

## Classical mystery

*'Forensic' concert  
will examine  
Beethoven's cause  
of death*

**BY COLLEEN LEE**

Contributor

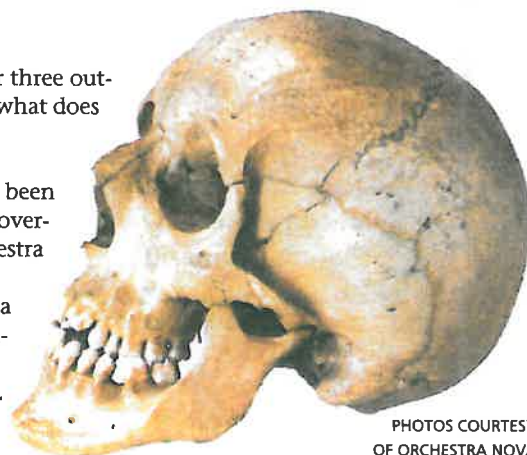
Classical music will meet up with cutting-edge forensic technology for three out-of-the-ordinary concerts by Orchestra Nova on May 7, 8 and 10. But what does classical music and modern forensic science have in common?

One word: Beethoven.

The struggle to determine Ludwig van Beethoven's real cause of death has been a pursuit of many since his passing in 1827 at age 56. Modern forensic discoveries may provide the answer — as well as a fun marketing hook for an orchestra playing his music.

Orchestra Nova's Artistic Director and Maestro Jung-Ho Pak, described as a man who conducts like a rock musician, will shake things up in an unexpected way by taking listeners on a journey of creativity with "CSI: Beethoven — Inside Ludwig's Head."

During the concert, Pak will attempt to "view" the inner workings of



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Beethoven's mind by taking apart Beethoven's "Leonore" overtures.

"Beethoven wrote and scrapped 'Leonore' three times. We look at each — examining passages to come to a conclusion," Pak said. "The audience can view it as a crime scene. Each scrap is evidence taking a musicological forensic tour. Our investigation of each piece explains his obsessive search for perfection."

Adding to the twist of CSI-meets-classical-genius, Jennifer Shen, a San Diego Police Department criminalist, will be on hand to connect Beethoven to present forensic efforts.

"I will bring science together with Beethoven," Shen said. "Beethoven's death has been a mystery for so many years. (Scientists have hypothesized it was due to lead poisoning, alcoholism, pneumonia, syphilis or other maladies.) Can science finally solve the puzzle of his death? Also, what caused Beethoven's deafness?"

In the mid-1990s, a chunk of Beethoven's hair was put on auction. The auction winner was a fan, who hoped pay tribute to the musical genius by sending the hair to a forensic scientist. It's known that before his death Beethoven asked his brothers to find the cause of his lifelong physical pains and agony. That chunk of his hair, which was taken by a young boy as a souvenir a day after Beethoven's death, has an

## 'CSI: Beethoven — Inside Ludwig's Head'

### ■ Orchestra Nova performances:

• 7:30 p.m. May 7 at St. Paul's Cathedral, 2728 Sixth Avenue, San Diego

• 8 p.m. May 8 at Qualcomm Hall, 5775 Morehouse Drive, Sorrento Valley

• 7:30 p.m. May 10 at Sherwood Auditorium, Museum of Contemporary Art, 700 Prospect, La Jolla

■ Tickets: \$22-\$99; (858) 350-0290, [www.orchestra-nova.org](http://www.orchestra-nova.org).

■ Discounts: 20 percent off to biotech industry employees and their guests

## Did you know?

**Beethoven's health was normal as a boy. However, in his early 20s, he developed chronic illnesses that plagued him throughout his adult life. His main complaint was abdominal pain, referred to as 'colic.' His personality transformed during those years of illness. The friendly and charming young man grew irritable, hot-tempered and socially isolated. At age 31, he reported that he was losing his hearing. He was almost completely deaf by age 42.**

— Source: *Orchestra Nova program notes*

extraordinary story.

"Since Ludwig's hair was well preserved, we are able today to take strands of his hair and subject them to forensic tests. We can look for contamination and drugs," said Shen, "His hair gives us a snapshot of his life, and can determine the cause of his death — and possibly much more."

The connection between forensics and Beethoven makes sense to Pak, and he reasons that it makes sense to

bring both to San Diego.

"San Diego is not conventional and doesn't stand on ceremony," Pak said. "It doesn't try to be like New York, San Francisco or Chicago. There is everything here, so in a city where there is so much to do, you need to do something special to grab attention. And, there is no disdain here to making classical music fun."

Audience members won't experience a traditional classical concert — Maestro Pak



Maestro Jung-Ho Pak with a few of the musicians of Orchestra Nova. COURTESY

does tend to conduct like his own hair is on fire. His concerts are friendly and contemporary, and definitely a multimedia experience, which brings video into the mix. "You won't find us wearing tuxedos," Pak added.

For those unfamiliar with classical music, this concert is bound to tickle the imagination. It will also explain the creative process behind great art.

Summing up the experience, Pak said, "Classical music is complex, but understanding it is similar to wine tasting. When you have a bit of knowledge about it, you tend to enjoy it more. We dissect the music to understand each element."

The program will feature the three Leonore Overtures, Fidelio Overture, and what Pak describes as Beethoven's funny side, Symphony No. 4.