

Today's program

SETH KNOPP, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Yellow Barn

Opening Night

July 10, 2020 | 7:30 | The Big Barn, Putney, VT

Charles Ives (1874-1954) Piano Sonata No. 2 "Concord, Mass., 1840-60" (c.1911-15)

- I. "Emerson"
- II. "Hawthorne"
- III. "The Alcotts"
- IV. "Thoreau"

Gilbert Kalish, piano

Brief intermission

On the Big Barn walls Autograph sketches and manuscript pages from Beethoven's String Quartet Op.132

Stephen Coxe (b.1966) Entstehung Heiliger Dankgesang (Emergence of a Holy Song of Thanksgiving) (2020)
World Premiere

Alice Ivy-Pemberton and Emma Frucht, violins; Roger Tapping, viola;
Coleman Itzkoff, cello; Eduardo Leandro, percussion

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quartet in A Minor, Op.132 (1825)

Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart (Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian mode)

Alice Ivy-Pemberton and Emma Frucht, violins; Roger Tapping, viola;
Coleman Itzkoff, cello

Big Barn installation designed and created by Catherine Stephan

Wall program by Maureen Hoon (and Beethoven)

Program Notes

Stephen Coxe (b.1966) Entstehung Heiliger Dankgesang (Emergence of a Holy Song of Thanksgiving) (2020)

Stephen Coxe is a recipient of awards from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Artspace, ASCAP, Composers Guild, Meet The Composer, and National Association of Composers, as well as a BAEF Fellowship. He has received commissions from American Voices, Musicians Accord, the Peabody Trio, Sequitur, and others, and has held residencies at Yaddo, Ragdale, and the Virginia Center. He has directed programs for young composers at the Peabody Institute, the Walden School, and the Putney School. Since its inception in 1998, Stephen has shaped the direction of composition activities at Yellow Barn's Young Artist Program.

In addition to his *Entstehung Heiliger Dankgesang* that you will hear this evening, Yellow Barn has commissioned many works from Stephen, among them *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* for narrator, violin, and marimba, *A Book of Dreams* for accordion, percussion, and piano, and *Gordon's Garden Music*, an hour-long performance/installation for multiple ensembles premiered at Hayward Gardens. *Previous Yellow Barn musician (since 1999)*

Stephen offers the following note for tonight's composition:

Entstehung Heiliger Dankgesang was written to precede a performance of the slow movement ("Heiliger Dankgesang") from Beethoven's Opus 132 String Quartet. Its material consists of fragments, realizations, and musical 'essences' from that movement, and it is performed this evening within the total space of Big Barn surrounded by pages from Beethoven's sketch books.

Influenced by the presentation of "Beethoven Walks" during this Yellow Barn season, which exhibit examples of Beethoven's sketches outdoors, "Entstehung" relies primarily on material from Beethoven's sketch books for interpretation of musical 'essences'. It is also scored for string quartet, with percussionist, closely emulating the "Heiliger Dankgesang" movement from which it is drawn.

The current work consists of forty-five pages of realizations, reworkings, responses, guidelines for interpretation, and examples from Beethoven's autograph score, all of which may be excerpted and arranged in any fashion for a given performance. A performance of the entire set would take well over an hour: this evening's performance explores a considerably shorter 'excerpted' version among many possible versions, as it is conceived to directly precede a performance of the Opus 132 slow movement.

I have interpreted the Beethoven slow movement through four basic 'categories' of response: Canons, which take essential canonic material from the slow movement and re-interpret them as if felt to be sketch material; realizations from selected sketch pages, interpreted as visual representations of new music, often involving theatrical gestures or 'sound' gestures as extensions of traditional performance

practice; guidelines for live performance from selected sketch pages, rather than written out realizations; and passages from Beethoven's autograph showing late stage editing, maintaining these unedited originals as 'roads not taken'. These chosen autograph passages are often accompanied by my original musical responses.

Entstehung will incorporate sections from each of the above 'categories', followed by a performance of the Opus 132 slow movement. This has been a collaborative effort with Seth Knopp, who brought the idea of this piece to me, the input and vision of the performers, Alice Ivy-Pemberton, Emma Frucht, Roger Tapping, Coleman Itzkoff, and Eduardo Leandro, and Catherine Stephan, who created the installation present in the Big Barn this evening.

—Stephen Coxe

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quartet in A Minor, Op.132 (1925)
Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart (Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian mode)

A poem by Dylan Thomas begins: Your pain shall be a music in your string / And fill the mouths of heaven with your tongue

Art has the capacity to take on the burdens of existence and lend to them in reflection beauty and nobility that both console and edify. Ludwig van Beethoven was a man within whom the trials and triumphs of being resonated loudly. His ability to translate these into music was not something he took lightly; sensing the pressure of time in his final years he chose to renounce the felicities of life and devote his energies fully to composition. For Beethoven the act of composition was an act of giving, of doing for others, and the last years of his life saw the birth of a remarkable set of works, which are indeed a gift. His late period works offer hope of transcendence through penetrating insight into the nature of suffering and difficulty.

No single utterance epitomizes this more than the third movement of Beethoven's opus 132 string quartet, entitled "Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian mode". This is a profound and deeply personal utterance, rooted certainly in biographical fact, but perhaps in metaphysical metaphor as well. The ancient modes, with a slightly different color than the major and minor scales on which most music of this period is based, and thus exotic in sound, suggest piety and devotion. (Among Beethoven's unrealized plans at the end of his life were a "pious song in a symphony in the ancient modes" and a "chorus in the ancient modes" as part of an oratorio.) Hymn-like sections alternate with sections marked "feeling new strength." In this quicker, far more ornate music, there is the sense of a vibration of the soul as it aspires upward toward heaven, of illumination born of a struggle with darkness. At each return of the hymn-like music it becomes more sensitive, more vulnerable. At its third and final appearance Beethoven writes in the score above the material which weaves through the intoned hymn melody "with the most intimate feeling." The movement builds to a climax of nearly unthinkable

intensity, filled with love and recognition of the sublime. Its denouement leads to an almost complete stillness, with only the merest suggestion of a vibration within, a sense of peace. The last moments perhaps relate to something Beethoven had copied into one of his notebooks of this period, from an Indian religious text, “for God, time absolutely does not exist.” This movement must be counted among the greatest of Beethoven’s creations.

—Mark Steinberg