

**Program for Richard Fountain
Steinway Hall - Fort Worth
January 25, 2018**

**“Liszt van Beethoven: The Nine Symphonies”
Season One, Episode One**

Sonata in C major, Op. 2, no. 3.....Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio
- III. Scherzo. Allegro
- IV. Allegro assai

— Pause —

**Symphony No. 1 in C, Op. 21.....L. van Beethoven
Transcribed for solo piano by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

- I. Adagio molto - Allegro con brio
- II. Andante cantabile con moto
- III. Menuetto. Allegro molto e vivace
- IV. Adagio - Allegro molto vivace

Program Notes

Beethoven's symphonies have been cornerstones of classical music for many, many decades, and today performances and recordings have become so ubiquitous that musicians frequently take them for granted. However, in the years after Beethoven's death these works still needed conductors to champion them and guide orchestras through the composer's expanded vocabulary of technical and musical challenges. Liszt's role as such a champion, both as conductor and as transcriber, is a surprising corner of musical history. As the original touring virtuoso in the 1830's, Liszt performed versions of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh symphonies as part of his immense repertoire, presenting these masterworks to audiences from the British Isles to Iberia and Russia. Many of these audiences otherwise would not have had the opportunity to hear a Beethoven symphony performed, since the only orchestras of recognizable quality were in the great musical centers of the time such as Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and Leipzig.

After Liszt retired from the concert stage, he settled in the relatively small rural town of Weimar to direct the court orchestra. In addition to premiering and championing many of the great operas of the early 19th century, Liszt repeatedly and persistently programmed Beethoven's symphonies, becoming known as a definitive interpreter. During a two-year retreat between 1863 and 1865 in a monastery just outside Rome, Liszt completed transcribing the full cycle of Beethoven symphonies - remarkably, on a very average upright piano with a missing "D!" His goals were manifold: to broaden the audience and appreciation for Beethoven's music, certainly, but also to showcase the full range of capabilities of the new iron-frame concert pianos and to prove that the complex texture of an orchestral work could be faithfully reproduced by two hands on a piano. These transcriptions are remarkable in that one could very nearly conduct from the score - Liszt provides "cues" for each instrument or family of instruments as they enter, and almost every note from the orchestral original is present in the piano score. Liszt refused to engage in virtuosic showmanship or editorial revisionism, instead retaining slurs, articulations, dynamics, and other markings in an unusually scholarly manner for editors of his day.

In pairing a solo sonata in the same key as each symphony, I hope to illuminate several things. First, composers from the Baroque through the Classical era, and even some Romantic composers (including Liszt), often associated particular moods or "affects" with particular keys. Second, it is remarkable how Liszt's symphonic transcriptions actually "sound" like Beethoven in their textures and voicing. At times one almost feels like this music could have been written for the piano - particularly when the transcriptions are heard in combination with the sonatas.

Beethoven Sonata in C, op. 2, no. 3

In this evening's program, we explore how Beethoven treats the key of C major, which with no sharps or flats is often considered a "pure" or "fresh" key, an image of innocence or peace. Beethoven's other large C-major sonata, the op. 53 "Waldstein," exhibits an exuberance that the composer adds to these traits. Most famously, the C-major finale of the great Op. 111 sonata is a journey beyond time and space to the realm of the divine.

Several interesting parallels between this sonata and the C-major symphony are worth mentioning. Both works have a quick scherzo, in triple meter, with a main theme moving along the C-major scale (the sonata's going down, the symphony's going up). Both finales feature a fast ascending C-major scale as the main theme. Both first movements develop a halting, but energetic, initial motive, although the symphony precedes this theme with a remarkably colorful slow introduction. The influence of Haydn, with whom Beethoven briefly studied, is clear throughout both pieces. Beethoven's individual genius really emerges in the slow movement of the sonata, which presents a dramatic conflict between E major and E minor, foreshadowing the later Op. 14, no. 1 sonata as well as the slow movement of the C-minor concerto.

Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 1 in C, Op. 21

Beethoven's first symphony is, at first glance, a straightforward work in traditional four-movement symphonic form. A large-scale first movement is followed by a lilting second movement, a quick triple-time dance in the third movement, and an even faster finale. This format had been followed by Haydn and Mozart, as well as countless other composers, to great success in the Classical period. However, even in this youthful work Beethoven's penchant for brilliantly tweaking the audience's expectation is readily apparent. The slow introduction to the first movement (no doubt inspired by Haydn) opens with a cadence into the "wrong" key of F major! We also hear Beethoven's particular genius for motivic development throughout the first movement, where the halting repeated figure of the first theme and the gentle falling scale of the second theme are contrasted and combined in perfect balance. Some very surprising modulations appear in the F-major second movement, including an extended trip to D-flat major. The "Menuetto" is actually a very quick scherzo, quite unlike a "proper" courtly minuet that one would find in a Mozart symphony. The brilliant finale develops a simple ascending C-major scale, contrasted with a repeated-note figure reminiscent of the first and second movement's main themes, before a brief, but exuberant coda rounds out the work.