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# BEET HO VEN

COMPLETE  
SYMPHONIES

Staatskapelle Dresden

Herbert Blomstedt  
*conductor*

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## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

### Complete Symphonies

CD1 76'52

#### Symphony No.1 in C Op.21

- 1 I. Adagio molto –  
Allegro con brio 9'03
- 2 II. Andante cantabile  
con moto 8'32
- 3 III. Menuetto & Trio:  
Allegro molto e vivace 3'26
- 4 IV. Finale: Adagio –  
Allegro molto e vivace 6'09

#### Symphony No.3 in E flat Op.55 'Eroica'

- 5 I. Allegro con brio 15'02
- 6 II. Marcia funebre:  
Adagio assai 16'47
- 7 III. Scherzo & Trio:  
Allegro vivace 5'49
- 8 IV. Allegro molto –  
poco andante – presto 11'49

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CD2 72'25

#### Symphony No.2 in D Op.36

- 1 I. Adagio molto –  
Allegro con brio 13'05
- 2 II. Larghetto 12'33
- 3 III. Scherzo & Trio: Allegro 4'06
- 4 IV. Allegro molto 6'43

#### Symphony No.4 in B flat Op.60

- 5 I. Adagio – Allegro vivace 12'09
- 6 II. Adagio 10'31
- 7 III. Menuetto: Allegro vivace –  
Trio: Un poco meno allegro 5'50
- 8 IV. Allegro ma non troppo 7'10

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CD3 78'55

#### Symphony No.5 in C minor Op.67

- 1 I. Allegro con brio 8'05
- 2 II. Andante con moto 11'21
- 3 III. Allegro 8'53
- 4 IV. Allegro – presto 8'52

#### Symphony No.6 in F Op.68 'Pastoral'

- 5 I. Allegro ma non troppo  
(Erwachen heiterer  
Empfindungen bei der  
Ankunft auf dem Lande) 9'31
- 6 II. Andante molto mosso  
(Szene am Bach) 12'40
- 7 III. Allegro – sempre più stretto –  
in tempo d'allegro – Tempo i –  
presto (lustiges Zusammensein  
der Landleute) 5'44
- 8 IV. Allegro (Gewitter, Sturm) 3'42
- 9 V. Allegretto (Hirtengesang,  
frohe und dankbare Gefühle  
nach dem Sturm) 9'51

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CD4 69'06

#### Symphony No.7 in A Op.92

- 1 I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace 13'31
- 2 II. Allegretto 9'57
- 3 III. Presto – Assai meno presto 9'45
- 4 IV. Allegro con brio 9'03

#### Symphony No.8 in F Op.93

- 5 I. Allegro vivace e con brio 10'02
- 6 II. Allegretto scherzando 3'56
- 7 III. Tempo di menuetto 4'47
- 8 IV. Allegro vivace 7'50

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CD5	72'18	4	IV. Presto – Allegro assai – presto – recitativo – Allegro assai – Allegro assai vivace (alla marcia) – Andante maestoso – Adagio ma non troppo ma divoto – Allegro energico e sempre ben marcato – Allegro ma non tanto – presto – maestoso – prestissimo	25'09
<b>Symphony No.9 in D minor Op.125 'Choral'</b>				
1	I. Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso	16'55		
2	II. Molto vivace – presto	13'48		
3	III. Adagio molto e cantabile – Andante moderato – Tempo i – Andante moderato – Adagio – lo stesso tempo	16'24		

Helena Döse *soprano* · Marga Schiml *mezzo-soprano*  
Peter Schreier *tenor* · Theo Adam *bass*

Rundfunkchor Leipzig  
Chor der Staatsoper Dresden

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## Revolution and Enlightenment

The symphony cycle which gave rise to the very idea of symphony cycles opens with a slap in the face. The playbill says we are in C major, key of Mozart's last symphony. But we are not. We are in F. Then we move to G. The music itself sounds puzzled, and we should be too. It's only the first of many sophisticated musical tricks which litter the symphony, reminding us not only that Beethoven was 25, with a young man's desire to shock and impress and amuse, but also that he had the mastery to do so.

A return to first principles is palpable. Nothing can be taken for granted on this symphonic journey. Everything is open to question, even the obligatory 'slow movement'. The opening bars present a microcosm of the symphony's focused progression and indeed of the composer's working methods at the piano: a fourth becomes a third becomes a second.

In the finale the unit of musical currency is a scale, nothing more, nothing less. It is 'found' note by note in the slow introduction as though a weighty proposition was being uncovered – but when the Allegro races off, it can be heard at every turn; not always in the most obvious place, but present somewhere.

With the Eroica on the horizon, the Second was the longest and most powerful symphony ever written. The slow introduction is of a grandeur then rivalled only by Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony, and with far bolder strokes of modulation. Not even the length of the coda, nor its abrupt contrasts, can contain the music's spectacular progress which culminates in the trumpets ripping through the fabric of the full orchestra.

The slow movement must needs be of Schubertian length and peacefulness to counterbalance such exhilaration. With the third movement, Beethoven brings the Scherzo to the symphonic form for the first time, and it throws heavy punches at the old minuet form before the finale reverts to the style of opera buffa (and in particular to its apotheosis in the trilogy created by Mozart and da Ponte).

A myth, a tradition, a man: three interwoven inspirations for the Third. The myth

is of Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and brought it to men. Beethoven had composed a ballet in 1801 for the Habsburg Imperial Court, called *The Creatures of Prometheus* about two statues turned to humans and shown, by Prometheus, all the beauties of civilisation: it was poorly performed and received, and Beethoven made it his first and last excursion in the genre. Its principal theme became that of the finale of the 'Eroica'. He had already used the theme a decade earlier, however, in a dance for an entertainment called a *Ritterballet*. This is where the tradition comes in: at such dances it was customary for masters and servants to dance together. The original dedication to Napoleon, torn up when Beethoven learnt that the French general had declared himself Emperor, clinches the deal: this is a Revolutionary Symphony.

If the symphony really is a portrait of a hero, many have chosen to identify the composer himself as the subject of his own work, beset by deafness and despair and winning through in a heroic act of self-renewal. How, then, are we to view the Funeral March? Certainly, its weight and bottomless grief must mark the death of a hero. The timpani, so often reserved for moments of crisis and affirmation, here take their place as an integral part of the texture. Even in this Adagio, sforzandi and accent markings slash across the score, as if to make the whole orchestra one huge death-march drummer.

So revolutionary was the Eroica's heavy weighting towards the first two movements that composers have been struggling with the problem of what to do with the remaining two ever since. Like Beethoven, many have chosen to begin from silence, as if the music was hardly there at all. Its momentum once gained, however, is unstoppable. The 'Promethean' finale presses on with a sweeping gesture that seems to dismiss everything that had gone before it – a trope to which he returned for the finale of the Ninth.

In both the Fourth and the Fifth symphonies Beethoven continues to liberate the drums as an agent of change rather than reinforcement. In the gloom of the Fifth's scherzo they find the C major which irresistibly propels us towards the finale; in the first

movement of the Fourth, it is the timpanist's singular assertion of B flat that leads the development away from distant harmonic peregrinations and back to the home key.

But ask bassoonists about the Fourth and they too may claim it as 'their' symphony. When the bassoon articulates the little rocking figure that grounds the Adagio (and animates its contrasting passages when played upside-down), it prompts a clarinet reply, merely a descending, four-note scale, elevated by its colouring and context into a wonder of suspended beauty at the heart of a long and soulful movement. But it's the finale where bassoonists really earn their fee, especially when taken anywhere near Beethoven's precipitate metronome mark.

Beethoven's trick of halting the momentum of the finale near its close is even more elaborately staged than in the First and Second symphonies. It's an old joke of Haydn's, told with a new vigour that entirely belies the old reputation of the Fourth as necessarily more graceful or feminine than the heroic statements of the Third and Fifth. Of the Fifth itself, perhaps it is enough to note that the symphony's famous trajectory from C minor to C major is not uncomplicated. The relentless proliferation of that four-note molecule in the first movement contrasts with a more relaxed model of growth in the second. The dark march of the Scherzo and its spectral return on plucked strings presage the famous C major burst of light in the finale – but the Scherzo music comes back again, as though it has never been vanquished.

Shrinks and couches were yet to make Vienna famous as the birth of psychoanalysis, but modern ears may listen to Beethoven's balancing of energies – the relentless celebration of C major in the coda as the necessary counterweight to the unrelieved C minor of the first movement – in the context of another composer with more than a passing interest in politics and psychology, Michael Tippett, and the words of his oratorio *A Child of our Time*: 'I would know my shadow and my light, so shall I at last be whole'.

While it inspired Berlioz to bring the novel to the symphony with his *Symphonie Fantastique*, the form of the Sixth is less radical than it appears. The Storm is the

‘extra’ movement in number, but counts as a transition between Scherzo and finale of the sort that Beethoven had already devised in the Fifth. What’s revolutionary about the Pastoral is its conservatism. This is far and away his most diatonic symphony: meaning that when the score says F major (a key for pastoral thoughts in music by Bach and beyond), it sets a path and sticks to it. Beethoven uses patterns and chains of rhythms throughout the symphony to a degree unprecedented even for him.

Such minimalism (anticipating the American school that bears its name) is even more germane to the Scene by the Brook. Beethoven sets his scene in motion – the murmur of the brook in the strings, the song of the earth in the winds, off-beat horns between – and lets his elements interact with a slowly intensifying hypnosis thereafter rediscovered in the late music of Sibelius.

It is Beethoven’s orchestration (so admired by Berlioz) that populates his landscape, nowhere more vividly than the Scherzo. The Scotch snap on the clarinet of the Trio is a red-nosed peasant straight out of Breughel, but the first and only F minor chord in the entire symphony is saved for the beginning of the storm. Beethoven has entirely withheld drums and trombones until this point, which is what gives the storm its always unexpected vehemence, and only the trombones are retained for the finale. Now Beethoven introduces his only ‘found object’ of this nature-symphony, a shepherd’s call such as Brahms found for the same crucial point of his own First Symphony. Once more, energy is accumulated patiently, adding instruments towards one swell which subsides to prepare for another, each more intense, until the last is capped with a radiant horn sunset.

For Wagner, the Seventh was ‘the apotheosis of the dance’; Weber said on the strength of it that Beethoven was now fit for the madhouse. Yet they are, in essence, hearing the same piece and reacting to it in the same way. For the symphony carries to extremes – for Weber, self-parody perhaps – Beethoven’s obsession with rhythm.

Much of the slow introduction is built from simple scales in the strings and arpeggios in the winds. They are gradually concentrated to a single note. It is

repeated, goes down the octave, then up, then down again. Bar by bar, a figure is developed, long-short-short, as if the music was composing itself in front of you. The not-really-slow movement is similarly fixated. The long-short-short figure has a long-long appended to it: a dactyl and a spondee, the two classic rhythmic cadence of a good Homeric line of poetry. The Greeks divided drama into comedy and tragedy, and in the implacable tread of this *Allegretto*, built on the same structural plan as the *Eroica* Symphony’s Funeral March, it is clear which Muse is ascendant.

Composed in 1811, the Eighth hangs on the coat-tails of the Seventh, at least in terms of chronology and in the estimation of many listeners who have preferred its weightier and more exuberant predecessor. One was foolish enough to ask Beethoven why he thought this was so. ‘Because it’s so much better’ came the reply.

Listening to the Seventh, there is not one superfluous note; and yet the Eighth strips away even more musical connective tissue; we are left with something bald, uncompromising and gleaming, a musical skull. Earlier commentators found it bubbling over with wit and high spirits; the conductor Michael Gielen is nearer the mark when he identifies the humour of the Eighth as ‘the humour of Rumpelstiltskin, full of wrath and suppressed violence, and without a hint of merriment.’

Just as we arrive apparently in the thick of things – no grand introduction – so the first three movements do not so much finish as stop. There is no slow movement. The second movement ticks like one of Beethoven’s new metronomes that briefly tickled his fancy, with a couple of explosions along the way. Only the Minuet offers brief respite from the tension, but it dances with two left feet. Beethoven has saved up all his endings for the overweening force of the finale – itself the longest symphonic finale that he had composed until then – which hammers home the key of F on 51 separate chords.

Beethoven wrote his first eight symphonies within the space of 15 years, 1797 or thereabouts to 1812. Another 12 would elapse before the next, and last, was complete. And yet Beethoven had the idea of setting Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy’ a full 30

years previously, before the First Symphony was even a glint in his eye.

Symphonic innovation on an unprecedented scale is evident from the outset: modern commentators may indulge talk of a world or a work creating itself as mere sentiment, but imagine the opening of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* without it. And as creation begets evolution, so Beethoven must dispose of the formal convention of the exposition repeat in order to hasten the development of his two main themes towards their inevitable immolation at the movement's climax – after which the movement's world must be forged anew – only to result in the final reiteration of its tenebrous opening and uncompromised reiteration of D minor.

No longer is the Scherzo a 'joke': learned fugue has expanded its dimensions, while abrupt silences contract its rhetoric. Rising cello phrases towards the end of the trio describe an idyll that the music itself is reluctant to forsake, being finally tugged away by the scherzo's implacable return. Withholding the slow movement heightens its pathos, and so does the care Beethoven takes in drawing out his late slow-movement style of two complementary tempi and themes – the second slightly faster than the first. Imagine the loss of impact to the finale's opening 'Schreckensfanfare' – horror fanfare, as the Germans call it – had the Scherzo come third.

And so, with the return of chaos from the opening movement and its 'discussion' in the subsequent cello recitative, voices present the only possible resolution. But Schiller's text is no simple celebration of brotherhood: he who is without a friend or a family or a soul 'must steal away weeping from this assembly'. Even in the blithe elegance of this line we may hear a composer who complained of loneliness throughout his adult life and who in the wake of the symphony's first performance sent a stinging letter of rejection to one of his closest companions, Anton Schindler – and in the 'Turkish' episode for tenor and trumpet-and-drum punctuated, choral statements of the Joy theme we are faced with a violent exhortation to rejoice in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, a sentiment that would have hit home to an audience and a kingdom still smarting from Napoleon's assault upon

their lands. The voices may have moved the symphony as a form in a decisively new direction, but the episodic construction and straightforward harmonies of the Ninth's finale draw it back, way past the agonised dissonance of the first movement towards the Enlightenment ideals adumbrated in *The Magic Flute* of Mozart.

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