

Wednesday, January 25, 2023, 7:30pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## Emanuel Ax – Leonidas Kavakos – Yo-Yo Ma

Emanuel Ax, *piano*  
Leonidas Kavakos, *violin*  
Yo-Yo Ma, *cello*

### PROGRAM

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Symphony No. 4 in B-Flat major,  
arr. SHAI WOSNER Op. 60 (1806)  
Adagio – Allegro vivace  
Adagio  
Allegro vivace  
Allegro ma non troppo

### INTERMISSION

BEETHOVEN Piano Trio in B-flat major,  
Op. 97, *Archduke* (1810–11)  
Allegro moderato  
Scherzo (Allegro)  
Andante cantabile, ma però con moto  
Allegro moderato

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Sakurako and William Fisher.*

COVID-19: Masking is required inside the auditorium, and is strongly recommended, though not required, for indoor lobby/waiting areas as well as outdoor spaces. Up-to-date vaccination is strongly recommended, though not required for entry. The latest information on Cal Performances' COVID-19 safety policies is available at [calperformances.org/safety](https://calperformances.org/safety).  
Photographing and/or recording this performance is strictly prohibited.



## BEETHOVEN'S 4TH SYMPHONY AS PIANO TRIO

For someone so often perceived as the embodiment of the revolutionary musician, it is surprising how rarely Beethoven actually broke the rules. His true genius wasn't in rebelling against his predecessors Haydn and Mozart but rather in expanding their language to reach new, uncharted territories. It enabled him to take the revolutionary ideals he fervently believed in—freedom, individual agency—and reflect them in music without burning down the house.

The Fourth Symphony is a case in point. Nestled between two symphonies that are far more famous and dramatic, it can seem less audacious. But it is a prime example of how Beethoven used existing concepts to express something entirely new.

From the start, Beethoven appears to follow Haydn's model of opening a symphony with a slow, weighty introduction. But "introduction" is a misnomer here—this music doesn't exactly set the stage for us. Quite the opposite, in fact, it is daringly abstract: just bare, falling intervals over a diaphanous drone. (You may hear Mahler's First Symphony in it. Or *Star Trek* music. Either way, you are absolutely correct!) We are being led blindly through dark, amorphous space with nothing to indicate the path forward. But just as we hit an impasse, with a sudden chord and a violin flourish—like a burst of sonic light—the music breaks free and sets the rest of the movement on course with irresistible energy. It's an unforgettable moment, possibly inspired by Haydn's "let there be light" from *The Creation*, but also fundamentally different: for Beethoven, the triumph of order over chaos is not a religious sentiment but an idealistic, political one. And as if to reiterate that it's never guaranteed, the music later slides again into that formless abyss, now placing the mysterious drone down in the darkest depths, threatening to devour all other notes. But as if strug-

gling against its pull, the familiar flourishes in the strings that had heralded the moment of freedom build up again, toward an even brighter sonority than before. That's the one element Beethoven keeps going back to more than anything else in the first movement, which he ends with a surge of optimism that is simply intoxicating, the glow of which prevails over the rest of the symphony.

Chamber versions of orchestral music used to be fairly common during the 19th century. But conveying a Beethoven symphony scored for dozens of instruments through the intimate, more conversational idiom of a piano trio is a bit like translating a truly great novel. To try and illuminate his explosive, timeless ideas through a whole new lens is nothing short of thrilling.

—Shai Wosner

Ludwig van Beethoven  
Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60  
Arr. by Shai Wosner

Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op. 97,  
*Archduke*

As the concert repertoire grew through the 19th century, so did the demand for music that could put the family piano to use. In those days before recordings, orchestral works made their way into music lovers' homes via transcriptions. Versions for piano, often for piano four-hands, opened the repertoire to those who could play and to those who preferred just to listen. Transcriptions also guaranteed composers and publishers steady sales for their symphonies and overtures, no orchestra required. Nor were transcriptions confined to the home. Franz Liszt transcribed all nine Beethoven symphonies, keyboard versions made for virtuosos and the concert hall, made also for those who wanted to know these works but who might never have the chance to hear an orchestra perform them.

Transcriptions of orchestral music, while not limited to the keyboard, all have the common purpose of helping that music find a wider audience. And the best transcriptions, though faithful to the source, are also original. In fitting an orchestral work to a smaller ensemble, the transcriber reduces the source—in the sense that a sauce is reduced, concentrating rather than diminishing it.

The transcriber weighs how to channel the interweaving lines of an orchestra into those of a chamber ensemble, and how to assign, to a group of three or four, the many colors of the many instruments in an orchestra's many sections. Depending on the transcriber's choices and emphases, the result can reveal new aspects in music you thought you knew—music such as a Beethoven symphony, for example, whose familiarity can erode its contours, along with its sense of surprise. It is this sense of surprise, this sense of *Beethoven*, that the transcriber attempts to restore. This evening we hear pianist Shai Wosner's version of the Beethoven Fourth Symphony for piano, violin, and cello.

Beethoven completed his Fourth Symphony in the fall of 1806, and it shares qualities with other music he composed around that time, such as the Fourth Piano Concerto and Violin Concerto. These compositions, says his biographer Maynard Solomon, “appear to have taken on certain qualities of a magnified chamber music,” given “their temporary retreat from exalted rhetoric into a more lyrical, contemplative and serene style.” The symphony does indeed bear temperamental resemblances with the concertos, though in a composer of Beethoven's breadth the differences in concurrent compositions are also notable. The Fourth Symphony was composed almost alongside the Fifth, whose only tranquil moments unfold in its lovely slow movement.

Which is not to say the Fourth and Fifth symphonies are total opposites. If you know the Fifth, you will recognize how closely the

tense, *sotto voce* opening of its third movement resembles the Fourth Symphony's hushed introduction. These opening *pianissimo* bars of the Fourth move as deliberately as a cat focused on its prey, the music confined to the dark minor until it leaps forward in a *fortissimo* explosion of B-flat major and the tempo's switch is thrown from *adagio* to *allegro vivace*. From here on out, the movement thrusts ahead at high speed and with manic energy.

Beethoven's work includes pages that are among music's most thrilling, but he also composed slow music of a beauty that defies reality. The *cantabile* passage that opens the symphony's second movement is such music, but what transforms this passage from pretty to ravishing is the accompanying string figure, sounding first as two notes, then three, and which will rarely be absent throughout the movement. The scherzo and finale are cousins—that *vivace* tempo marking for the scherzo could apply as well to the concluding allegro. Together, they recall the spirit of the first movement. It is all about celebrating life, remarkable when you consider that only four years earlier, in his Heiligenstadt Testament, Beethoven had disclosed his growing deafness and confessed that he had considered suicide. He rejected that path because, he implied, he felt compelled to produce what no one else could. In Beethoven, the work always justifies the ego.

**Given Beethoven's omnipresence** on concert programs and his mastery of almost every genre, we can imagine him at his desk morning to night, grinding out the next masterpiece. But genius guarantees no immunity from fallow stretches, and ill health and hangovers—regular facts of Beethoven's adult life—undermine inspiration and the work ethic. Beethoven's Opus 97, his last trio for piano, violin, and cello, was born during a dry spell and was his only major work of 1811. Still, when he returned to the sketches

he had made the previous year and set his attention to the trio, he completed it in just over three weeks, from March 3 to March 26. Beethoven's story seems always a fusion of the wretched and the miraculous, proof that the grand can coexist with the miserable, the reason (embodied in the music) we keep returning to him—the reason, that is, for his omnipresence.

The Archduke Rudolph, for whom Opus 97 is named, was Beethoven's student and patron. The two men admired each other, and Rudolph sparked an uncharacteristic warmth in Beethoven, so much so that the composer dedicated more works to him than to anyone else, 15 of them, important music that includes the Fourth and Fifth piano concertos, the *Missa solemnis*, and, of course, this trio.

If you were the sort of person to invent lyrics for the concert hall's big tunes—mnemonic devices for the Brahms First, say, or the Schubert Fifth—you would surely be tempted to find words for the opening of the *Archduke* Trio. The solo piano outlines one of music's great melodies before violin and cello join in. Echoes of this noble first theme are then woven into the lighthearted second subject, and a satisfying sense of rightness ends the exposition, which Beethoven repeats almost verbatim, the better to lodge the singable themes in our memory. The development includes an extraordinary section in which pizzicato strings mimic the plucked keys of the piano, followed by a passage in which the various lines seem to unravel, to be tied back into place with a reprise of the first theme. The recapitulation leads to a conclusion that embodies what Maynard Solomon calls the trio's "measured nobility of rhetoric," one of those indefinables that can cast a kind of spell over a listener, a spell whose source is Beethoven's "development of broad, moderately paced, and flowing melodies," which create "a sense of calm [and] spaciousness."

Beethoven's scherzos generally unfold in three parts, the opening and closing "A" sections surrounding a middle "B" section. Here the cello and violin, then piano, start the "A" section with a country dance, all high spirits until "B." With an abrupt mood shift, an oddly disturbing darkness intrudes and our ears feel suddenly abandoned, the tonal center having dropped out. This lasts for only a few measures. No sooner do high spirits return, however, when darkness falls again—again just briefly—prelude to another episode of alternating light and dark. With the reappearance of the opening dance, we seem at last to have entered the concluding "A" section. But Beethoven will not let us off so easily and ventures yet again into the indeterminate area of "B" until a resolute consonant gesture seals the movement.

Now comes one of Beethoven's great adagios. The theme, on which four variations are built, is a dreamlike song. Piano and cello take the lead in the first variation, followed by violin, the strings singing long lines below the quietly rapturous keyboard. Violin and cello introduce a jaunty tune in variation two, first playful and then yearning. With the piano in the lead, the pace accelerates in variation three. In the fourth variation, strings enter a long rhapsody while the piano marks time. The coda opens with a return of the main theme, though the pace is slower than at the outset while the theme's shapes are explored, its risings and fallings. Soon we are back home, in the midst of the music that opened this movement. That music grows ever quieter, fading, yet it heads not toward silence but instead straight to the finale, whose raucous first bars burst the mood just established. This is Beethoven's brand of humor, verging on the boorish. He has no time, however, for what you or I think of his manners. Because now he gives the players the opportunity to display their delight in music-making, and this is where they get to have fun—conscious, perhaps, that they are

doing more than bringing great music to life. They are also entertaining an audience.

—Larry Rothe

*Larry Rothe writes about music for Cal Performances and San Francisco Opera. His books include For the Love of Music and Music for a City, Music for the World. Visit [larryrothe.com](http://larryrothe.com).*

**EMANUEL AX, piano**

Born to Polish parents in what is today Lviv, Ukraine, Emanuel Ax moved to Winnipeg, Canada, with his family when he was a young boy. Ax made his New York debut in the Young Concert Artists Series, and in 1974 won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv. In 1975, he won the Michaels Award of Young Concert Artists, followed four years later by the Avery Fisher Prize.

In fall 2021, Ax resumed a post-COVID touring schedule that included concerts with the Los Angeles and New York philharmonics, the Philadelphia and Cleveland orchestras, and the Minnesota Orchestra. 2022–23 will include a tour with Itzhak Perlman and a continuation of the current *Beethoven for Three* touring and recording project with partners Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma, this year on the west coast.

In recital, Ax can be heard this season in Palm Beach, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Chicago, Washington (DC), Houston, Las Vegas, and New York, and with orchestras in Atlanta, Detroit, Boston, San Francisco, San Diego, New York, Naples, Portland, Toronto, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland. Touring in Europe includes concerts in Germany, the UK, Switzerland, and France.

Ax has been a Sony Classical exclusive recording artist since 1987 and following the success of the Brahms Trios with Kavakos and Ma, the ensemble launched an ambitious, multi-year project to record all the Beethoven trios and symphonies arranged for

trio, of which the first two discs have been released. Ax has received Grammy Awards for the second and third volumes of his cycle of Haydn's piano sonatas. He has also made a series of Grammy-winning recordings with Ma of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas for cello and piano.

Ax is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary doctorates of music from Skidmore College, the New England Conservatory of Music, Yale University, and Columbia University.

### LEONIDAS KAVAKOS, *violin*

Leonidas Kavakos is recognized across the world as a violinist and artist of rare quality, acclaimed for his matchless technique, captivating artistry, superb musicianship, and the integrity of his playing. He works regularly with the world's greatest orchestras and conductors and plays as recitalist in the world's premier recital halls and festivals. In recent years, Kavakos has also succeeded in building a strong profile as a conductor.

During the 2022–23 season, Kavakos appears in the US with the National Symphony Orchestra and New York Philharmonic, and with the Minnesota Orchestra in a play-conduct program, and performs in recital with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma. He tours Europe with Yuja Wang, and plays a number of concerts throughout Europe and the Middle East with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and Daniel Harding, as well as returning to the Vienna Philharmonic, Bayerischen Rundfunks Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, NDR Hamburg, and the Czech Philharmonic. He is honored as Artist in Residence at Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, where he will appear as both violinist and conductor. He will also conduct the Danish National Symphony Orchestra and RAI Torino Orchestra. Kavakos has two extensive visits to Asia, including a residency at Tongyeong International Music Festival, in addition to a

series of recitals in Japan and South Korea, where he will perform Bach's Partitas and Sonatas, following the release of his critically acclaimed album *Bach: Sei Solo* in 2022.

Kavakos is an exclusive recording artist with Sony Classics. Most recently in 2022, he released *Beethoven for Three: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5* arranged for trio, with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma. The second album from this series was released last November.

Kavakos plays the "Willemotte" Stradivarius violin of 1734.

### YO-YO MA, *cello*

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma's life and career are testament to his enduring belief in culture's power to generate trust and understanding. Whether performing new or familiar works from the cello repertoire, collaborating with communities and institutions to explore culture's role in society, or engaging unexpected musical forms, Ma strives to foster connections that stimulate the imagination and reinforce our humanity.

Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 to Chinese parents living in Paris, where he began studying the cello with his father at age four. When he was seven, he moved with his family to New York City, where he continued his cello studies at the Juilliard School before pursuing a liberal arts education at Harvard. Ma has recorded more than 100 albums, is the winner of 19 Grammy Awards, and has performed for nine American presidents, most recently on the occasion of President Biden's inauguration. He has received numerous awards, including the National Medal of the Arts, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Birgit Nilsson Prize. He has been a UN Messenger of Peace since 2006, and was recognized as one of *TIME* magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2020. Ma's latest album is *Beethoven for Three: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5*, recorded with pianist Emanuel Ax and violinist Leonidas Kavakos.

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