

CONCERTO IN C MAJOR FOR PIANO, VIOLIN, AND CELLO, OPUS 56, “TRIPLE”

Composed in 1804

Premiered in April 1808 in Leipzig, Germany

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born in Bonn, Germany; December 16, 1770

Died in Vienna, Austria; March 26, 1827

This work was previously performed by the Charlotte Symphony on two occasions: February 13, 1985 and January 9, 1991, both with Leo Driehuys conducting in Ovens Auditorium.

By the start of the 19th century, Ludwig van Beethoven had firmly established himself as one of Vienna’s most prominent musicians—a virtuoso pianist and composer of the first rank. It appeared as if nothing could stand in the way of Beethoven’s continued ascent. But in 1800, Beethoven, not yet thirty, began to realize that his hearing was deteriorating. Beethoven sensed that the onset of deafness was only a matter of time and that soon, he would be unable to hear his own musical creations.

On October 6, 1802, Beethoven penned the letter to his brothers known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*. Beethoven confessed:

How humiliated I have felt if somebody standing beside me heard the sound of a flute in the distance and *I heard nothing*, or if somebody heard *a shepherd sing* and again I heard nothing—Such experiences almost made me despair, and I was on the point of putting an end to my life—The only thing that held me back was *my art*. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence—a truly miserable existence.

And, indeed, Beethoven responded to his adversity by composing at a furious pace. Masterpieces from the first decade of the 19th century include Beethoven’s Symphonies Nos. 2—6, the “Razumovsky” String Quartets, the “Waldstein” and “Appassionata” Piano Sonatas, and the composer’s only opera, *Fidelio*. The Triple Concerto belongs to that same remarkable period. Beethoven began composition of the Concerto in late 1803, completing the work in the summer of 1804.

Beethoven composed the piano part of the Triple Concerto for Archduke Rudolph (1788-1831), the youngest son of Emperor Leopold II. Rudolph, a longtime pupil, friend and patron of Beethoven, was the dedicatee of many of the composer’s finest works, including the “Emperor” Piano Concerto, the “Archduke” Piano Trio, and the great choral work, the *Missa Solemnis*. The fact that Beethoven composed the keyboard parts of both the Triple Concerto and the “Archduke” Trio for Rudolph is testament to his considerable talents as a pianist.

The Triple Concerto is scored for a trio of soloists (violin, cello and piano) and orchestra. Beethoven composed the Triple Concerto around the same time as his path-breaking “Eroica” Symphony (see, below). However, the Concerto’s three movements present a far more genial and lyrical side of Beethoven’s craft. The opening *Allegro*, the most expansive of the work’s three movements, begins with an orchestral introduction of the principal themes. The cellist inaugurates the entrance of the soloists. The brief, hushed slow movement (*Largo*) leads without pause into the finale (*Ronda alla polacca—Allegro*), based upon a *polonaise*, a sparkling Polish dance.

The score calls for solo piano, violin, and cello with flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Duration: c. 33 minutes

SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OPUS 55, “EROICA”

Composed in 1804

Premiered on April 7, 1805 at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna, with the composer conducting

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born in Bonn, Germany; December 16, 1770

Died in Vienna, Austria; March 26, 1827

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on April 4, 1941 with Guillermo S. de Roxlo conducting at the Armory Auditorium. The tenth and most recent performance was on April 3, 1999 with Peter McCoppin conducting in the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

“Composed to celebrate the memory of a great man”

In the early part of the 19th century, many idealists, Beethoven included, viewed Napoleon Bonaparte as a staunch defender of liberty and democratic ideals. By the spring of 1804, Beethoven had completed his Third Symphony, which he entitled “Bonaparte.” Beethoven’s friend, Ferdinand Ries, informed the composer that Napoleon had proclaimed himself emperor. According to Ries, Beethoven:

flew into a rage and cried out: “Is he then, too, nothing more than an ordinary human being? Now he, too, will trample on all the rights of man and indulge only in his ambition. He will exalt himself above all others, become a tyrant!” Beethoven went to the table, took hold of the title page by the top, tore it in two, and threw it on the floor. The first page was rewritten and only then did the symphony receive the title *Sinfonica eroica*.

Some biographers, including Maynard Solomon (*Beethoven*, Schirmer Books, New York, 1977), suggest that Beethoven's actions may have also been motivated by career aspirations. During the relevant time frame, Beethoven contemplated, and ultimately rejected, the notion of relocating from Vienna to Paris.

With that scenario in mind, conductor Arturo Toscanini's remarks about the "Eroica's" first movement offer a useful perspective: "To some it is Napoleon, to some it is Alexander, to me it is *Allegro con brio* (i.e., the movement's tempo marking)." In other words, the significance of Beethoven's Third Symphony, which the composer ultimately subtitled *Sinfonica Eroica, Composed to Celebrate the Memory of a Great Man*, rests not with its dedicatee, but with the revolutionary nature of the music itself.

Beethoven's "New Road"

In 1802, Beethoven proclaimed to his friend, Wenzel Krumpholtz: "I am not satisfied with my works up to the present time. From today I mean to take a *new road*." Certainly there are many aspects of the "Eroica" that establish a profound line of demarcation between it and the composer's first two symphonies—not to mention the symphonies of Beethoven's great predecessors, Haydn and Mozart. The extraordinary length of the opening movement, achieved in great part by an unprecedented expansion of the development and coda sections (as well as the transitional material between themes), is perhaps the most obvious example. Likewise, the use of an epic funeral march is a stunning departure from the lyricism found in most slow movements of the time.

Still, it would be incorrect to characterize the "Eroica" as a total rejection of the musical style of Beethoven's first two symphonies. The Symphonies in C (1800) and D (1802) already offer hints of the rhythmic drive, pungent dynamic contrast, bold harmonic strokes and ingenious thematic development that characterize the "Eroica." It should also be mentioned that Beethoven creates the profoundly revolutionary atmosphere of his "Eroica" with an orchestra quite similar in size and instrumentation to that of a late Haydn or Mozart Symphony.

Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony inspired awe, even disorientation, on the part of the early audiences. It's not surprising that reviews were decidedly mixed. While many questioned the attractiveness of the Third Symphony as a form of entertainment, few could deny its power and innovation. Indeed, symphonic music would never be the same after the "Eroica."

Musical Analysis

In the first movement (*Allegro con brio*), Beethoven introduces his musical "new road" in bracing fashion with two brusque chords, out of which emerges the cellos' statement of the opening theme. Several themes follow, and they soon undergo a rich and varied development that becomes a fierce battleground. A recapitulation of the themes and extended coda are capped by a repeat of the opening two chords. In the second movement, Beethoven replaces the traditional lyrical interlude with an extended and epic Funeral March (*Marcia funebre; Adagio assai*). The mood of the "Eroica" Symphony is

transformed from despair to joy with the arrival of the ebullient third movement (*Scherzo: Allegro vivace*), with a central Trio section that prominently features the horns. The *Finale (Allegro molto)* is a brilliant set of variations on a theme, first introduced softly by pizzicato strings. The third variation features the oboes and clarinets playing a melody that will return in different guises throughout the finale. It is a melody that was a particular favorite of Beethoven, one that makes appearances in his *Contredanses*, WoO 14 (1802), the “Eroica” Piano Variations, Opus 35 (1802) and the ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Opus 43 (1800-1801). The entire *Finale* closes in thrilling fashion, with a headlong rush into a *Presto* coda, featuring yet another version of the “Prometheus” melody.

The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Duration: c. 47 minutes