Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 -1827)
Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61 (1806)

Ludwig van Beethoven's only violin concerto is truly iconoclastic. Written during a particularly productive time for the composer, it was composed hurriedly and completed just two days before the premiere. Franz Clement, violin prodigy and a close friend of Beethoven, was forced to sight-read the staggeringly difficult piece in concert. After mixed reviews, the concerto was shuttered into obscurity until 1844 when Felix Mendelssohn conducted the piece with the Philharmonic Society of London and twelve-year-old violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. Since then, it has been considered one of the great concertos of the 19th century, requiring a soloist with both intense technical skill and musical intelligence.

The concerto begins somewhat strangely with five gentle beats from the timpani. Although it could at first be mistaken for an incidental interjection between woodwind melodies, soon the violins imitate this same four-beat motif. The drumbeat motif is repeated throughout the first movement, sometimes with a fifth resolving note, until it becomes an integral part of the main melody. As in his third symphony, Beethoven's compositions often verge on obsessiveness in their repetitive nature, but the drumbeat motif here is balanced beautifully with a fantastical violin solo that quickly reaches the highest stratosphere of the instrument's range. The second movement, Larghetto, lets the violin shine with minimal orchestral accompaniment and launches immediately into the robust, cheery finale.

Symphony No. 3 in E flat Major, Op. 55 (Eroica) (1805)

When Beethoven's third symphony premiered in 1805, it sounded like nothing the world had heard before. Audiences at that time, like those today, had specific expectations regarding orchestral concerts; the average length and sound level were particularly important. Eroica was twice as long as any symphony by Beethoven's predecessors; the first movement alone is nearly 20 minutes long. It was the loudest, most bold, dramatic, in-your-face music in the classical music canon. Eroica changed the notion of what a symphony can and should be; many music historians view it as the turning point between the Classical and Romantic eras. Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Wagner, Strauss, Mahler, and many more composed their life's work on the shoulders of Beethoven's symphonies, starting with Eroica.

The piece begins with two E flat chords, followed by a simple arpeggio melody in the cellos. Although the first movement is massive in scope and unprecedented in musical drama, it follows a strict Classical-era sonata form. Beethoven introduces a new theme in the oboe in the rather meaty development section, which was unusual but not unheard of at the time. More inventive is the “false start” in the horns just before the recapitulation. And of course, Beethoven's obsessive nature is apparent as he repeats dissonant chords, almost reminiscent of a child stomping their foot on the ground. The second movement is equally intense: an epic, unrelenting funeral march. Beethoven introduces the listener to a new level of musical drama as the orchestra mourns the death of a hero. Two happy interludes are allowed, but the movement ends with heavy grief nonetheless. Another innovation from Beethoven was the addition of a third horn player to the symphony, which he puts to good use in the much-needed respite of the light-hearted Scherzo with a brilliant hunting horn trio. The finale is a classic theme and variations, utilizing a theme Beethoven had used several times before (most notably in his ballet The Creatures of Prometheus). Here, the composer shows the extraordinary depth of his skill as the orchestra moves seamlessly between virtuosic solos, a dance section, a bass-line fugue, and even a hymn. The piece ends with a magnificent coda and a triumphant burst from the horns.

Reunion: Beethoven 3
Sunday, November 17 2019, 3pm
North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, Skokie
Larry Rachleff conductor
David Perry violin

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)
Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61
I. Allegro ma non troppo
II. Larghetto
III. Rondo. Allegro

Intermission

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)
Symphony No. 3 in E flat Major, Op. 55 (Eroica)
I. Allegro con brio
II. Marcia funebre. Adagio assai
III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace
IV. Finale. Allegro molto

Performance time approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes

Chicago Phil Reunion: In the Foyer
Celebrate Chicago Philharmonic's 30 years by walking down memory lane with the display of images and materials in the foyer.

30 years
Chicago Philharmonic
Larry Rachleff, conductor
Larry Rachleff is the Walter Kris Hubert Professor of Orchestral Conducting and Music Director of the Shepherd School Symphony and Chamber Orchestras. From its inception, he was the Music Director and Principal Conductor of Chicago Philharmonic for 23 years. He recently completed 21 years as Music Director of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, and formerly served as Music Director of the San Antonio Symphony. Additionally, he served as Artistic Advisor of the Grand Rapids Symphony.

“A take-charge maestro who invests everything he conducts with deep musical understanding” (Chicago Tribune), Mr. Rachleff is in constant demand as a guest conductor. Recent engagements include the Utah Symphony, Houston Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, Dayton Philharmonic, and Toledo Symphony among many others. Summer festival engagements include Tanglewood, Aspen, Interlochen, Chautauqua, Brevard Music Festival, Music Academy of the West, Opera Theatre of Lucca, Italy, and the Grand Teton Music Festival. In 1993, he was selected as one of four American conductors to lead the Cleveland Orchestra at Carnegie Hall under the mentorship of Pierre Boulez. In Fall 2017, Rachleff was inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame.

A former faculty member of Oberlin Conservatory, where he was Music Director of Orchestras and Conductor of the Contemporary Ensemble, he also served as conductor of the Opera Theatre at the University of Southern California. He has conducted and presented masterclasses all over the world, including the Chopin Academy in Warsaw, the Zurich Hochschule, the Sydney and Queensland, Australia conservatories, the Juilliard School, the New England Conservatory, and Royal Northern College in the United Kingdom.

Rachleff is an enthusiastic advocate of public school music education. He has conducted All-State orchestras and festivals across the United States as well as throughout Europe and Canada. He has also served as principal conducting teacher for the American Symphony Orchestra League, the Conductors’ Guild, and the International Workshop for Conductors in the Czech Republic.

As a dedicated advocate of contemporary music, Mr. Rachleff has collaborated with leading composers including Samuel Adler, the late Luciano Berio, George Crumb, Michael Daugherty, and John Harbison among others.

Larry Rachleff holds honorary doctorates in music from both Roger Williams University, and Providence College, Rhode Island. He resides in Houston with his wife, soprano Susan Lorette Dunn, and their son, Sam.

David Perry, violin
Violinist David Perry enjoys an international career as a chamber musician, soloist, and teacher. Mr. Perry has performed in Carnegie Hall and most of the major cultural centers of North and South America, Europe, and the Far East. Mr. Perry joined the Pro Arte Quartet and the UW-Madison faculty in 1995, and was granted a Paul Collins Endowed Professorship in 2003. The Pro Arte celebrated its Centennial Anniversary in 2011-2012. Composers commissioned for the celebration included William Bolcom, John Harbison, Pierre Jalbert, Walter Mays, Benoit Mernier, and Paul Schoenfield.

Former concertmaster of the Aspen Chamber Symphony, Mr. Perry was on the artist-faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School for nearly two decades and continues to tour the U.S. annually as founding violinist of the Aspen String Trio. Often appearing as concertmaster of the Chicago Philharmonic since its beginning, he has been a frequent guest concertmaster with such groups as the China National Symphony Orchestra, Ravinia Festival Orchestra, American Sinfonietta, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Active with Orpheus since the late 1980s, he may be heard on many of the ensemble’s Deutsche Grammophon recordings. Mr. Perry’s chamber and solo recordings can be found on the Delos, Naxos and Albany labels. He performs in the summers as first violinist of the Midsummer’s Music Festival in Door County, Wisconsin.

A 1985 U. S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, his first prizes have included the International D’Angelo Competition, National MTNA Auditions, and the Juilliard Concerto Competition.

A native of Illinois, his early training was with John Kendall and Almita Vamos, followed by studies with Dorothy DeLay, Paul Kantor, and Masao Kawasaki at the Juilliard School. Thanks to the Nathan McClure Opportunities Fund, Mr. Perry plays on a 1711 Franciscus Gobetti violin, arranged by Chancellor John Wiley and the UW Foundation.