

# The University Musical Society

of

## The University of Michigan

*Presents*

*The* ANN ARBOR

# *May Festival*

THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

EUGENE ORMANDY, *Music Director and Conductor*

WILLIAM SMITH, *Assistant Conductor*

EUGENE ORMANDY, *Conducting*

SOLOIST

RUDOLF SERKIN, *Pianist*

WEDNESDAY EVENING, MAY 2, 1973, AT 8:30

HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

### All-Beethoven Program

"Leonore" Overture No. 3, Op. 72a

\*Concerto No. 4 in G major for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 58

Allegro moderato

Andante con moto

Rondo: vivace

RUDOLF SERKIN

INTERMISSION

\*Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55 ("Eroica")

Allegro con brio

Marcia funebre: adagio assai—(*Honoring the memory of Dr. Charles A. Sink*)

. . . a moment of silence

Scherzo: allegro vivace

Allegro molto

\* Available on Columbia Records RCA Red Seal

## PROGRAM NOTES

by

GLENN D. MCGEOCH

### Compositions of Ludwig van Beethoven

By the time Beethoven (1770–1828) was twenty-eight years of age he had achieved fame and fortune. Publishers were competing for his manuscripts, he had become the favorite piano virtuoso of his time, and he was pampered and fostered by the aristocracy. At the height of his popularity, and with every prospect for a spectacular career, he became conscious of increasing deafness. In a letter to his friend Dr. Franz Wegeler (June 29, 1801), he wrote, "My hearing for the past few years has grown suddenly worse." Therefore, as early as 1798, he had become aware of the incurable malady that was to progress inexorably to total deafness. To another friend, Carl Amenda, he had written earlier the same month, "Know that the noblest part of me, my hearing, has become very bad—but I keep silent about it—I beg you to keep the matter a confirmed secret, and confide it to no one." His music, up to this time for the most part traditional, had begun to reveal rebellious and erratic moods. From his letters and friends, we learn of his reaction of defiance and rage at the senseless irony of his affliction.

Upon the advice of his physician, Beethoven spent the summer of 1802 at the quiet and secluded village of Heiligenstädt, where he wrote the "Heiligenstädt Testament," not discovered until after his death. In it he wrote "I was brought to despair, . . . I will put an end to my own life. Only it—my art—holds me back . . . with joy I hasten to meet death face to face . . . does he not free me from a state of ceaseless suffering— . . . come when thou wilt, I shall face thee with courage—Farewell." The document marked a crisis in his life, for he had become aware within himself of an indomitable creative energy that nothing could destroy. The suicidal gloom of the "Testament" reflects merely a passing mood. From the depths of his misery, he rebounded to the ebullience of one of his most fecund periods. Despair about his life and undiminished enthusiasm for his art, deep despondency and firm resolution fused into the heroic effort that forged the Eroica Symphony. Personal emotions of anger and rebellion submitted in the end to imperial reason.

All the works on tonight's program were composed in quick succession, a few years after the *Heiligenstädt Testament*; first the epoch-making Eroica Symphony (1803–4); the conciliatory Concerto No. 4 in G major (1805–6), and the heroic *Leonore Overture* No. 3 (1806). Even in the life of Beethoven, itself exceptional, the years 1802–6 are unique, for during this period he came to the realization of his own indestructible creative power and the acceptance of submission to his fate. "Plutarch taught me resignation," he wrote to Wegeler, "Resignation! what a wretched refuge, and yet the only one open to me. . . . I shall seize Fate by the throat, most assuredly it will not get me down." This spirit of courage sustained him throughout his entire life and constantly renewed his creative energies. The Eroica Symphony is, in truth, the first music he composed with a really profound and important spiritual context; it is a miraculous transformation of emotions of desperation, generated by tragic experience, expressed first in words in the *Heiligenstädt Testament*, and then sublimated into multiple daring innovations and heroic musical forms.

#### "Leonore" Overture, No. 3, Op. 72a

Beethoven, born at the end of the eighteenth century, witnessed in the formative period of his life the drastic changes that were occurring throughout central Europe; changes which affected the political, intellectual, and artistic life of the world.

He appeared at the very moment of transition from the classicism of the eighteenth century to the romanticism of the nineteenth, becoming the sage of the one and the prophet of the other. Throughout a period of chaos and turmoil, he stood, a colossus, bridging with his mighty grasp the two centuries in which he lived. His art became an harmonious embodiment of opposing forces, controlled by an architectonic intelligence that molded and fused them together into one passionate, creative impulse which resulted in the production of epoch-making masterpieces, built upon firm foundations, but emancipated from the confining elements of tradition, and set free to discover new regions of unimagined beauty.

As a master of absolute music Beethoven undeniably exerted a powerful influence upon the succeeding opera composers. But *Fidelio*, his single attempt in that field, has been far less an emancipating force than most of his instrumental compositions. The supreme service of *Fidelio* to aesthetic history was accomplished in turning Beethoven's attention to the dramatic overture. There is more real dramatic art in the four overtures designed as preludes for *Fidelio* than exists in the entire bulky score of the opera.

The four overtures are known as the "Leonore" Nos. 1, 2, and 3, in C major, and the "Fidelio" in E major. We know that the overture numbered by the publishers as No. 2 was used for the première of the opera, November 20, 1805. The incomparable No. 3, on this evening's program, is a remodeled form written for the reconstructed version, heard March 29, 1806. The established order of composition is No. 1 before 1805, No. 2 in 1805, No. 3 in 1806, and the "Fidelio" overture in 1814.

The action of *Fidelio* occurs in a fortress near Seville. Don Florestan, a Spanish nobleman, has been imprisoned for life, and to make his fate certain, his mortal enemy Don Pizarro, governor of the prison, has announced his death, meanwhile putting him in a dungeon where he is to die by gradual starvation.

Don Florestan, however, has a devoted wife who refuses to believe the report of his death. Disguising herself as a servant and assuming the name of Fidelity, she secures employment with

Rocco, the head jailer. Rocco's daughter falls in love with the supposed handsome youth, who is soon in such high favor that permission to accompany Rocco on his visits to the prisoner is granted.

Hearing that the minister of the interior is coming to the prison to investigate the supposed death of Florestan, the governor decides to murder him, and asks Rocco's aid. Fidelio overhears the conversation and gets Rocco to allow her to assist him in digging the grave. Just as Don Pizarro is about to strike the fatal blow, Fidelio rushes forward, proclaims herself the wife of the prisoner, and shields him. The governor is about to sacrifice both when a flourish of trumpets announces the arrival of the minister just in time to prevent murder.

Richard Wagner paid a remarkable tribute to Beethoven and this great overture when he wrote, in part:

"Far from giving us a mere musical introduction to the drama, it [the "Leonore" No. 3] sets that drama more completely and more movingly before us than ever happens in the broken action which ensues. This work is no longer an overture, but the greatest of dramas in itself . . .

In this mighty tone-piece, Beethoven has given us a musical drama, and not the mere sketch of one of its main ideas, or even a purely preparatory introduction to the acted play; but a drama, be it said, in the most ideal meaning of the term. . . . His object was to condense to its noblest unity the *one* sublime action which the dramatist had weakened and delayed by paltry details in order to spin out the tale; to give a new, an ideal motion, fed solely by its inmost springs . . . We are plunged into a gloomy dungeon; no beam of day strikes through to us; night's awful silence breaks only to the moans, the sighs, of a soul that longs from its deepest depths for freedom. A swift resolve inspires it, to tear down all the barriers hedging the prisoner from heaven's light: higher, higher, and even fuller swells the soul, its might redoubled by the blest resolve; 'tis the angel of redemption to the world. Yet this angel is but a loving woman, its strength the puny strength of suffering humanity itself; it battles alike with hostile hindrances and its own weakness, and threatens to succumb. But the superhuman idea, which ever lights its soul anew, lends finally the superhuman force; one last prodigious strain of every fibre, and, at the moment of supremest need, the final barrier falls."

### Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58, for Piano and Orchestra

Beethoven always approached a new form with caution, leaning heavily at first upon traditions established by his predecessors Haydn and Mozart. Whatever the form, he entered the untried field with deliberation. Once he found himself the master, he subjected it to merciless scrutiny and went about deliberately to free it from the fetters of the past. His piano compositions were always in the vanguard of his maturing style and showed the greatest originality and freedom from the restrictions of traditions.

About five years elapsed between the writing of the Third and Fourth concertos. The Fourth was composed for the most part and completed in 1806. During this period Beethoven was pursued by disaster, disappointment, and sorrows of all kinds brought about by the full realization of the seriousness of his increasing deafness and the collapse of the high hopes he had for his opera *Fidelio*.

There is no more potent example of an artist's escape from personal grief and tragic circumstances than that found in this concerto. In its exuberance and lighthearted charm, Beethoven lost himself in a world of his own making.

The Fourth concerto was dedicated to the Archduke Rudolph of Austria, Beethoven's pupil, friend, and patron, and was published in August 1808. It had its initial performance at one of the two subscription concerts devoted entirely to Beethoven's works, given at the home of Prince Lobkowitz in Vienna, in March 1807. The first public performance took place at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna, December 22, 1808, with Beethoven as soloist.

For many years the Fourth concerto was neglected, overshadowed by the overwhelming popularity of the great one in E-flat major known as the "Emperor." It was Mendelssohn who saved it from possible oblivion when he revived it at a Gewandhaus concert at Leipzig in 1836. At the time, Robert Schumann wrote, "I have received a pleasure from it such as I have never enjoyed and I sat in my place without moving a muscle or even breathing, afraid of making the least noise."

The Fourth concerto marks an innovation in the long evolution of the form, from a mere show piece with a servile orchestral accompaniment to a full emancipation of the orchestra, such as one finds later in those of Schumann and Brahms.

The first movement (*Allegro moderato*, G major, 4/4) begins with the announcement of the principal theme in the piano. By giving the initial statement to the solo instrument instead of the orchestra, Beethoven, as did Mozart in an earlier work, helped to free the concerto from one of its most traditional bonds. It is a brief statement of only four measures after an introductory chord, but none the less daring for its brevity. With the entrance of the orchestra the treatment becomes orthodox, presenting the conventional exposition of contrasting themes.

The second movement (*Andante con moto*, E minor, 2/4) in its construction is aiming chiefly at expressiveness. Described by Sir George Grove, it "is one of the most original and imaginative things that ever fell from the pen of Beethoven, or any other musician. The strings of the orchestra alone are employed, but they maintain throughout a dialogue with the piano in alternate phrases of the most dramatic character—the orchestra in octaves forte and staccato, fierce and rude; the piano employing but one string *molto cantabile*, *molto espressivo*, as winning, soft, beseeching as ever was human voice."

The third movement (*Rondo: vivace*, G major, 2/4), following the preceding movement without pause, opens with a lively theme announced immediately in the strings, *pianissimo*, answered by the piano in a florid variation. After a short melodic phrase, first heard in the strings and taken up by the piano, and a bold digressing section in the orchestra, the second theme of the movement is stated in the piano. This "round" of returning themes is brilliantly developed in a "reckless, devil-may-care spirit of jollity" to a coda of enormous proportions, and the movement ends on an exciting increase of tempo.

## Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55 ("Eroica")

Beethoven belongs among the late developing geniuses. He wrote his first symphony in 1800, at the age of thirty—a vivid contrast to his immediate predecessor Mozart, who, at the age of thirty-two had produced his forty-first. In his initial symphony, he had already found his individual voice and had uttered prophecies of a career that was to free music from the fashionable but worn-out patterns of the rococo world. It was referred to by the critics as being "wildly iconoclastic," "the confused explosions of the outrageous effrontery of a young man," and as "danger to the musical art." It anticipated in its occasional dissonant harmonies, audacities of key relationships, emphasis upon the woodwinds and brass instruments, culminating themes, and a scherzo-like third movement, the "Eroica" that was to appear only four years later. Until the Third Symphony, music had never realized such tonal dimension or such broad lines of terrific intensity. Although Beethoven retained the conventional form, he expanded it into epic proportions in every movement, sweeping away with every stroke of his pen the mannerisms and clichés of the classical style of his predecessors. Themes emerged from germ ideas into sweeping crescendos; sudden changes of mood were accomplished by violent contrasts; daring modulations moved to remote keys; ruthless, concentrated dissonances led to shattering climaxes; codas at the end of sections and movements changed from their former brief formulation to lengthy projections of the design they appended; elementary and mechanical links or transitions between themes and sections, welded them together like bonds of steel; increased ensemble of instruments, particularly the brass, went far beyond what had hitherto been required.

All these innovations become eminently clear in the first movement (E-flat major, *allegro con brio*), which remains the most remarkable of all Beethoven's works for its incomparable mastery of tonal architecture. From a germ idea of the mere intervals of the E-flat major chord is evolved a towering edifice whose structure grows ineluctably and remains taut, despite its molten torrent of thematic manipulation. In no other Beethoven symphony does the development section attain such grandeur or achieve such a dramatic climax as it reaches its plateau of persistent and increasingly dissonant and syncopated chords. For the second movement (C minor, *adagio assai*) Beethoven substitutes for a merely quiet and serene contrast a mighty Funeral March, whose mood of profound grief over the inexorable tragedy of death has never found a more poignant expression. Beginning in a somber minor mood, its middle section offers a respite of optimism and consolation, in which a mighty double fugue of heroic magnitude emerges. It then subsides to a quiet, halting ending, in broken almost inarticulate phrases. With the third movement (Scherzo, E-flat major, *allegro vivace*), Beethoven achieved perhaps his most epoch-making innovation. Retaining the three-part form and the triple rhythm of the traditional minuet in this movement, with the designation of *allegro vivace*, he uttered the death knell to the stately minuet. In a boisterous scherzo with vigorous, crescendoing themes and strong syncopated rhythms; in the bold contrast in the middle section sounded by three horns, and with the onrushing return of the scherzo, he dispels the gloom of the preceding movement, and affirms the optimistic and positive aspects of life. The Fourth movement (E-flat major, *allegro molto*) is cast on a mighty set of variations based upon a theme of the utmost insignificance, being nothing more than a suggestion of a basic tonic and dominant harmony. Basic and simple as this idea may appear, it challenged Beethoven's inventiveness in three previous compositions (*Contretanz*, No. 7, c. 1800; the finale of his *Prometheus* ballet of Op. 43, c. 1801; *Fifteen Variations for piano solo*, Op. 35, 1802), before it reached its ultimate fulfillment in this movement. In this crowning finale to a work so replete with innovations, the theme and variations design had never before reached such structural magnificence. All the classical devices previously used in this design appear—changes of rhythm, use of counter melodies, and changes of key and instrumentation. Beethoven, by composing a quasi-three-part form, and introducing fugal passages that lead to stunning climaxes (variations 4 and 8) casts the variations into an impressive mold. Presenting the theme with a sweeping Introduction in the strings and returning to it at the conclusion of the movement, he provides a framework that lifts it above a mere chain of independent variations. Every variation has its root in the tonic, dominant theme which, except for fleeting moments, is always in evidence, or at least inferred. In the third variation, however, there arises from it a melodic theme that ultimately dominates the entire movement. Only at the final climax is it no longer appended to the first subject from which it originally sprang; it soars and broadens to a glorious fulfillment. The Introduction returns and, even here, it appears in an increased tempo and modified rhythmic form.

The Third Symphony is indeed a miracle, even among Beethoven works. If later he went further, never did he again take so big a single stride. It burst upon the world with the abruptness of an exploding bomb and, with it, Beethoven became the spokesman of the new Romanticism. Born and nurtured as he was in a world ringing with the words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," in this symphony he freed musical Romanticism to deliver its direct and overwhelming message to the nineteenth century. In the words of Romain Rolland, "The Third Symphony rightly bears the title "Eroica"—it is an Etna, and within, the Cyclopes are forging the shield of Achilles."

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Charles A. Sink was associated intimately with the affairs of the University Musical Society from the year of his graduation from The University of Michigan in 1904 until his death last December 17, 1972. He was an active administrator of the Society until 1957, its president until 1968. The School of Music was under his administration until 1940. His community and state-wide affiliations were many and distinguished. His congenial and energetic personality won life-long friends and admirers and his professional integrity and genius were most highly respected. The May Festival tradition was one of his most cherished responsibilities which he maintained with continuing success throughout a half century. The collection of artists' photographs displayed now in the auditorium lobbies reflects his extensive managerial career and the cultural legacy he left this community.

Tonight a tribute is offered with the second movement of the "Eroica" Symphony to signify the dedication of the 80th Annual Ann Arbor May Festival to the lasting memory of Charles A. Sink.