

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

- Wed. September 21** The 104th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert
Fri. September 23 The 884th Suntory Hall Subscription Concert
Sun. September 25 The 885th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, op.73, "Emperor" 9/21 9/23

- I. Allegro (ca. 20 min)
- II. Adagio un poco mosso (ca. 8 min)
- III. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo (ca. 10 min)

As with his other works similarly dubbed with additional titles, Beethoven was not the one to subtitle his final piano concerto "Emperor". It is believed rather, that his long time friend and pianist John Baptist Cramer, who was born in Germany but based in London, gave the name. While Beethoven thought highly of his pianist/publisher friend, he did not hold in high esteem emperors, so it is a bit of a puzzle as to why his friend would attach such a moniker to the work. In fact, at the time that Beethoven was composing this piece, Napoleon and his French forces were soon to invade and occupy Vienna.

Beethoven had recently completed his Fifth and Sixth symphonies, as well as his Fourth Piano Concerto, and had given the marathon concert of a number of his recent works for a charity event in December of 1808. It was in 1809 that the composer began work on this his last piano concerto. He had recently been given a contract by Archduke Rudolph,

together with two princes that gave him the financial freedom to remain in Vienna and dedicate himself to his art. Unfortunately though, as a result of the occupation, Beethoven along with all citizens of Vienna, were heavily taxed. Not only did the occupation result in less financial freedom for the composer, but limited his movement as well, so that he was unable to spend time outside of the city in the countryside during the summer months, to which he had become accustomed.

The *Piano Concerto No. 5* is in the traditional three-movement form, and not surprisingly is dedicated to Archduke Rudolph, who had been not only a patron but also a student of Beethoven's. While Beethoven had previously premiered his own piano concertos, his hearing loss had gotten to the point where he realized he could no longer perform his own works publicly. Instead, the premiere was played by the organist, Friedrich Schneider in Leipzig in 1811. The following year, in February of 1812, one of Beethoven's students, Carl Czerny, gave the work its Vienna premiere.

As with many of his compositions, Beethoven was exploring new avenues

of expression, and this concerto was no different. Instead of the usual orchestral exposition, the first movement opens with a single sustained chord by the ensemble. This is immediately followed by several cadenza-like passages from the soloist, which are in turn emphatically resolved by the orchestra's sustained chords before taking off into the glorious first theme. The second movement is

hymn-like in the key of B major, resolving with a simple half-step by the bassoon to B flat to return us to the dominant of the original key of E flat major and the final rondo in all its grandeur.

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

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 6 in F major, op. 68, "Pastorale" 9/21 9/23 9/25

- I. 'Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside.' — Allegro ma non troppo (ca. 9 min)
- II. 'Scene by the brook.' — Andante molto mosso (ca. 12 min)
- III. 'Merry gathering of country folk.' — Allegro (ca. 5 min)
- IV. 'Thunderstorm.' — Allegro (ca. 4 min)
- V. 'Shepherd's song. Happy and thankful feelings after the storm.' — Allegretto (ca. 9 min)

'*Sinfonia caratteristica* — or memories of country life.... *Sinfonia pastorella*.... Anyone who has experienced country life can determine the intentions of the composer even without titles.... The listener should be allowed to discover the situation.... All painting in music is a failure if it is pushed too far.... Instead the music is more an expression of feelings rather than a painting in sounds....'

These various comments were written by Beethoven in his sketches for the Sixth Symphony and reveal that although he did in fact give titles, not only to each movement of the work, but also to the

work as a whole, that his focus was more on expressing the emotional reactions to nature rather than presenting a programmatic piece.

Beethoven's love for nature, in fact his need to be in constant connection with nature, is well known. But the fact that, of all of his works, he felt it important to entitle each movement of his *Pastorale Symphony*, emphasizes even more his strong feelings associated with his relationship with nature. The first movement, '**Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arrival in the country**', may be an expression of his own personal feelings whenever he would leave the city to take time out in the countryside, such as he often did. In fact when he composed this and his Fifth Symphony, among other works, during the summers of 1807 and 1808, he was on retreat in the rural town, Heiligenstadt.

The second movement, '**Scene by the brook**', perhaps comes close to painting a picture of nature with the timbres of the orchestra aptly imitating the sound of the babbling brook as well as mimicking particular bird songs. Beethoven even

indicated in the score the bird song each instrument was playing in the closing woodwind cadenza, with the flute playing the part of the nightingale, the oboe as a quail, and the clarinet a cuckoo. But again it seems it was Beethoven's intent to create a serene atmosphere with these sounds rather than a sound painting.

The remaining three movements are performed without pause, almost creating the effect of a three-movement work, rather than the five indicated in the score. In fact, many have commented that the fourth movement '**Thunderstorm**', in all of its brevity, acts more as an introduction for the final movement, '**Shepherd's song. Happy and thankful feelings after the storm.**' The third movement, '**Merry gathering of country folk**' is a fairly traditional scherzo/trio form with abrupt interruptions in even rhythms, almost as a foreshadowing of the storm to come. And again, though the fourth movement clearly depicts a scene during a sudden rainstorm, Beethoven's hope was that the audience would experience the emotions at hand, beyond the inevitable sound painting.

Symphony No. 6 was premiered in December of 1808 at the massive concert at the Theatre an der Wien where

Beethoven introduced his Fifth Symphony along with his Fourth Piano Concerto, two sections of the Mass in C major, the concert aria *Ah! Perfido*, the Fantasia in G major for piano, as well as the Fantasia in C minor for piano, chorus and orchestra. Needless to say it was somewhat overwhelming for the audience to sit through such a full program. And given that both the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were composed about the same time, their numbers were mistakenly reversed on the program for this premiere.

As the final movement expresses pure thanksgiving in an exultant hymn, one can't help but hear Beethoven's own words describe his joy at being surrounded by nature as he wrote in a letter to a friend: "How glad I am to be able to roam in wood and thicket, among the trees and flowers and rocks. No one can love the country as I do.... In the country, every tree seems to speak to me.... In the woods, there is enchantment, which expresses all things.... For surely woods, trees, and rocks produce the echo that man desires to hear."

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

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 7 in A major, op. 92 9/25

- I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace (ca. 12 min)
- II. Allegretto (ca. 9 min)
- III. Presto – Assai meno presto, trio (ca. 8 min)
- IV. Allegro con brio (ca. 7 min)

With his continually declining health in the summer of 1811, Beethoven was referred by the prominent Viennese physician, Dr. Giovanni Malfatti to retreat to the Bohemian town of Teplitz, which