

I Allegro ma non troppo. The movement opens with five soft beats on the kettledrum, followed by the soloist's statement of the wonderfully calm principal theme. Then the violins take up the kettledrum's opening statement and throughout the movement's development the rhythm of those five beats haunts the music.

II Larghetto. A deceptively simple theme in the muted violins opens the movement; two horns and a clarinet restate the theme as the solo violin embellishes it. A series of beautiful variations follows before the brilliant rondo finale.

III Rondo: Allegro. A vivacious virtuoso movement with a dance-like refrain in which the solo violin displays sparkling runs, trills and arpeggios. After the soloist's cadenza the whole structure is rounded off with a brilliant coda for soloist and orchestra. The perfectly timed surprise ending never fails to achieve its effect.

Contemporary Comment

"Beethoven has put forth no strength in his violin concerto; it might have been written by any third or fourth rate composer." - *Harmonicon journal*, May 1832.

Symphony No 3 in E flat major, Opus 55 (Eroica).

In the summer of 1817 Beethoven and his friend, the poet Christian Kuffner, were having supper together. Kuffner asked the composer which of his symphonies was his favourite. Beethoven replied, "Why, the Eroica". Kuffner said, "I would have guessed the C minor (Fifth)". "No," insisted Beethoven, "the Eroica". At that time the Symphony No 9, Choral, had not been written; but today many good judges place the Eroica above it.

Beethoven had more than musical reasons for his special feelings about his Third Symphony. At the time he was composing it, in 1803 and early 1804, he constantly had in mind one of his great heroes, Napoleon Bonaparte, the military and political defender of the French Revolution and of its "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". When the symphony was completed he put the name "Bonaparte" at the very top of the score and placed his own name at its foot. Then a friend, Ferdinand Ries, brought him the news that Napoleon had crowned himself Emperor. Ries later wrote that Beethoven flew into a rage, predicting that Bonaparte would become a tyrant, and immediately scratched out that name so vigorously that

the paper was cut. Later he gave the symphony a new title: Symphony Eroica, Composed to Celebrate the Memory of a Great Man.

I Allegro con brio. The symphony has no introduction; after two sharp chords the orchestra begins the robust, swinging theme. The outstanding characteristic of this movement is its constantly recurring tension, a deliberate refusal to find a conventional resolution of the principal theme's development. At one point, at the peak of the movement, there is a cataclysmic explosion of harmonic dissonance and syncopated rhythms of a kind that had never been heard in music before.

II Marcia funebre: Adagio assai. The profundity and eloquence of this great Funeral March has probably never been equalled. It is an epic lamentation and a unique poetic conception of sorrow.

III Scherzo: Allegro vivace. The mood of the Funeral March is immediately broken with a fleet movement of delicate, shifting light and shadow.

IV Finale: Allegro molto. In this supreme movement Beethoven introduces the

Prometheus theme which he had already used in three other works and subjects it to a series of twelve substantial and brilliant variations that carry the work to its impressive conclusion.

Contemporary Comment

"The Heroic Symphony contains much to admire, past all doubt, but it is difficult to keep up admiration of this kind during three long quarters of an hour...if this symphony is not by some means abridged, it will soon fall into disuse." - *Harmonicon journal*, April 1828.

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