

**TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Gustavo Gimeno, Music Director

# Beethoven's Fifth

**Earl Lee**, conductor

**Jaemin Han**, cello

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**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, K. 492

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**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

*Variations on a Rococo Theme*, Op. 33

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## Intermission

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**Carlos Simon**

*Fate Now Conquers*

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**Ludwig van Beethoven**

Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante con moto

III. Allegro

IV. Allegro

*Program 2*

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**Saturday,  
October 11, 2025**

7:30pm

**Sunday,  
October 12, 2025**

3:00pm

Performances at  
George Weston Recital Hall

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*The TSO's George Weston  
Recital Hall Series is  
generously supported by  
Jim Fleck and Georgina  
Steinsky.*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

## Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, K. 492

Composed 1785–1786

4 min

**IT WAS WITH CONSIDERABLE AUDACITY** that Mozart and the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte began work on an operatic version of *The Marriage of Figaro*—a scandalous play by the French writer Beaumarchais—in 1785. While they excised most of the politics, the material was still widely considered subversive, if not revolutionary, both morally and politically, and some powerful forces in the Viennese court conspired to undermine the opera. Nevertheless, the première took place in Vienna on May 1, 1786. There were many encores, but its success was short-lived and the box-office receipts were disappointing. But it was a huge hit in Prague, where it opened that December, and it was revived in Vienna (somewhat revised) in August 1789, after which its fame spread widely.

*Figaro* was Mozart's breakthrough work in the genre that meant the most to him as a composer. It is long and ambitious, uncommonly nuanced and sophisticated, with characters more finely drawn and profoundly human than in any previous opera buffa. It is also very funny. As was

usual, the overture was written last, just days before the première. The one-movement overture, by this time, had replaced the old three-movement sinfonia (the prototype of the concert symphony), though it was not until 1787, in *Don Giovanni*, that Mozart would write his first overture that actually quotes from the opera itself. In some earlier overtures, including those for *Idomeneo*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and this one, he sought at least to encapsulate the basic mood of the opera.

The whole bewildering and hilarious plot unfolds over the course of a single day, summed up perfectly in this bustling overture. The main themes, all of them introduced quietly, convey stealth—aptly so for an opera laced with intrigue and disguise: the first theme scurries (strings and bassoons), and the second darts and feints (strings, with commentary from flutes and oboes). The overture is set in an easygoing sonata form with no development section. A handful of themes are presented. Then, after a quick transition back to the home key, the whole sequence is repeated. A brief coda featuring noisily chattering woodwinds follows, and the overture comes to a joyous close.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

## *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, Op. 33

Composed 1876

18 min

**TCHAIKOVSKY ADORED THE COURTLY MUSIC OF THE 18TH CENTURY**, in particular the elegant rococo style of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

"I not only like Mozart, I idolize him," he wrote. "He captivates, delights and warms me. It is my profound conviction that Mozart is the culminating point of musical beauty. It is thanks to him that I devoted my life to music."

He paid homage in several ways, most directly through *Mozartiana*, an orchestral

suite transcribed from the earlier composer's piano and choral pieces. Another means was the creation of works that reflect and stylize Mozart's musical world, like the luxurious *Serenade for Strings* and this charming set of variations for cello and small orchestra.

Prior to the variations, his most recent creation had been *Francesca da Rimini*, a stormy symphonic fantasia inspired by Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. While he was composing the variations, he was also striving to create a viable scenario for an operatic setting of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The opera came to nothing. The variations may have provided a diversion from the stresses and eventual frustrations of labouring over it, as well as a cool, emotionally detached counterweight to the Dante piece.

He created it, presumably on commission, for Wilhelm Fitzenhagen. This German-born cellist, a faculty colleague at the Moscow Imperial Conservatory, had participated in the premières of Tchaikovsky's three string quartets.

The composer gratefully accepted the cellist's advice on modifications to the solo part, but Fitzenhagen's contributions didn't end there. In the autumn of 1877, Tchaikovsky fled from Russia to recover from his disastrous marriage. During his prolonged absence, Fitzenhagen took it upon himself to "improve" the variations. He shuffled the order, eliminated completely the last (and most difficult) of them, and replaced it with the original Variation 4.

When Tchaikovsky's publisher, Pyotr Jurgenson, saw Fitzenhagen's edition, just before it was to be published with piano accompaniment, he wrote to the composer, "Loathsome Fitzenhagen! He is most importunate in wishing to alter your cello piece, to make it more suitable for the instrument, and he says you have given him full authority to do this. Good heavens! Tchaikovsky reviewed and corrected by Fitzenhagen!"

Nevertheless, the fact that Fitzenhagen's performances of his edition won considerable acclaim may have mollified to some degree Tchaikovsky's understandable displeasure.

After a triumphant reading at a German festival in June 1879, Fitzenhagen wrote to the composer, "I produced a furore with your variations. I pleased so greatly that I was recalled three times.... [Franz] Liszt said to me 'You carried me away! You played splendidly,' and regarding your piece he observed, 'Now there, at last, is real music!'"

At first, Tchaikovsky appears to have held ambivalent feelings toward Fitzenhagen's revisions. These changed to deep bitterness as the full score approached publication in 1889. Nevertheless, apparently weary of the affair and having received news that Fitzenhagen was dying, one of his pupils reported that he cried out, "The devil take it! Let it stand as it is!" In recent years, some cellists have returned to the original version. Fitzenhagen's undeniably effective edition remains the standard, however, and it is the one you will hear at this concert.

The brief introduction establishes both the gentle, refined mood and the transparency of the chamber orchestra scoring. The soloist introduces the relaxed and winsome theme—and rarely gets a breather after doing so. The theme is an original Tchaikovsky creation that author Paul Serotsky has described as a "drawing room march." The variations rarely stray far from it, transmuting it into, among other things, a nostalgic waltz (Variation 3) and a sorrowful lament (Variation 7).

—Program note by Don Anderson



←  
Wilhelm  
Fitzenhagen  
(1848–1890)

Carlos Simon (b. 1986)

## Fate Now Conquers

Composed 2019

5 min

**FROM THE COMPOSER:** This piece was inspired by a journal entry from Ludwig van Beethoven's notebook written in 1815:

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*Iliad. The Twenty-Second Book*

*But Fate now conquers; I am  
hers; and yet not she shall share  
In my renown; that life is left to  
every noble spirit  
And that some great deed shall  
beget that all lives shall inherit.*

Using the beautifully fluid harmonic structure of the 2nd movement of Beethoven's 7th symphony, I have composed musical gestures that are representative of the unpredictable ways of fate. Jolting stabs, coupled with an agitated groove with every persona. Frenzied arpeggios in the strings that morph into an ambiguous cloud of free-flowing running passages depicts the uncertainty of life that hovers over us.

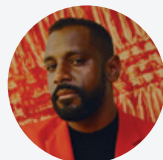
We know that Beethoven strived to overcome many obstacles in his life and documented his aspirations to prevail, despite his ailments. Whatever the specific reason for including this particularly profound passage from the *Iliad*, in the end, it seems that Beethoven relinquished to fate. Fate now conquers.

**COMPOSER BIO:** Atlanta native Carlos Simon's music ranges from concert works for large and small ensembles to film scores with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism. He is Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and frequently writes for the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera. He is also the inaugural Composer Chair of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The 2025/26 season sees the world premières of Simon's Double Concerto for Violin and Cello, featuring Hilary Hahn and Seth Parker Woods with the National Symphony Orchestra; *Lamentations for String Orchestra*, commissioned by New World Symphony and Miami City Ballet; a symphonic soundtrack to *The Unspoken Elegance of Stillness*, directed by Simon Frederick; plus works for the Boston Symphony Chamber Players and Augustin Hadelich, commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Simon's celebrated discography includes the orchestral album *Four Symphonic Works; Together; brea(d)th*, a landmark work written in response to the murder of George Floyd; the GRAMMY®-nominated *Requiem for the Enslaved*; and others.

Simon earned his doctorate at the University of Michigan and is an Associate Professor at Georgetown University. He was a recipient of the 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the highest honour bestowed by the Sphinx Organization to recognize extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

## Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67

Composed 1807–1808

36 min

**THE FIFTH SYMPHONY MAY BE THE MOST FAMILIAR OPUS IN ALL OF CLASSICAL MUSIC**, and today it is a struggle to recapture the astonishment with which it was received in Beethoven's day, or to appreciate how replete with novelties—how radical—it was. In a review of the Fifth Symphony published in 1810, E. T. A. Hoffmann wrote that Beethoven “unlocks the marvellous realm of the infinite,” “awakens that endless longing that is the essence of Romanticism,” and “surrenders himself to the inexpressible.” It was a pathetic work, in the old sense of the word—impassioned, full of emotion and pathos. Unrestrained by conventional notions of beauty, order, and good taste, this was no mere pleasant half-hour for an early 19th-century audience accustomed to regarding a symphony as public entertainment, but an elevated, edifying, sometimes disturbing, ultimately uplifting musical drama. As Hoffmann noted, a symphony could be philosophical and metaphysical—and reveal a composer's whole world view.

In all four movements, Beethoven plays fast and loose with Classical conventions, yet his forms are as logical and organic as they are unpredictable. Note, for instance, his near-obsessive developing of the famous “da-da-da-daaah” four-note motif with which the piece begins (“Thus Fate knocks at the door!” he supposedly remarked of that motif). The result is a dense, driven first movement in which tension accumulates steadily and finally explodes in furious convulsions.

The ingenuity of the Fifth extends beyond the individual movements to the structure of the whole: the four movements

form a unified cycle in which the confident finale, in radiant C major, is eventually heard as the goal to which the work's stormy opening bars aspire. The brassy, celebratory finale resolves and transcends the musical argument of the previous movements: militaristic episodes in the march-like slow movement look ahead to it; and Beethoven links the finale directly to the third movement (a scherzo in all but name) with a tense, dramatically charged transition. He also inserts a ghostly recollection of the scherzo in the middle of the finale, casting a momentary shadow over the prevailing mood of triumph.

The massive, often clangorous scoring of the Fifth was much indebted to the “public” music of the French Revolution and to the operas of Gluck. The woodwinds and brass often evoke band music, especially in the finale, where Beethoven employs several instruments associated with the military: piccolo, contrabassoon, and trombone. It is perhaps no coincidence that by the time the symphony was completed, in the spring of 1808, Austria was at war with Napoleon's France, and the music often strikes a militaristic note that surely reflected the patriotic sentiments then sweeping through German-speaking lands.

The Fifth had its première as part of a long, all-Beethoven program, conducted by the composer on December 22, 1808. Inadequately rehearsed and fraught with problems, the concert ran for four hours in a freezing-cold hall, and, not surprisingly, the music had a mixed reception. Posterity, to say the least, has been kinder to it.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana



### **Earl Lee, conductor**

Earl Lee made his TSO début in January 2015.

Winner of the 2022 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award, Earl Lee is a renowned Korean-Canadian conductor who has captivated audiences worldwide. Music Director of the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra since 2022, he recently finished a successful three-year tenure as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to a full season of concerts with the Ann Arbor Symphony, Lee's 2025/26 season includes return engagements with the Toronto Symphony, Boston Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, and Colburn Orchestra at Walt Disney Concert Hall. He débuts with the Omaha Symphony and Rhode Island Philharmonic. Lee starts his season in his native Korea with appearances at the Seoul Arts Center and the Tongyeong International Music Festival (TIMF) with the TIMF Orchestra.

Previous seasons included engagements with the Boston, Atlanta, San Francisco, Colorado, Saratoga, and Vancouver Symphonies, Seoul Philharmonic, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, and Sejong Soloists at Carnegie Hall and in Seoul.

Lee previously held the positions of Associate Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony and Resident Conductor of the Toronto Symphony. In 2022, he appeared with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra as a participant in the Ammodo Conducting Masterclass led by Fabio Luisi. He studied cello at the Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School, and conducting at Manhattan School of Music and the New England Conservatory.



### **Jaemin Han, cello**

These performances mark Jaemin Han's TSO début.

Cellist Jaemin Han, born in 2006 in South Korea, gained international recognition in 2021 as the youngest-ever first-prize winner at the prestigious George Enescu International Competition. Additional accolades, including prizes at the Geneva International Music Competition and ISANGYUN Competition, have firmly established him as one of the standout young soloists of his generation.

Han has performed with prestigious orchestras worldwide, including the Seoul Philharmonic; Orchestre de Paris; the Rotterdam, Tokyo, and Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestras; and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Among his career milestones are the inauguration of the BBC Proms in Korea with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, a residency at Seoul's Lotte Concert Hall, his US début with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and appearances at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw.

Collaborating with renowned conductors such as Myung-Whun Chung, Jaap van Zweden, Gustavo Gimeno, Andris Poga, Ryan Wigglesworth, Alexandre Bloch, Pietari Inkinen, and David Reiland, Han performs an extensive and wide-ranging repertoire.

Han's 2025/26 season begins with a recital at the Septembre Musical festival in Switzerland alongside his pianist partner Alexander Malofeev. He then heads to North America, where he will make his highly anticipated Canadian début with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under Earl Lee, followed by his recital début at New York's iconic Carnegie Hall. Han's touring schedule includes two visits to Korea with the Czech Philharmonic and Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, and engagements in Paris, Bucharest, Warsaw, Austria, and Germany.