

# MUSIC IN THE WESTERN WORLD

*A History in Documents*

Selected and Annotated by

PIERO WEISS and RICHARD TARUSKIN

*Department of Music, Columbia University*

SCHIRMER BOOKS

*A Division of Macmillan, Inc.*

NEW YORK

Collier Macmillan Publishers

LONDON

in his Power to do to be admitted to the Ranks of worthy Artists and Men. And so it is done—I hasten with joy towards my Death—should it come before I have had an Opportunity to disclose all my Artistic Capacities, then it shall still have come too soon despite my Hard Destiny, and I should indeed wish it came later—yet even then am I content. Does it not free me from an endless Suffering State? Come *when* you will, I'll meet you bravely—farewell and do not wholly forget me in Death. I have deserved it of you, for in Life I thought of you often, in order to make you happy, so may you be—

Heiligenstadt  
6th october  
1802

Ludwig van Beethoven

Heiligenstadt 10th October 1802 and so I bid you farewell—and sadly too—yes the cherished Hope—which I brought here with me, that I might be cured at least up to a Point—it must abandon me completely now, as Autumn Leaves fall away, wither; so has—it too wilted for me, I go from here—much as I came—even the High Courage—that often inspired me during the Lovely Days of Summer—has vanished—o Providence—grant me one day of pure *Joy*—the inner reverberation of true Joy has so long been a stranger to me—o when—o when, o Deity—may I feel it once more in the Temple of Nature and Mankind,—Never?—no—o it would be too hard.

Piero Weiss (ed.), *Letters of Composers Through Six Centuries* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1967), 167–69.

## 92

### ***The First Reactions to Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony***

Beethoven's Third Symphony (the "Eroica") represented a wilful break with tradition to those who knew him only through the first two symphonies and some other, earlier works. The sheer length of the "Eroica" (about twice the length of normal symphonies) was in itself bewildering. Here is a review of its first public performance, on 7 April 1805, by the Vienna correspondent of a German literary journal (*Der Freymüthige*).

Some, Beethoven's particular friends, assert that it is just this symphony which is his masterpiece, that this is the true style for high-class music, and that if it does not please now, it is because the public is not cultured enough, artistically, to grasp all these lofty beauties; after a

few thousand years have passed it will not fail of its effect. Another faction denies that the work has any artistic value and professes to see in it an untamed striving for singularity which has failed, however, to achieve in any of its parts beauty or true sublimity and power. By means of strange modulations and violent transitions, by combining the most heterogeneous elements, as for instance when a pastoral in the largest style is ripped up by the basses, by three horns, etc., a certain undesirable originality may be achieved without much trouble; but genius proclaims itself not in the unusual and the fantastic, but in the beautiful and the sublime. Beethoven himself proved the correctness of this axiom in his earlier works. The third party, a very small one, stands midway between the others—it admits that the symphony contains many beauties, but concedes that the connection is often disrupted entirely, and that the inordinate length of this longest, and perhaps most difficult of all symphonies wearies even the cognoscenti, and is unendurable to the mere music lover; it wishes that Herr v. B. would employ his acknowledgedly great talents in giving us works like his symphonies in C and D, his ingratiating Septet in E flat, the intellectual Quintet in D [C?] and others of his early compositions that have placed B. forever in the ranks of the foremost instrumental composers. It fears, however, that if Beethoven continues on his present path both he and the public will be the sufferers. His music could soon reach the point where one would derive no pleasure from it, unless well trained in the rules and difficulties of the art, but rather would leave the concert hall with an unpleasant feeling of fatigue from having been crushed by a mass of unconnected and overloaded ideas and a continuing tumult by all the instruments. The public and Herr van Beethoven, who conducted, were not satisfied with each other on this evening; the public thought the symphony too heavy, too long, and himself too discourteous, because he did not nod his head in recognition of the applause which came from a portion of the audience. On the contrary, Beethoven found that the applause was not strong enough.

Elliot Forbes (ed.), *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 376.

## 93

### *A Contemporary Portrait of Beethoven*

The following description of Beethoven's character and personal circumstances appeared in 1823, at the end of a biographical article in the London musical periodical *The Harmonicon*.