

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2014-2015

February 20 and 22, 2015

MANFRED MARIA HONECK, CONDUCTOR
LARS VOGT, PIANO

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Allegro ma non tanto from the String Quartet in C minor,
Opus 18, No. 4
arranged for string orchestra by Mr. Honeck

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra in C major, Opus
15

I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo: Allegro scherzando
Mr. Vogt

Intermission

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Opus 55, "Eroica"
I. Allegro con brio
II. Marcia funèbre: Adagio assai
III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
IV. Finale: Allegro molto

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born 16 December 1770 in Bonn; died 26 March 1827 in Vienna

Allegro ma non tanto from the String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4 (1798-1800)
Arranged for String Orchestra by Manfred Honeck

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, 1801; Ignaz Schuppanzigh Quartet

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 10 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: strings

The year of the completion of the six Op. 18 Quartets — 1800 — was an important time in Beethoven's development. He had achieved a success good enough to write to his old friend Franz Wegeler in Bonn, "My compositions bring me in a good deal, and may I say that I am offered more commissions than it is possible for me to carry out. Moreover, for every composition I can count on six or seven publishers and even more, if I want them. People no longer come to an arrangement with me. I state my price, and they pay." At the time of this gratifying recognition of his talents, however, the first signs of his fateful deafness appeared, and he began the titanic struggle that became one of the gravitational poles of his life. Within two years, driven from the social contact on which he had flourished by the fear of discovery of his malady, he penned the Heiligenstadt Testament, his *cri de cœur* against that wicked trick of the gods. These first Quartets stand on the brink of this great crisis in Beethoven's life.

The string quartet, perfected by Haydn, was a favorite form of musical entertainment in the salons of Vienna at the turn of the 19th century. As early as 1795, Count Anton Georg Apponyi had suggested to Beethoven that he undertake some works in the form, but the proposal did not bear fruit until three years later, when the Op. 18 set was begun. In 1798, Beethoven was closely associated with the noted composer and theorist Emanuel Alois Förster, perhaps as a student. (Beethoven later referred to him as his "old master.") Förster was one of the era's foremost composers of string quartets, and his influence may have inspired Beethoven to undertake his first works in the genre. Beethoven, at that time of his life still determined to impress the aristocracy, probably wished to have his name attached to the most elegant musical form of the day. At any rate, the Quartets were begun in mid-1798 (though some sketches apparently date back to the early 1790s), mostly composed the following year, and completed in 1800. They were first played by the ensemble of Ignaz Schuppanzigh either (reports differ) in the home of Förster or in the Viennese palace of Prince Karl Lobkowitz, to whom they were dedicated upon their publication in 1801. Lobkowitz was so pleased with the Quartets that he pledged Beethoven an annual stipend of 600 gulden. With their respectful renewal of the Classical style and technique of Haydn, the Quartets enjoyed a good (though, as was always the case with Beethoven's works when they were new, not unanimous) success, and were frequently heard during the composer's lifetime. Looking back on Op. 18 in 1811, a critic for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* wrote, "In them the loveliest melodies appeal to the feelings, and the unity, the supreme simplicity, the particular and firmly sustained character in each individual piece making up those Quartets raise them to the level of masterworks, and join Beethoven's name with the revered names of Haydn and Mozart."

The Quartet in C minor, the only number of Op. 18 in a minor key, was apparently the last of the set to be composed; the manuscript was delivered to the Viennese firm of T. Mollo by the end of 1800 and published (along with the Quartets Nos. 5 and 6) the following October. The C minor Quartet is unusual in Beethoven's output in that no sketches for it have been discovered, a circumstance that led Joseph de Marliave to conjecture that it was written "at a single stroke, and at express speed." It seems more likely, however, that Beethoven may have borrowed ideas for the composition from some earlier works he carried with him to Vienna from Bonn, a theory advocated by his early biographer Thayer. The C minor Quartet, which shares its impassioned key with the Fifth Symphony, Third Piano Concerto, "Pathétique" Sonata, *Coriolan Overture* and some half-dozen of Beethoven's other chamber compositions, opens with a darkly colored theme that rises from the lowest note of the violin to high in the instrument's range. Some stabbing chords begin the transition to the subsidiary subject, a sunshine melody derived from the

leaping motive that closed the main theme. Both the main and second themes are treated in the development section. The recapitulation recalls the earlier thematic material to balance and round out the movement.

Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra in C major, Opus 15 (1795)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, 18 December 1795; Burgtheater; Ludwig van Beethoven, conductor and soloist

PSO PREMIERE: 12 November 1909; Carnegie Music Hall; Emil Paur, conductor; Myrtle Elvyn, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 37 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings

“His genius, his magnetic personality were acknowledged by all, and there was, besides, a gaiety and animation about the young Beethoven that people found immensely attractive. The troubles of boyhood were behind him: his father had died very shortly after his departure from Bonn, and by 1795, his brothers were established in Vienna, Caspar Karl as a musician, Johann as an apothecary. During his first few months in the capital, he had indeed been desperately poor, depending very largely on the small salary allowed him by the Elector of Bonn. But that was all over now. He had no responsibilities, and his music was bringing in enough to keep him in something like affluence. He had a servant, for a short time he even had a horse; he bought smart clothes, he learned to dance (though not with much success), and there is even mention of his wearing a wig! We must not allow our picture of the later Beethoven to throw its dark colors over these years of his early triumphs. He was a young giant exulting in his strength and his success, and a youthful confidence gave him a buoyancy that was both attractive and infectious. Even in 1791, before he left Bonn, Carl Junker could describe him as ‘this amiable, lighthearted man.’ And in Vienna he had much to raise his spirits and nothing (at first) to depress them.” Peter Latham painted this cheerful picture of the young Beethoven as Vienna knew him during his twenties, the years before his deafness, his recurring illnesses and his titanic struggles with his mature compositions had produced the familiar dour figure of his later years.

Beethoven came to Vienna for good in 1792, having made an unsuccessful foray in 1787, and he quickly attracted attention for his piano playing. His appeal was in an almost untamed, passionate, novel quality in both his manner of performance and his personality, characteristics that first intrigued and then captivated those who heard him. It was for his own concerts that Beethoven composed the first four of his five mature piano concertos. (Two juvenile essays in the genre are discounted in the numbering.) The opening movement of the First Piano Concerto is indebted to Mozart for its handling of the concerto-sonata form, for its technique of orchestration, and for the manner in which piano and orchestra are integrated. Beethoven added to these quintessential qualities of the Classical concerto a wider-ranging harmony, a more openly virtuosic role for the soloist and a certain emotional weight characteristic of his large works. The second movement is a richly colored song with an important part for the solo clarinet. The rondo-finale is written in an infectious manner reminiscent of Haydn, brimming with high spirits and good humor.

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Opus 55, “Eroica” (1803-1804)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, April 7, 1805; Theater an der Wien; Ludwig van Beethoven, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 21 January 1897; Carnegie Music Hall; Frederic Archer, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 50 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds and trumpets in pairs, three horns, timpani and strings

The year 1804 — the time Beethoven finished his Third Symphony — was crucial in the modern political history of Europe. Napoleon Bonaparte had begun his meteoric rise to power only a decade earlier, after playing a significant part in the recapture in 1793 of Toulon, a Mediterranean port that had been surrendered to the British by French royalists. Britain, along with Austria, Prussia, Holland and Spain, was a member of the First Coalition, an alliance that had been formed by those monarchical nations in the wake of the execution of Louis XVI to thwart the French National Convention’s ambition to spread revolution (and royal overthrow) throughout Europe. In 1796, Carnot entrusted the campaign

against northern Italy, then dominated by Austria, to the young General Bonaparte, who won a stunning series of victories with an army that he had transformed from a demoralized, starving band into a military juggernaut. He returned to France in 1799 as First Consul of the newly established Consulate, and put in place measures to halt inflation, instituted a new legal code, and repaired relations with the Church. It was to this man, this great leader and potential savior of the masses from centuries of tyrannical political, social and economic oppression, that Beethoven intended to pay tribute in his majestic E-flat Symphony, begun in 1803. The name “Bonaparte” appears above that of the composer on the original title page.

Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor of France in 1804 and was crowned, with the new Empress Josephine, at Notre Dame Cathedral on December 2nd, an event forever frozen in time by David’s magnificent canvas in the Louvre. Beethoven, enraged and feeling betrayed by this usurpation of power, roared at his student Ferdinand Ries, who brought him the news, “Then is he, too, only an ordinary human being?” The ragged hole in the title page of the score now in the library of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna bears mute testimony to the violent manner in which Beethoven erased Napoleon from this Symphony. He later inscribed it, undoubtedly with much sorrow, “To celebrate the memory of a great man.”

The “Eroica” (“Heroic”) is a work that changed the course of music history. There was much sentiment at the turn of the 19th century that the expressive and technical possibilities of the symphonic genre had been exhausted by Haydn, Mozart, C.P.E. Bach and their contemporaries. It was Beethoven, and specifically this majestic Symphony, that threw wide the gates on the unprecedented artistic vistas that were to be explored for the rest of the century. In a single giant leap, he invested the genre with the breadth and richness of emotional and architectonic expression that established the grand sweep that the word “symphonic” now connotes. For the first time, with this music, the master composer was recognized as an individual responding to a higher calling. No longer could the creative musician be considered a mere artisan in tones, producing pieces within the confines of the court or the church for specific occasions, much as a talented chef would dispense a hearty roast or a succulent torte. After Beethoven, the composer was regarded as a visionary — a special being lifted above mundane experience — who could guide benighted listeners to loftier planes of existence through his valued gifts. The modern conception of an artist — what he is, his place in society, what he can do for those who experience his work — stems from Beethoven. Romanticism began with the “Eroica.”

The Symphony’s first movement, probably the largest sonata design composed to that time, opens with a brief summons of two mighty chords. At least four thematic ideas are presented in the exposition, and one of the wonders of the Symphony is the way in which Beethoven made these melodies succeed each other in a seemingly inevitable manner, as though this music could have been composed in no other way. The development section is a massive essay progressing through many moods which are all united by an almost titanic sense of struggle. It is in this central portion of the movement and in the lengthy coda that Beethoven broke through the boundaries of the 18th-century symphony to create a work not only longer in duration but also more profound in meaning. The composer’s own words are reflected in this awe-inspiring movement: “Music is the electric soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents.”

The beginning of the second movement — “Marcia funèbre” (“*Funeral March*”) — with its plaintive, simple themes intoned over a mock drum-roll in the basses, is the touchstone for the expression of tragedy in instrumental music. The mournful C minor of the opening gives way to the brighter C major of the oboe’s melody in a stroke of genius that George Bernard Shaw, during his early days as a music critic in London, admitted “ruins me,” as only the expression of deepest emotion can. A development-like section, full of remarkable contrapuntal complexities, is followed by a return of the simple opening threnody, which itself eventually expires amid sobs and silences at the close of this eloquent movement.

The third movement is a scherzo, the lusty successor to the graceful minuet. The central section is a rousing trio for horns, one of the earliest examples (Haydn’s “Horn Call” Symphony is an exception) of the use of more than two horns in an orchestral work.

The finale is a large set of variations on two themes, one of which (the first one heard) forms the bass line to the other. The second theme, introduced by the oboe, is a melody which appears in three other of Beethoven’s works: the finale of the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, *Contradanse No. 7* and *Variations and Fugue*, Op. 35 for piano. The variations accumulate energy as they go, and, just as it seems the movement is whirling toward its final climax, the music comes to a full stop before launching into an extended *Andante* section which explores first the tender and then the majestic possibilities of the themes. A brilliant *Presto* led by the horns concludes this epochal work.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda