**Program for Richard Fountain**

**The Landing – Lincoln, NE**

**May 4, 2019**

**“Liszt van Beethoven: The Nine Symphonies”**

**Season Two, Episode One**

**Sonata in A major, Op. 101…………………...Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

1. Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung

(Somewhat lively and with the most intimate feeling)

1. Lebhaft. Marschmäßig

(Lively. In march tempo)

1. Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll

(Slowly and full of longing)

1. Geschwinde, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit

(Quickly, but not too much, and with resolution)

**Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92………....................Ludwig van Beethoven**

**Transcribed for piano solo by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace

II. Allegretto

III. Scherzo. Presto

1. Allegro con brio

***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 A major, Op. 101**

Beethoven’s op. 101 sonata is the first of the celebrated “late-period” sonatas, which are characterized by a radical reinterpretation of musical structure and a more inward expressive focus. By this time Beethoven was almost totally deaf, and in a way his deafness seemed to redirect his musical ideas from the virtuosic to the contemplative. These late works also involve extensive use of strict counterpoint, including fugue, which had not been a consistent presence in classical music for some fifty years. Also, the trill becomes important as an expression of timelessness or eternity, particularly in the op. 109 and op. 111 sonatas.

Op. 101 has four movements, which nods to the tradition of a large multi-movement sonata form, but the individual movements themselves are remarkably unique. The first movement is one of the briefest of all Beethoven’s sonata forms, just 102 measures. In many ways this is one of the more introverted statements in all of Beethoven’s output – the dynamic rarely surpasses mezzo-forte (medium-loud), and the phrases are frequently interrupted by silence or quiet reflections. The second movement is a lively march, angular and surprisingly chromatic. This march alternates with a “dolce” (sweet) middle section written almost entirely in two voices. The “slow movement” – really an intermezzo before the finale – barely completes three phrases before returning to the opening phrase of the first movement, a technique which Beethoven later uses to magnificent narrative effect in the finale of the Ninth Symphony. A trill signals the transition to the fourth movement, which alternately leaps and rolls along on either side of a massive four-voice fugue in the center of the piece.

**Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92**

Beethoven’s Seventh is most famous for its “slow movement,” actually an Allegretto, which has become something of an audio meme in popular culture. The work as a whole is massive, around forty-five minutes in length, with thickly written textures and undeniable power. It is unashamedly loud, bold, celebratory music, whose periodic interludes of quiet only serve as the start of a buildup to the next great outburst of joyful sound.

The first movement begins with a long introduction, built around a descending triad and an ascending scale, and moving through several surprising harmonic progressions before a series of repeated “E’s” signal the beginning of the “Vivace.” Here the 6/8 time signature establishes a rollicking, dance-like feel which permeates the entire movement. The middle of this movement features what must surely be the longest stretch of “fff” (as loud and strong as is physically possible) in Beethoven’s entire output, and the tail end of the piece builds from breathless anticipation to unbridled triumph. The aforementioned Allegretto is actually more of a dance than a dirge, despite many recordings which would seem to say the opposite. It is sad, but not despondent, music, with a nobility of spirit restraining any impulse of sentimentality. The Scherzo alternates “ff” and “pp” ideas at ridiculously fast speed, and Beethoven enjoys his material so much that he repeats the middle section twice, turning an ABA form into an ABABA form. The finale is, if possible, even more relentlessly triumphant than the first movement, with only a few passages of quiet energy to balance the nearly constant fortissimo dynamic. Instructions like “sf” (emphasized), “sempre piu forte” (always getting louder), and “sempre ff” (always fortissimo) occur throughout the score. It is riveting, riotous music, leaving listener and player alike quite out of breath by the end.