

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Mon. September 18, The 896th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Thu. September 21, The 112th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 3, in C minor, op. 37

Premiered on April 5th, 1803 at the Theatre-an-der-Wien, Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto was believed to have been completed several years earlier with some sketches found as early as 1797. This performance was given at another one of the large benefit concerts for which Beethoven was known and included premieres of two of his other works: the Second Symphony and the oratorio "Christ on the Mount of Olives." In addition, his First Symphony was presented, though it had been premiered the previous year.

Apparently, the only rehearsal for the musicians for all of the works being performed was on the same day and began early that morning, continuing throughout the day and facing many difficulties. Beethoven had yet to finish writing the score of the Third Concerto, which was confirmed by one of his students, Ignaz von Seyfried, who also turned pages for the soloist during the concert: "I saw almost nothing but empty pages, at most on one page or another a few...hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me and scribbled down to serve as clues for him. He played nearly all of the solo part from memory since...he had not had time to put it all down on paper. He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages, and my scarcely concealable anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly..."

Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto pays tribute to Mozart, especially to his Piano Concerto (K. 491) in the same key of C minor, with some theme fragments borrowed among other musical similarities. However, Beethoven goes beyond the classical composer's model taking the work to the next level. In fact, many scholars view this concerto as a turning point of sorts in the composer's style between his first two piano concertos and works that would follow. One key example of this is the choice of key chosen for the second movement, E major. With a key signature of four sharps, this was quite unexpected being considered so far from the opening key of C minor with its three flats.

This slow movement, marked Largo, presents a lyrical melody that is more of a nod to the romantic vein to come than that of the classical era. The soloist's opening expansive melodic lines are taken up by the strings and woodwinds and accompanied by arpeggios in the piano. A featured duet by bassoon and flute can be heard over pizzicato strings and additional arpeggios from the soloist.

The final movement, a rondo, returns to the key of C minor again. However, he returns again to the E major key used in the slow movement in the middle of the last movement to reinforce that harmonic connection. Eventually returning to C minor again, the composer would find himself prancing into the key of C major after a short cadenza where he gallantly ends the work at a presto tempo with full orchestra.

In the city that Beethoven considered Mozart's territory, and with a piece that pays homage to that composer, one review following the premiere stated that this work would be received well "even in places like Leipzig, where people were accustomed to hearing the best of Mozart's concertos." High praise, yet qualified with the acknowledgement of the greater musical and emotional depth taken by Beethoven in this work, commenting that the soloist would need "in addition to everything one associates with virtuosity, [an] understanding in their head and a heart in their breast – otherwise, even with the most impressive preparation and technique, the best things in the work will be left behind."

Work composed: 1800-1803 **World premiere:** 1807, Wien

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings, solo piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No 3 in E-flat major, op. 55 "Eroica"

Originally entitled "Bonaparte Symphony", as a tribute to Napoleon Bonaparte, Beethoven was determined to erase this title, literally, when Napoleon crowned himself emperor, which was a huge disappointment to the composer. So strong was his anger that apparently upon scratching out the title, Beethoven tore a hole in the paper. However, the published manuscript still carried the inscription: "composed to celebrate the memory of a great man" purportedly a nod to the earlier notions of the Frenchman.

The official dedication consequently was given to one of Beethoven's strongest supporters, Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, and the subtitle "Eroica" intended to represent a heroic ideal in more general, albeit musical, terms. In fact, this symphony has come to be the epitome of what is now termed as Beethoven's Heroic style, which is identified by such features as the driving rhythms, drastic dynamic changes, and musical themes of drama, death, rebirth, and a general 'overcoming' of strifes in life.

The Third Symphony was first premiered on April 7th, 1805 at the Theatre-an-der-Wien in Vienna, after at least one private performance. The composer had remarked three years earlier: “I am not contented with my works so far. Henceforth I shall take a new path.” And apparently when he did just that, it took audiences by surprise. With the more powerful dramatic and emotional forces in this work, together with the significant increase in length over previous symphonies, it is said that one listener’s response was: “I’d give another kreutzer if they would stop!”

The first movement has been said to be fit to stand alone as a symphony in itself. And the second movement, as a Funeral March, was referred to by the composer, upon hearing of the death of Napoleon, when he stated: “I have already composed the proper music for the catastrophe.” The third and fourth movements are in great contrast to the first half of the symphony with their more uplifting tones, again perhaps emphasizing the ‘hero’s’ ability to overcome difficulties in life.

The theme of the finale had been explored previously in his “*Prometheus*” ballet as well as in the fifteen piano variations, *Variations and Fugue on a Theme from Prometheus*. But in this work, Beethoven takes the theme to greater depths, or one may prefer to say greater heights, as he perhaps intended to invoke the central character from the ballet, who was a mythical figure that defied authority to enlighten the human race, yet another nod to the ‘heroic’ themes pervading this work.

During this ‘heroic’ period, Beethoven not only composed this work, so removed in style and form from his previous symphonies, but he also wrote five more symphonies, as well as the “Razumovsky” quartets, the last two piano concertos, the violin concerto and his only opera, *Fidelio*. All of these works show an increased dramatic content, as well as the strong focus on the human ideals of heroism, but perhaps none more than this, his Third Symphony. With Beethoven knowingly facing his increasing deafness, some have said this work may also depict the composer himself in a heroic spirit, overcoming his own tragedies to create from the depths of his soul in spite of his loss.

Work composed: 1803-1804 **World premiere:** 1804, Wien

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

April L. Racana / As for the writer’s profile, please refer to page 27.