UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY

LONDON CLASSICAL PLAYERS

Roger Norrington, Conductor

Thursday Evening, October 25, 1990, at 8:00
Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, Michigan

PROGRAM

Overture: *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Op. 43 . . . . . Beethoven

Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60 . . . . . Beethoven
- Adagio, allegro vivace
- Adagio
- Allegro vivace
- Allegro ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, "Scottish" . . . . . Mendelssohn
- Andante con moto, allegro un poco agitato
- Vivace non troppo
- Adagio
- Allegro vivacissimo, allegro maestoso assai

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Program Notes

Overture, Op. 43, *The Creatures of Prometheus*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

While working on his Second Symphony, Beethoven received an unexpected commission from the Court Theatre to compose music for a ballet on the legend of Prometheus. Ballet had established itself as a major art form in Vienna at the turn of the century, and for the thirty-year-old Beethoven, the commission represented a major step forward in his career. In terms of his stylistic development, it was to have long term consequences, signaling that remarkable broadening of expressive horizons that acquaintance with theatre music of all types encouraged.

Beethoven composed an overture and 17 further numbers, music that is characterized by a ready sense of the vivid and the charming. As was typical of the time, the overture arouses a sense of expectation rather than providing a summary of the action to follow. The syncopations and sudden bursts of *fortissimo* do, however, suggest the powers of the Titan, Prometheus, who created two beings with the help of fire stolen from Olympus.

—David Wyn Jones, 1989

Symphony No. 4 in B-flat, Op. 60

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

In the late summer of 1806, Beethoven was introduced to Count Franz von Oppersdorff by a mutual friend, Prince Lichnowsky, and spent some time as a guest in his house near Ober-Glogau in Silesia. Oppersdorff was one of the few artistocratic patrons of the time who, despite inflation and increasing taxation, had managed to retain a court orchestra. Beethoven was greeted with a performance of the four-year-old Second Symphony and agreed to compose a new symphony specifically for the Count. The composer had already embarked on the Fifth, but laid it aside to compose in the matter of three or four months, this symphony, No. 4 in B-flat. Beethoven received 500 gulden and, in turn, dedicated the work to Oppersdorff.

Oppersdorff was also involved in discussions about the Fifth Symphony, and it is possible that this work, too, was at one stage intended for the Count. Perhaps Beethoven felt that its more ambitious scope made it impracticable for the Count's orchestra; more likely, is that Beethoven welcomed the opportunity to compose a less demanding work after the epochal *Eroica*. It was to be a recurring feature of his symphonic output that an ambitious work be succeeded by a more relaxed one, the *Pastoral* after the Fifth, and the Eighth after the Seventh. It was not a question of spent intellectual energy, merely searching after a different tone. Certainly, the Fourth Symphony is not a lightweight work.

Like the Second Symphony, the work opens with an expansive slow introduction, the slowest music in the symphony and featuring several magical changes of key. The ensuing *Allegro vivace* wills a new energy and direction to the music.

The slow movement returns to the warm lyricism of the *Largo* of the Second Symphony, including the prominent use of the clarinet, but there is also a prophetic feature. Shortly before the close, the flow of the movement is halted briefly so that the horn, violins, clarinet, and flute can interject arpeggios. Beethoven was to return to this idea of an interruption in the slow movement of the *Pastoral*, the celebrated depiction of the nightingale, quail, and cuckoo.

The Scherzo is the first in Beethoven's symphonies in which the Trio is heard twice, a section of relaxed dialogue that contrasts with the abruptness of the main section.

The finale is a *moto perpetuo* of relentless and precarious energy, occasionally relieved by snatches of melody — the musical equivalent of being in a bob-sleigh steered by Eddie Edwards.

—David Wyn Jones

Symphony No. 3 in A minor, "Scottish"

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Mendelssohn's parents were firmly convinced that foreign travel was essential to complete their son's education and broaden his horizons. Thus, shortly after his twentieth birthday, he began a series of European travels that were to occupy much of the next five years and would provide him with considerable creative inspiration. His first journey, in 1829, was to Britain. In London, he was introduced into society and laid the foundations of his future musical activities there. Then, in July, he traveled north to Scotland, where the mysterious beauty of the country and its Romantic historical associations stirred his imagination, giving rise, ultimately, to the *Hebrides* overture and the *Scottish Symphony*. The first ideas for the symphony came to him in Edinburgh when he visited the ruined chapel of Holyrood House. On July 30, he described his feelings in a letter home: "grass and ivy grow there and at the broken altar where Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything around is broken and mouldering, and the bright sky shines in. I believe I found today in that old chapel the beginnings of my 'Scottish' symphony."

But work on the symphony progressed slowly. Mendelssohn's letters mentioned the projected A-minor symphony several times during 1830, and he was certainly working on it during his Italian journey the following year. The bright Italian skies, however, were not conducive to the composition of a symphony conceived in Scotland. As he wrote to his family in March 1831: "The finest season of the year in Italy is from the 15th April to the 15th May. Who can wonder that I find it impossible to return to my misty Scottish mood? I have therefore laid aside the symphony for the present." In any event, he was not to return to it seriously for another ten years. When he finally began work again on the *Scottish Symphony* in 1841, the circumstances of his life were radically different from those of the carefree years of travel. He was deeply embroiled in an attempt, undertaken at the request of King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, to revitalize Berlin's musical life, but it had become increasingly apparent that bureaucratic inertia and the conservative Prussian society of the time would doom his efforts to failure. The consequent stress and frustration that he experienced seem to be reflected in the *Scottish Symphony's* passionate and, to some extent, somber mood.

Mendelssohn did not reveal a specific program for the symphony, but he headed the score with the instruction: "The individual movements of this symphony must follow straight on from one another and not be separated from each other by the usual long break. The content of the individual movements can be given to the listener on the concert program as follows: Introduction and Allegro agitato-Scherzo assai vivace-Adagio cantabile-Allegro guerriero and Finale maestoso."

Like his concert overtures, the Symphony No. 3 is a series of mood pictures intended to stimulate the imagination of the audience rather than a distinct narrative. The first and last movements, with their rich and virile orchestration, evoke the atmosphere of Sir Walter Scott's historical romances. The second movement introduces dancelike melodic and rhythmical material with a distinctly Scottish flavor, while the recitative opening of the beautiful slow movement reinforces the impression of a hidden narrative to which individual listeners can respond in their own way.

After the first performance of the *Scottish Symphony* at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on March 3, 1842, Mendelssohn made a few alterations to the score before taking it with him to London. Bearing a dedication to Queen Victoria, the Scottish Symphony received its English première under the composer's baton at the Philharmonic Society on June 13, 1843.

—Dr. Clive Brown

London Classical Players

The London Classical Players have earned a reputation for being one of the most talked-about orchestras throughout the musical world as a result of its pioneering work with Roger Norrington. In its London concerts, at festivals in Britain and abroad, on recordings, and in several television programs, the group has developed a series of classical recreations and a whole new style of historical playing.

The orchestra was the first to give historic performances of almost all the major eighteenth-century masterpieces, including Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St. John Passion*, Mozart's *Requiem*, and Haydn's *Creation* and *Seasons*. It has also moved ahead into the nineteenth century with Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Fantastic Symphony*, and symphonies by Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, and Mendelssohn. The London Classical Players have made a number of programs for radio and TV, including the Beethoven Symphony cycle for BBC TV in 1989, and earlier this year, a documentary on authentic performance practice.

The London Classical Players have recorded the complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies and piano concertos with Melvyn Tan as part of its recording program with EMI, together with symphonies by Schubert, Schumann, and Mendelssohn. It will continue to move forward with landmark performances of early romantic repertoire on historical instruments. Its recording of Berlioz's *Fantastic Symphony* successfully occupied the top ten classical charts for most of 1989 in Great Britain and the United States. Schubert's Symphony No. 9 and a set of Early Romantic Overtures by Weber, Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, and Wagner were released earlier this year, followed by Schubert's Symphonies 5 and 8, Schumann's Symphonies 3 and 4, and Mendelssohn's Symphonies 3 and 4 this autumn.

During 1989, the London Classical Players toured in Germany, Austria, and the United States, as well as in Holland, France, and Belgium. On this, their second tour of the United States, they will visit Boston, Wilmington, New York, Stamford, Houston, Berkeley, Costa Mesa, and Los Angeles, in addition to this evening's concert marking their Ann Arbor debut.

Roger Norrington is among today's leading specialists in historically-informed performances of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, and more recently, Schubert, Schumann, and Mendelssohn, evidenced in the success of the London Classical Players, an ensemble he founded in 1978. His broad experience encompasses both operatic and orchestral conducting, innumerable radio and television broadcasts, and a commitment to contemporary music (including the presentation of over 50 premières).

Born in 1934 in Oxford, England, Roger Norrington studied violin from the age of ten, and, at age ten, performed his first operatic role, that of Phyllis in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*. Music remained a hobby throughout his school years, and he won a choral scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge, to read English Literature. He became immersed in the musical life of Cambridge — singing, playing, and conducting — and in his final year began to organize and conduct his own concerts. After leaving Cambridge, he continued to conduct small choral groups, which led to the founding and development of the Schütz Choir. At this point, music, with emphasis on conducting, became the center of his life.

Norrington's particular interest in authentic performance practice was awakened during his fifteen-year tenure as the first music director of the newly formed Kent Opera, when he performed Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea* on period instruments. Today, along with the activities of his London Classical Players, he appears with other period instrument groups, including the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century, Boston's Early Music Festival, the Netherlands Bach Society, and the Early Opera Project, which he co-founded in 1984 with his wife, producer/choreographer Kay Lawrence. Their production of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and Purcell's *The Faery Queene* staked claims not only for the use of original instruments and vocal techniques, but also for the equal validity of historical staging, scenery, costumes, and acting style. In addition, Norrington has conducted productions for the English National Opera in London, Milan, Venice, Florence, Paris, Bordeaux, Lisbon, Karlsruhe, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Vienna. He made his Covent Garden debut in 1986 with Handel's *Samson* and was invited back to conduct Britten's *Albert Herring* and *Peter Grimes*.

As an orchestral conductor, Roger Norrington has worked with most of the major orchestras of the United Kingdom, including London's Symphony, Philharmonic, and Philharmonia, and the BBC Symphony. He is much in demand in the United States, where he is music director of New York's St. Luke's Orchestra and works each season with the Boston Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony. This season he conducts the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Montreal and Toronto Symphonies. In the summer of 1989, Norrington brought his London Classical Players to the United States for the first time, and they made festival appearances at Great Woods, Tanglewood, Ravinia, and Mostly Mozart (at Lincoln Center), and for the closing performances of Pepsico Summerfare in Purchase, New York.

Typical of Roger Norrington's originality of approach is his invention of a new kind of concertgiving: a whole weekend's events devoted to the music of one composer. His "Haydn Experience" in February 1985 at London's South Bank drew such acclaim that he followed with similar "Experiences" of Beethoven, Mozart, and Berlioz. Concertgoers will remember last November's Michigan MozartFest in Ann Arbor, when he focused on the fortepiano concertos of Mozart, both in concert and symposium.

With his international career firmly in place, Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players are now enjoying an exclusive, long-term association with EMI.

Bringing a Sense of History to Beethoven

It may come as a surprise to those who know of Roger Norrington only through his widely praised early-music recordings that the English conductor has been a fixture on Britain's teeming musical scene for more than two decades. But it was his recent concerts and recordings of the Beethoven symphonies performed by his period-instruments orchestra, the London Classical Players, that really propelled Norrington to the attention of a large musical public, on both sides of the Atlantic. He has risen to the top of the early-music heap, giving his better-known colleagues Christopher Hogwood, John Eliot Gardiner, and Trevor Pinnock a run for their money in the authenticity derby.

Audiences everywhere have responded eagerly to the bracing new sonic and musical perspective that Norrington and his Classical Players bring to the Beethoven symphonies. It's not just the pleasant shock of hearing these familiar works played with the proper balances, pitches, articulations, and timbres; it's the exhilaration of hearing this music played at the speeds Beethoven probably intended.

For many years, those speeds have been the subject of intense scholarly controversy. But Norrington insists the tempo markings are correct, and that they make sense in the perspective of a correct period-instrument performance. This doesn't mean he adheres slavishly to every marking, only that he attempts to reconcile his scholarly instincts about a given tempo with the practicalities of performance — to experiment with the composer's indications. Even when he seems to flirt with perversity (as some critics felt he did in some of his tempos of the Beethoven Ninth on the recent EMI recording), his choices represent a serious attempt to re-create the music as he believes it was meant to be done.

"We approach Beethoven from the point of view of someone brought up on Haydn. I find it exciting to hear period instruments straining at the edge of their capabilities, especially the winds. I love those wild nasal notes produced by the hand-stopped horns. It's something I miss in modern-instrument performances. The subtext of all music of around 1800 is: Can you dance to it?" And the wonderfully fleet and buoyant articulation that the London Classical Players bring to Beethoven (and all the other composers in their diverse repertory) proves that Norrington hasn't forgotten.

Norrington's ensemble draws on the same pool of experienced early-music players that feeds Hogwood's Academy of Ancient Music and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, among other London-based groups. But the musicians make music very differently for Norrington than they do for Hogwood and others, partly because he is an excellent, sensitive, widely experienced conductor. The modest Norrington prefers to attribute the differences to matters of concept and playing style. "I mean, Brueggen and Harnoncourt both play Beethoven totally different from me. So does Hogwood. I have very, very particular ideas about historical playing style that I have slowly developed over the years. It's been a matter of rereading the treatises and trying things out. I think it's good, in principle, to have competition. We are getting a more varied approach now with early music than with so-called modern symphony orchestras. It's like going back to the days of Furtwängler and Toscanini and Walter and Reiner, when there were many different approaches. People have a choice now."

Norrington admits he was a relatively late convert to the period-instrument cause. Though not a musicologist himself, he had always been eager to absorb scholarly ideas about how particular composers or works should be performed. Contact with such early-music experts as the Dutch musicians Gustav Leonhardt and Sigiswald Kuijken further whetted his curiosity about historically correct performance, forcing him to rethink much of the music he admired.

Ironically, it was the modern London orchestra system, widely decried by British critics because of the intolerable burdens it places on underpaid players, that proved such a boon to Norrington and his conducting colleagues. Many fine players, seeking additional employment, welcomed the chance to learn and perform on early instruments: here was a vast, uncharted musical area that allowed them a degree of individual expression hardly possible within the comparatively anonymous, regimented routine of a big symphony orchestra.

Norrington began using authentic instruments in his Schütz Choir performances, not out of faddishness, but because he believed the music sounded better that way. This led him, in turn, to Monteverdi and Purcell, then Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Lately, he has been delving into the early Romantic literature as played on period instruments — Berlioz, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, even Wagner. Nor is Verdi safe from Norrington's "authentic" inquiry; he recently conducted the Verdi Requiem in London and, by observing the composer's markings, managed to shave 17 minutes off Carlo Maria Giulini's performance.

Predictably, those with deeply ingrained stylistic preconceptions about nineteenth-century musical performance will take serious issue with Norrington's approach to that sacrosanct area of the literature. For his part, the conductor welcomes discussion, even controversy, if it helps cast new light on the music itself.

— *John von Rhein (excerpts)*
The Chicago Tribune

London Classical Players

Roger Norrington, *Music Director*

Leader
John Holloway

First Violins
Carla Moore
Jane Gillie
Matthias Witt
Fiona Duncan
Helen Brisco
Liz Edwards
Pierre Joubert
Lucy Russell

Second Violins
Marshall Marcus
Gustav Clarkson
Stephen Rowlinson
Ann Monnington
Catherine Ford
Maurice Whitaker
Julia Bishop
Joanna Parker

Violas
Katherine Hart
Colin Kitching
Rosemary Nalden
Annette Isserlis
Nicola Cleminson
Peter Collyer

Cellos
Susan Sheppard
Sebastian Comberti
Timothy Mason
Timothy Kraemer
Lynden Cranham

Basses
Peter Buckoke
Amanda Macnamara
Peter McCarthy
Ian Anderson

Flutes
Lisa Beznosiuk
Neil McLaren

Oboes
Paul Goodwin
Lorraine Wood

Clarinets
Colin Lawson
Margaret Archibald

Bassoons
Alastair Mitchell
Philip Turbett

Horns
Andrew Clark
Elizabeth Randell
Susan Dent
Colin Horton
Roger Montgomery

Trumpets
Michael Laird
Stephen Keavy
Michael Harrison

Timpani
Robert Howes

Monika Clifford, *Head Administrator*
Colin Kitching, *Orchestral Consultant*
Philippa Brownsword, *Orchestra Manager*
Richard Rosenberg, *Musical Associate*

Inside the Recording Studio

It was years since I had visited Abbey Road Studio No. 1, and I wasn't prepared for the control room transformation. The console was straight out of *Phantom of the Opera*, with its galaxy of orange-lit level indicators. But engineer Mike Clements was only using a fraction of the potential. This mixer could get "The Philadelphia Sound" from a penny whistle and a jew's-harp, but what I was hearing was pure Toscanini/NBC in mid-'80s best quality. I say Toscanini because the music, the finale of Beethoven 2, was registering as comparable in pacing and intensity — horns and timps cutting through *tuttis* to make a brilliant culmination. The orchestra was Roger Norrington's London Classical Players, recording a coupling of Symphonies 2 and 8 for EMI. He didn't seem affronted by the comparison. Not a "records man," he'd nevertheless heard enough to suggest that of the great past maestri, Toscanini had the right grasp of speeds for the Haydn-Beethoven period.

Here, they were going for the metronome markings, even in the finale of the Eighth. Norrington says that even if there were no markings, his players would instinctively adopt stylistic speeds — the very nature of the authentic instrument (e.g., sustaining power of the early string bows) tending to determine the tempo.

Earlier, I had asked producer David Murray about the general sound: none of the thinness or bulges one used to associate with "authenticity." A myth, was his answer. With players of this caliber, the timbres would be right, but not a hardship. David was using the simplest of microphone arrangements — three recent Japanese designs of high sensitivity suspended fairly high up, over the conductor. Screens were standing behind the string basses, and some fruitless experimentation with putting firsts on platform slabs took place in a run-through of the Eighth. The takes, monitored from detail on light headphones, were "covered" with a minimum of fuss; then (democratic indeed) individual players, unhappy with their efforts, would ask to repeat this or that section.

Batonless, Norrington conducts in a way that is, to say the least, energetic: great scything sweeps of the arms to encourage the full bravura of his instrumentalists. He keeps up a patter of instructions, laced with historical anecdotes; the orchestra hardly has time to feel tired . . .

After a quick break, four takes of the *Allegretto* from the Eighth (each one more intensified and with some new rich mining of fresh inner detail), before ending the day's session, gave a foretaste of an exciting project coming to fruition.

— *Christopher Breunig*
Hi-Fi News & Record Review

Coming Soon!

October 26 & 27 Ballet Français de Nancy, Power Center, 8 p.m.
Friday: "Homage to Nijinsky and Balanchine"
Saturday: "Contemporary Classics"

October 28 Shanghai Acrobats and Imperial Warriors of Peking Opera
Sunday, 3 p.m., Power Center for the Performing Arts

October 30 Duo-recital, Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zuckerman
Tuesday, 8 p.m., Hill Auditorium, Music by Bach, Mozart, Prokofiev, Moszowski.
Philips Pre-concert Presentation, 7 p.m. Rackham Building (free). An audio-visual montage prepared and presented by David Smith: "A UMS Photo Retrospective."

November 14 The Prism and Chester Quartets, 8 p.m. Rackham Auditorium.
A concert of 20th-century music, including Michael Sahl's "Storms," for saxophones and strings.
Philips Pre-concert Presentation, 7 p.m. Rackham Building (free), given by U-M professor of saxophone Donald Sinta.