

Barry Shiffman, *artistic director*  
 Osvaldo Golijov, *composer-in-residence*

28  
june

THURSDAY

8 PM

**JAMES EHNES, *violin***  
**ANDREW ARMSTRONG, *piano***

Pre-concert talk, 7 PM

**Beethoven Sonatas**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

**VIOLIN SONATA NO. 3 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 12 NO. 3 (1797-98)**

Allegro con spirito  
 Adagio con molt' espressione  
 Rondo: Allegro molto

**VIOLIN SONATA NO. 5 IN F MAJOR, OP. 24, 'SPRING' (1800-01)**

Allegro  
 Adagio molto espressivo  
 Scherzo: Allegro molto  
 Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

:: INTERMISSION ::

**VIOLIN SONATA NO. 8 IN G MAJOR, OP. 30 NO. 3 (1801-02)**

Allegro assai  
 Tempo di minuetto, ma molto moderato e grazioso  
 Allegro vivace

**VIOLIN SONATA NO. 10 IN G MAJOR, OP. 96 (1812, with later revisions)**

Allegro moderato  
 Adagio espressivo—  
 Scherzo: Allegro  
 Poco allegretto

*This concert is sponsored in part by the generosity of Mary Malone.*

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Pencil drawing of Beethoven was made in Mödling, near Vienna, by August von Kloeber (1793-1864)

### VIOLIN SONATA NO. 3 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 12 NO. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven (b. Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; d. Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827) *Composed 1797-98; 19 minutes*

Why Beethoven turned so enthusiastically to the violin sonata—he wrote eight of his ten violin sonatas in the four years after 1798—reflects the ready market he found for chamber music among the growing middle-class Viennese, increasingly interested in music. No one commissioned the sonatas. Beethoven followed the convention of the time (no doubt also with an eye on the market) by issuing his earliest collection, the three Op. 12 sonatas, as accompanied sonatas ‘for pianoforte with violin accompaniment.’ But the truth was that in all ten, Beethoven created real duo sonatas that called for considerable technical and musical expertise from both instruments.

Beethoven dedicated his three Op. 12 sonatas to Antonio Salieri, the composer and Imperial court Kapellmeister in Vienna, with whom he was studying at the time. They are the only music works he dedicated to any of his teachers, likely because Salieri was the only teacher in a position to offer work to his student. “Heaven help us!” Beethoven wrote mockingly to the publisher Hoffmeister, “What appointment at the Imperial court could be given to such a mediocre talent as myself.” (Salieri evidently agreed—or feared the competition—since no job offer was forthcoming.) Beethoven composed the three sonatas quickly. The E-flat sonata is the grandest of the three and the most purposeful. Its opening movement is a virtuoso vehicle for both violin and piano. The lyrical slow movement is one of Beethoven’s finest to this point, designed to explore the ability of the violin to sustain a singing melody. The finale is another virtuoso movement in which an energetic theme—it’s the only theme in the movement, after the manner of many a Haydn finale—is busily worked into a rondo, with a fugal conclusion.

#### BEETHOVEN AND THE VIOLIN

Of the three best-known classical Viennese composers, Beethoven was by far the worst violinist. Where Mozart and Haydn excelled, Beethoven sent a shudder down the spine of his listeners when he took up the fiddle. “Have mercy – quit!” one of his friends once exclaimed. His pupil Ferdinand Ries remembers the experience of playing Beethoven’s violin sonatas with the composer as painful. Beethoven would become wrapped up in the music, he said, not caring about fingering mistakes and intonation. In his early years in Vienna, Beethoven took violin lessons from his friend Wenzel Krumpholz and from Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the leading Viennese violinist of the day.

Earlier in his career, in Bonn, the young Beethoven was required to earn part of his living as a viola player in the Elector of Bonn’s orchestra. Then, throughout his time in Vienna, he continued to keep abreast of new developments in violin technique established in France by Viotti and his followers. When one of them, Pierre Baillot (1771-1842), came to Vienna in 1805, he arranged to meet the increasingly famous composer in a tavern. Baillot was then surprised to discover Beethoven’s genial side “although his portraits always show him to be so unattractive and almost fierce,” he said.

All the while, Beethoven had been working towards a concerto for the instrument. A fragment of his earliest concerto written in 1790 survives. A decade later, he wrote two short, charming *Romances* for violin and orchestra. Then came the Triple Concerto for violin, cello, piano and orchestra – another work that helped lay the groundwork for the violin concerto. Beginning in 1798, Beethoven took to the medium of the violin sonata with enthusiasm, completing nine of his ten violin sonatas before he started work on the concerto. On the score of the ninth, the “Kreutzer,” Beethoven wrote that the work is written “in a very concerto-like manner, almost like that of an actual concerto.” By 1806, Beethoven was ready to compose a full concerto. It was to become the first and the greatest of 19th century violin concertos and the yardstick by which all subsequent violin concertos are measured.

## VIOLIN SONATA NO. 5 IN F MAJOR, OP. 24, “SPRING”

*Composed 1800–01; 23 minutes*

Beethoven did not give his “Spring” Sonata its nickname, but it is altogether appropriate for this, one of the best-known of all classical violin sonatas. Beethoven wrote the work for one of his early patrons, the banker Moritz von Fries, between 1800 and 1801, along with a companion, the A-minor Sonata, Op. 23. The two sonatas could not be more different and it’s quite likely that Beethoven designed them to be played as a contrasting pair. Certainly, they were intended to be published as a pair and it was only a publisher’s error in formatting the violin part that led to the two sonatas appearing under separate opus

numbers. Where the A-minor opens in a characteristically confrontational manner, with terse, argumentative dialogue between the two instruments, the “Spring” presents an elegant, expansive melody, first on violin, with the piano in a supportive role, then, no less eloquently, on the piano, with the violin taking the secondary, accompanying role. The two instruments remain in equilibrium throughout the “Spring” Sonata. The F major tonality is Beethoven’s “pastoral” key and its radiant slow movement seems to look forward to the “Scene by the Brook” of the “Pastoral” Symphony, written some seven years later. There’s even a suggestion of birdsong—first from the violin, when the main theme appears for a second time, rich in Baroque decoration, then, again, after a minor-key variation, in the profusion of trills at the end. The whimsical Scherzo no sooner begins than it is over, though it does inject dynamic contrast before a genial Rondo concludes the Sonata. The nickname was given after Beethoven’s death.



Beethoven, the lover of nature, walking near Heiligenstadt, then a village close to Vienna. Around the time of his “Spring” sonata (1800–01) he wrote: “I live entirely in my music; and hardly have I completed one composition than I have already begun another. At my present rate of composing, I often produce three or four works at a time.” Now 30, he had published four violin sonatas, two for cello, and more than a dozen for piano.

## VIOLIN SONATA NO. 8 IN G MAJOR, OP. 30 NO. 3

*Composed 1801–02; 18 minutes*

Op. 30 No. 3 is not only the shortest of Beethoven’s violin sonatas but, in many ways, the most loveable. Its compact outer movements, vivacious and full of humor, enclose a minuet that looks both to the past and the future. The first movement opens with a brief whirlwind of a theme that generates many subsequent ideas, often with striking key changes, during which one instrument frequently completes the other’s thoughts. The middle movement serves as both minuet (“very moderate and graceful” in Beethoven’s direction) and slow movement, with two wide-ranging episodes that add expressive tenderness to a traditional dance form. Beethoven then follows with a witty rondo finale whose vein of rustic humor was already well mined by Haydn. Beethoven, however, goes a step further in his coda, sending the piano into distant E-flat, appearing to vamp with a series of chords, until the violin directs the theme squarely back to the home key of G.

## VIOLIN SONATA NO. 10 IN G MAJOR, OP. 96

*Composed 1812, with later revisions; 27 minutes*

Here, Beethoven has one last say on the partnership between violin and piano. He wrote the Sonata a decade after its predecessor, the “Kreutzer,” and dedicated it to Archduke Rudolph—



Beethoven Monument, Vienna 1880. The composer sits high above those viewing him in Beethovenplatz, surrounded by allegorical figures.

a musician who stimulated him to write not only one of his finest violin sonatas but also to dedicate more compositions to him than to any other person. He also wrote to the Archduke about the background to the generally reflective, often serene tone of this late sonata, poised at the end of his middle period and frequently foreshadowing the more inward probing of his late music. It was written for both the Archduke and the esteemed French violinist Pierre Rode then visiting Vienna, on December 29, 1812. "I had, in writing it, to consider the playing of Rode," the composer wrote of a violinist respected for his aristocratic manner, though now, late in his career, less than virtuoso playing. "In our finales we like rushing and resounding passages, but R does not agree with this."

The sonata opens with an unhurried, gentle conversation between violin and piano, prominently anchored by the trill that is integrated into its musical development. Beethoven explores the lyrical side of the two instruments with music that reflects and gently contemplates, rather than drives relentlessly towards a goal. The slow movement opens a door into the serene world of the late quartets and piano sonatas, coming to rest on a chord that leans into the Scherzo that follows without break. Compact and marked by its off-beat accents, the Scherzo is understated and balanced by a high-soaring trio. Its surprising ending in the major key again anticipates the movement that follows. This is an unassuming little theme with six wide-ranging, probing variations, full of surprises, sudden stops and strikingly adventurous twists and turns.

– Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca

## About the Artists

### JAMES EHNES, *violin*



James Ehnes has established himself as one of the foremost violinists of his generation. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, Mr. Ehnes is a favorite guest of the world's most respected conductors, and has performed with a lengthy list of orchestras, including the principal symphony orchestras of Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, New York, and London. He has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including a Gramophone Award for his live recording of the Elgar Concerto with the Philharmonia Orchestra. His recording of the Korngold, Barber and Walton violin concertos won a Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Soloist Performance and a JUNO award for Best Classical Album of the Year. Mr. Ehnes began violin studies at the age of four, became a protégé of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin at age nine, made his orchestral debut with Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal at age 13 and graduated from The Juilliard School in 1997, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music.

### ANDREW ARMSTRONG, *piano*



Praised by critics for his passionate expression and dazzling technique, the pianist Andrew Armstrong has delighted audiences around the world. His orchestral engagements have seen him perform a sprawling repertoire of more than fifty concertos. He often collaborates with quartets, including the Elias, Alexander, American, and Manhattan quartets and has been a member of the Caramoor Virtuosi, Boston Chamber Music Society, Seattle Chamber Music Society and the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players. Mr. Armstrong's debut solo CD featuring Rachmaninoff and Mussorgsky received great critical acclaim: "I have heard few pianists play [Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Sonata*], recorded or in concert, with such dazzling clarity and confidence." (*American Record Guide*) He followed that success with a disc on Cordelia Records of works by Chopin, Liszt and Debussy, and the world's premier recording of Bielawa's *Wait* for piano and drone. Additionally, Mr. Armstrong has released several award-winning recordings with his longtime recital partner James Ehnes, and the duo has recently released Beethoven's Sonatas Nos. 6 and 9 to stellar reviews, *Gramophone's* Editor's Choice, and *Sunday Times's* Disc of the Week.