Purpose of the series

The WVU School of Music is offering a series of weekday matinee performances, open to all grades and ages from public schools, private schools and homeschool groups. The performances provide an opportunity to enhance school curriculum and to expose students to the arts. Performances start at 10:30 a.m. and are typically 75 minutes in length without intermission. The WVU School of Music ensembles will include Symphony Orchestra, Percussion Ensemble, University Chorus, Wind Symphony, and Jazz Ensembles.
Director spotlight

Dr. Mitchell Arnold is the director of the West Virginia University Symphony Orchestra (WVUSO), and also the director of Orchestral Studies in the School of Music. Previously he served on the faculties of Northern Illinois University, Northwestern University, Baldwin Wallace, and Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. Professional engagements include appearances with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, the United States Navy Concert Band, and the West Virginia, Santa Fe, Toledo, Omaha, New Mexico symphonies, and Spoleto Festival USA.

Ensemble background and history

In recent years the WVU Symphony Orchestra has traveled on a three-state tour and to Texas as one of only two orchestras invited to perform at the College Orchestra Directors Association’s national conference in January 2014. Last spring WVUSO performed in Lewisburg, WV’s Carnegie Hall and will return this coming year.

Overall theme of the performance

“Flying through the Storm!” will show your students how an orchestra builds sounds and rehearses them to make them express the music. The musical selections used to demonstrate these techniques will be the powerful, almost terrifying “Storm” movement of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 6, and Wagner’s fleet, fast-flying Prelude to the 3rd act of his opera Lohengrin. Dr. Arnold and the orchestra will take your students through the nuts and bolts, showing how the different instruments of the orchestra all contribute to the exciting final product in concert.

Composers’ backgrounds

Beethoven (1770-1827) lived in a time when what we think of as the modern world was just beginning. It was a time of political upheaval, war, invasion, occupation, and also the beginning of the end of a world dominated by kings and other nobles. It was also a time when composers were exploring new sounds, and new ways of composing for instruments. Beethoven composed music for piano, small groups like string quartets, and orchestra. He composed 9 symphonies, of which his 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th and 9th are among the most played works in the history of music.

Wagner (1813-1883) composed music mostly for the theater; specifically operas, where all the dialogue and verbal expressions of feeling are set to music. He was a master at telling the story in the orchestra, so, for example, while a character was singing about something happy, the music could be reminding the audience of something worrisome!

Composition backgrounds

Beethoven lived at a time of great turmoil, and sometimes composed music that seems very turbulent. Ironically, Beethoven wrote his sixth symphony as a way of expressing a yearning for a lost, innocent world. He called it a “Pastoral” symphony, where each movement depicts the simplicity of living in a time long ago. The sounds of the music attempt to create the feeling of man’s happiness in a beautiful natural world. But, of course, there is a storm…..!
Wagner’s Prelude to Act III of Lohengrin, as the title tells us, opens the third act of the opera Lohengrin. Lohengrin is Knight of the Holy Grail, and the opera is a retelling of a German legend. The third act opening features extremely fast rhythms and surging melodies that create a sense of high-speed motion, foreshadowing the dramatic action that will take place in the third act.

**Key musical concepts from the performance**

The most important concept, one that is important to us as an orchestra - and thus to an audience - is the cooperative environment within which we work. We must all work hard to master our parts and then to combine them artistically and with technical excellence. The specific musical concepts we will cover are all secondary to this most important over-arching concept: that no matter who we are, what our own specific abilities are, we must work together to successfully perform this music.

We will explore and demonstrate how Beethoven creates the music that depicts the power and terror of a lightning and thunder storm in his “Storm” movement from his Symphony No. 6; and how Wagner creates the high-energy sounds of his Prelude to Act III. Among the concepts we will demonstrate:

1. loud and soft (dynamics)
2. musical expression
3. how different instruments contribute to the whole
4. different families of instruments in the orchestra: woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion.