

# program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

## **Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93 (1811-1812)**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN ■ 1770-1827

At that time he wrote his Eighth Symphony (he was 42), Beethoven was immensely fond of a certain rough fun and practical jokes, and Sir George Grove believed that “this symphony, perhaps more than any other of the nine, is a portrait of the author in his daily life; the more it is studied and heard, the more will he be found there in his most natural and characteristic personality.” Certainly the Symphony No. 8 presents a different view of Beethoven than do its immediate neighbors, and it is this very contrast that helps to bring the man and his creations more fully into focus.

The compact sonata form of the first movement begins without preamble. The opening theme, dance-like if a bit heavy-footed, appears immediately in vigorous triple meter; the second theme is built from short sequentially rising figures. The development section is concerned with a quick, octave-skip motive and a rather stormy treatment of the main theme. The second movement is a sonatina — a sonata form without a development section — based on a ticking theme in the woodwinds (intended to imitate the metronome recently invented by Beethoven’s friend Johann Nepomuk Mälzel) and an impeccable music-box melody presented by the violins. The third movement is in the archaic form of the minuet; its central trio features horns and clarinets. The finale is joyous in

mood and sonata in form, with enough repetitions of the main theme thrown in to bring it close to a rondo.

## ***Bertoia Sound Sculptures for Percussion and Orchestra (2017)***

DOUGLAS OVENS ■ b. 1953

*World Premiere. Commissioned by the Allentown Symphony.*

Composer, percussionist and teacher Douglas Ovens earned his bachelor’s degree at San Francisco State University and his master’s and doctorate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has served as Chair of the Music Department at Muhlenberg College since 1994; in 1996-1997 he held the College’s Donald B. Hoffman Research Fellowship, which allowed him to devote that time to creating new works for electronic percussion controllers. He spent October 1998 in Japan on a fellowship from the Atlantic Center for the Arts and Japan Foundation, and taught composition at the Accademia dell’ Arte in Arezzo, Italy during summer 2011. Ovens has written some one hundred works in media ranging from orchestral compositions to incidental music to electronic pieces for dance. His compositions have won awards from the Percussive Arts Society, Auros Group for New Music and University of California, and been selected for performance at the Charles Ives Center for American Music. Douglas Ovens’ music is recorded on four internationally released CDs.

Designer and sculptor Harry Bertoia (1915-1978) was born in Italy, moved to Michigan as a teenager, studied at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in suburban Detroit (where his fellow students included architect Eero Saarinen and designers Charles and Ray Ames), and made his reputation in the 1940s designing furniture. In 1950, he moved to the Lehigh Valley to develop new designs for Knoll, Inc., a pioneer in contemporary furnishings, who introduced the Bertoia Chair Collection in 1952. Bertoia soon thereafter began focusing on metal sculptures, producing several dozen large public pieces before developing his “tonal sculptures” in 1960, constructed from assemblies of rods varying in length from a few inches to twenty feet whose motions produce a wide range of sounds. He collected these “Sonambient” sculptures (a term he coined) in a renovated barn in Barto, Pennsylvania, gave occasional concerts for guests, and recorded eleven albums of their sounds. (The “Sonambient” barn and other sites may be visited on a Bertoia Studio Tour [bertoiastudio.com].) Harry Bertoia’s remarkable creative work was recognized with honorary degrees from Muhlenberg College and Lehigh University and exhibits at the Allentown Art Museum.

Douglas Owens wrote of his *Bertoia Sound Sculptures* for Percussion and Orchestra, composed in 2017 on a commission from the Allentown Symphony, “I am well-acquainted with Bertoia’s work and, having been a percussionist my whole life, have spent much time exploring sounds derived from sources other than traditional musical instruments. Bertoia’s ‘Sound Sculptures’ invite interaction ... they sit there being beautiful but also holding possibility. Setting the sculpture in motion unleashes a wash of resonant sound. Each of the sculptures

produces sounds that are determined by the materials of which it is made — brass, bronze, beryllium copper. Each different metal has a distinctive ‘sound color.’ (Musicians often use the French word ‘timbre’ for this.)

“In writing the piece, I embraced the idea of many individual sound sources. The traditional approach in orchestral writing has been to deal with all of the violins as two big groups: Violins I and Violins II. Similarly, the violas, celli and basses are all usually treated as sections, except in rare cases in which one player is a soloist. In *Bertoia Sound Sculptures*, I have made each musician a soloist for much of the time, contributing one note to an emerging cloud of sound or elaborate melody.

“The work is in one movement of about ten minutes. After the opening ‘clouds’ described above is a ‘cadenza,’ a section for soloist (me) playing the various sculptures. From this cadenza, a rhythmic pattern launches a return of the orchestra, this time featuring sounds from the sculptures as a part of the orchestral fabric. This builds to an accompanied cadenza, a kind of drum solo with orchestral accompaniment. An orchestral melodic section announces the last part of the piece, a brief ‘scherzo’ that dissolves in sounds of harp, timpani and sculpture, each making an appearance as it takes its leave.”

## **Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra in C major, Op. 56, “Triple Concerto” (1803-1804)**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

“Everyone likes flattery; and when you come to Royalty you should lay it on with a trowel,” counseled the 19th-century British statesman Benjamin Disraeli.

He would have gotten no argument from Beethoven. When Rudolph, Archduke of Austria and titled scion of the Habsburg line, turned up among Beethoven's Viennese pupils, the young composer realized he had tapped the highest echelon of European society. Beethoven gave instruction in both piano and composition to Rudolph, who had a genuine if limited talent for music. Concerning flattery, the most important manner in which 19th-century composers could praise royalty was by dedicating one of their compositions to a noble personage. Beethoven wrote the Triple Concerto for Rudolph, who eventually became Archbishop Cardinal of Austria and remained a life-long friend and patron of the composer, and dedicated to him such important works as the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, "Lebewohl" and "Hammerklavier" Sonatas, Op. 96 Violin Sonata, "Archduke" Trio, *Missa Solemnis* and *Grosse Fuge*.

The "Triple" Concerto's first movement is a modified sonata design with a lengthy exposition and recapitulation necessitated by the many thematic repetitions. After a hushed and halting opening in the strings, the full orchestra takes up the main thematic material of the movement. The soloists enter, led, as usual throughout this Concerto, by the cello with the main theme. The second theme begins, again in the cello, with a snappy triad. Much of the remainder of the movement is given over to repetitions and figuration rather than to true motivic development. A sudden quickening of the tempo charges the concluding measures of the movement with flashing energy. The second movement is a peaceful song for the solo strings with elaborate embroidery for the piano. The finale is a strutting *Rondo alla Polacca* in the style of the Polish polonaise.

# ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

NOVEMBER 4 AND 5, 2017  
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

**DIANE M. WITTRY** MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93                      LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
Allegro vivace e con brio  
Allegretto scherzando  
Tempo di minuetto  
Allegro vivace

*Bertoia Sound Sculptures*                                      DOUGLAS OVENS  
for Percussion and Orchestra  
Percussion Soloist: Douglas Ovens

WORLD PREMIERE  
COMMISSIONED BY THE ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and                      LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
Orchestra in C major, Op. 56, "Triple Concerto"  
Allegro  
Largo —  
Rondo alla Polacca  
Eroica Trio  
Erika Nickrenz, piano  
Sara Parkins, violin  
Sara Sant'Ambrogio, cello