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Get hooked on classics

MSO pairs the masters for second Bravo concert

BY GREG WAXBERG

Special to Northeast Ledger

They're probably the two most recognized composers in classical music, and they're both on the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra's program on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at Thalia Mara Hall. Music director Crafton Beck will conduct Beethoven's uplifting "Leonore Overture No. 3" and "Symphony No. 7," with Mozart's popular "Clarinet Concerto" in the middle.

Beethoven's overture is one of four that he composed for his only opera, "Fidelio." The story focuses on Leonore, who disguises herself as a man named Fidelio to rescue her husband from unjust imprisonment. Her love and devotion conquer tyranny, and the overture is equally triumphant.

"Leonore Overture No. 3" is not often played in opera houses because some conductors and stage directors consider it too powerful in the middle of the action, but it is popular as an independent work in concert halls.

"I will never forget sitting in the silence of the opera hall at Lyric Opera in Chicago and waiting for Act II of 'Fidelio' to begin ... and out of the pit came this 'Leonore Overture No. 3' ... amazing music which embodies the drama of the opera," Beck said, describing the first time he heard the overture in performance.

Mozart's "Clarinet Concerto" was his last complete instrumental work, written for a friend who had developed the "basset clarinet," which produced more low notes than a standard clarinet. The original score was lost, so the concerto is adapted for a normal instrument.

Saturday's soloist is Mississippi native John Craig Barker, who trained at Juilliard in New York and recently was named principal



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Maestro Crafton Beck will conduct the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra in its next Bravo performance Saturday at Thalia Mara Hall.

clarinet of the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra in Houston. He will incorporate some changes that are closer to the earlier version.

"Mozart's instrumental writing is influenced greatly by musical thoughts that he expressed in writing for the voice. The import of all of his instrumental writing is his ability to capture this vocal quality. It is easier for me to achieve this with the standard range instrument," Barker said.

Beck, who played clarinet earlier in his career, points out that it was considered the closest instrument to the human voice in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is almost non-stop joy and energy, and the orchestra races at full speed in the final movement.

"Our chore as musicians is to get as close as possible to (the indicated speed) so that we can dance with the exuberance which Beethoven intended," Beck said.

One of the symphony's biggest fans is Michael Beattie, the orchestra's president and executive director.

"Every single line of the entire symphony speaks directly to the heart of the listener. Everything that might have come between the composer and the clarity and beauty he sought was removed. The result is an exuberant, moving, life-changing kind of work," he said.

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Greg Waxberg is music director of Mississippi Public Broadcasting Radio.