

## **Program for Richard Fountain**

### **“Liszt van Beethoven: The Nine Symphonies” Episode Eight**

**Sonata in B-flat major, op. 22.....Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio con molta espressione
- III. Minuetto
- IV. Rondo: Allegretto

**Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60.....Ludwig van Beethoven  
Transcribed for piano solo by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

- I. Adagio – Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro vivace – Un poco meno Allegro
- IV. Allegro, ma non troppo

## *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 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 B-flat major, op. 22 (25')**

This sonata is one of Beethoven's sunniest works. With the exception of a transitional passage in the slow movement, there is hardly any dark or troubled material in the entire piece. Even minor-key passages have an energy and forward motion that reveal the essential optimism at the heart of the work.

The first movement develops a short, twice-repeated bubbly motive into a perfectly balanced form featuring a seemingly endless variety of ascending lines. Wit and inner energy combine to make this an especially enjoyable musical experience. The second movement is the essence of tranquility, with a gently expressive melody unfolding over a foundation of repeated chords. The minuet features a kind of metrical syncopation in the trio, with strong accents on the second beats of each measure creating a sense of displaced downbeats. In the finale, Beethoven is at his most melodic, writing a main theme that could almost have been written by Mozart. This theme is varied ever-so-slightly at each return and is balanced beautifully by the contrasting sections of the form.

### **Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60 (36')**

Beethoven's Fourth has been greatly overshadowed by its two rather more famous neighbors, and as a result it is one of the least-performed of Beethoven's major works. Despite that, it is a thoroughly enjoyable, beautifully poised work full of energy and optimism. In this way it pairs well with the op. 22 sonata, as well as the B-flat piano concerto, another piece which brims with positive energy.

As with several of Beethoven's early symphonies, a slow opening sets up the tonality while at the same time subverting our expectations. In this case, Beethoven spends a bit of time around G-flat, a half step away from the F which we would expect to set up B-flat major. Once the main body of the form arrives, Beethoven sweeps us away with infectious rhythmic energy and creative melodic writing, including a brief canon in the second theme area. The slow movement's melody is a simple, peaceful descending scale, with a rhythmic ostinato providing its foundation. One highlight of this movement is a fortissimo reharmonization of the opening scale toward the middle of the form, ending up in the same G-flat tonality that Beethoven hinted in the slow introduction of the first movement.

The third movement repeats the trio section twice (creating a sort of A-B-A-B-A form), something which recurs in quite a few of Beethoven's larger works, particularly the Seventh and Ninth symphonies. The finale is a perpetual motion with controlled frenetic energy, trading a set of scale-based motives back and forth around the orchestra until the unexpected tongue-in-cheek conclusion.