

**Program for Richard Fountain
Steinway Hall - Dallas
January 26, 2018**

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

Sonata in F major, Op. 54.....Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

- I. In Tempo d'un Menuetto
- II. Allegretto - Più Allegro

—- Pause —-

**Symphony No. 6 in F, Op. 68 “Pastoral”.....L. van Beethoven
tr. F. Liszt**

- I. Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande.
(Awakening of serene, joyful feelings upon arriving in the countryside)
- II. Scene am Bach.
(Scene at the brook)
- III. Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute.
(Merry gathering of country folk)
- IV. Donner. Sturm.
(Thunderstorm)
- V. Hirtengesang. Frohe, dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm.
(Shepherd's song. Cheerful, thankful feelings after the storm)

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 F, op. 54

Beethoven used the key of F major for some of his most unique and unusual pieces. The monumental final string quartet, Op. 135, the "Andante favori" and Op. 34 variations for solo piano, and the Sixth and Eighth Symphonies all share this tonality. The Op. 54 sonata is especially odd in that it has only two movements, neither of which follow traditional formal roles. The first movement is marked "menuetto," implying a courtly dance in triple time, but the frequent syncopations and bare octaves in the second theme group subvert any notions of a "proper" aristocratic character. The second movement has an ex-

tremely unusual AABB form, with the B sections being nearly ten times as long as the A sections. The sonata closes with a rather jaunty outburst, all octaves and “wrong-note” interjections, like a century-too-early boogie.

Liszt-Beethoven Symphony No. 6 in F, Op. 68 “Pastoral”

Along with the Fifth and Seventh, the “Pastoral” Symphony was one of three Beethoven Symphonies that Liszt originally transcribed in his younger years, programming them regularly on the concert stages of Europe. Although Liszt did revise these three works to some degree, they remain among the most difficult of the transcriptions due to their comprehensive requirements of the performer. Octaves, thirds, tremolos, tenths, large leaps to and from complex chords, and many other technical challenges abound throughout these scores. (As a side note, Glenn Gould made a memorable recording of this transcription, which is readily available online and well worth several listens.)

This most unusual and underrated of symphonies contains some of the loveliest, most peaceful music Beethoven ever wrote, as well as the best thunderstorm music outside of Rossini’s William Tell Overture. Both the five-movement structure, with the final three movements joined as one continuous stream, and Beethoven’s programmatic titles in the vernacular German (rather than the traditional Italian) were a complete novelty in his time. Beethoven surrounds concise melodic figures, suggestive of folk melodies in their stepwise motion or movement around a simple chord, with a lush landscape of sound ideally suited to the visual imagination of the listener.