

five can't-miss Bravo! concerts

As usual, there are some tough decisions to be made



The Dallas Symphony Orchestra's opening night is Wednesday, and the program is all about Beethoven.

ZACH MAHONEY | Daily file photo

wednesday

Dallas Symphony Orchestra Great Works for Orchestra

The symphonic opener of the festival is all about Beethoven. This is excellent introductory music for newcomers to classical music, while for regular listeners, Beethoven is just like an old friend, with whom you can slip into a conversation after not seeing each other for years. The "Egmont Overture" starts the program, followed by the Triple Concerto. That's Ida Kavafian on the violin, Peter Wiley on cello and McDermott on piano, which makes up a star-studded cast. The second half of the night is Beethoven's Seventh. Come one, come all.

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By Chris Freud
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VAIL — This is always a hard article to write. The newsroom conversation goes like this: "Can you Caramie Schnell, Vail Daily High Life editor: "Can you write me your annual Bravo! article on the top five concerts of the season?"

Chris Freud, Vail Daily sports editor and local classical-music aficionado: "Sure, but how do I narrow it down to five?"

The 2011 Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival presents another bonanza of musical offerings from Mozart to Mahler. It's the latter's centennial and also Liszt's 200th. There's tons of Beethoven, which is never a problem, and plenty of must-listen performances, like Orff's "Carmina Burana," (Philadelphia Orchestra, July 16), Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" (New York Philharmonic, July 27) and Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto (Philadelphia, July 8), which didn't make this list. (I'm so ticked off at myself, I think I'll write a letter to the editor about my indignation. Hearing "Pictures at an Exhibition" at Bravo! is one of my favorite things in life.)

Seriously, this is the problem. Too much good music and five spots. Go to as many concerts as you can — starting Sunday night with Anne-Marie McDermott's recital — but don't miss this quintet:

BRAVO! CONCERTS

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july 9

Philadelphia Orchestra**Nature, a Birthday and a Rose**

More Beethoven follows with the Pastoral Symphony. This is one of those pieces that are wonderful to hear anywhere but extra special at the Ford Amphitheater. With views of the Gore Range to your left and Vail Mountain on your right, it's just that much more easy to envision the countryside scenes Beethoven wrote.

Lost in Mahler's anniversary is Lizst's bicentennial. We get the Second Piano Concerto with Bravo! favorite Jean-Yves Thibidault. Strauss' "Der Rosenkavalier" rounds out the evening.



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Spectators watch a past performance of the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival at Ford Amphitheater in Vail.

july 22

New York Philharmonic**Of Peasants and Heroes**

OK, Beethoven's "Eroica" symphony makes the list no matter what. The kicker here is that one of the many pieces I've always wanted to see and hear performed here, Dvorak's Violin Concerto, is finally at Bravo! Where has this been all these years? Veronika Eberle is on the violin. The New York Philharmonic never disappoints during its opener. This will be no exception.

july 23

New York Philharmonic**Luminous Magic and a Raging Sea of Sound**

This is also known as Austrian Appreciation Music Night with Mozart's Violin Concerto in A and Mahler's Fifth. The latter is a part of the Mahler Centennial celebration — he died in 1911. Alan Gilbert conducts the New York Philharmonic in the Mahler, which is a fun fact because Mahler himself conducted the New York Phil in his last days.

And now a note for those suffering from Mahler-phobia. Bite the bullet, people. Dispelling the first Mahler myth, this is not a 90-something-minute symphony like No. 3. It's a little more than an hour. There are no choral parts like No. 8, which was originally scored for 1,000 musicians, which would be a little much for the stage at the Ford Amphitheater. You can do this.

In case you don't trust us, we Googled the Fifth. From Wikipedia, "Conductor Herbert von Karajan said that when one hears Mahler's Fifth, 'You forget that time has passed. A great performance of the Fifth is a transforming experience. The fantastic finale almost forces you to hold your breath.'"

It will be OK. You might, in fact, really like it.

july 28

New York Philharmonic**Tonight We Love a la Russe**

I hate it when anything is described as "rousing" or "stomping," but this concert is. It's all Russian and very rousing. You also haven't lived until you see Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 performed in person. Kirill Gerstein does the honors.



Alan Gilbert directs the New York Philharmonic during a performance in Vail.

CHRIS LEE | Special to the Daily

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