



Lieutenant Colonel Ryan J. Nowlin, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA  
Sunday, February 4, 2024 at 2:00 P.M.  
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center  
Northern Virginia Community College  
Alexandria Campus  
Captain Darren Y. Lin, conducting

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Tōru Takemitsu (1930–96)

*Rain Tree* (1981)

*MSgt Steven Owen, SSgt Alexander Garde,  
and SSgt Michael Hopkins, percussion*

Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)

*Absolute Ocean* (2008)

the moon is hiding in her hair  
who knows if the moon's a balloon  
Interlude for solo harp and four instruments  
open your heart

*SSgt Hannah Davis, soprano  
SSgt Taylor Fleshman, harp obbligato*

## INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

*Symphony No. 6 in F, Opus 68, Pastoral*

Allegro ma non troppo  
Andante molto moto  
Allegro  
Allegro  
Allegretto

# ***PROGRAM NOTES***

## ***Rain Tree (1981)***

Tōru Takemitsu (1930–96)

Tōru Takemitsu was a Japanese composer and writer on aesthetics and music theory. He was largely self-taught as a composer and was known for his unique approach to musical timbre. Many of Takemitsu's works are marked by unusual combinations of instruments and inventive orchestration techniques. He was a founding member of the avant-garde artist collective Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop). Many of Jikken Kōbō's members were self-taught, like Takemitsu, and created outside academia and Japan's art culture. They collaborated on the production and presentation of performances combining visual art and literary art, with music written both by the collective's members and the Western avant-garde. Those performances were influential in the twentieth-century art scene.

Takemitsu gained international attention in the late 1950s. The NHK or Japan Broadcasting Corporation played Takemitsu's Requiem for Strings by mistake as part of their survey of Japanese music for Igor Stravinsky's 1958 visit to Japan. Stravinsky insisted on listening to the entire piece and praised the work's "sincerity" and "passionate" writing. Stravinsky reached out to Takemitsu and invited him to lunch. Shortly after Stravinsky's return to the United States, Takemitsu received a commission for a new work by the Koussevitsky Foundation possibly through a recommendation from Stravinsky to Aaron Copland.

Takemitsu became known as the leading Japanese composer of the twentieth century. He received numerous awards, commissions, and honors, and composed more than 100 film scores and about 130 concert works. Upon Takemitsu's passing, Japanese composer Jō Kondō summarized his late colleague with the following words: "Needless to say, Takemitsu is among the most important composers in Japanese music history. He was also the first Japanese composer fully recognized in the West, and remained the guiding light for the younger generations of Japanese composers."

Takemitsu wrote three compositions with the title "Rain Tree:" beginning with the percussion trio written in 1981 and followed by the piano works *Rain Tree Sketch* written in 1982 and *Rain Tree Sketch II – In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen* written in 1991. The title "Rain Tree" stemmed from the novel *Atama no ii, Ame no Ki* by Kenzaburo Oe:

It has been named the "rain tree" for its abundant foliage continues to let fall rain drops collected from last night's shower until well after the following midday. Its hundreds of thousands of tiny leaves - finger-like - store up moisture while other trees dry up at once. What an ingenious tree, isn't it?

Takemitsu took this turn of phrase as a metaphor for water circulating in the cosmos. To express this musically, he utilized "modes of limited transpositions" or types of musical scales which have two or more transpositions that result in identical pitches. These modes were compiled by the French composer Olivier Messiaen and utilized by Takemitsu to evoke the cosmos.

***Absolute Ocean (2008)***  
Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)

Thomas mirrors the sparse beauty of E. E. Cumming’s poetry in this song cycle. *Absolute Ocean* opens simply, with unison melodic lines in the solo voice, solo harp, and strings. Thomas gradually introduces additional colors, most notably from the percussion section. “who knows if the moon’s a balloon” serves as scherzo. The solo voice is used percussively, playfully tossing a single melodic line back and forth with the orchestra. The third movement, “Interlude” is purely instrumental. The solo harp comes to the fore, acting as a connective tissue between the disparate textures. “open your heart” returns to the sparseness of the first movement with an added sense of urgency while recalling musical ideas from earlier movements. The composer wrote the following about the work:

Lasting for a duration of 22 minutes, the four-movement composition has the following characteristics. First, this work is for a relatively small orchestra, in which there is only one of each wind type: one piccolo, one flute, one alto flute, one oboe, one English horn, and so forth. Second, six players are playing from the very back of the orchestra, arranged in a semi-circle in this order: Perc. 1, Perc. 2, Celesta, Piano (lid off), Perc. 3, Perc. 4. They form a “wall” or “screen” of sound that surrounds the rest of the orchestra, and they often play with the harp obbligato part, as if to take the harp’s music and amplify it, like a spiraling helix, through the orchestra. Third, generally only pitched percussion are used. And finally, the notation is highly detailed and nuanced.

Perfumes of my “grandparents” can be smelled in the music—Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy, Mahler, Berg, Berio, Brahms, American Jazz, Knussen, and so forth. But it is not “stolen Debussy” or “paraphrased Stravinsky;” rather, it is all personal musical invention.

The wide variety of characters in the piece—graceful, majestic, spacious, spry, jazzy, resonant, elegant, playful, lively, rhythmic, punchy, and lyrical—imply a great deal of color and motion. Everything is an organic outgrowth of something else, and transformation is key.

The closing image of the final poem, “Absolute ocean,” became the title for the entire composition.

**Staff Sergeant Hannah Davis, soprano**

Soprano vocalist and concert moderator Staff Sergeant Hannah Davis of Pittsburgh, PA joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band in September 2023. She is the band’s second official female vocalist. Staff Sgt. Davis began her musical instruction at age eight. After graduating in 2017 from Moon Area High School in Moon Township, PA, she attended West Virginia University (WVU) where she studied under Hope Koehler and earned a bachelor’s degree in music in 2021. Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” she performed with the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra and WVU Opera Theatre and was a private voice instructor.

**Staff Sergeant Taylor Fleshman, harp obbligato**

Harpist Staff Sgt. Taylor Fleshman of Kernersville, NC, joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band in July 2023. Staff Sgt. Fleshman began her musical training on harp at age 7. After graduating in 2014 from University of North Carolina School of the Arts, she attended the University of Cincinnati, where she studied under Dr. Gillian Benet Sella and

earned a bachelor's of music performance in 2018. She then continued her studies with Florence Sitruk at Indiana University where she earned a master's of music in 2020. Prior to joining "The President's Own," Staff Sgt. Fleshman was principal harp with The Orchestra Now and was featured as a guest soloist with the Moscow Symphony Orchestra, the Pacific Region International Summer Music Academy Orchestra, and the Jakarta Simfonia Orchestra. She has also performed with the Cincinnati, Richmond and Virginia Symphony Orchestras.

### **Symphony No. 6 in F, Opus 68, "Pastoral"**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

*"How happy I am to be able to wander among bushes and herbs, under trees and over rocks; no man can love the country as I love it. Woods, trees, and rocks send back the echo that man desires."*

—Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven joined a long line of composers inspired by nature with the "Pastoral" symphony. From prehistoric and ancient music imitating sounds of the natural world to Antonio Vivaldi's imitation of birdsong in *Spring* in *The Four Seasons* composers have often sought to represent the outdoors with music. About a quarter century before Beethoven's "Pastoral," the German composer Justin Heinrich Knecht wrote *Le Portrait musical de la nature*, a five-movement work that may have inspired Beethoven. Knecht's *Portrait* included both a storm sequence and a conclusion that offered thanks to a divine being, two ideas mirrored in Beethoven's symphony.

The "Pastoral" represents a unique innovation in music history. Beethoven created a descriptive work still cast within the classical symphony form. This symphony exists as a kind of prototype for the fully programmatic works created in the Romantic era. Beethoven's simultaneous adherence and expansion of the symphonic form paved the way for composers of the future like Hector Berlioz, Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, and Franz Liszt.

Unlike the Romantic era programmatic music to come, Beethoven was insistent that the "Pastoral" would not paint a specific picture or tell a certain story. Instead, the symphony expressed his feelings about spending time in the country. Throughout the sketches of this work, Beethoven wrote reminders to himself that the music did not tell a story. Early Beethoven biographer Gustav Nottebohm refers to the following notes in Beethoven's sketches for the work:

Sinfonia caratteristica—or recollection of country life...All tone painting loses its value if pushed too far in instrumental music...Sinfonia pastorella—anyone who has formed any idea of rural life does not need many titles to imagine the composer's intentions...Even without a description, the whole thing, which is feeling more than tone painting, will be recognized!

Beethoven gave each movement titles that were evocative and not overly prescriptive. The first movement's translated title, "Pleasant, cheerful sensations awakened on arrival in the countryside," incorporates compositional techniques established in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to evoke pastoral settings. This includes bass lines scored in fifths suggesting bagpipe drones, the prominent use of the oboe evoking folk instruments, and twittering woodwind melodies conjuring birdsong.

The undulating rhythms that open the second movement, “Scene by the brook,” frame the movement. The birdsong hinted in the first movement is fleshed out in the movement’s codetta. Beethoven specifies which birdcall each instrument plays: the nightingale by the flute, the quail by the oboe, and the cuckoo by the clarinet. Modern Beethoven scholar Barry Cooper discusses this as “the most specifically naturalistic passage in the symphony...the music is still essentially motivic, with the ‘nightingale’ developing a figure from the accompaniment in bar 1.” Even in the most programmatic moment of the piece, Beethoven’s adherence to Classical motivic development is prioritized over Romantic musical depiction.

Humans of the countryside, not animals, are the focus of the third movement. The “Merry gathering of the country people” is a joyous depiction of a country dance. Beethoven attempts to capture the limited skills of a village band, such as limiting the bassoon’s part to only three notes for an extended passage. This bucolic romp is anchored to the Classical minuet and trio form, modifying only the melodic and harmonic content to evoke the rustic celebration.

The happiness of this scene gives way to one of the most vivid musical depictions of a thunderstorm. Beethoven creates the storm with sudden changes of dynamic, irregular phrase lengths, and the inclusion of piccolo and trombones which make their first appearance in this movement.

The oboe signals the end of the storm as the symphony moves without pause into the final movement: “Shepherds’ song: Beneficent feelings abound with thanks to the Godhead after the storm.” Shepherds come to mind with an alphorn call played by the clarinet and French horn which transforms into the movement’s main theme. Music critic Richard Osborne describes that, “[i]n the Finale, Beethoven becomes the shepherds, sharing with them the mood of general thanksgiving, before a distant muted horn, emblem of autumn and the dying year, sounds its chilly lament.”