

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58

Allegro moderato
Andante con moto
Rondo (vivace)

When by the late thirteenth century one of the seven grand electors of the German emperors, the Archbishops of Cologne, had moved their archiepiscopal court to Bonn, the influence of that city grew exponentially allowing the musical atmosphere to which Beethoven was born. Without this influence, Beethoven's grandfather, also Ludwig, would not have been the fine, versatile musician that rose to the position of Kapellmeister for the Archbishop's court at Bonn. His son Johann would try and live up to his father, but not succeed, barely holding on to a chorister position and prone to violent and drunken behavior. He married the former head cook at the household of the Archbishop of Trier, another of the grand electors. As it turns out, Johann, like his mother before him, was an alcoholic. It was to this lowly union that our Ludwig was born.

It is a testament to his greatness that Beethoven's brush with archbishops was not as a servant, as was the case with his mother, or for that matter with Mozart in the employ of the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg. Rudolf Johannes Joseph Rainier von Habsburg-Lothringen, Archduke and Prince Imperial of Austria, Prince Royal of Hungary and Bohemia and a member of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine was also a Cardinal, and Archbishop of Olomouc, and happened to be Beethoven's piano pupil, friend and most devoted patron. It is to Archduke Rudolf that both the Fourth and the Fifth (*Emperor*) Piano Concerti are dedicated - and not through some servile reaction but as 'master to pupil'. Rudolf returned the favour, dedicating a couple of his works to Beethoven.

The Fourth concerto comes from what is known as Beethoven's 'middle' or heroic period. In 1805 the great 'Eroica' symphony broke certain barriers in size and form, but the language that was being used was one that was undergoing a steady fruition and can be traced back to the piano sonatas. As a pianist, a musician is free to 'drive' at will, controlling everything with his personal touch and yet playing with a full range of sonic expression - a full orchestra on the keyboard like a Ferrari on the *autobahn*. When one considers orchestral composition and the bringing together of massed forces, the composer - and in particular the conductor - no longer has a Ferrari, he has an ocean going Super Tanker, resigned to signaling miles in advance to make a simple turn. My analogy serves to point out that the creative process through which Beethoven churns, is more spirited and adventurous, more spontaneous and whimsical, and allows for more real experimentation in his piano works than in other forms. One can look to

the piano sonatas for the line of creative spirit, and find that the symphonies and quartets chart the same ebb and flow.

The 'Appassionata' and the 'Waldstein' sonatas are from this period, and anyone who has heard them can hear an entire orchestra within their notes. The opening of the 'Waldstein' with its repetitive, low-register pulsing – giving way to a high-register melodic episode is exactly the same instinct as one hears in the third movement of the Third Symphony (*Eroica*). Not surprisingly, they were written at the same time. In this instance, the Piano Sonata drives the way forward not just because it is a natural progression, but also because Beethoven had taken delivery of a new piano, and I'm convinced he was trying out the effect. The fact that something so pianistic could spill into the symphonic form shows the organic nature of Beethoven's composition and why it is, at once, so enticingly rich and so great in its legacy.

The Fourth Piano Concerto also comes from this period. Most will agree that there is something singularly poetic about this G major work. Beethoven never wrote a symphony in G major, for which we might suppose its inherent *femininity* or *pathos*. Yet, by the time the work has elapsed taking one through the shade of E minor and returning in triumph through C Major one is aware that the journey is a special one. Performed first in private at the home of Count Lobkowitz, another of Beethoven's patrons, the concerto received its official premier in 1808 at that mammoth concert at the *Theater an der Wien*, along with the Fifth Symphony. Its popularity remains constant.

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