



ABOUT THE MUSIC

Beethoven's Ninth

December 3, 4 & 5, 2022

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Soul Force



COMPOSER: born December 8, 1981, New York City

WORK COMPOSED: 2015. Commissioned by The Dream Unfinished, a benefit for civil rights.

WORLD PREMIERE: James Blachly conducted the first performance on July 17, 2015, at the Salvation Army's Centennial Memorial Temple in New York City.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones (1 doubling bass trombone), tuba, timpani, anvil, bass drum, brake drum, chain, cowbells, crash cymbal, frame drum, glockenspiel, hi-hat, kick drum, ride cymbal, snare drum, temple blocks, tom toms, whip, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 8 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

For the past several seasons, the Santa Rosa Symphony has presented works by the acclaimed composer Jessie Montgomery. In this concert, we continue showcasing Montgomery's innovative voice. Her work combines classical language with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, language, and social justice. The resulting music has earned Montgomery rave reviews for her "vibrantly inventive original works for strings" (ClassicsToday.com) and numerous awards, including the ASCAP Foundation's Leonard Bernstein Award. Montgomery's works are performed frequently around the world by leading musicians and ensembles. In May 2021, Montgomery began her three-year appointment as the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Since 1999, Montgomery has been affiliated with The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African-American and Latinx string players, and has served as composer-in-residence for the Sphinx Virtuosi, the Organization's flagship professional touring ensemble. She was awarded a generous MPower grant to assist in the development of her 2016 debut album, *Strum: Music for Strings* (Azica). In 2019, the New York Philharmonic selected Montgomery as one of the featured composers for its Project 19, which marks the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment granting American women the right to vote.

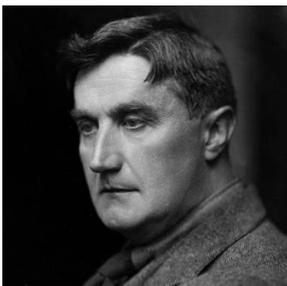
“*Soul Force* is a one-movement symphonic work which attempts to portray the notion of a voice that struggles to be heard beyond the shackles of oppression,” Montgomery writes. “The music takes on the form of a march which begins with a single voice and gains mass as it rises to a triumphant goal.

“Drawing on elements of popular African-American musical styles such as big-band jazz, funk, hip-hop, and R+B, the piece pays homage to the cultural contributions, the many voices, which have risen against aggressive forces to create an indispensable cultural place.

“I have drawn the work’s title from Dr. Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech in which he states: ‘We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.’”

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Flos Campi [Flower of the Field]: Suite for Viola, Orchestra and Chorus



COMPOSER: born October 12, 1872, Down Ampney, England; died August 26, 1958, London

WORK COMPOSED: Written for and dedicated to violist Lionel Tertis in 1925

WORLD PREMIERE: Sir Henry Wood led the Queen’s Hall Orchestra with violist Lionel Tertis and singers from the Royal College of Music on October 10, 1925 in London.

INSTRUMENTATION: solo viola, small SATB wordless chorus, flute (doubling piccolo), oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, celesta, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 20 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

“[Ravel] ... paid me the compliment of telling me that I was the only pupil who ‘n’écrit pas de ma musique’ [didn’t write my music].” – Ralph Vaughan Williams

In the winter of 1907-08, Ralph Vaughan Williams traveled to Paris to study composition with Maurice Ravel. For the next three months, Vaughan Williams, who was three months older than his teacher, undertook an intensive course of study; the two men met several times a week and Vaughan Williams later credited Ravel for helping him find a clearer, less dense, coloristic approach to orchestration. A casual survey of Vaughan Williams’ music bears out the truth of Ravel’s comment, quoted above, that Vaughan Williams, of all his students, did not imitate the French composer’s style.

Vaughan Williams’s music cannot be easily categorized. His best-known early works – *The Lark Ascending* and *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, for example – have a pastoral, dreamy, folk-music-laden quality. Vaughan Williams’ later works sound entirely different; the raw power, fury, and consummate use of orchestral timbres in the Fourth Symphony, for example, sounds worlds away from the style of the earlier music.

Flos Campi, written in 1925, occupies a category of its own. This unusual work, a quasi-concerto for solo viola, chorus, and orchestra, reflects Ravel's tutelage, particularly its use of wordless chorus phonating on the syllable "Ah," (Ravel used a wordless chorus in *Daphnis et Chloé*), as well as the subtle shadings of its harmonies. But the overall harmonic language is both unexpected and unique; nothing else in Vaughan Williams' catalog sounds quite like it.

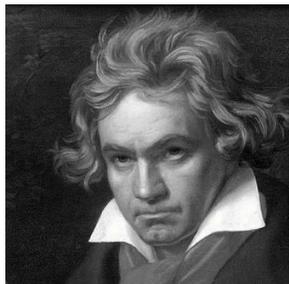
Vaughan Williams used texts from the Biblical Song of Songs as his inspiration for this exotic – and in places erotic – love song. Each of *Flos Campi's* six sections, played without pause, is paired with a particular quotation from the Song of Songs. In the original program notes, Vaughan Williams included these quotes, in Latin, for the audience. In his third-person notes for a 1927 performance of *Flos Campi*, Vaughan Williams explained how the music was received:

"When this work was first produced two years ago, the composer discovered that most people were not well enough acquainted with the Vulgate (or perhaps even its English equivalent) to enable them to complete for themselves the quotations from the Canticum Canticorum [Song of Songs]. Even the title and the source of the quotations gave rise to misunderstanding. The title *Flos Campi* was taken by some to connote an atmosphere of buttercups and daisies, whereas in reality 'flos Campi' is the Vulgate equivalent of the Rose of Sharon (*Ego flos campi, et lilium convallium*: "I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valleys.") The Biblical source of the quotations also gave rise to the idea that the music had an ecclesiastical basis. This was not the intention of the composer."

1. Lento. ("As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples, for I languish for love.")
2. Andante con moto. ("For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.")
3. Lento, senza misura. ("I sought him whom my soul loveth, but I found him not. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, tell him that I am sick from love. Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? That we may seek him with thee.")
4. Moderato alla Marcia. ("Behold his bed which is Solomon's, three score valiant men are about it. They all hold swords, being experts in war.")
5. Andante quasi lento. ("Return, Shulamite! Return, return that we may look upon thee. How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter.")
6. Moderato tranquillo. ("Set me as a seal upon thine heart.")

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 “Choral”



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

WORK COMPOSED: Beethoven made preliminary sketches in 1817-18, but most of the music was composed between 1822–24. Beethoven finished his Ninth Symphony in February 1824 and dedicated it to King Frederick William III of Prussia.

WORLD PREMIERE: Beethoven conducted the first performance on May 7, 1824, at the Kärntnerthor Theater in Vienna.

INSTRUMENTATION: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass soloists, four-part mixed chorus, piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals triangle and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 70 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The Ninth Symphony extends beyond the realm of the concert hall and has permeated Western culture on many levels, including socio-political and commercial arenas. The music of the Ninth, particularly the “Ode to Joy” melody of the final movement, is so familiar to us that it has lost its unique character and taken on the quality of folk music; that is, it has shed its “composed” identity as a melody written by Ludwig van Beethoven and simply exists within the communal ear of our collective consciousness.

While some classical works are inextricably linked to the time in which they were written, Beethoven’s profound musical statements about freedom, equality, and humanity resonate just as powerfully today as they did at the Ninth’s premiere. This was evident to the entire world just over 30 years ago, when Leonard Bernstein conducted an international assembly of instrumentalists and singers in a historic performance of Beethoven’s Ninth at East Berlin’s Schauspielhaus (now Konzerthaus) on December 22, 1989, three days after the fall of the Berlin Wall. To emphasize the historic event, Bernstein substituted the word “freedom” for “joy” in the famous lyrics by the poet Friedrich Schiller in the final movement. The performance was broadcast on television worldwide, attracting more than 200 million viewers.

By 1822, Beethoven was completely deaf and emotionally isolated. Five years earlier, at the age of 47, he had written in his journal, “Before my departure for the Elysian fields I must leave behind me what the Eternal Spirit has infused into my soul and bids me complete.” Alone and embittered, Beethoven focused almost exclusively on his musical legacy.

The lofty salute to the human spirit expressed in Schiller’s poem *An die Freude* (To Joy) had resonated with Beethoven for many years; in 1790 he set a few lines in a cantata written to commemorate the death of Emperor Leopold II; he also included portions of Schiller’s poem in his opera *Fidelio*. “The search for a way to express joy,” as Beethoven described it, was the subject of his final symphony. To that end, Beethoven edited and arranged Schiller’s lines to suit his musical and dramatic needs, using a melody from the Choral Fantasy he had written 20 years earlier.

The symphony opens with the strings sounding a series of hollow open chords, neither major or minor, which are harmonically ambiguous – what key is this? The fifths build into a massive statement featuring a weighty dotted rhythmic theme. The power and intensity of this movement foreshadows the finale.

As was his wont, Beethoven broke with symphonic convention by writing a second-movement scherzo. The music bursts forth with dramatic string octaves and pounding timpani. The main theme, a contrapuntal fugue, gives way to a demure wind melody. Underneath its playful simplicity, the barely contained agitation of the scherzo pulses in the strings, like a racehorse pawing at the starting gate.

In a symphony synonymous with innovation, Beethoven's most significant departure from convention is the inclusion, for the first time, of a chorus and vocal soloists in a formerly exclusively instrumental genre. The cellos and basses play an instrumental recitative, later sung by the baritone, which is followed by the unaccompanied "Joy" melody. Beethoven then presents several instrumental variations, including a triumphal brass fanfare. The baritone soloist introduces Schiller's poem with words of Beethoven's: "O friends, not these tones; instead, let us strike up more pleasing and joyful ones." The chorus repeats the last four lines of each stanza as a refrain, followed by the vocal quartet. A famous interlude, the Turkish March, follows (this music was considered "Turkish" because of the inclusion of the triangle, cymbals and bass drum, exotic additions to the orchestra of Beethoven's time). After a number of variations, the chorus returns with a monumental concluding double fugue.

© 2022 Elizabeth Schwartz

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. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media).

NOTE: These program notes are for Santa Rosa Symphony patrons and other interested readers. Any other use is forbidden without specific permission from the author, who may be contacted at classicalmusicprogramnotes.com.