

# PENN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

*Presents*

*A Tale of Two Symphonies*

Thomas Hong, Conductor

Saturday, March 23, 2024

8:00 PM

Irvine Auditorium

University of Pennsylvania



**PennMusic**  
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

The Department of Music and the Student Activities Council Present:

# **PENN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

## *A Tale of Two Symphonies*

Thomas Hong, Conductor & Director

With thanks to the University of Pennsylvania Music Department

Dr. Timothy Rommen, Department Chair  
Dr. Michael Ketner, Director of Performance  
Isaac Shalit, Performance Operations Coordinator  
Diane Imboden, Communications Coordinator  
Eugene Lew, Director of Sound and Music Technology

Irvine Auditorium  
University of Pennsylvania  
March 23, 2024  
8:00pm



# Program

## Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Adagio molto - Allegro con brio
- II. Larghetto
- III. Scherzo. Allegro vivo
- IV. Allegro molto

(1770 - 1827)

## Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 73

Johannes Brahms

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Adagio non troppo
- III. Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)
- IV. Allegro con spirito

(1833 - 1897)

## About the Ensemble

The University of Pennsylvania Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1878 and is comprised of musicians from throughout the University community, primarily non-music majors. The ensemble rehearses for four hours each week and performs a diverse range of repertoire drawn from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth Centuries. The Penn Symphony Orchestra rehearses and performs in historic Irvine Auditorium on Penn's Campus. Due to the increased number of student participation, the ensemble has expanded to two ensembles with rotating/interchangeable personnel.



## About the Conductor

Hailed by Kurt Masur as “one of the most talented young conductors of his generation,” **THOMAS HONG** enjoys the distinction of being one of many successful protégés of the great Maestro. Having won titled positions with the Dallas, Pittsburgh, and Seattle Symphony Orchestras as well as Orchestre National de France, Hong has conducted countless concerts with those orchestras, ranging from classical, community, education and pops concerts. Presently, he is the

artistic director and conductor of the University of Pennsylvania Orchestras. Recent activities include being principal conductor for the inaugural season of the DSO on the “GO” series with the Dallas Symphony, performing in neighboring venues of the North Texas area, and a re-engagement with the Utah Symphony, where he was the conductor for the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition in Salt Lake City.

# PENN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## BEETHOVEN SYMPHONY NO. 2

Flute, Alyssia Liu (Rishi Dadlani, assistant) / Rebecca Lim  
Oboe, Daniel Koropeckyj-Cox / Nick Kwok  
Clarinet, Colin Ly / Gavin Kurdek  
Bassoon, Rick Barrantes\* / Alex Hill  
Horn, Anagha Gouuru (Evan Bretz, assistant) / Harold Litt  
Trumpet, Celeste Adler / Rob High\*  
Timpany, Avery Kirschbaum

### 1st Violins

Elliot Kim, Concertmaster / Bonnie Li  
Isaac Yan / Hannah Tsai  
Roberto Ligeralde / Daniel Da  
William Qi / Amy Hong  
Hannah Goldberg / Alan Hong  
Cece Petruconis / Aiwen Li  
Ryan Aihara / Gabriel Huang  
Aruli Pillai / Emily Li Wang  
Brinson Moore\*

### 2nd Violins

Michael Huang, Principal / Jason (Jaemyoung) Lee  
Eric Liu / Michelle Edavetta  
Sophie Rosales / Ian Lee  
Tianhao Luo / Angela Zhu  
Sophia Fu / Eric Cui  
Hannah Lee / Yam Felsenstein  
Ben Amidon\* / Isaac Balsan\*

### Violas

Henry Sywulak-Herr, Principal / Gavin Lee  
Liam Tan / Anna Chung  
Sidney Fitzgerald / Vidhu Bulumulla  
Dominick Kau / Jeremy Wong\*  
Isaac King\*

### Cello

Christine Kong, Principal / Sophie Sax  
Gabrielle Ryu / Thomas Sharrock  
Michelle Shi / Brianna Hess  
Andy Liu / Katie Kim

Melanie Hilman / Evan Jiang  
Marcela Reina\*

### Bass

Maria Evancho, Principal / Daniel Virgen  
Vishva Gajaraj / Josh Hadfield\*  
John Di Carlo\*

## BRAHMS SYMPHONY NO. 2

Flute, Rachel Wang (Kristine Huang, assistant) / Clara Ma  
Oboe, Luna Sato / Jonathan Hong  
Clarinet, Kyunghwan Kim (Sam Park, assistant) / Will Wang  
Bassoon, Judy Belland / Rick Barrantes\*  
Horn, Brian Herman (Anne Nye\*, assistant) / Ryan Yang / Evan Bretz / Harry Li  
Trumpet, Seamus Wang / Samy Antifit  
Trombone, Tyler Jenkins-Wong / Rishi Patel / Leo Zhou / Hunter Stufflebeam (bass)  
Tuba, Joseph Gould\*  
Timpani, Bill Priebe\*

### 1st Violins

Hannah Lee, Concertmaster / Daphnie Nie  
Julianna Cimillo / Jonah Baer  
Ethan Yu / Joey Wu  
Louis Dong / Gracie Zhang  
Kevin Zhou / Richard Xiong  
Maxine Moody / Leyla Robertson  
Darae Kang / Isaac Yang  
Henry Love / Ting-Wei Liao (Ernie)  
Elliot Kim / Brinson Moore\*

### 2nd Violins

Talia Coopersmith, Principal / Joy Onawola  
Jason Ren / Hertha Torre Gallego  
Victor Tsao / Kate Wong  
Kevin Xu / Sakyō Maeda  
Zayd Khan / Eva Gonzalez-Whitehead  
Lucas Schrier / Susan Zhang  
Ethan Fan / Sheridan Marsch

Ben Amidon\* / Isaac Balsan\*  
Isaac Yan

\*Guest Musician

## Viola

Autumn Cortright, Principal /  
Greg Kraynak  
Cynthia Dong / Rayan Jawa  
Madeline Chun / Nihar Ballamundi  
Emma Bethon / Justin Duong  
Affan Jabbar / Svanik Jaikumar  
Henry Sywulak-Herr / Jeremy Wong\*  
Isaac King\*

## Cello

Michael Tu, Principal /  
Samantha Martinez  
Leo Huang / Andy Liu  
Thomas Sharrock / Melanie Hilman  
Christine Kong / Marcela Reina\*  
Leo Kim / Evan Jiang  
Addie Olsen\* / Clarisse Hayden\*  
Hayden Kang\* / Noah Dharmawirya\*

## Bass

William Stewart, Principal /  
Daniel Virgen\*  
Alex Kalbach / Josh Hadfield\*  
John Di Carlo\*

# Program Notes

## **Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36**

Ludwig van Beethoven

The years 1801-02 marked the nadir of Beethoven's emotional life, as he grappled with the reality of his increasing and permanent deafness. His despair was total, and the prospect of suicide is clearly implied in the documentary evidence. Tumultuous and bitter family feuding entered into this cruel time, but the famous "Heiligenstadt Testament" records his final triumph over the depression and his resolve to live and compose. That he did, and soon received a prized engagement to compose an opera, and an important concert of his compositions followed shortly thereafter, as well. This historic concert featured his oratorio, Christ on the Mount of Olives, the First Symphony, the Third Piano Concerto (with the composer at the piano), and the Second Symphony. For such a grand and ingratiating work, the second unfortunately stands understandably in the shadow of later symphonies far more familiar to today's concert audiences. Nevertheless, it would be a serious mistake to relegate it to the realm of "youthful" works. Not at all a "farewell" to the eighteenth

century, as his First Symphony has sometimes been characterized, the second is the creation of a composer of genius who had already spent almost a decade in Vienna--the musical capital of Europe— successfully building his reputation as a powerful, formidable, and expressive composer primarily of piano and chamber music works. He had fast become the beloved composer of the corpus of works that still stands squarely at the center of his enduring reputation and popularity. Symphony No. 2 (composed largely during 1802) is yet again prima facie evidence of the ability of artists to soar above sorry personal circumstances and produce works that totally transcend the emotions of their peculiar state. Mozart was a case in point, and here in his Second Symphony, Beethoven has created a most sunny, cheerful and expansive exploration of optimism—all during his low moods grappling with his growing deafness.

This is not a lightweight work, though, for it totally prepares us for the monumental Third Symphony. It begins with a Haydn-like slow introduction that portends the scope of things to come. After several dramatic moments—some of which may remind us of jagged gestures in the Ninth Symphony, the introduction glides effortlessly into the cheerful opening. The themes are also Haydn-like, simple and often based on triads, but there is a decided difference in the intensity and brilliance in which Beethoven characteristically works out his material. It's clearly the Beethoven we all know and love. The ensuing *larghetto* is from the untroubled world of his contemporary, Franz Schubert—a mellifluous and tuneful affair that takes little of what we have come to expect in Beethoven's intense and often tragic slow movements. A string of ingratiating melodies, often involving warm, romantic clarinets, walks us along in a floating mood of serenity. The third movement, as one would expect, is a scampering scherzo, a modest little one at that, characterized by quick alternations of high and low, loud and soft, and frequent changes of instrumental color. The middle part is a leisurely, flowing affair that provides the requisite contrast to the bustling bookends of the form. The last movement is an expansive forward-looking exercise in the Beethoven style with which we are so familiar. It opens with a bumptious “hiccupping” theme that is unusual, to say the least. This is not the time nor place to explore various theories of its origin as an onomatopoeic rendition of Beethoven's infamous digestive problems. However, suffice it to say, it's clearly a case in point of the composer's well-known coarse sense of humor. All of this aside, whatever its origin, it provides perfect fodder for the composer's consummate skill in constructing a rousing finale out of almost any little musical idea. The movement drives to conclusion exhibiting most of the marvelous traits of the mature Beethoven, but to most listeners, in a relatively unfamiliar work.

## **Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 73**

**Johannes Brahms**

Simply put, the composers of the nineteenth century after Beethoven tended to divide themselves into two groups. The progressives were true “Romantics,” and were greatly influenced by the extra-musical ideas that were the subjects of contemporary literature, poetry, and painting, among others. They devised new genres, such as the tone poems of Smetana and Liszt, the music dramas of Wagner, and the characteristic piano pieces of Chopin. This music, to use a phrase still common among seekers of meaning in music, was about “something”—meaning something familiar to human existence

Others, Brahms most significantly, still adhered strongly to the musical philosophy that great music was simply about “itself,” and required no extra-musical references for complete and satisfying meaning. So, he and his ilk continued to write “pure” or “abstract” music, like sonatas and symphonies (a so-called symphony is just a sonata for orchestra). The example of Beethoven's music (in this tradition) loomed almost as overwhelming for Brahms, and he

waited for decades after reaching musical maturity to essay his first symphony, completing it in 1876, when he was forty-three years old. It garnered sufficient success to be deemed the “Tenth,” referencing Beethoven’s nine in that genre, although it bears more comparison with Beethoven’s fifth symphony.

Well, it didn’t take Brahms nearly so long to write his second symphony as it did the first, and the mood of the work is a strong contrast to that of the mighty seriousness of the first. That is not to say that the second is not without a gravitas that is an essential part of the composer’s musical (and his own, for that matter) personality. But, if anything, one could characterize this important work as “sunny.” It’s common to call it his “pastoral” symphony. That being said, it’s still Brahms, and therefore infused with melancholy—not tragedy, not sadness, just deep reflection upon the human condition. It was composed during the summer of 1877, while Brahms was vacationing in a particularly beautiful part of southern Austria, surrounded inspiring mountains and tranquil lakes. He certainly understood the work’s general cheerfulness, but playfully teased his publisher about the nature of the symphony by claiming that it was such a dark and gloomy work that the score should be edged in black. We know better, of course.

The first movement opens with a simple little four-note motive in the low strings that absolutely forms the core of the piece. Only a consummate craftsman like Brahms could do so much with such a simple idea. The motive pervades the movement, and it’s a cheerful and rewarding process to spot as many variants of it as the music unfolds. As soon as we hear that motive, romantic horns—evoking the bucolic setting—play another essential motive. We’ll hear a lot of each. The warmth and optimism of the opening has no sooner started, than unexpectedly there is a soft, menacing timpani roll and quiet, sinister passage in the trombones. Brahms explained, though he had intended to do without the trombones in the first movement, he couldn’t resist depicting the “black wings” constantly flapping above us all. Soon thereafter, the alert listener will spot Brahms’ famous “Cradle Song” melody appearing as a major melodic element in the movement. The middle of the movement is a vigorous working out of all that we have heard, including some startling real nastiness in the trombones, that remind us that all is not happiness and light. A varied review of all the familiar wraps up the movement, and we end calmly and securely in a soft chord of affirmation.

The second movement is one of Brahms’ loveliest creations, beginning with the cello section spinning out a long-breathed, elegant line. The lyricism continues with other equally attractive tunes, and after a short development, the movement ends as tranquilly and softly as does the first. The third movement is a graceful evocation of a lighthearted walk and scamper through the out of doors, to my mind. There are two contrasting sections that alternate: the first a gentle stroll—but almost slowly waltzing, and the second a rough, rather Beethoven-like scurry. Yet, for all the motion, this movement, too, like the first two, ends quietly.

After all of this placidity, the time has come to “let’er rip,” and the last movement opens in the strings with the quiet intensity of summer lighting on the horizon. We just know that this is going to be a romp, and it is. A few simple, memorable themes carry this thing along, and while it is tempting to track them as Brahms works them around and about—it’s not really about that process at all. It’s about his uncanny ability to build and release tension, to kick you about with unexpected accents, to cross and re-cross the meters as he builds a tight, and remarkable architecture that drives in a fury to the end. The so-called second theme becomes the primary element that relentlessly carries us to the final magnificent statement in the trumpets, and a blaze of a D major chord in the now optimistic trombones brings it all to a conclusion. There are few moments in all of music so glorious.



## UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

### **Penn Jazz Ensembles**

March 28, 2024 at 6:00 PM (Set 1) and 7:30 PM (Set 2)  
*Fisher-Bennett Hall - Rose Recital Hall*

### **Music in the Stacks: Penn Flutes**

March 29, 2024 at 1:30 PM  
*Holman Biotech Commons - Collaborative Classroom G16*

### **Music in the Pavilion: Perspectives on Bartók's Second Quartet**

*Featuring Daedalus Quartet*  
April 10, 2024 at 7:00 PM (pre-concert talk at 6:15 PM)  
*Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center - Kislak Center*

### **Opera and Musical Theater Workshop**

April 10, 2024 at 7:30 PM  
*Fisher-Bennett Hall - Rose Recital Hall*

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