

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

With Beethoven, we also see the decline and secularization of Princely Power. The Beethoven family that had moved to Bonn from Malines with Grand Elector Clemens August of Bavaria would be present two generations later to see the complete dissolution of the Grand Electors of Cologne. The Elector Maximilian Franz – the last real power broker in that position – was a patron to Ludwig in his youth. In 1787 at the urging of good friend Count Waldstein, Maximilian Franz allowed Beethoven to leave Bonn for a much longed for trip to Vienna. Beethoven planned the trip to Vienna primarily to seek out Mozart and perhaps engage in some lessons with him. There was a fateful meeting, in which Mozart was duly impressed with Beethoven's pianism and inventive improvisation. 1787 is a year marked with interest for researchers. It is the year that Beethoven met Mozart, but it is also the year that Beethoven's beloved mother died, forcing an untimely return to Bonn and cutting off any chance to forge any relationship. How we all wonder where this would have led. This blow of fate was only made worse by the drunken behavior of his father, which became worse until the man's death in 1791. This would mark the end of the Bonn years and the psychological release in moving to Vienna forever, but too late to connect with Mozart. Meanwhile, in 1787, Goethe had penned his play *Egmont*, for which Beethoven would later compose incidental music. The famous overture represents all the power and inventiveness of Beethoven's style, and is a fine complement to the music of the *Eroica* and the Fifth symphony. Whether writing a symphony or incidental music, Beethoven is completely obsessed with dramatic force and rhythmic tautness. Listeners will recognize the Beethovenian signature of 'di-di-di-dah' – as prevalent in the fifth symphony as *Egmont*.

From the patronage of Elector Maximilian Franz – to the patronage of Prince Lobkowitz and Archduke Rudolf in Vienna, Beethoven was to be present at the dissolution of the entire Austrian aristocracy, as Napoleonic forces swept through, setting up puppet states as they went. The *Eroica* Symphony and the *Emperor* Piano Concerto – are products of this period and though their premiers and their dedications were to great Austrians, their revolution and their innovation - is decidedly Napoleonic. Following its completion in August 1804 Beethoven presented the *Eroica* in Prince Lobkowitz' living room in several private patronage performances before its official public performance on April 7, 1805 at the famous *Teater an der Wien*. Although there are still critical errors in the score, hotly debated amongst musicians, Beethoven had an unusually extraordinary chance to correct and revise his work. Lobkowitz paid for the rights to the work for six months, and the 'fully paid-up' orchestra rehearsed and performed several times during this period."

Everything we know about this piece suggests cosmic changes in the musical landscape, and it would ever change how people perceived symphonic writing, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, despite Beethoven telling us that he was 'embarking upon a new road' – the musical form and content came from a boiling cauldron of gold that was put to the furnace years earlier. The 'new road' is better explained as the sentiments of a man whom, close to suicide, pulls back from the brink and channels energies into artistic endeavour. The new road is life itself after the outpouring of the *Heiligenstadt* testament, where Beethoven lays bare his personal struggle with deafness and ponders life as it is, and life as it might have been. The force of the pain and struggle is surely the source of this extraordinary music, and how unlucky for him and how lucky for us. The "marche funèbre" of the second movement is without doubt the Requiem he never wrote. Whether it was for the grand man to whom the symphony is dedicated or in memoriam for his own condition, it eloquently contains all the ingredients of a first rate requiem.

In 1803 Beethoven took on Archduke Rudolf as a student. The two became fast friends and despite considerable political instability, Rudolf still paid towards Beethoven's needs, famously rounding up support and a princely sum of florins so that Beethoven would remain in Vienna and not take a position offered in Germany. The dedication of the *Emperor* Piano Concerto along the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, the *Archduke* Trio and *Missa Solemnis* is a completely understandable reciprocal devotion. The Piano Concerto comes from the same 1809-12 period in which the *Egmont* music was written. Meanwhile, the defeat of Napoleon and the surrender of France in 1814 after nearly 24 years of continuous war led the way for the Congress of Vienna – which Beethoven must have witnessed. It reestablished governance that had no interest in *republicanism* or *enlightenment*. As Europe slipped back into the bad habits that would eventually lead again to world war, Beethoven seems to have his soul fixed on a different path. Later works would have us revel in harmonic experimentation, while he - now completely deaf - would hold firm in that awesome silence to the lofty ideals of Brotherhood and Peace.

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