

One tiny key to the symphony might lie in the finale. Its innocuous theme—which is led through a kaleidoscopic set of variations—originates in Beethoven's music for a ballet based on the Prometheus myth.

In the ancient story, Prometheus steals fire from the gods to create humans. The story was popular in Beethoven's time, with Prometheus as a symbol of rebellion. But the image—resistance to powerful interests to the benefit of all—retains its relevance.

Still, Beethoven kept the meanings of his works intentionally vague: "No mortal person has raised my veil," read an inscription he kept on his work desk. Any meaning in this ambitious, ambiguous symphony must be found by each audience member for themselves.

**First public performance:** April 7, 1805, at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna, Austria

**First SLSO performance:** February 11, 1906, Alfred Ernst conducting

**Most recent SLSO performance:** October 1, 2016, David Robertson conducting

**Scoring:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

**Performance time:** Approximately 47 minutes

*Tim Munro is the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's Creative Partner. A writer, broadcaster, and Grammy-winning flutist, he lives in Chicago with his wife, son, and badly-behaved orange cat.*



St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

20  
21

141st season

Stéphane Denève, conductor

Thursday, October 15, 2020 at 7:30pm

Friday, October 16, 2020 at 11:00am

Saturday, October 17, 2020 at 7:30pm

Sunday, October 18, 2020 at 3:00pm

**JESSIE MONTGOMERY** *Starburst*

(b. 1981)

**BEETHOVEN**

(1770–1827)

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major,  
op. 55, "Eroica"

Allegro con brio

Marcia funebre: Adagio assai

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Finale: Allegro molto

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This program is presented by **The Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation**.

# Program Notes

By Tim Munro

## Stéphane on this program

“After more than six months of unexpected silence, we restart with a universal masterpiece. Something essential. The ‘Eroica’ is full of hope, and this is the right piece to begin making music together again.

“We commemorate the loss of the past months with the symphony’s second movement, the *Marcia funebre* (“Funeral March”), but at the same time the symphony shows the fullness of life, offering every possible emotion. There is romantic struggle, joy, energy, youthful freshness, divine beauty and—in the last movement—something extremely witty.

“Playing this piece with a chamber orchestra is an opportunity to offer a different type of energy to this symphony, a different sound. In fact, when the ‘Eroica’ was premiered, it was in a very small hall, with a very small orchestra.

“With a chamber orchestra, there is an element of chamber music. The energy will be different, because when you have a smaller ensemble everybody plays more like a soloist. I will guide the interpretation and, I hope, give you a new experience.”



### JESSIE MONTGOMERY

Born 1981, New York, New York

## Starburst

### Montgomery: *Starburst*

Jessie Montgomery wrote *Starburst* for The Sphinx Virtuosi. This ensemble grew out of The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African American and Latinx string players.

In a “starburst” galaxy, new stars are created at an incredibly fast rate, changing the structure of the galaxy. Montgomery draws a parallel with The Sphinx Organization, which, in its support for young musical stars, is slowly but surely changing the galaxy of American classical music.

The music of *Starburst*, Montgomery writes, is also “a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle fleeting melodies in an attempt to create a multidimensional soundscape.”

Montgomery is a violinist and composer whose work is heard across the country. “I’ve always been interested in trying to find the intersection between different types of music,” she has said. “I imagine that music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.”

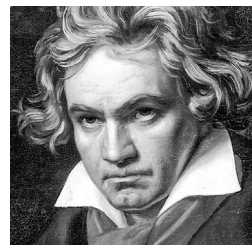
Recent works by Montgomery include a nonet inspired by the Great Migration and told from the perspective of her great-grandfather William McCauley, and a reimagining of Scott Joplin’s opera *Treemonisha*. Montgomery is a member of the Catalyst Quartet and plays with the Silkroad Ensemble and Sphinx Virtuosi.

**First performance:** September 2012, in Miami, Florida, by The Sphinx Virtuosi

**First SLSO performance:** This weekend’s concerts

**Scoring:** strings

**Performance time:** Approximately 3 minutes



### LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

### Beethoven: Symphony No. 3, “Eroica”

Beethoven was at his lowest point. The ambitious 32-year-old had steadily built a career in Vienna, but struggled with hearing loss and ringing in his ear.

Sent into isolation to come to terms with this condition, Beethoven wrote a letter to his brothers. “[F]or six years I have been a hopeless case,” he writes, “forced to isolate myself, to live in loneliness ... [I]f I get close to people I feel terrified that I might be found out.”

Isolation, Beethoven writes, was forcing him “to become a philosopher.” He doesn’t expand on this phrase, but it was around this time—the time Beethoven began work on the Third Symphony—that his music decisively shifted to a bold, strange new direction.

The kernel of the new symphony was a single person: Napoleon Bonaparte. A divisive military and political leader, Napoleon dominated European affairs for more than a decade. The defensive, arrogant, self-obsessed man was loved and loathed across the continent.

Beethoven saw himself reflected in Napoleon. Both men achieved success without inherited wealth, and both fought in their own revolution. “In the world of art, as in the whole of our great creation,” Beethoven wrote, “freedom and progress are the main objectives.”

Most likely, Beethoven’s intention was to give the Third Symphony the title “Bonaparte.” But (according to one telling) when Beethoven learned that Napoleon had crowned himself Emperor, he angrily tore the symphony’s title page. “Now he will also trample all human rights underfoot,” he reportedly said, “and only pander to his own ambition.”

Later, Beethoven would subtitle the symphony “Eroica” (“Heroic”), writing that it was “composed to celebrate the memory of a great man.”

If Beethoven’s first two symphonies push at the edges of tradition, the Third crashes through it with force. The “Eroica” was longer than any previous symphony, it pushed players of the time to the edge of their capabilities, and it baffled listeners, who found it long, shrill, and complicated.