The Williams College Department of Music presents the Berkshire Symphony in concert on Friday, September 29, at 7:30 p.m. in Chapin Hall. There is a pre-concert talk with conductor Ronald Feldman at 6:45 p.m. in Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall.

This event is free and open to the public. There are no reservations or ticketing.

The program includes Beethoven *Fidelio Overture*, the world premiere of *Sinfonietta* by faculty member Zachary Wadsworth, Haydn *Symphony No. 8, "Le Soir,"* and Richard Strauss *Serenade for Winds*.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Fidelio Overture, op. 72c (1814)

In 1804, Ludwig van Beethoven began work on his only opera, which puts into music the heroic tale of Leonore, who rescues her husband Florestan from starving to death in a political prison.

A nobleman and Spanish official, Florestan is abducted after attempting to expose the abuses of his rival, Pizarro, who has corrupted the prison system in Seville where he serves as warden. Although Pizarro has spread false rumors that her husband has died, Leonore maintains hope that Florestan is alive and risks her life to search for him. She takes on the disguise of a male guard named Fidelio in order to work as a prison guard at Pizarro's prison. Gradually, Leonore gains access to all inmates by earning the other guards' trust that she can fulfill her duties. It is then announced that the local minister is planning a visit to the prison to see for himself if Pizarro's reported misdeeds are true, and so Pizarro hastens Florestan's execution and burial in order to hide evidence. In the dim and murky caverns of the prison's underground catacombs, Leonore is ordered to begin digging Florestan's grave, during which she can hear Florestan's cries in the dark. She offers him bread and wine, but is caught by the other guards. As Pizarro rushes into the room, Leonore flings herself on top of Florestan, drawing a pistol to defend herself. A distant trumpet call then signals the arrival of the minister, who releases Florestan and captures Pizarro.

Beethoven had completed composing the music for *Fidelio* before he started writing the opera's overture, or the orchestral introduction that is played before the performers enter on stage. This was common practice in the opera world; since only the musicians were required, its rehearsal could be left until the very end. Nevertheless, he had quite a difficult time settling on an appropriate musical introduction for this opera, between 1805 and 1808 writing three *Leonore Overtures*. In 1814, for a revival of the production in Vienna, Beethoven wrote a fourth and final edition, simply called *Fidelio Overture*, the version the Berkshire Symphony will perform.

Fidelio Overture is the most unique in its group of four, having been written many years after the others. Both Beethoven and the audience had been unsatisfied with the three previous renditions for a variety of reasons: the first had been deemed by some to be "too light in character," the third was by contrast too long and heavy – "less an overture to a music drama than a music drama itself," as the opera composer Richard Wagner described it. The second had the right ideas, but it was said to be too rough and not thought out well enough. With the fourth, Beethoven took a step back and started from scratch, creating an overture that replaced drama with energy and excitement. This version also did not draw on any of the themes from the opera as the others did: Beethoven believed that the overture should not spoil the most important and moving parts of the production, such as the arias or the famous brass fanfare that signals the minister's arrival.

In the end, Beethoven deemed the 1814 *Fidelio Overture* as the true curtain-raiser to the opera, and today productions honor his wish by performing this version instead of the others. It was in part because of his years-long struggle to write a compelling overture that Beethoven, despite being such a prolific composer in so many other fields, vowed never again to undertake the writing of an opera.

Zachary Wadsworth, Associate Professor of Music, Williams College

Sinfonietta (2023)

The second piece on this concert's program was written by an esteemed member of our own Music Department faculty, Professor Zachary Wadsworth. A teacher here since 2015, his previous compositions have won numerous awards and have been presented by different ensembles located around the world, including the Yale Schola Cantorum, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Atlanta Philharmonic Orchestra. Wadsworth's anthem *Out of the South Cometh the Whirlwind* was performed by the choir at Westminster Abbey in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II.

This September, Wadsworth sets his sights back on Williams College, presenting a piece written with the Berkshire Symphony in mind. Specifically, this piece celebrates the numerous musical achievements of Ronald Feldman, who has led the orchestra for an amazing thirty-five years. As I was outlining these notes, Professor Wadsworth was putting the finishing touches on the full score. I reached out to him for comment on his piece, and he replied,

"My *Sinfonietta* is a kind of retirement present for Ronald Feldman, honoring his longtime leadership of the Berkshire Symphony. While composing it, I was thinking a lot about what a symphony orchestra means, both in music history and in the lived present. At the beginning of the piece, I channel Classical style through a more contemporary idiom in an attempt to rekindle the countless symphony performances that Feldman has led. Listeners with music theory knowledge can listen for Sonata-Allegro form here, despite the many "wrong notes." In the rest of the piece, I move away from older styles to explore how collective music-making connects student and faculty musicians, and how one person's musical legacy can shape both past and future."

In a summer email to orchestra members detailing this season's program, Mr. Feldman wrote,

"Being a champion for the music of living composers has been an important part of my musical DNA for 50 years. I'm excited to see Zach's composition."

This is not the first time a piece by Professor Wadsworth was written for a member of the Williams College Music Department faculty. In 2021, Joanna Kurkowicz, Lyell B. Clay Artist in Residence in Violin and Concertmaster of the Berkshire Symphony, commissioned a work by Wadsworth called *Fixation I* for her performance series "Bach and Beyond," in which she presents contemporary music alongside the works written by Johann Sebastian Bach that they were inspired by.

"[Professor Wadsworth] is a really talented and original composer. We are lucky to have him at Williams College," Ms. Kurkowicz commented. The Berkshire Symphony performance this September, she added, "certainly will be a special concert."

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Serenade for Winds in E-Flat Major, op. 7 (1881)

The third piece on our program, *Serenade for Winds*, was written by Richard Strauss when he was only seventeen. Richard was at this time first learning how to write for different sections of the orchestra other than the stringed instruments he understood intuitively, himself a violinist. The serenade demonstrated at once his capability for woodwind orchestration – his musical childhood was influenced in large part by his father, Franz Strauss, who played principal French horn at the Court Opera in Munich, and so Richard had much in the way of preparation for writing this piece. The remarkable nuance of its melodies and its luscious harmony allows the ensemble to sound much more like a choir of human voices rather than simply a section of woodwind instruments.

"*Serenade* demonstrates the richness of the wind choir," writes Mr. Feldman, "Warm, luxurious harmonies are what this composition is about … gorgeous piece!"

Indeed, this piece was a crucial stepping stone in the road towards many of Richard Strauss' future endeavors in large, lush orchestration, including *Don Juan*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Ein Heldenleben*, and *Eine Alpensinfonie*.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Hob. I:8 "Le Soir" (1761)

The final piece on this concert's program comes from undoubtedly the most prolific symphonist of all time, Franz Joseph Haydn. The eighth of over one hundred symphonies that the composer would write, "*Le Soir*" is one of the first in a line of works that would solidify Haydn's title as the "Father of the Symphony."

Franz Joseph was born in 1732 in Rohrau, a small village in Austria between Vienna and Bratislava. An acclaimed chorister in his youth, Haydn was forced to move on when his voice matured and faced hardship as a musical freelancer with no formal training in theory or composition. He put himself through rigorous self-instruction, studying the most important pieces of the day, such as the six keyboard sonatas of Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, and numerous manuals on music theory.

In 1757, Haydn was appointed as Kapellmeister, or music director, of a palace in the modern-day Czech Republic where his first employer, Count Morzin, lived. In those times aristocratic support was crucial for a musician or composer to attain enough income. It was under Count Morzin that Haydn wrote his first handful of symphonies, to be performed by the palace's own small orchestra, but soon this became too costly for even the Count to maintain, and so Haydn was dismissed in 1761.

Hearing news of his great skill, Prince Paul Anton II, head of the Esterhazy family, quickly hired Haydn after he was laid off. Franz Joseph soon was promoted to Kapellmeister of Eisenstadt, the Esterhazy palace south of Vienna, where he would lead the orchestra, chamber music, and opera.

Le Soir (evening) is the final symphony in a set of three that was commissioned by Prince Paul Anton II in 1761, perhaps the very first Esterhazy commission Haydn received in the almost thirty years that he served the family. Each of the three symphonies was inspired by the different times of day. Symphony No. 6 was given the title "*Le matin"* (morning) and features a slow introduction indicating the sunrise. Symphony No. 7 was given the title "*Le midi"* (noon) and features fanfares, reminiscent of ceremonial marches.

The most prominent feature in *Le Soir* takes place in the fourth and final movement, which depicts *"la tempesta,"* or the storm. Haydn uses multiple devices to illustrate the falling

rain, including descending scales in the strings and broken chords played by the flute. Leading this is a series of quick leaps played by a solo violinist that adds tension to the scene, perhaps representing rolling thunder clouds or rushing wind. In all, the movement stays in a major key, indicating that this may be a pleasant rainstorm after all.

–Richard O’Donnell ‘27