

# SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

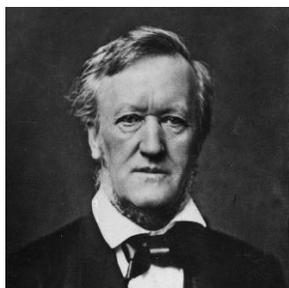
## ABOUT THE MUSIC

BEETHOVEN À LA KERN | JAN 8, 9 & 10, 2022

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

### RICHARD WAGNER

*Lohengrin*: Prelude to Act 1, WWV 75



**COMPOSER:** born May 22, 1813, Leipzig; died February 13, 1883, Venice

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1848

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Franz Liszt premiered *Lohengrin* in Weimar on August 28, 1856.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals and divisi strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 10 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

Today Richard Wagner is considered one of the most influential composers of the 19th century, but during his lifetime he did not enjoy such universal esteem. At the time he conceived and wrote *Lohengrin*, for example, Wagner's reputation was at a low ebb. Wagner's rapidly-evolving music and aesthetic ideas were too new and unusual for mid-19th-century audiences to comprehend or appreciate. Thus, when Wagner completed *Lohengrin*, he could not convince anyone to publish it or mount a production. In despair, Wagner wrote to Franz Liszt, head of the Weimar Opera, asking him to conduct the opening production of *Lohengrin*. Wagner hoped that Liszt's strong reputation would lend credibility to *Lohengrin* and win audiences over. Wagner proved prescient; the mere fact that Liszt took on *Lohengrin* elevated its importance in the eyes of many, and both audiences and critics were favorably impressed with what they heard. After its premiere, Liszt wrote to Wagner, "The public interest in *Lohengrin* is rapidly increasing. You are already very popular at the various Weimar hotels, where it is not easy to get a room on the days when your operas are given."

*Lohengrin* is Wagner's last opera written in the 19th-century Romantic style; all his later works came to be known as "music dramas." Wagner was much concerned with the relationship of music to literature, and believed the two must combine to form a new genre. In his 1850-1851 book, *Oper und Drama* (Opera and Drama), Wagner laid out his ideas for this new and singularly distinct genre, one he hoped would displace conventional operas with their frivolous plots and emphasis on recitatives and arias. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "This new type of work was intended as a return to the Greek drama as Wagner understood it – the public expression of national human aspirations in symbolic form by enacting racial myths and using music for the full expression of the dramatic action." All words would be sung, rather than mixing spoken and sung text; arias would not be the focus of the music or narrative, nor would they serve as vehicles to show off the singers' virtuosity; libretto and music

would be created by one person, rather than two or more, to insure unity between dramatic and musical concepts; short, distinctive musical fragments would be assigned to each of the characters, and these would sound each time the character appeared or was the focus of the narrative.

Although *Lohengrin* is not technically a music drama, several elements of its construction foreshadow Wagner's mature style found in later works such as the *Ring Cycle*. Beginning with *Lohengrin*, Wagner wrote his own libretto. We can also hear the evolution of Wagner's concept of *leitmotif*, the association of characters with specific themes and musical keys. Although Wagner did not apply the term *leitmotif* to *Lohengrin*, the beginnings of the idea are evident in the music.

The Prelude to Act I presents one of these proto-leitmotifs, the theme of the Holy Grail, which features – atypically for Wagner – a restrained, almost Minimalist quality. In the opera, Lohengrin is a knight who lives in the Temple of the Holy Grail with his father Parsifal. Elsa, unjustly accused of murdering her brother, dreams of a knight who will come to her defense. Her prayers summon Lohengrin, who arrives in a swan boat. Lohengrin jousts with Elsa's accuser, Telramund, and defeats him, thus proving Elsa's innocence.

Wagner splits the violin sections into eight parts, all of which play in an extremely high register. These *divisi* violins present the delicate ethereal music of the Grail, the mythical cup into which the blood of Jesus flowed while he was on the Cross. The music expresses both Elsa's star-crossed love for Lohengrin (and his for her), as well as the exquisitely unattainable perfection of the Grail.

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## GABRIELLA SMITH

### ONE for Orchestra [First Symphony Project Commission] (World Premiere)



**COMPOSER:** born December 26, 1991, Berkeley, California

**WORK COMPOSED:** 2021

**WORLD PREMIERE:** January 8-10, 2022 by the Santa Rosa Symphony, under the direction of Francesco Lecce-Chong, at the Green Music Center's Weill Hall in Rohnert Park, California

**WORK COMMISSIONED:** First Symphony Project donors from the Santa Rosa and Eugene symphonies

**INSTRUMENTATION:** 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, bass drum, 2 suspended cymbals, glockenspiel, marimba, 3 resonant metal objects pitched in F, several metal objects with varying degrees of resonance, tala wands (or hot rods), vibraphone and strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 30 minutes

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

Composer/environmentalist Gabriella Smith has made an international name for herself with music hailed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as “high-voltage and wildly imaginative.” Clive Paget, writing for *Musical America*, declares Smith possesses “the coolest, most exciting, most inventive new voice I’ve heard in ages.”

In June 2021, Smith released her first full-length album, *Lost Coast*, with cellist Gabriel Cabezas. The Santa Rosa Symphony performed her 2016 work, *Rust*, on its October 2021 concert.

In a recent interview, Smith expressed her gratitude for Music Director Francisco Lecce-Chong's First Symphony Project, which has afforded her the rare chance to write a large-scale multi-movement orchestral work that will

be performed by the Santa Rosa and Eugene symphonies. “It’s challenging to get a commission for an orchestra piece generally,” she explains. “I’ve never had the opportunity to write a symphony before.”

Smith originally planned to write one large movement “because I like building big arcs,” but as the work proceeded, “the idea of four movements started to appeal to me more.” Structurally, **ONE** is similar to a typical 19th-century symphony; the opening and closing movements are large and expansive. Smith has also included a slow movement and “a kind of scherzo,” which references the scherzo from Beethoven’s *Eroica*.

“I really like the *Eroica* and the energy of that movement,” Smith explains. “My third movement takes the character of Beethoven’s scherzo and makes it even more manic; the music distorts and comes back to it constantly throughout.”

Nods to Beethoven and symphonic architecture notwithstanding, the sound of this music is wholly Smith’s own. “I like the idea of constantly playing with references to older forms while also being new.”

A decidedly “new” component of **ONE** is the list of unconventional percussion instruments Smith requires. In the score, she calls for “metal objects with varying degrees of resonance,” and encourages players to be creative. A suggested list includes metal mixing bowls, pots, pans, lids, cheese graters, metal water bottles, machine parts or tin cans.

“This piece is called **ONE**, which is both a reference to Symphony No. 1, but also the culmination of a lot of what I spent time thinking about last summer,” says Smith. “The title is a reminder that we humans are only one of millions of species on this planet – each of which plays an important role in the functioning of a healthy ecosystem – and we need to come together as one in order to fix the imbalance humans have created. We forget that we’re only one part of this amazing ecosystem. It’s about the whole and all the parts and how they interact. When I think about the connection between environmentalism and my music, the orchestra itself is a good metaphor.

“This piece is about climate change and climate solutions, but I wanted to write something that was about getting excited about being involved in the climate movement and the climate solutions,” Smith continues. “I wanted to bring the joy of environmentalism to the music, not the despair.”

While Smith’s music is inspired by environmental concerns, it is not programmatic; there are no depictions of storms or floods or fires. “I write emotions rather than specific ideas of environmentalism in my music,” says Smith.

Since the music evokes emotional states rather than specific images, each listener will experience the music differently. “Listening can be so personal; it becomes about the listener’s journey rather than the composer’s intent. I’d like people to take away the bigger concept, rather than a specific moment.”

# LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

## Piano Concerto No. 5, *Emperor*



**COMPOSER:** born December 16, 1770, Bonn; died March 26, 1827, Vienna

**WORK COMPOSED:** 1809. Dedicated to Beethoven's patron and student, Archduke Rudolph.

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Johann Philipp Christian Schulz led the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig on Nov. 28, 1811, with Friedrich Schneider at the piano.

**INSTRUMENTATION:** solo piano, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 38 minutes

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

In May 1809, Napoleon's troops attacked the city of Vienna, and throughout the following summer, the city shook with mortar fire. Ludwig van Beethoven, whose hearing was severely impaired, suffered both the stress of living under attack and constant painful assaults on his ears. In July, he wrote his publisher, "Since May 4th I have produced very little coherent work, at most a fragment here and there. The whole course of events has in my case affected both body and soul ... What a destructive, disorderly life I see and hear around me: nothing but drums, cannons, and human misery in every form." Despite the traumatic conditions, Beethoven continued to compose, producing what is arguably the most popular piano concerto ever written.

It is not clear how "Emperor" came to be associated with Beethoven's final piano concerto, although there is an apocryphal story about a French officer who, upon hearing the work performed in Vienna in 1812, exclaimed, "C'est l'Empereur!" If, as many have assumed, the emperor in question refers to Napoleon, Beethoven, suffering under Napoleon's continuous bombardment, would certainly have disapproved.

By this point in his compositional career, Beethoven's penchant for innovation in the opening measures of his concertos had become a signature, and the Fifth is no exception. After an introductory orchestral chord, the piano enters with a cadenza. Cadenzas, unaccompanied virtuoso passages filled with scales and trills created from fragments of thematic material, usually appear at the close of a movement. By opening the concerto with a cadenza full of musical foreshadowing, Beethoven telegraphs the themes and ideas of the opening movement to the listener. The seamlessness of the opening movement gives listeners a sense of inevitability, as if the music could unfold in no other way. This semi-subversive cadenza acts as a subliminal suggestion, planting the basic elements of later themes in our ears without our noticing.

In the Adagio un poco mosso, listeners may recognize the opening notes of Leonard Bernstein's song *Somewhere* from *West Side Story*. We can picture Beethoven, surrounded by aural and emotional chaos, escaping from the turmoil of his surroundings into an ethereal sound world. All too soon Beethoven brings us back to earth as the whole orchestra drops down a half-step, from B to B-flat; it sustains that note while the piano storms into the Rondo with renewed vigor. Piano and orchestra execute a series of variations on this theme, each more elaborate than the next. The playful, humorous aspects of Beethoven's personality reveal themselves here in the "false ending," abrupt key changes and generally buoyant mood throughout.

In the review of its premiere, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reported that "[the audience] could hardly content itself with the ordinary expressions of recognition" in their excitement at hearing Beethoven's greatest piano concerto.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Ms. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today" (now heard on American Public Media).

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