

**Program for Richard Fountain
Steinway Hall - Plano
January 27, 2018**

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

Sonata quasi una fantasia in E-flat, Op. 27, no. 1....Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- I. Andante - Allegro - Tempo I
- II. Allegro molto e vivace
- III. Adagio con espressione - Allegro vivace - Tempo I - Presto

— Pause —

**Symphony No. 3 in E-flat, Op. 55 “Eroica”Ludwig van Beethoven
Transcribed for piano solo by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Marcia funebre [Funeral March]. Adagio assai
- III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace - Trio
- IV. Finale. Allegro molto

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 quasi una fantasia in E-flat, Op. 27, no. 1

Beethoven wrote two sonatas for his Op. 27 subtitled "quasi una fantasia," or "almost a fantasy," signifying that these pieces unfold continuously, without traditional breaks between movements. The second of this pair is the famous "Moonlight" Sonata in C-sharp minor. Both sonatas start with an introspective slow movement rather than a traditional up-tempo opening section and feature high-energy finales.

E-flat was a key of particular nobility and grandeur for Beethoven, who wrote several of his more majestic works in this key, such as his fifth piano concerto, the "Emperor,"

the “Eroica” piano variations, and the later Op. 81a “Les Adieux” piano sonata. One could think of E-flat as the positive side of Beethoven’s famous “C-minor mood,” exemplified in the Fifth Symphony, the “Pathetique” and Op. 111 piano sonatas, and the third piano concerto.

The second movement of this piece gives us a taste of this “C-minor mood,” while the brief introduction to the finale moves into A-flat major, one of Beethoven’s most intimate keys (the slow movement of the “Pathetique” sonata comes to mind). Bookending these excursions are a meditative opening movement and rollicking finale.

Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 3 in E-flat, Op. 55 “Eroica”

The Third Symphony was originally dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte, but once the French leader declared himself dictator and began his march across Europe, Beethoven furiously tore up the title page. The published score eventually read “Heroic Symphony, composed to celebrate the memory of a great man.” The opening movement is immense, nearly as long as many entire symphonies by Haydn or Mozart. Throughout the movement Beethoven showcases his unmatched talent for breaking down simple motives, recombining the components, and maximizing their dramatic impact through carefully structured buildups. No film director could have done better. The second movement, a powerful expression of the “C-minor mood” mentioned above, bears one of Beethoven’s slowest tempo markings (“Adagio assai,” extremely slow), and portrays the funeral procession of Beethoven’s idealized “great man.” The scherzo contains some striking syncopations, and the “trio” in the middle of the movement showcases the French horns with a characteristic “hunting-horn” motive. The finale is a giant theme-and-variations, building from a ridiculously banal staccato motive into a tour de force of contrapuntal imagination. The symphony concludes with a typical Beethovenian cadence, reiterating E-flat major chords with nobility, power, and sheer joy.