

# Program Notes

by April L. Racana

**Mon. September 18, The 896th Orchard Hall Subscription Concert**

**Thu. September 21, The 112th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert**

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827)

## Piano Concerto No. 3, in C minor, op. 37

Premiered on April 5th, 1803 at the Theatre-an-der-Wien, Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto was believed to have been completed several years earlier with some sketches found as early as 1797. This performance was given at another one of the large benefit concerts for which Beethoven was known and included premieres of two of his other works: the Second Symphony and the oratorio "Christ on the Mount of Olives." In addition, his First Symphony was presented, though it had been premiered the previous year.

Apparently, the only rehearsal for the musicians for all of the works being performed was on the same day and began early that morning, continuing throughout the day and facing many difficulties. Beethoven had yet to finish writing the score of the Third Concerto, which was confirmed by one of his students, Ignaz von Seyfried, who also turned pages for the soloist during the concert: "I saw almost nothing but empty pages, at most on one page or another a few...hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me and scribbled down to serve as clues for him. He played nearly all of the solo part from memory since...he had not had time to put it all down on paper. He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages, and my scarcely concealable anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly..."

Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto pays tribute to Mozart, especially to his Piano Concerto (K. 491) in the same key of C minor, with some theme fragments borrowed among other musical similarities. However, Beethoven goes beyond the classical composer's model taking the work to the next level. In fact, many scholars view this concerto as a turning point of sorts in the composer's style between his first two piano concertos and works that would follow. One key example of this is the choice of key chosen for the second movement, E major. With a key signature of four sharps, this was quite unexpected being considered so far from the opening key of C minor with its three flats.

This slow movement, marked Largo, presents a lyrical melody that is more of a nod to the romantic vein to come than that of the classical era. The soloist's opening expansive melodic lines are taken up by the strings and woodwinds and accompanied by arpeggios in the piano. A featured duet by bassoon and flute can be heard over pizzicato strings and additional arpeggios from the soloist.

The final movement, a rondo, returns to the key of C minor again. However, he returns again to the E major key used in the slow movement in the middle of the last movement to reinforce that harmonic connection. Eventually returning to C minor again, the composer would find himself prancing into the key of C major after a short cadenza where he gallantly ends the work at a presto tempo with full orchestra.

In the city that Beethoven considered Mozart's territory, and with a piece that pays homage to that composer, one review following the premiere stated that this work would be received well "even in places like Leipzig, where people were accustomed to hearing the best of Mozart's concertos." High praise, yet qualified with the acknowledgement of the greater musical and emotional depth taken by Beethoven in this work, commenting that the soloist would need "in addition to everything one associates with virtuosity, [an] understanding in their head and a heart in their breast – otherwise, even with the most impressive preparation and technique, the best things in the work will be left behind."

**Work composed:** 1800-1803 **World premiere:** 1807, Wien

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

**Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827)

## Symphony No 3 in E-flat major, op. 55 "Eroica"

Originally entitled "Bonaparte Symphony", as a tribute to Napoleon Bonaparte, Beethoven was determined to erase this title, literally, when Napoleon crowned himself emperor, which was a huge disappointment to the composer. So strong was his anger that apparently upon scratching out the title, Beethoven tore a hole in the paper. However, the published manuscript still carried the inscription: "composed to celebrate the memory of a great man" purportedly a nod to the earlier notions of the Frenchman.

The official dedication consequently was given to one of Beethoven's strongest supporters, Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, and the subtitle "Eroica" intended to represent a heroic ideal in more general, albeit musical, terms. In fact, this symphony has come to be the epitome of what is now termed as Beethoven's Heroic style, which is identified by such features as the driving rhythms, drastic dynamic changes, and musical themes of drama, death, rebirth, and a general 'overcoming' of strifes in life.

