The Struggles of Beethoven

Greater Bridgeport Symphony

November 14, 2020 release
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In this season of “thanks-giving,” I join with our Board of trustees to welcome you, our loyal audience and friends, to the 75th season of the Greater Bridgeport Symphony.

I know you will join me in applauding the return of our acclaimed conductor, Eric Jacobsen, who is beginning his seventh season as maestro of our extraordinary orchestra.

We are grateful to our longtime friends, Christine and David Juneau, for their donation that helped make this first online concert a reality.

Great music is a gift that helps us through the confusion, tangles and dissonant sounds of our everyday lives. The Covid-19 pandemic certainly magnifies this. Social-distancing regulations prevent in-person gatherings at The Klein, but we will still be together in spirit as we share a digital concert experience.

We hope you enjoy your eSubscription, and if you do, please recommend us to your friends. Remember that eSubscription concerts are good all season long, and will make wonderful gifts this holiday season!

Speaking for the entire Board, our musicians and staff, I wish you all a healthy and blessed Thanksgiving.

In gratitude,

Jean Halaby Moffitt
President
The Greater Bridgeport Symphony gratefully acknowledges the music lovers listed here, who have contributed to this season’s Annual Fund Campaign. Each gift plays an important role in the continued success of GBS programs. By bridging the gap between expenses and ticket revenues, the Annual Fund provides critical support for all GBS activities, at concerts and in the community.

More than ever, GBS needs your support, so that we may continue to grow and thrive. Like all arts organizations, we are facing a difficult future. In the face of adversity, GBS has chosen to take bold action to keep culture in our region, and provide much-needed respite from the stresses of a world in pandemic.

**We ask you to step up with us to preserve culture as we step boldly into the future.**

Please give generously!

*Thank you for helping us make the music!*
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GBS Trustee and valued friend
Is there another word in the English language that means more in times like these?

GBS is fortunate to have many friends. In particular, we want to thank our friends, the

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who came forward this season to augment their subscription costs with donations – many giving to the same level they paid for seats at The Klein last season – over and above their regular annual donation levels. GBS thanks those who are there for us when we need them most, and we pledge to continue in our mission and come out of this crisis an even stronger, more vibrant organization.

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for their support of this concert.
The Struggles of Beethoven

Eric Jacobsen, Cello
Deborah Wong, Violin
Arthur Moeller, Violin
Chiu-Chen Liu, Viola

Ludwig van Beethoven 1780-1828

String Quartet No. 4 in C minor (1798)
Opus 18, No. 4
I. Allegretto ma non tanto
II. Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto
III. Menuetto
IV. Allegro

Reinhold Glière 1875-1956

8 Duets for Violin and Cello (1909)
Opus 39
1. Prelude
2. Gavotte
3. Berceuse (Cradle Song)

Recorded at Future Past Studios, Hudson, New York
Acclaimed conductor and cello virtuoso Eric Jacobsen is now completing his sixth season as Music Director of GBS. After a year-long nationwide search in 2013-14, Jacobsen was named Music Director of the Greater Bridgeport Symphony, the fifth conductor in an illustrious lineup: Saidenberg, Perlea, Iturbi and Meier. Eric’s first concert with GBS on December 14, 2013 was threatened by a freak snowstorm, that nearly scuttled the performance; the choral group scheduled for the night cancelled, and only about 250 people braved the weather to attend. Eric’s optimistic spirit did more than make the best of a bad situation; improvising with limited resources, he conducted a smashing concert that confirmed in the minds of audience and musicians alike that he was the right person to fill the shoes of outgoing Music Director Gustav Meier. He made his debut as GBS Principal Conductor at the Barnum Festival Skyblast Concert at Seaside Park in Bridgeport in June 2014, concluding with the now traditional 1812 Overture opening the annual fireworks.

Since his inaugural season, 2014-15, Eric has electrified our audience, bringing to The Klein such performers as Gabriel Kahane, Sara Watkins, Jan Vogler, Nicholas Cords, Johnny Gandelsman, Colin Jacobsen, Gil Shaham, and Yuja Wang to perform with GBS. In December 2014, he also introduced his Bridgeport audience to his then-fiancée – now his wife – singer-songwriter Aoife O’Donovan.

In 2018-19, Eric led GBS in “A Season in Space,” a celebration of flight in music, with thrilling selections including The Planets, Also Sprach Zarathustra, and The Beautiful Blue Danube. Eric brought three of today’s greatest Classical performers to The Klein – Colin Jacobsen, Yuja Wang, and Gil Shaham. Shaham was a surprise guest in April 2018 when GBS brought the entire orchestra into Bridgeport’s Central High School. With GBS musicians, Eric spread music into a dozen other Bridgeport public schools. The 2019-20 Season, which began with exotic sounds created by members of the Silkroad Project, was cut short in March 2020, but Eric is thrilled that the music of GBS will still find its audience in this pandemic year.

Born and raised on Long Island, Eric is the son of Edmund Jacobsen, a violinist and former member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and the late Ivy Jacobsen, a noted flutist.
At age four, he discovered the cello, though he was too small to handle such a large instrument; his father got him a viola and fitted it with an endpin – and the rest is history. His brother is violinist Colin Jacobsen (who performed the Brahms Violin Concerto with GBS in October 2014 and last September on The Lark Ascending), with whom Eric co-founded Brooklyn Rider and The Knights. The Jacobsen brothers were exposed early to music through their parents, whose late-night chamber music soirees, in part, influenced the brothers to study music. Both brothers went on to graduate from The Julliard School.

Based in Brooklyn, New York, Eric is also conductor of Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble and the Orlando Symphony, and is acclaimed all over the world with his music. Even with all this, Bridgeport has assumed a big role in his life. Last season, he spearheaded production of the first installment of a YouTube series – The Bridgeport Sets – featuring GBS playing in iconic locations. With his brother Colin, Eric brought the orchestra into Bridgeport’s abandoned Palace Theater which resulted in a stunning video of The Lark Ascending, released in July 2019. “Some of my most rewarding and beautiful experiences have been in Bridgeport,” said Eric. “Between working with students in local schools, and making music with the incredible musicians of GBS, I feel at home here in Bridgeport.”
“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything.”
— Plato

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THE STRUGGLES OF BEETHOVEN

Since GBS’ last concert at The Klein on December 21, 2019, the world has turned upside-down. Like Beethoven, struggling with the spectre of oncoming deafness, we as a society have had to face struggles large and small, in every facet of our daily lives. Beethoven didn’t know how he would do it, but he knew he had to create music. None of us knows when the pandemic will end, but we go forth every day and make life work.

On Thursday March 12, a GBS concert – and several associated large-scale outreach activities – came to a crashing halt less than 48 hours before curtain. Over the next weeks, as arts organizations cancelled events, GBS faced a dilemma like no other in its history: Would we go dark, or would we make music? Immediately, plans were laid for musical messages from Eric and piano afternoons. Though these were well-received, it soon became apparent that people longed for live music, and orchestral music of larger scale. How could we do this? We had a long, mysterious road ahead of us – but we knew we had to keep the music going.

After months of behind-the-scenes effort, GBS presented one of the only full-scale orchestra concerts in the country on Labor Day weekend. With safety protocols in place, GBS staged 38 musicians and 3 vocalists for a Broadway night at Trumbull’s Indian Ledge Park. Over 400 fans, all masked and socially-distant, left the park with the feeling that something missing had been restored – gloriously!

In another bold venture, GBS has assembled the means to perform for our audience, and we are proud to present our first-ever video concert. Our goal this year is to present our concert series on the dates originally planned for concerts, so that we can create a sense of normalcy for our friends. Three of the four videos will be produced at The Klein – home to the Symphony since 1947. We look forward to seeing you all in person again, when conditions permit, but in the meantime we’ll do the next best thing, and bring you our music at home.
Ludwig van Beethoven 1780-1828

*String Quartet Op. 18 No. 4*

1798-1800

I. Allegretto ma non tanto
II. Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto
III. Menuetto
IV. Allegro

Beethoven was starting to lose his hearing around the time he wrote the Op. 18 Quartets. He knew it, as evidenced in letters to close friends expressing his fears. The struggle Beethoven endured as he composed this work gives the music its own brand of tension that hadn’t been heard in his music before. Despite the challenges this period in his life presented, this quartet in its own way chronicles a journey of coming to grips with his new reality, and shines the light forward for Beethoven to create his greatest works even as his hearing continued to decline.

The first movement of Op. 18, no. 4 begins with the *Sturm und Drang* so well known in early German Romanticism. As the urgency of the opening develops, it brings us to a second theme of longing. This contrast of themes continues...
through the movement, perhaps reminding us of the drama of today and longing for times not so long past, and how quickly humankind can change moods when faced with great adversity.

The second movement embarks on an almost playful and delicate journey through a quartet without a slow movement. The interplay between the voices in this movement grows from a fugue into a three-part counterpoint. This leads into the third movement, a dance full of syncopation and contrasting textures. The mood continues to darken as the almost frantic opening of the fourth and final movement is presented. A recurrent theme finally drives us to the end at breakneck speed. The battle between the major and the minor, perhaps a sign of Beethoven’s internal struggles, reaches dramatic heights in this movement.

Throughout the entirety of the quartet, Beethoven uses a number of dramatic techniques to heighten the intensity of the battle within. The wide range of dynamics and articulations bring the listener on a tumultuous ride. Relatively frequent use of the fermata gives the listener just a moment to process what came before, just in time to embark on the next roller coaster ride.

The mood of this piece in C minor presents a vastly different experience from what one may expect based on other Beethoven works in the same key, especially if this is one’s first experience with this quartet. The stern image of Beethoven is softened by the light and delicate moments present in this work.
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Reinhold Glière 1875-1956

8 Duets for Violin and Cello, Op. 39

1909

Prelude, Gavotte, Berceuse

Reinhold Glière is a Soviet composer of German and Polish descent, known for his interest in folk styles and incorporating them into his compositions. The Duets were created in the aftermath of the First Russian Revolution in 1905. This series of duets was written in 1909 after Glière returned from studying conduction in Berlin. Glière would go on to achieve high musical status in Russia due to his incorporation of national styles into his compositions. He would have a profound impact on his students, including Sergey Prokofiev and Aram Khachaturian. While some critics say he lacks originality, Glière knew what the Russian people wanted to hear and he faithfully gave it to them. Arranged like a Baroque suite, this series of “dances” displays a range of moods and compositional techniques that perfectly suit these tiny pieces. While the violin takes center stage melodically, the cello provides deep harmonic support while occasionally shining through melodically. The excerpts from 8 Duets for Violin and Cello Op. 39 performed by our conductor and concertmaster highlight the beauty of Russian Romanticism.

The Prelude highlights a richness of harmony. It’s a magical series of chord progressions made full by the use of double stops in both instruments. The effect is such that without seeing it, the listener may not know that only two instruments are playing. The murky, mysterious sonorities of the Prelude run into a very different mood in the Gavotte. The Gavotte has a playful beginning with a very present counterpoint. Violin and cello combine to create a drone-like effect while the melody dances over the top. The drone effect gives this part of the piece a medieval quality, which may inspire current listeners to think back to another time of plague. The dynamic contrasts also provide a throwback to an earlier time. The move back into the playful qualities from earlier in the movement point towards a time of light as the polyphonic writing takes hold again. The cello arpeggio of the Berceuse provides a foundation for plaintive and longing violin melody. The tenderness of the movement shines through the melancholy harmonies of the duet. The cello takes center stage as the movement comes to a conclusion, gently fading into silence. The tranquility of the conclusion inspires hope for good things to come.

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