



Smithsonian Associates

Magnificent Movie Music: Classical Sounds of the Cinema

Dr. Rachel Franklin

Wednesday, January 31, 2024 - 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. ET

Jan 31st Lecture 2: The Myth of Beethoven

Why Beethoven—and why so much of him? Dive into Beethoven’s very busy side-gig, providing the soundtrack of hundreds of films. Tragedy, satire, history, romance, goofball, animation, sci-fi, adventure, horror, it turns out he’s scored them all! It’s just unfortunate that we can’t ask Beethoven what he thinks about this massive appropriation of his work. His musical brand is so embedded in Western culture that most of the time we don’t even notice he’s secretly driving our movie experience. What cultural signals does it send us when a director uses a well-known Beethoven work, and is the composer’s sublime inspiration simply being used as a substitute for the lack of it on screen?

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Films discussed

“The King’s Speech” UK Film Council/Weinstein Company, 2010

Director: Tom Hooper

Composers: Beethoven, Mozart, Alexandre Desplat

Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Original Screenplay

Works featured today: Beethoven – Symphony No. 7, Op. 92, 1812. 2nd movement, Allegretto

Beethoven – Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 73, 1811. 2nd movement, Adagio

“Picnic at Hanging Rock” British Empire Films, 1975

Director: Peter Weir

Composers: Beethoven, Mozart, Bruce Smeaton, Romanian traditional

Works featured today: Beethoven – Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 73, 1811. 2nd movement, Adagio

“Django Unchained” Columbia Pictures, 2012

Director: Quentin Tarantino

Composers: Beethoven and others

Academy Awards: Best Original Screenplay

Work featured today: Beethoven – “Für Elise” Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor (WoO 59)

“Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure” Orion Pictures, 1989

Director: Stephen Herek

Composers: Beethoven, David Newman and others

Work featured today: Beethoven – “Für Elise” Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor (WoO 59)

“The Man Who Wasn’t There” USA Films, 2001

Director, Writer, Producer: Joel and Ethan Coen

Composers: Beethoven, Carter Burwell

Work featured today: Beethoven – Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor, “Quasi una fantasia” Op. 27, No. 2, also known as the “Moonlight” sonata.

“Equilibrium” Miramax, 2002

Director: Kurt Wimmer

Composers: Beethoven, Klaus Badelt

Work featured today: Beethoven – Symphony No. 9, 1st movement

“Ice Age: Continental Drift” 20th Century Fox Animation, 2012

Director: Steve Martino

Composers: Beethoven, John Powell

Work featured today: Beethoven – Symphony No. 9, 4th movement “Ode to Joy”

“Die Hard” 20th Century Fox, 1988

Director: John McTiernan

Composers: Beethoven, Michael Kamen

Works featured today: Beethoven – Symphony No. 9, 4th movement “Ode to Joy”

“Dead Poet’s Society” Touchstone Pictures, 1989

Director: Peter Weir

Composers: Beethoven, Maurice Jarre

Academy Awards: Best Original Screenplay

Works featured today: Beethoven – Symphony No. 9, 4th movement “Ode to Joy”

Rachel Franklin

British-born classical and jazz concert pianist Dr. Rachel Franklin is a renowned performer and public speaker. Her acclaimed wit, scholarship and insights about music have led to countless speaking engagements for such distinguished organizations as the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and National Public Radio.

Besides appreciating her performing artistry, her listeners rave about her warm, engaging style as she illustrates on the piano. Since 2020 she has been greatly in demand for her unique online presentations. She is one of the Smithsonian Associates’ most popular live-streaming music lecturers, and her topics explore intersections between classical and jazz music, film scores, and the fine arts.

Last June she was one of the featured speakers at the Aspen Ideas: Health Conference in Colorado, presenting and performing on the subject of Music and the Natural World. She has also recently been interviewed on this topic by WHYY’s Maiken Scott for The Pulse.

This past New Year she was invited to give the Plenary Lunchtime Performance for the prestigious Renaissance Weekend conference in Charleston, SC.

Rachel Franklin's great passion is provoking connections and sparking imaginative pathways for her listeners and students, so their own creativity can be inspired by extraordinary musical art. She has concertized in major halls across Europe, Canada and the US. The Washington Post has praised her "cool-headed bravura and panache" and the Baltimore Sun lauded "a flawless crystalline technique, and warmth and electricity in her playing."