

US-CHINA MUSIC INSTITUTE OF THE BARD COLLEGE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
PRESENTS

CHINA NOW MUSIC FESTIVAL

CHINA AND BEETHOVEN



EGMONT IN CHINA WITH THE NCPA ORCHESTRA

Friday, December 18, 2020

7:30pm

China Now Music Festival Livestream

Jindong Cai
Artistic Director, China Now Music Festival

Ren Xiao-Long,
CEO, China NCPA Orchestra

Lü Jia
Artistic Director of Music, NCPA

Song Yuanming
Soprano

Sun Qiang
Narrator

OPENING REMARKS

Jindong Cai, Artistic Director, China Now Music Festival

Ren Xiao-Long, CEO, China NCPA Orchestra

Lü Jia, Artistic Director of Music, NCPA

CHINA NCPA ORCHESTRA

Lü Jia, conductor

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Incidental Music to Goethe's Egmont, Op. 84

Overture: *Sostenuto, ma non troppo – Allegro*

I. Lied: "Die Trommel gerühret"

II. Entr'acte I. *Andante*

III. Entr'acte II. *Larghetto*

IV. Lied: "Freudvoll und leidvoll"

V. Entr'acte III. *Allegro - Marcia*

VI. Entr'acte IV. *Poco sostenuto e risoluto*

VII. Klärchens Tod

VIII. Melodram: "Süßer Schlaf"

IX. Siegessymphonie (symphony of victory):

Allegro con brio

Song Yuanming, soprano

Sun Qiang, narrator

Performed on November 12, 2020

Translation into Chinese by Li Jianming

PROGRAM NOTES

Incidental Music to *Egmont*, Op. 84 (1810)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Three years before Beethoven was born, the German playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing published an important theoretical work on theatre called the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. In it, Lessing wrote at length about the role of music in spoken drama, an area in which he felt substantial changes were needed. 18th-century aesthetics insisted not only on music's power to express human emotions but also its obligation to do so as fully as possible. According to Lessing, music for spoken plays should express the subject matter at hand, rather than just provide a background or a distracting entertainment.

In the same year, 1767, Christoph Willibald Gluck wrote a preface to his opera *Alceste*, in which he said: "My idea was that the overture ought to indicate the subject and prepare the spectators for the character of the piece they are about to hear."

In the hands of Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven, the genre of the overture became capable of dramatic expression to a degree never dreamed of by Lessing. Beethoven discovered entirely new possibilities in the overture, and when, between the second and third versions of his opera *Fidelio*, he turned to the spoken theatre to write *Egmont*, he incorporated incidental music into the drama like no one had ever done before.

The action of Goethe's tragedy *Egmont*, written in 1786, takes place in the 16th century, when Flanders was occupied by the Spanish. Count Lamoral van Egmont, scion of a noble family of Flanders, was appointed governor of the province by Spain's King Philip II (the stepfather and rival of Don Carlos in Schiller's tragedy and Verdi's opera). Seeing the suffering of his oppressed fellow countrymen, Egmont turned against the Spaniards and challenged the King to give freedom to the Low Countries. In response, Philip had Egmont executed in Brussels on June 4, 1568; this cruel act touched off a war of independence that eventually ended with the victory of the Flemish insurgents.

This story of a foreign oppression challenged could never have been timelier than in the Vienna of 1809, occupied by Napoleon's forces. And surely no composer had treated the themes of oppression, struggle, and freedom as often and as gloriously as Beethoven, whose opera *Fidelio* was about the liberation of a freedom-fighter from unjust imprisonment and whose Fifth Symphony climaxed in a breath-taking transition from darkness to light.

Lessing had written in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*: "The overture must only indicate the general tendency of the play and not more strongly or decidedly than the title does. We may show the spectator the goal to which he is to attain, but the various paths by which he is to attain it must be entirely hidden from him." In fact, the Overture to *Egmont* describes the goal (victory) through a transition from darkness to light not unlike those in the earlier Fifth Symphony and the "Leonore" Overture No. 3.

The overture consists of three sections: slow introduction (*Sostenuto ma non troppo* ["Slow, but not too much so"], F minor, 3/2)—*Allegro* in sonata form (F minor, 3/4)—*Allegro con brio* final section (F major, 4/4). The introduction is based on two themes, a forte chordal passage played by the strings and a doleful melody given to the woodwinds. A short transition leads into the passionate *Allegro*, written in a heroic style with reminiscences of the Fifth Symphony. The chordal passage from the introduction reappears as the *Allegro's* second theme. Another dramatic transition ushers in the coda (concluding section), in which the fanfare of the horns and trumpets proclaims the triumph of the cause of freedom.

Goethe's tragedy ends as Egmont confronts his executioners without fear; as the curtain falls, Goethe's stage direction calls for a *Siegessymphonie* (symphony of victory) to be played by the orchestra. The last section of Beethoven's overture is this "symphony of victory," and it will be repeated under that title as the last number of the incidental music.

Beethoven wrote an additional eight musical numbers for *Egmont*. Two of these are songs for a soprano soloist representing Clärchen (Claire), Egmont's love. She is not a historical figure but an invention of Goethe's (the real Egmont, by the time the events of the drama took place, was a married man with eleven children). An innocent young girl full of admiration for her idol, Clärchen imagines Egmont in the midst of his troops and wishes she could be there when he leads his soldiers to victory. Her military song evokes the side of Egmont that he wants to leave outside the door when he is with her.

*Die Trommel gerühret!
Das Pfeifchen gespielt!
Mein Liebster gewaffnet
dem Haufen befiehlt.
Die Lanze hoch führet,
die Leute regieret,
Wie klopft mir das Herz!
Wie wallt mir das Blut!
O hätt ich ein Wämslein,
und Hosen und Hut!*

Roll the drum,
play the fife!
My beloved, in arms,
commands the troops.
He bears his lance high,
and rules the people.
How my heart is beating!
How my blood is racing!
Oh, if only I had a doublet,
breeches and helmet!

*Ich folgt' ihm zum Thor 'naus
Mit mutigem Schritt,
Ging durch die Provinzen,
Ging überall mit.
Die Feinde schon weichen,
Wir schiessen darein.
Welch Glück sondergleichen,
Ein Mannsbild zu sein!*

I'd follow him with bold steps
out of the city gates,
and go through the provinces,
go everywhere with him.
The enemy is retreating,
we shoot into them!
What fortune beyond compare
to be a man!

Entr'acte I consists of a shorter lyrical *Andante* and a more extensive *Allegro con brio*. In the play, this piece served as a link between a scene involving Clärchen and her rejected suitor Brackenburg, and one depicting the increasing unrest on the streets of Brussels. Entr'acte II is a slow piece emphasizing the gravity of the political situation, as debated by the cautious William of Orange and Egmont, who is determined to fight.

In his insightful book on Beethoven's stage works, Swiss musicologist Willy Hess pointed out the extent to which Clärchen's character evolves between her rather naïve first song and her second, where she reveals the full range of her passion for Egmont—a passion that encompasses joy as well as pain. Goethe's lines have become famous all over the German-speaking area as a classic depiction of love, and Beethoven's setting does full justice to the emotional extremes experienced by the heroine.

*Freudvoll
Und leidvoll,
Gedankenvoll sein,
Langen
Und bangen
In schwebender Pein,
Himmelhoch jauchzend,
Zum Tode betrübt –
Glücklich allein
Ist die Seele, die liebt.*

Joyful
and sorrowful,
deep in thought,
longing
and fearing
in painful suspense,
rejoicing to heaven,
grieving to death –
happy alone
is the soul that is in love.

The love song continues in **Entr'acte III** as the soprano melody is taken over by the solo oboe. It is suddenly interrupted by a march tune—first soft and distant, then getting gradually louder and louder. The Spanish troops are approaching. In his extensive review of the incidental music published in 1813, the poet and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann found particularly apt words to describe this passage:

It has such a sombre, frightening, and in the louder passages even sinisterly jolly quality, that one imagines Alba's hirelings strutting in, relishing the prospect of pillage and murder. The march carries on in C minor even after the curtain has been raised, and as it dies away in short, disjointed phrases it corresponds perfectly to the dramatic action that follows, namely a depiction of the citizens' alarmed state.*

Egmont is captured by the Duke of Alba, the new and ruthless Spanish commander. His monolog from his jail cell is followed by **Entr'acte IV**. The dramatic opening measures signal the hero's fate being sealed. The somber melody of **Entr'acte II** is briefly recalled, before the music turns to Clärchen in the next section, *Andante agitato molto ligato ed espressivo* ("Agitated motion, with a continuous flow in the melody and very expressive"). Upon learning that Egmont faces execution the next morning, Clärchen takes her own life by poison. The movement **Clärchen's Death** is a moving lament, dominated by the same solo oboe that carried Clärchen's love song in the third entr'acte.

Egmont's final speech ("Sweet sleep...") is set to a **Melodrama**—a recitation over music. As the hero's thoughts turn from a peaceful contemplation of death to a vision of the great battle for freedom and the triumph of the Dutch people, the music becomes more and more animated. Finally, a trumpet fanfare appears, preparing the **Symphony of Victory**—a reprise of the last section of the Overture, in celebration of the cause for which Lamoral, Count of Egmont, Prince of Gavere, gave his life.

* *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, transl. Martyn Clarke, ed. David Charlton, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 348.

— Peter Laki, Visiting Associate Professor of Music, Bard College
2018

Notes From the NCPA Performance

The year 2020 is the 10th anniversary of the founding of the NCPA Orchestra, and the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. On November 12, a production of Beethoven's incidental music piece *Egmont* in Chinese translation commissioned by the NCPA premiered in Beijing, with the collaboration of an all-star team including translator and playwright Li Jianming, prestigious actor Sun Qiang, and Austria-based soprano Song Yuanming. The ancient oriental language, Goethe's moving tragedy and Beethoven's ideal are brought together in the heroic life of the protagonist Count Egmont, who was killed in his fight against the Spanish invaders.

BIOGRAPHIES

LÜ JIA is Artistic Director of Music of National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), and Music Director of China NCPA Orchestra, and Music Director & Chief Conductor of the Macao Orchestra, prior to which he has acted as Music Director of the Verona Opera House, Italy, and Artistic Director of the Santa Cruz De Tenerife Symphony Orchestra, Spain.

Maestro Lü has conducted in as many as 2000 music concerts and operas in Europe and the United States. As the first Asian conductor assuming the director position in a national opera house of Italy, he is been proclaimed as "a conductor who has a deeper understanding of Italian operas than Italians" by Italian music commentators. In 2007, he was awarded "The President Cup" by the Italian President for his exceptional contribution and outstanding achievements in Italy, followed by the acclaim "Best Opera" of Europe for the *La gazza ladra* that he conducted in the "Rossini Opera Festival" held at Rossini's hometown Pesaro.

As CEO of the China NCPA Orchestra, **REN XIAO-LONG** has overseen the orchestra's growth into a mainstay of Beijing city life. During the disruption of the pandemic, Ren helped to create an innovative new approach to programming so that the orchestra could continue to reach their audience. Said Ren in a recent interview, "The orchestra sailed against the current in the pandemic and via music inspired and connected each other with faith. It is not only a rare re-examination and re-reflection of our responsibilities and mission as an artist but also an opportunity to grow and self-educate."

Soprano **SONG YUANMING** obtained her Graduate Artist Diploma and Double Master's Degrees in "Opera and Light Opera" and "Art Songs and Cantata" at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, under the tutelage of Professor Franz Lukasovsky.

Song has won several awards including the first prize at the 48th Concours International de Chant de La Ville de Toulouse and the first prize and the award of "Best Singer" at the 44th Antonín Dvořák International Vocal Competition in Czech Republic. She has performed at Schlosstheater Schönbrunn, Grazer Opera House, Karlovy Vary Opera House, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Buenos Aires Teatro, China National Centre for the Performing Arts and Salzburger Festspiele, and has worked with Wiener Philharmoniker and the Philadelphia Orchestra as well as renowned conductors including Riccardo Muti, Daniel Barenboim, Valery Gergiev and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

An actor who has performed widely in China on the stage, and in film and television, **SUN QIANG** brings his signature voice full of dramatic tension as narrator in the NCPA production of Beethoven's *Egmont*, which premiered at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing on November 12, 2020.

CHINA NCPA ORCHESTRA

Music Director: Lü Jia

Conductor Laureate: Chen Zuohuang

China NCPA Orchestra is the resident orchestra of the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), Beijing. Since its founding in 2010, the orchestra has fast established itself as one of the most adventurous and dynamic orchestras in the country and earned an international reputation through extensive performances abroad.

Over the years, the orchestra has gained critical acclaim for its artistic excellence in both concerts and operas. To date they have played in over 60 NCPA opera productions, including classical repertoires and newly commissioned works.

The orchestra has consistently offered creative and diverse programs through its concert season. As part of its continuous efforts to promote contemporary music, the orchestra presented the China Premieres of major works by John Adams, Toru Takemitsu, et al. and gave the World Premieres of dozens of substantial new orchestral works commissioned from composers across the globe, including Chen Qigang, Bright Sheng, Zhao Jiping, Michael Gordon, Kalevi Aho, et al. It has also played a significant role in the NCPA's Young Composers Program, providing a unique platform nurturing the next generation of composers in China.

Alongside its concert series, the orchestra has received widespread praise for its international appearances at the Kissingen Summer Music Festival and the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival and concerts in many cities in Germany, as well as in other countries and regions such as Sydney, Singapore, Seoul, Daegu, Abu Dhabi, Taipei and Macau. In 2014, the orchestra undertook its first North American tour and returned in 2017, where it performed at Carnegie Hall, Chicago Symphony Center, Davies Symphony Hall and other major venues in the US and Canada, under the baton of Lü Jia. Musical America praised its "joyful confidence and youthful strength". Concerto Net described it as "a polished, first rate ensemble".

In this unpredictable 2020, the NCPAO led by the Music Director Lü Jia has collaborated with Li Xincuo, Chen Lin, Li Biao, Yang Yang, Zhang Yi, Siqing Lu, Zhang Haochen and many other artists in presenting online concert series over five months period. In November, the NCPAO announced its 2020-21 season after several rounds of adjustments. The new season sees the orchestra's performances in operas including Fang Zhimin, Visitor on the Snow Mountain, Lan Huahua, and the premiere of the NCPA's new production of Gianni Schicchi. The 2020-2021 season features several Chinese artists' debuts, among them Yu Feng, Zhang Jiemin, Jinxu Xiahou, Kong Jianing, Du Tianqi, and Chen Yue. Highlights of the season also include the returns of Zhang Guoyong, Yuan Ding, Song Yuanming, Yang Xuefei, Zhang Qiang, Li Jia, and David Wang. As the Composer-in-Focus, Zhao Jiping's music will be performed by the NCPAO throughout the season.

In February 2012, Lü Jia took up the post of Chief Conductor, succeeding Chen Zuohuang, NCPA's then Artistic Director of Music as well as a founder of the orchestra. In January 2017, LÜ Jia started serving as NCPA's Artistic Director of Music and the NCPA Orchestra's Music Director.

CHINA NOW MUSIC FESTIVAL

Jindong Cai, *Artistic Director*

Kathryn Wright, *General Manager*

Hsiao-Fang Lin, *Producer*

Weiber Consulting, *public relations and marketing*

Liminal Entertainment Technologies, *editing and broadcast*

Zhou Long, *China Now opening music*

The China Now Music Festival is an annual series of events produced by the US-China Music Institute of the Bard College Conservatory of Music. Dedicated to promoting an understanding and appreciation of classical music from contemporary China, each year's festival explores a singular theme. The inaugural festival, *Facing the Past, Looking to the Future: Chinese Composers in the 21st Century*, took place in 2018. The following year, the festival presented *China and America: Unity in Music*, featuring the world premiere of a major new symphonic oratorio by Zhou Long, 'Men of Iron and the Golden Spike.'

US-CHINA MUSIC INSTITUTE

Jindong Cai, *Director*

Kathryn Wright, *Managing Director*

Hsiao-Fang Lin, *Director of Music Programming*

The US-China Music Institute was founded at the Bard College Conservatory of Music in 2017 by conductor and classical music scholar Jindong Cai and Robert Martin, a cellist, philosopher, and the founding director of the Bard Conservatory. The Institute's mission is to promote the study, performance, and appreciation of music from contemporary China, and to support musical exchange between the United States and China. It is the most comprehensive institution for Chinese music in the West, with unprecedented degree programs and research and performance opportunities for students, artists, composers, and scholars around the world. barduschinamusic.org

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