

# Community in Symphony - Program Notes

Friday, April 5, 2024

By Yoon Sang Timothy Cho

## **Étienne-Nicolas Méhul - Overture to *Joseph* (1807)**

Étienne-Nicolas Méhul's opera "Joseph," premiered in 1807 during a transformative period in French history, encapsulates the composer's innovative spirit and narrative prowess. The overture serves as a captivating prelude, introducing thematic elements that weave throughout the opera, enticing listeners with bold orchestral statements and foreshadowing. Méhul's dynamic interplay of vocal and orchestral elements unfolds the biblical tale of Joseph, his journey from innocence to wisdom mirrored in poignant arias that reveal vulnerability, strength, and ultimate triumph. The chorus, representing diverse perspectives, enriches the narrative, while Méhul's orchestration and harmonic language showcase his mastery and forward-looking approach. Though less frequently performed than works by his contemporaries, "Joseph" has experienced a contemporary revival, inviting audiences to rediscover the historical significance and musical ingenuity within Méhul's compelling operatic creation. As we embark on this performance, let the evocative music transport you into the world of ancient tales, where Méhul's enduring composition illuminates the timeless narrative of "Joseph."

## **Johannes Brahms - Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77 (1879)**

Johannes Brahms' Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77, is a testament to the composer's enduring friendship and collaboration with the renowned violinist Joseph Joachim. Completed in 1878, it was dedicated to Joachim, who provided invaluable feedback during its composition. The concerto's genesis can be traced back to Brahms' early years when he became acquainted with Joachim and the violinist's influence profoundly impacted Brahms' understanding of the instrument's capabilities. This concerto emerged as a result of their artistic dialogue and mutual respect, with Brahms crafting a work that not only showcased Joachim's virtuosity but also pushed the boundaries of violin repertoire. Premiered in Leipzig with Joachim as the soloist, the concerto initially faced mixed reviews but soon garnered acclaim for its technical brilliance and emotional depth. Over time, it has become one of Brahms' most celebrated works for its seamless integration of soloist and orchestra, its profound lyricism, and its exploration of the violin's expressive possibilities. Today, Brahms' Violin Concerto in D Major stands as a cornerstone of the violin repertoire, a testament to the enduring friendship and artistic collaboration between Brahms and Joachim, and a beloved masterpiece cherished by performers and audiences worldwide.

## **Ludwig van Beethoven - Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55, "Eroica" (1804)**

Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55, commonly known as the "Eroica," represents a pivotal moment in the composer's career and in the history of Western classical music. Completed in 1804, Beethoven originally dedicated the symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte, whom he admired as a champion of the ideals of the French Revolution. However, upon learning of Napoleon's declaration of himself as Emperor, Beethoven famously tore up the dedication in a fit of rage, renaming the work simply "Sinfonia Eroica" (Heroic Symphony). This symphony marks a departure from the Classical symphonic tradition, both in its scale and its emotional depth. Its expansive structure, innovative harmonic language, and bold thematic development herald a new era in symphonic writing. Premiered in 1805, the "Eroica" shocked audiences with its length and complexity, yet it also captivated them with its stirring melodies and profound expression. Its impact on subsequent composers and its enduring popularity attest to its status as a landmark work of the Romantic era. Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 stands as a testament to the composer's revolutionary spirit, his unwavering dedication to artistic integrity, and his profound belief in the power of music to inspire and uplift humanity.