and carry us to a distant key of D-flat, where Rachmaninoff presents a sumptuous and lavishly-harmonized version of the main theme in a texture filled with dense piano chords. A seemingly new theme, presented as a light waltz in 3/8 time, heard in the solo clarinet and bassoon against sparkling figuration in the piano, is a subtle trick: it is, in fact, the opening theme of the entire concerto, but beginning at a different level of the scale (the third instead of the tonic) and so changed in its rhythm as to conceal the connection almost perfectly! Not one person in a thousand will recognize it by hearing alone!

The soloist “interrupts” the end of the slow movement with a brief cadenza that leads back to the home key of D minor for the finale. This is the ne plus ultra of virtuosic concerto finales, filled with impetuous and dashing themes, rhythmically driving, syncopated and sunny by turns. A lively middle section in E-flat involves acrobatic and lightly-spooky variations on a capricious theme that turns out to be related to the opening of the finale and the second theme of the first movement. Moreover, Rachmaninoff inserts a reminder of both themes of the first movement. Following the restatement of all the thematic material, the piano builds a long and exciting coda that brings this most brilliant and challenging of concertos to a flashing, glamorous close.