

Program for Richard Fountain

“Liszt van Beethoven: The Nine Symphonies” Episode Seven

Sonata in D major, Op. 10, no. 3.....Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- I. Presto
- II. Largo e mesto
- III. Menuetto: Allegro
- IV. Rondo: Allegro

**Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 36.....Ludwig van Beethoven
Transcribed for piano solo by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

- I. Adagio molto – Allegro con brio
- II. Larghetto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro
- IV. Allegro molto

Program Notes

Beethoven's symphonies have been cornerstones of classical music for many, many decades, and today performances and recordings have become so ubiquitous that musicians frequently take them for granted. However, in the years after Beethoven's death these works still needed conductors to champion them and guide orchestras through the composer's expanded vocabulary of technical and musical challenges. Liszt's role as such a champion, both as conductor and as transcriber, is a surprising corner of musical history. As the original touring virtuoso in the 1830's, Liszt performed versions of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh symphonies as part of his immense repertoire, presenting these masterworks to audiences from the British Isles to Iberia and Russia. Many of these audiences otherwise would not have had the opportunity to hear a Beethoven symphony performed, since the only orchestras of recognizable quality were in the great musical centers of the time such as Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and Leipzig.

After Liszt retired from the concert stage, he settled in the relatively small rural town of Weimar to direct the court orchestra. In addition to premiering and championing many of the great operas of the early 19th century, Liszt repeatedly and persistently programmed and conducted Beethoven's symphonies, becoming known as a definitive interpreter. During a two-year retreat between 1863 and 1865 in a monastery just outside Rome, Liszt completed transcribing the full cycle of Beethoven symphonies - remarkably, on a very average upright piano with a missing "D!" His goals were manifold: to broaden the audience and appreciation for Beethoven's music, certainly, but also to showcase the full range of capabilities of the new iron-frame concert pianos and to prove that the complex texture of an orchestral work could be faithfully reproduced by two hands on a piano. These transcriptions are remarkable in that one could very nearly conduct from the score - Liszt provides "cues" for each instrument or family of instruments as they enter, and almost every note from the orchestral original is present in the piano score. Liszt refused to engage in virtuosic showmanship or editorial revisionism, instead retaining slurs, articulations, dynamics, and other markings in an unusually scholarly manner for editors of his day.

In pairing a solo sonata in the same key as each symphony, I hope to illuminate several things. First, composers from the Baroque through the Classical era, and even some Romantic composers (including Liszt), often associated particular moods or "affects" with particular keys. Second, it is remarkable how Liszt's symphonic transcriptions actually "sound" like Beethoven in their textures and voicing. At times one almost feels like this music could have been written for the piano - particularly when the transcriptions are heard in combination with the sonatas.

Beethoven – Sonata in D major, Op. 10, no. 3 (25')

Beethoven's early works have an odd tendency to come in sets of three - the Piano Trios, op. 1, the op. 2 piano sonatas, the String Trios, op. 9, these op. 10 piano sonatas, and the op. 12 violin sonatas. During the course of the present cycle all of the op. 10 sonatas will be performed, with op. 10, no.1 keeping the Fifth Symphony company, op. 10, no. 2

appearing with the Eighth Symphony, and op. 10, no. 3 pairing with the Second Symphony.

The D major sonata is the grandest in scale of the op. 10 sonatas, being the only one of the set with four movements rather than three. The core of the piece is the slow second movement, one of Beethoven's darkest and most tragic pieces. Set in D minor, a key associated with death and darkness on a cosmic scale (think Mozart's "Kyrie" and "Dies irae" from the Requiem and the opening movement of Beethoven's own Ninth Symphony), this movement is also among the slowest of Beethoven's works. These characteristics create feelings of lament, depression, and futility. In contrast, the outer movements are full of sparkling energy and even whimsy. The opening movement is built from a simple D-major scale, first descending and then ascending with a sense of eager optimism. The minuet features a cross-hand middle section with a series of obnoxious noises, sort of like musical "LOL's". The finale begins with an apologetic question, like the quiet student in the back of the class who feels like he is offending those around him by being so bold as to make a sound. Beethoven uses this motive to great comedic effect throughout the movement, before concluding the piece with a quiet inversion of the scale figures that opened the entire sonata.

Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 36 (35')

Beethoven's Second Symphony is both a culmination of the Classical symphonic tradition as begun by Haydn and a dramatic achievement of Beethoven's unique genius. Like his first symphony, and several of Haydn's, the work begins with a slow introduction. Unlike most of these others, however, Beethoven's "introduction" proceeds at some length and travels through several distant harmonic areas before finally setting off the main structure of the piece. One is reminded both of Haydn's final symphony, no. 104, and Beethoven's own Seventh Symphony. In classic Beethovenian efficiency, he unfolds the form of the entire first movement out of a simple arpeggiated triad, operating with tremendous energy and moments of great good humor.

The second movement is marked "Larghetto," a very unusual indication for Beethoven. The conductor/performer has a difficult task: to maintain coherent musical phrases while restraining the forward momentum of the piece. The scherzo is a jolly back-and-forth between lower and higher groups of instruments, and features one of Beethoven's most endearing little melodies in the trio section. The finale is the polar opposite of the final movement of the op. 10, no. 3 sonata. Both movements begin with abrupt, inconclusive material. Unlike the sonata's reluctant three notes, however, the symphonic finale opens with two quick, loud bursts of sound, one high, one low, a bold in-your-face statement that propels the symphony to a rousing, rollicking conclusion.