

DT501/1 History of Music: Classical/Romantic

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Lecture 4: Orchestral Music (3)
The Symphony: Beethoven

Beethoven: the three periods

- First Period (1770 –1802)
 - covers the period of his youth in Bonn and the first ten years after the move to Vienna in 1792.
- Middle Period (1803 –1812)
 - begins shortly after the personal crisis brought on by his realisation of his growing deafness and its consequences. Often termed the ‘heroic’ period.
- Late Period (1813 –1827)
 - begins somewhere between 1812 and 1814 and lasts until his death.
 - works from this period characterised by a highly introspective, intensely expressive and experimental style.

Ludwig van Beethoven: 1770-1802



- Born in Bonn to a family of musicians. Both his father and grandfather were musicians at the minor electoral court of Bonn.
- Studied with his father and Christian Gottlob Neefe, a local composer and the court organist.
- Maximilian Franz, brother of Joseph II, appointed Elector of Bonn.
- 1787 travels to Vienna intending to study with Mozart.
- Returns almost immediately on hearing of his mother's illness.
- Assumes responsibility for his family after mother's death, staying in Bonn until 1792.

Major works and musical style of the first period

- Music of the Bonn period.
 - earliest works show influence of Mozart and his teacher Neefe.
 - composed two promising sets of piano variations.
 - in general however, these early works reveal Beethoven struggling to master sonata form.
- Music of early Vienna period.
 - composed little in the first year.
 - stylistic breakthrough in the third of the op. 1 piano trios in C minor and the first piano sonata in F minor.
 - masters sonata form with distinctive touches: dramatic return of the first subject in the recapitulation.
 - characteristic extremes of tempo, dynamics and texture.
 - bold modulations in the second subject area.

Move to Vienna: 1792



- Moves to Vienna in 1792 to study with Haydn. The lessons prove a disappointment to Beethoven.
- Also studies counterpoint with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger and Italian word setting with Antonio Salieri.
- Performs regularly in aristocratic circles.
- 1796 undertakes a concert tour giving a concert in Prague and playing before the Elector of Saxony in Dresden and the King of Prussia in Berlin.
- By 1800 several publishers are competing for Beethoven's works.

The Heiligenstadt Testament

[...] what a humiliation when one stood beside me and heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard the shepherd singing and again I heard nothing, such incidents brought me to the verge of despair, but little more and I would have put an end to my life - only art it was that withheld me, ah it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt called upon me to produce....

You my brothers Carl and [Johann] as soon as I am dead if Dr. Schmid is still alive ask him in my name to describe my malady and attach this document to the history of my illness so that so far as possible at least the world may become reconciled with me after my death.



Romanticism

- Prioritises subjectivity and emotional expression over reason, objectivity and order.
- Individualistic – emphasises the artist as creative genius. Originality more important than adherence to shared norms.
- Authenticity – a preoccupation with origins, getting to the source of a particular idea, the feeling that rational thought and rules impede this process.
- Etymology – derived from ‘Romance’, the ancient language of France. The term came to be applied to the fantastical and adventurous tales and poems that were typical of its literature.
- Reflects the political and social upheaval of the French Revolution.



Beethoven's Manuscript Title Page



Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major 'Eroica'

- Beethoven originally intended to dedicate the symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte whom he greatly admired.
- After Napoleon made himself Emperor of France, Beethoven reacted angrily by scratching out Bonaparte's name from the title page.
- He then rededicated it to Prince Lobkowitz and named it 'Eroica' with the subtitle 'composed to celebrate the memory of a great man'.
- The longest symphony ever composed up until this time. The first movement alone is the length of a Haydn or Mozart early symphony.
- Scoring: Strings, Double Woodwind (flutes, oboes, clarinets in B-flat and bassoons), 3 horns, 2 trumpets and timpani.
- In four movements:
 - 1) Allegro
 - 2) Funeral March
 - 3) Scherzo
 - 4) Finale

Prescribed Listening

Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major 'Eroica' (1st Movement)

Prescribed Reading

Chapter 24 of *The Norton History of Western Music* (9th edition), pp. 560–577.

Chapter 10 in Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: the Music and the Life*, pp. 202–214.

Also read Taruskin's account of the first movement of the 'Eroica' symphony in *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, pp. 655–670.

For a general overview of Beethoven's career consult the 'Beethoven' entry on Grove Music Online.