



# Program Notes

for kids

**Blue Cathedral**  
**Saturday, March 17, 2018**  
**8:00 p.m.**  
**Michigan Theater**

**Higdon**      *Blue Cathedral*  
**Beethoven**      *Piano Concerto No. 1*

*Intermission*

**Schumann**      *Symphony No. 1, "Spring"*



**Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra**  
*Music in the Key of A<sup>2</sup>*®

# Blue Cathedral

by Jennifer Higdon

## About the Music

### What kind of piece is this?

*Blue Cathedral* is a *tone poem*. A *tone poem* (also often called a *symphonic poem*) is typically a single-movement piece of music that is inspired by a non-musical idea or story. *Blue Cathedral* was also created as a *commission* from the Curtis Institute of Music, where Jennifer Higdon teaches. A *commission* is when a person or group of people pay a composer to write a brand new piece of music. Often, that piece is written for a specific event or to honor a person or place. In the case of *Blue Cathedral*, this composition does both. The Curtis Institute asked Higdon to write a piece for a celebration of the Institute's 75th anniversary. She chose to write about the inspirational story of her and her brother's journey through life.

### What is it about?

This piece was written after the death of Jennifer's brother, Andrew Blue. The solo flute & clarinet voices are used to represent Jennifer and her brother. Jennifer, who is represented by the solo flute, enters first because she was the oldest of the two siblings. Throughout the piece you will hear the flute and clarinet converse with themselves and other members of the orchestra which is meant to represent their journeys both individually and together through life. Even though it was Andrew who passed away, the piece ends with the flute dropping out which leaves his solo clarinet voice playing alone. Why is it surprising that it's the clarinet voice that is the last one playing and not the flute voice? Why do you think Higdon wrote the piece to end this way?

### Fun Facts

Higdon uses two non-traditional percussion instruments in *Blue Cathedral*: Chinese Reflex Bells and Tuned Glasses.



### Listen for...

Watch for the back row of brass players to set down their instruments and pick up water glasses.

How are they playing these glasses?

What sounds are the glasses making?

Do all of the glasses sound the same?



## About the Composer

**Jennifer Higdon** | Born December 31, 1962 in Brooklyn, New York

### Family & Career

Jennifer Higdon did not start taking music lessons until she was 18 years old - 3 years after she started playing flute. She now holds PhD and Master's degrees in music composition, following her Bachelor degree and Artist Diploma in flute performance. She has received many notable awards for her compositions, including a Pulitzer Prize and a Grammy. *Blue Cathedral* is one of the most frequently performed contemporary orchestra works.

Higdon is a modern composer who is still living. She currently teaches at the Curtis Institute of Music and resides in Philadelphia with her wife Cheryl Lawson.

### Listen for...

*Cadenzas* in the first and third movements. A *cadenza* is a section where the soloist shows off their skills. The rest of the orchestra stops playing during the *cadenza*. In this piece, Beethoven put a *cadenza* near the end of the first movement and at two points in the last movement.

After the *cadenza* in the last movement, the pianist plays a quiet melody, then the orchestra ends the piece playing loudly.



*Beethoven was only 25 when he wrote this concerto. This was him when he was 33.*

### Fun Facts

One of Beethoven's favorite foods was macaroni and cheese. He was known for his poor cooking skills and for his bad behavior in restaurants. He had a loud laugh, an annoying voice, and sometimes left a restaurant without paying, writing music on the bill instead.

Beethoven composed best while walking. He was often seen wandering the streets, waving his arms and loudly singing bits of music, oblivious to the crowds of people staring at him.

# Piano Concerto No. 1

by Ludwig van Beethoven

## About the Music

### What kind of piece is this?

A *concerto* is a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In this case, the piano player is the soloist, so he sits at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a concerto, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three movements.

## About the Composer

**Ludwig van Beethoven** | Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn, Germany | Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

### Family

Ludwig van Beethoven's parents were Johann van Beethoven and Maria Magdalena Keverich. Johann was a German musician, teacher, and singer, and was Beethoven's first music teacher. Johann was quite harsh with Ludwig, and neighbors sometimes reported seeing Beethoven standing at the piano in tears. Beethoven had two brothers and one sister. He never married, nor had any children.

### Music

Beethoven is one of the most important composers of classical music. His best-known compositions include nine symphonies, five concertos for piano, 32 piano sonatas, and sixteen string quartets. Because his ninth symphony was so well-respected, composers since Beethoven have felt the "curse of the ninth." Many believed that they would die after completing nine symphonies, so they were afraid to reach that landmark.

# Symphony No. 1, "Spring"

by Robert Schumann



Robert and Clara Wieck Schumann

## About the Music

### What kind of piece is this?

A *Symphony* is a long piece of music containing three or four movements. These *movements*, or sections, each have their own characteristics. Some movements may be upbeat and lively, while others may be slower and more song-like. This symphony has four movements and is about a forty-five minutes long, much longer than any symphony before it.

### When was it written?

Schumann liked to focus on one thing at a time. At first, he only wrote piano music. Then, in 1840, he spent a whole year only writing songs. And in 1841, he focused on symphonies. The next year, it was chamber music. Schumann wrote this piece in just a few weeks in the winter of 1841.

### What is it about?

Composing in the dead of winter, Schumann was longing for spring. He originally titled the work *Spring Symphony* and gave titles to each of the movements as well. However, in a move not unusual for a composer who did not want to tell people what to hear, Schumann erased the titles before the piece was published. But maybe you can still hear "spring" in this symphony.

### Fun facts

Clara was much more famous than Robert in their lifetime. When Robert traveled with her on her concert tours, people often asked if he was a musician, too.

Schumann was also a music critic. He invented two fictional characters who argued about modern music: Florestan, who was very passionate and fiery, and Eusebius, who was more calm and thoughtful.

## About the Composer

**Robert Schumann** | Born June 18, 1810 in Zwickau, Germany | Died July 29, 1856 in Endenich, Germany

### Family & Career

Schumann studied to be a lawyer, but then left that profession to pursue his dream of becoming a pianist. After injuring his hand, he devoted himself to composition. Schumann married Clara Wieck, a pianist and composer and the daughter of his piano teacher. They had eight children.

### Music

Schumann wrote a lot of music including piano music, songs for voice and piano, four symphonies, and one opera. Two of his most famous works are his *Scenes from Childhood* (13 piano pieces in which he reminisces about his childhood) and *Album for the Young* (a collection of 43 short piano pieces that he wrote for his daughters).

