

subito con forza **UNSUK CHIN (B. 1961)**

COMPOSED: 2020, on commission from BBC Radio 3, the Cologne Philharmonic (KölnMusik, for the “non bthvn project” 2020), and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra

WORLD PREMIERE: September 24, 2020, at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, with Klaus Mäkelä conducting Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. These concerts mark the first West Coast performances of the work

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, vibraphone, xylophone, marimba, crotales, tubular bells, large and small cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, snare drums (large, medium, small), tambourine, whip, güiro, pitched gongs, piano, and strings

DURATION: About 5 mins

THE BACKSTORY The first four seconds you probably know already: a sustained low C in the strings, *fortissimo*, that leaps to a ferocious F minor chord spread through the full orchestra. This is the instantly recognizable opening of Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Coriolan* Overture of 1807, but it is also the opening of *subito con forza* (suddenly with force), composed 213 years later, in 2020, by Unsuk Chin. After that, the pieces go their separate ways. Beethoven repeats the same idea twice again, changing the harmony, before launching into the simmering nervousness of the overture’s main theme. In Chin’s piece, that opening salvo is answered by the loud clatter of vibraphone, marimba, piano, and flutes (playing with flutter-tongue), a sound that recedes from *fortississimo* to *piano* and then yields to the first violins and double basses, five octaves distant from each other, playing *pianississimo* and with mutes—so practically inaudible. Clearly, it’s not the nineteenth century anymore, but Beethoven remains very much in our consciousness.

The music world was prepared to go into overdrive in December 2020 to mark the 250th anniversary of Beethoven’s birth, but a virus got in the way. For most orchestras and concert series, it would have translated into a denser-than-usual representation of Beethoven on programs, but a few organizations took a different tack. KölnMusik (Cologne Music) declared the Cologne Philharmonic Hall to be “a Beethoven-free zone”—just a half-hour from the composer’s native city of Bonn, no less—and announced a novel plan, called the “non bthvn project.” The organizers explained: “The point of departure is a not insignificant legacy from the great composer’s everyday life: when Beethoven was not even 30 years old, the first signs of a hearing problem appeared, which eventually led to the composer’s complete deafness. In order not to be cut off from all communication, he created the so-called conversation books, of which up to 400 are said to have accumulated over the years. They contain significant information about the reactions of his environment to what Beethoven said.”

More than 130 of these books survive, and KölnMusik, in association with various partners, commissioned twenty-five composers to write compositions engaging with ideas derived from them. Not all of the new works could be presented as hoped, due to pandemic issues, but Chin’s was unveiled a September ago in Amsterdam and has received multiple performances since.

THE MUSIC “I cannot and I do not need to describe my music,” Chin has declared. “You have to listen to it and everybody has to understand it in their own way. Everybody conceives it differently, yet I wish that every person who listens to my music, no matter how experienced they are with music, no matter where they come from and how old they are—that they feel something of my music, that there is no feeling of indifference.”

Nonetheless, she has provided a commentary about the work performed in this concert, explaining how it relates to the mission of the “non bthvn project.”:

“My new orchestral work [was] composed on the occasion of a certain anniversary in 2020. There are hidden allusions to Beethoven’s music, and it refers to his so-called Conversation Books, which the composer used to communicate with visitors once his hearing began to decline. Its content ranges

from the mundane to the profound, and is often enigmatic. In particular, I was “inspired” by the following sentence: ‘Major or minor. I am the winner.’ Beethoven’s struggle to communicate and his loss of hearing frequently resulted in an inner rage and frustration which may have found its reflection in the extreme range of his musical language, spanning emotions from volcano-like eruptions to utmost serenity. It tells profoundly and poignantly something indispensable about the human condition. This was a further inspiration for my piece, which is a homage for the arguably first modernist composer in musical history, a composer who constantly felt the urge to stretch boundaries of musical language, and whose quest for originality completely changed the course of music history.” —**James M. Keller**

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K.467 **JOANNES CHRISOSTOMUS WOLFGANG GOTTLIEB MOZART (1756–91)**

COMPOSED / WORLD PREMIERE: Primarily in February 1785 and completed by March 9. Mozart directed from the keyboard when the work was premiered on March 10 at the National Court Theatre (Burgtheater) in Vienna

SF SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES: FIRST—January 1956. Robert Casadesus was soloist, with Enrique Jordá conducting. MOST RECENT—April 2014. Garrick Ohlsson was soloist and Herbert Blomstedt conducted

INSTRUMENTATION: Solo piano, flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

DURATION: About 28 mins

THE BACKSTORY When Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart established himself in Vienna in 1781, he did so hoping to make a name for himself as a composer and as a pianist. He was supremely equipped to do both. The obvious intersection of Mozart’s two disciplines came in the composition of piano concertos, works he composed, in most cases, to spotlight his own talents as a performer. This was nothing new to his Vienna years; by that time he had already composed six piano concertos (including his concertos for two and for three pianos), not to mention a handful of others that were essentially piano-and-orchestra arrangements of movements by other composers. But with his arrival in Vienna Mozart’s livelihood depended on such pieces to a degree it had not before. As his acclaim as a performer increased, so did his production of piano concertos: He composed eleven of them between February 1784 and March 1786.

During the weeks in which he composed the C major Concerto in February and March 1785, Mozart had plenty on his plate. The musicologist Neal Zaslaw has described that span as “a period of twenty-seven days during which Mozart also taught private pupils, entertained his father, held a quartet party to play through with Joseph Haydn and his father some of the new quartets dedicated to Haydn, and participated in perhaps another dozen public and private concerts.”

THE MUSIC The opening movement of the C major Concerto lacks a tempo marking in the autograph manuscript, but when Mozart entered it in his catalogue he labeled it *Allegro maestoso*. At its outset the “maestoso” (majestic) indication seems strange, since the opening march music, marked piano, seems heard almost from a distance. It’s played by strings alone, though with the piano doubling the bass line, as was apparently common in the performance practice of Mozart’s time. At the theme’s repetition the full orchestra gets into the act, replete with trumpets and timpani, and finally the maestoso becomes a reality. Even so, a good deal of the writing in this concerto—certainly in the solo part, but in the orchestral writing too—tends towards what we might call “brilliant” rather than “majestic.” In any case, an indication at the head of a piece need not—indeed, rarely does—apply to absolutely everything in the piece. It would be folly to propose that this movement must come across as majestic at every turn when the music so clearly veers into such diverse terrain as the brilliant, the mysterious, the mournful, and even the rambunctious.

The soloist enters rather by the back door (not counting the bass doublings during the orchestral sections, which most modern pianists choose not to play). The exposition reaches its apparent end, but at the moment when an audience would expect the pianist to assume the spotlight, the winds—

oboe first, then bassoon, then flute—instead offer quiet extensions that keep the audience on tenterhooks. Finally the piano has its say, but rather than lunge into the principal theme, the soloist serves up an unassuming “lead-in” above an orchestral chord. The piano continues to withhold its full force, but this delayed gratification can’t go on forever. Finally the pianist starts behaving like a real soloist, picking up a secondary theme the orchestra has presented in its introduction. At last the piece is set on the path of a “proper” concerto first movement, one that (as in all of Mozart’s masterpieces in the genre) plots its own course, never following a predetermined textbook scheme. In the end we are returned to the domain of the march-like opening, and as the movement concludes it seems to recede quietly into the distance, a mirror image of the opening.

Now comes the Andante, in which gently undulating triplets murmur almost throughout (three heart-stopping measures being the exception) beneath the most sustained of melodies, introduced at the outset by muted first violins. It is hard to understand how a melody that looks so simple on paper can affect us so deeply. But this was Mozart’s gift, and 260 years after he was born it reliably transports listeners much as it must have when it was new.

The level of inspiration in the first two movements has been exceptionally high, even by Mozart’s standards, and that raises the challenge of how to finish the concerto. The composer’s solution is to serve dessert accompanied by champagne. Here we have an unfussy sonata-rondo movement full of witticisms worthy of a comic opera, based on themes that delight the intellect without taxing it greatly. As much as the early movements repay analysis, this fleet finale asks for none at all; its pleasures are obvious and apparent, in no way to its detriment.—**J.M.K.**

***Concert Românesc* (Romanian Concerto)** **GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923–2006)**

COMPOSED: 1951; Ligeti revised it in the mid-1990s and published its new version in 1996

WORLD PREMIERE: In a private orchestral rehearsal in Budapest in the 1950s, but it was not officially premiered until August 21, 1971, at the Peninsula Music Festival in the Gibraltar Auditorium, Fish Creek, WI, with Thor Johnson conducting The Festival Orchestra

SF SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES: FIRST AND ONLY—October 2013. Edwin Outwater conducted

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns (the 3rd seated at a distance from the others and fulfilling an echo function), 2 trumpets, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, small snare drum (tuned high), bass drum, and strings

DURATION: About 12 mins

THE BACKSTORY Growing up in a Jewish family in a Hungary that was in turns dominated by Hitler and Stalin, György Ligeti did not experience life as a bed of roses. Unlike his father and his brother, he at least managed to survive internment in a labor camp. Despite his perilous condition, he was able to cobble together a firm musical education, and he spent the years immediately following World War II studying at the Academy of Music in Budapest. He produced the stream of folk-based choral music that was *de rigueur* in Hungary at the time, but he also worked at blatantly experimental pieces, building on the models of Béla Bartók and the few other avant-garde composers of whose music he was aware. He prudently kept these scores to himself.

Ligeti became part of the great Hungarian exodus of 1956 and settled in Germany, where he avidly soaked up the thriving culture of contemporary music. Within a couple of years he became associated with the avant-garde center of Darmstadt and started producing captivating works of daring complexity, often within very free rhythmic frameworks.

The new-music community was watching Ligeti closely well before he was thrust to a sort of popular fame in 1968. That’s when, without the composer’s knowledge or permission, Stanley Kubrick incorporated four of his compositions into the soundtrack of the MGM film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In

1980, Kubrick would make further (now authorized) use of Ligeti's music to help create the creepy background in *The Shining*.

Ligeti's scores usually project a sensual appeal to which audiences overwhelmingly respond, even though its vocabulary is not that of most other music. We may sense an impulse towards "weaving" a musical composition even in such an early Ligeti score as the *Concert Românesc* (1951). Its four movements—played without separation and totaling only twelve minutes—may be taken as a sort of autobiographical snapshot by the composer. "I grew up in a Hungarian-speaking environment in Transylvania," he wrote. "While the official language was Romanian, it was only in secondary school that I learned to speak the language that had seemed so mysterious to me as a child. I was three when I first encountered Romanian folk music, an alpenhorn player in the Carpathian Mountains. . . ." Ligeti here continues the tradition of such works as Georges Enescu's Rumanian Rhapsodies and Bartók's Rumanian Folk Dances, infusing the "symphonic-folk" tradition with sounds that are both modernist and listener-friendly.

THE MUSIC The first two movements are adapted from a slightly earlier Ligeti piece, the Ballad and Dance for two violins, which he had written in 1950. The Ballad became an Andantino, in which a steady beat maintains throughout as individual measures shift constantly among several meters. The second movement follows without a break: a quick dance that swirls with infectious vigor, in which the flavorful voices of piccolo, solo violin, and percussion instruments provide particular delight. This leads into the slow third movement, which is a considerably more complex and subtle composition. Two horns play the opening material, one (positioned distantly) as an echo to the other evoking the sound of the alphorn. The finale is in a still more modern idiom, with expanses being given over to a string section that buzzes in tones that may seem hard to discern even though their general contours are clear. A solo violin emerges to lead the high-kicking dance, which grows riotous. The piece seems to conclude, but the solo violin is unwilling to cooperate.

The alphorn effect returns at the very end, the last gasp of this stubborn "false ending" that is finally snuffed out by a resounding chord from the full orchestra.—**J.M.K.**

Symphony No. 4 in A major, Opus 90, *Italian* Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

COMPOSED: Late 1832 and early 1833

WORLD PREMIERE: May 13, 1833. The composer conducted the Philharmonic Society in London

SF SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES: FIRST—February 1915. Henry Hadley conducted. MOST RECENT—June 2021. Esa-Pekka Salonen conducted

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets; timpani; and strings

DURATION: About 26 mins

THE BACKSTORY At the musical gatherings in the Mendelssohn home, young Felix unveiled his early compositions, including several of his twelve string symphonies, ebullient works that chart his progress toward increasing subtlety and refinement in manipulating orchestral forces. The last of the string symphonies was introduced in 1823. Three months later Mendelssohn, just turned fifteen, completed his first symphony for full orchestra, No. 1 in C minor. Four more symphonies would follow.

The inspiration for the *Italian* Symphony was a trip Mendelssohn made to Italy in 1830–31, on the urging of his friend Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and composition teacher Carl Friedrich Zelter. The trip began with a two-week visit with Goethe in Weimar—it would be the last time Mendelssohn saw the great poet—before the composer continued south to Munich, Pressburg, and finally Italy, where he arrived in October. Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples, Genoa, and Milan all delighted him, and he returned to Germany in October of 1831. "The whole country" he wrote, "had such a festive air that I felt as if I were a young prince making his entry." Writing to his sister Fanny on February 22, 1830, he

reported, “I have once more begun to compose with fresh vigor, and the Italian symphony makes rapid progress; it will be happiest piece I have ever written, especially the last movement.” According to his own account, the new symphony was meant to embody not only his impressions of the art and landscape he had encountered, but also the vitality of the people.

Other projects distracted him, and the deaths of Goethe, Carl Zelter, and Eduard Rietz (Mendelssohn’s boyhood friend and violin teacher) put a damper on his spirits. Impetus to move forward with the piece arrived in November 1832, when the Philharmonic Society of London offered Mendelssohn a generous commission of a hundred guineas for a new symphony, an overture, and a vocal composition. He wasted little time moving ahead. The symphony proved hugely successful at its premiere, but Mendelssohn had misgivings and soon began tinkering with the score, despite the objections of his friends and family.

It is difficult to understand the composer’s diffidence since the work’s immediate impression of perfect balance is borne out through repeated listening. Nonetheless, Mendelssohn wrestled with the score for years, claiming that the *Italian* Symphony cost him “some of the bitterest moments I have ever endured,” and he never allowed it to be played in Germany during his lifetime. At his death, he left sketches for extensive revisions in the second, third, and fourth movements. Because he had not yet gotten around to subjecting the first movement to the complete overhaul he had in mind, his revisions for the other sections were ignored when it came time to publish the piece in 1851. The work seems perfectly poised as it is, and audiences have embraced it completely, making it one of Mendelssohn’s most popular compositions.

THE MUSIC The *Italian* Symphony is extroverted from the outset, when violins launch the vigorous first theme over the propulsive repeated notes of the woodwinds. After a second theme, rather more leisurely than the first, a solo clarinet tries out the initial theme, prefiguring the nervous tension that will reign over much of the movement’s middle section. The listener grows lost in the maze of Mendelssohn’s themes, but the solo oboe intones a single note (A), held for nine-and-a-half measures, then a similarly extended F-sharp, to help guide the way, and the main theme soon emerges from the depths of the orchestra. In terms of sheer energy, one is tempted to think of the first movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony as a sort of model for the *Italian* Symphony.

The second movement is a slightly mournful slow march, noble and restrained. Mendelssohn’s friend Ignaz Moscheles claimed that the tune was derived from a Czech pilgrims’ song, which would be an odd inspiration for an “Italian” symphony. The third movement is an old-fashioned minuet-and-trio, with horns seeming to add their gentle punctuation from afar to introduce a trio section in the middle.

For the finale Mendelssohn plays a trick of sorts. Whereas many symphonies begin in the minor mode and end in the major, I can think of no other that begins in the major and ends in the minor, as this one does. One could not ask for a firmer rebuttal of the old saw which claims that major-key music is happy and minor-key music is sad. Mendelssohn calls his last movement a *Saltarello*, a traditional dance, dating at least to the fourteenth century, that involved a good deal of hopping about. (Its name derives from the verb saltare, which means “to jump.”) This is the most unmistakably Italianate movement of the symphony, a breathless *perpetuum mobile* in which rhythmic energy combines with buoyant counterpoint. Its coda is masterful. The piece seems to have pretty much danced itself into exhaustion—the orchestra finally reduced to nothing more than first violins whispering the rhythmic motif, pianissimo, over the cellos and basses—when it suddenly rebounds with a sudden, huge crescendo for a punchy, forte ending.—**J.M.K.**

LISTEN AGAIN: Herbert Blomstedt conducting the San Francisco Symphony (Decca)

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With the opening of the 2021-22 season **GUSTAVO GIMENO** celebrates with live audiences on both sides of the Atlantic: as Music Director with Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg (OPL), a title he has held since 2015, and with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) where his tenure began in 2020-21. During his first season in Toronto, Mr. Gimeno and the TSO recorded and streamed a range of digital performances; in 2021–22 they mark the TSO's centenary season.

In 2020, Mr. Gimeno conducted the world premiere of Francisco Coll's Violin Concerto with Patricia Kopatchinskaja. In 2021 Pentatone released a recording of the Violin Concerto with Ms. Kopatchinskaja, Mr. Gimeno, and OPL as part of a Coll monograph. Mr. Gimeno's catalogue on Pentatone with OPL also includes Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 1 and Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 1, Maurice Ravel's complete ballet music to *Daphnis et Chloé*, Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4, Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Gioachino Rossini's *Petite Messe solennelle*, and César Franck's Symphony in D minor.

Mr. Gimeno's debuts in 2021 and 2022 include the Berlin Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony. As an opera conductor he has led productions at the Liceu Opera Barcelona, Opernhaus Zürich, Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, and Teatro Real Madrid, where he conducts Calixto Bieito's production of Sergei Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* in 2022.

Born in Valencia, Spain, Gustavo Gimeno began his international conducting career in 2012 under the mentorship of Mariss Jansons. He also benefited from the support and influence of Bernard Haitink and Claudio Abbado.

Pianist **JAVIER PERIANES**'s 2021–22 season includes season-debuts with Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Aurora Orchestra, Sydney Symphony, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, and the Kristiansand Symphony. He gives the world premiere of Jimmy López's new piano concerto with the London Philharmonic, presents his first recital at the Boulez Saal in Berlin, and returns to the Toronto Symphony and the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo. Play-direct appearances include Real Filarmonía de Galicia, Asturias Symphony, and Orquesta Ciudad de Granada. He made his San Francisco Symphony debut in 2015.

Mr. Perianes frequently appears in recital and as a chamber musician he regularly collaborates with violist Tabea Zimmermann and the Quiroga Quartet. This season he takes on tour a program titled Love and Death, featuring works by Frédéric Chopin, Enrique Granados, Franz Liszt, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Mr. Perianes was awarded the National Music Prize in 2012 by the Ministry of Culture of Spain and named Artist of the Year at the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA) in 2019. In June 2021 he was awarded the Granada Festival Medal of Honour in recognition of his long-standing relationship with the festival, where he was also Artist-in-Residence for 2021.

An exclusive Harmonia Mundi recording artist, Mr. Perianes's recent releases on the label are *Ravel: Jeux de Miroirs* with Orchestre de Paris and Josep Pons; and *Cantilena*, a celebration of music from Spanish and Latin America. His other recent albums include *Les Trois Sonates—The Late Works*, featuring works of Claude Debussy, which won a *Gramophone Award* in 2019. In July 2021, Mr. Perianes released his latest album featuring Chopin's Piano Sonatas Nos. 2 and 3 and Mazurkas, Opus 63.

Inside Music Speaker **ELIZABETH SEITZ** is currently Professor of Core Studies at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, where she received the 2019 Distinguished Faculty of the Year award. She received her Ph.D. from Boston University. She has been a frequent lecturer at the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Lyric Opera, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Rockport Chamber Music, Tanglewood, and the New York Philharmonic.