**Program for Richard Fountain**

**Wayland Baptist University**

**April 4, 2019**

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

**Season Two, Episode Three**

**Sonata in C minor, Op. 10, no. 1…………….Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

1. Allegro molto e con brio
2. Adagio molto
3. Finale. Prestissimo

**Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67………....................Ludwig van Beethoven**

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

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante con moto

III. Scherzo. Allegro –

IV. Allegro - Presto

*This program is presented in partnership with the West Texas Chapter of the American Liszt Society.*

***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 C minor, Op. 10, no. 1 (18’)**

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

Even in this relatively youthful work, Beethoven’s famous “C-minor mood” is already well-established. C minor is a particularly dark, powerfully tragic key for Beethoven, but in his C-minor works he also offsets this darkness with particularly beautiful lyricism in related major keys. True to form, full chords and elemental outbursts of energy in C minor alternate with lyrical lines in E-flat major throughout the efficiently crafted opening movement. The slow movement is unquestionably a masterpiece of tender expression, whose simple binary form (ABAB-Coda) provides a transparent structure for Beethoven to show especially deep serenity. This movement shares the same key of A-flat major with the famous slow movement of the Pathetique sonata. The finale is marked “as fast as possible,” featuring leaps, scales, and tremolos before dissolving into a strangely abrupt, yet calm conclusion.

**Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 (36’)**

Very little needs to be said or written about Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Its opening four notes have become a musical meme almost from its first performances, and commentators throughout the years have tried without success to identify a singular “meaning” to this most compelling of musical statements. It is universally agreed, however, that this symphony is an achievement on par with the greatest works of art. Those famous four notes provide all the structure Beethoven needs to give voice to every corner of human experience, taking us from tragedy to triumph while simultaneously following and defying expectations of Classical convention. One of the most remarkable passages is the transition from the scherzo into the finale. The third movement begins conventionally enough, alternating C minor with C major, but in the return to C minor a curtain seems to fall over the sound, as Beethoven repeats his original material as soft as possible, but with the same energy. It is extremely tempting to read this as Beethoven commenting on his own experience of encroaching deafness, although the music’s effect is certainly unlimited in its signifying potential. Whatever one’s interpretation, this curtain is violently “torn in two” in the transition into the finale, where it can indeed be said that “death is swallowed up in victory.”