

Ludwig van Beethoven
 b. December 16, 1770; Bonn
 d. March 26, 1827; Vienna

Symphony No. 6 in F major (“Pastoral”), Opus 68

Composed during the summer of 1808 in the Heiligenstadt country outside Vienna, the Sixth Symphony was first performed (along with the Fifth Symphony) at Vienna's Theater-an-der-Wein on December 22, 1808. The symphony is dedicated to his devoted patrons, Prince Lobkowitz and Count Razumovsky. About 40 minutes in duration, the work is scored for piccolo, pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets and trombones and the usual strings. Andreas Delfs led the last series performance of this work at concerts in April of 2008.

In his sketchbooks, Beethoven made a number of revealing comments about his Sixth Symphony: “The hearers should be allowed to discover the situation. —All painting in instrumental music, if pushed too far, is a failure. —*Sinfonica pastorella*. Anyone who has an idea of country life can make out for himself the intentions of the author without many titles. —People will not require titles to recognize the general intention to be more a matter of feeling than of painting in sounds. —Pastoral Symphony: No picture, but something in which the emotions are expressed which are aroused in men by the pleasure of the country (or), in which some feelings of country life are set forth.” Nevertheless, Beethoven did apply titles to the movements of his Sixth Symphony, thereby providing grist for continuing discussions about the composer's intentions. In a broader sense, the Nature-loving Beethoven here expresses himself in a work that forms an artistic respite between the more cosmic utterances of his Fifth and Seventh Symphonies.

Less frequently considered is the fact that program music, music dealing with extra-musical subjects, was gaining popularity during those early years of the nineteenth-century. J.F. Fetis, a music historian and a contemporary of Beethoven, advanced an interesting theory. He and a few others suggest that Beethoven got the idea for his “Pastoral” Symphony from an advertisement on the back of a publication of three of his piano sonatas. The work advertised was “A Musical Portrait of Nature” by J.H. Knecht; the description of its five movements was very close to those that Beethoven ultimately used. Those who have seen the Knecht work assure us that any similarity ends with this programmatic outline. Storm scenes were very popular when Beethoven penned his symphony in 1807-08; it is significant that his is the only work of this genre that has truly survived to the present day. As usual, Beethoven outclassed his contemporaries at their own game.

- I. *Awakening of cheerful feelings on arriving in the country: Allegro ma non troppo*; F major, 2/4. A sense of simple tranquility pervades the first movement; violins begin the essential theme. Aside from a smoothly descending idea in C major that serves as a second theme, the movement progresses along on the first theme (or fragments thereof), with only a gentle hint of development.
- II. *Scene by the brook: Andante molto mosso*; B-flat major, 12/8. This movement is an expansive pastorella that is filled with soft murmuring. Strings reveal both themes in this contemplative panorama of nature. In the coda, Beethoven indicates: “the nightingale (flute), quail (oboe), and cuckoo (clarinet) are heard.”
- III. *Merry gathering of country folk: Allegro*; F major, 3/4. A sense of a rustic holiday is felt in this scherzo as Beethoven recreates a memory of the music that sounded throughout the Viennese countryside. Although the general mood of this movement is quite apparent, somewhat less evident is Beethoven's clever parody of village musicians. The oboe tune appears to come in a beat late and then “catches up” with the rest of the ensemble; the bassoon meanwhile plays the only three notes that seem to be available to him. This bucolic gaiety is ultimately dispersed by the onset of the next movement.

- IV. *Thunderstorm; Tempest: Allegro*; F minor, 4/4. With thunder in the low strings and a sense of wind and lightning in the upper voices of the orchestra, Beethoven creates a free-form storm scene. The activity rises to a climax and then dissipates into the finale.
- V. *Shepherd's song; Happy, thankful feelings after the storm: Allegretto*; F major, 6/8. The reappearance of the sun is greeted by a clarinet phrase that is soon echoed by the horn. Their calls, when taken up by the violins, prove to be the first theme of the movement. Aside from the occasional appearance of a second theme, first played by pairs of clarinets and bassoons, the movement is dominated by the lyric unfolding of the opening idea. This finale seems, to Edward Downes, "an ecstatic hymn on thanks to some pantheistic god, to Nature with a capitol 'N,' to the sun, to whatever beneficent power one can perceive in a universe that seemed as dark and terrifyingly irrational in Beethoven's day as it can in ours. That a man of sorrows and self-erected miseries like Beethoven could glimpse such glory and, by the incomprehensible alchemy of his art, lift us to share his vision--even if only for a few moments--is a miracle that remains as fresh as tomorrow's sunrise."

Ludwig van Beethoven

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major, Opus 61

Composed in 1806, the Violin Concerto was completed just in time for the first performance, on December 23, 1806 at Vienna's Theater an der Wien. In addition to the violin solo, the work is scored for flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings. Itzhak Perlman was the soloist at our most recent performances of this work in September of 2008, Andreas Delfs conducting.

Among the most beautiful and significant works in the violin repertoire, Beethoven's D-major *Concerto* is a product of a period of renewed fertility following a creative hiatus. It is believed that his period of reduced activity was triggered by the exertions involved in bringing the opera *Fidelio* to the stage, and by depression caused by the further deterioration of his hearing. Resolutely turning to more optimistic moods, Beethoven wrote: "Just as you plunge yourself here into the whirlpool of society, so in spite of all social obstacles it is possible for you to write operas. Your deafness shall be a secret no more, even where art is involved!" He then entered into a period that saw the creation of the three Rasoumovsky Quartets, the Fourth Symphony, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto. Despite indications that Beethoven wanted to write a second violin concerto, the present work remains his only large-scale composition for the instrument. With this single contribution to the form, Beethoven created what his biographer, George Marek, calls "the Mount Everest of violin concertos."

The concerto was written in 1806 for Beethoven's friend, Franz Clement, a highly regarded virtuoso and conductor of the Theater an der Wien. As with many of his commissioned compositions, Beethoven hastily completed the work at the last possible moment. Clement had no opportunity to look at the music before the first performance, but nevertheless performed it at sight before the first night audience at Vienna's Theater an der Wien on December 23, 1806. Miraculously, a catastrophe was avoided—although at some expense to the dignity of the occasion. Between the concerto's first and second movements, Clement played one of his own works, on one string... with the violin held upside down! (Such antics were not uncommon during this era; for example, the audiences at Paganini's concerts expected the famed violinist to render some of his barnyard imitations.) Although the Viennese audience was generally pleased with the concerto—there were some who felt that Beethoven had strayed too far from the classical spirit of his earlier works—the composition fell into comparative neglect until the famous Joseph Joachim revived it to permanent fame in 1844.

A review of the concert in the *Zeitung für Theater, Musik und Poesie*, dated January 8, 1807, gives not only a bit of perspective on the performance, but also demonstrates an attitude about contemporary music which echoes through the centuries: "The educated part of the audience

marveled how Clement could have lowered himself to indulge in the sort of tricks and stunts which might amuse the plebs [common people], since he is capable of expressing beauty and nobility in good music. We do not disagree with that opinion. A division of opinion exists about Beethoven's concerto; some acknowledge much beauty in it, others feel that its continuity seems frequently to be torn apart and that needless repetition of a few commonplace passages prove... fatiguing. It is said that Beethoven could employ his admittedly great talents better to give us works like his first symphonies in C and D, as well as several others of his earlier compositions, which place him in the rank of foremost composers. One fears that if Beethoven will pursue his present path, he and the public will come to no good end. He could arrive at the point where those who are not expert in the rules and intricacies of the art will find no pleasure in his music...."

No doubt the concerto we know today differs materially from the version which Clement read at the first performance, for the manuscript of the work is filled with many alterations in ink, pencil, and in red chalk, all in the master's hand. When published in 1809, the concerto was dedicated to Beethoven's lifelong friend, Stephan Breuning. Beethoven also made a dedication to Breuning's wife of a transcription of the *Violin Concerto* reworked as a piano concerto with an obbligato part for kettledrum! Upon hearing the work with orchestra, it is easy to see why a number of earlier listeners referred to it as "a tenth symphony with violin obbligato," for it transforms the concerto form to the most exalted heights of symphonic expression.

- I. *Allegro ma non troppo*; D major, 4/4. Four strokes of the timpani launch the rhythmic motive that dominates the first movement. With tremendous dramatic intensity, the woodwinds begin their melodic passage; after an orchestral climax, the woodwinds also provide the lyrically ascending second theme. Another thematic idea is presented in dialogue between upper and lower strings. Rising to a tremendous peak, the orchestra then dies away in anticipation of the soloist's entry. Beginning with a sweep of alternating octaves, the solo violin presents some florid passagework before singing the first subject. As the work progresses, the violin embellishes melodies first presented in the introduction.
- II. Although Beethoven composed a cadenza for his piano solo version of this work, he did not write a cadenza for the violin. Those of Kreisler or Joachim are frequently performed, but occasionally virtuosos will supply a cadenza of their own invention. Following the cadenza, there is an orchestral recollection of the second theme, before a brief coda brings the movement to its close.
- III. *Larghetto*; G major, 4/4. The slow movement, which has many of the characteristics of theme and variations, begins with the tranquil presentation of its first theme by muted strings. Enlarging on this theme, the solo violin then proceeds with a second subject. Continuing in an atmosphere of lyric introspection, the *Larghetto* wends its way to a cadenza, then continues without pause to the finale.
- IV. *Rondo: Allegro*; D major, 6/8. The inherent humor of this movement is immediately apparent in a first theme presented by the solo violin. The theme, based on a D major arpeggio, is tossed between soloist and orchestra. A gentler second theme and a flowing third subject in G minor complete the cast of thematic characters. A sense of impish wit pervades the bubbling interplay of themes which, after a cadenza, ends with a brilliant coda.