

### **Piano Concerto No. 5 in E Flat major Opus 73 “Emperor”**

Beethoven's concertos combine the most original inventive fantasy with vigorous form and highly exacting technical brilliance. The Concerto in E flat Op. 73 (1809) indisputably marks the high point of the Romantic piano concerto. Beethoven in this work enhances both the Classic and the Romantic. Romanticism should not be taken as the antithesis of classicism, nor was it a mere reaction to it, but rather a logical enhancement of certain elements which in classicism were inherent and active, but tamed and kept in equilibrium. The “Emperor” Concerto anticipates Liszt and Brahms by its leonine sweep, its symphonic cohesion and also by its general combative mood, the Concerto evidently came before its time. It became a favourite only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the powerful fingers of the great pianists of Liszt's tradition. It was then (1857) that a full score was issued for the first time by Beethoven's original publishers Breitkopf & Härtel, nearly half a century after the concerto had first been issued in print. In January of 1812 the Allgemeine Musik Zeitung stated that it was without doubt one of the most original, imaginative, most effective, but also one of the most difficult of all existing concertos. The work is unusual in that it starts with a decisive chord in the orchestra and then a cadenza-like outburst from the soloist. Until now Beethoven had improvised cadenzas in the works that he premiered but in this concerto he wrote out the cadenzas and was most insistent that the soloist stick to them. After two more chords and much activity on the part of the soloist the orchestra has quite a long episode to introduce the main theme – rather martial in style. This is developed throughout the orchestra and then in dialogue with the piano in passages ranging from majestic to intimate. Maximum power is required for the rhythmically repeated chords which, as it were, ‘cross swords’ with the orchestra before dominating it in a tremendous series of octaves, occurring towards the end of the development section. This is one of the most exciting moments in music. The ‘Adagio’ is like a serene nocturne. Violins introduce the first theme in B major followed by a meditative theme on the piano of beautiful tranquillity and poise; achieving mystical serenity in the recapitulation given out by the woodwinds and accompanied by garlands of chord-arpeggios in the piano: one of the highlights of Beethoven's pre-romantic style. Without wishing to indulge in so-called poetic hermeneutics the following lines from the “Merchant of Venice” describe the mood of magical uneventfulness which is the essence of this movement:-

*“How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.”*

At the end of the Adagio there is a magical change of key contrived by a single semi-tonal step down from B natural to B flat. Based on the latter, the piano spells out, in a magical pianissimo, the victory-conscious Rondo theme as if in a visionary trance. The final Rondo movement combines heroic sentiments with graceful, limpid, bravura-passages in Beethoven's inimitable semi-improvisatorial manner.

The importance of the Italian composers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century was in no way curtailed by the unprecedented world validity achieved by German music, which held throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the passing of the Italian hegemony their vigour was still great enough for them to prepare the transition into the new 'Classic-Romantic' period which lasted from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Such composers as Galuppi, Zipoli, Rossi and Pescetti helped to establish the point of departure. The start of the 'Classic-Romantic' style period can be said to reach as far back as the generation of J.S. Bach; marked by the deliberate break with the highly intensified composing techniques of the waning Baroque. Moreover, France continued throughout the entire 'Classic' period to produce models and incentives, and, with Rameau's many writings, most clearly reflect the newly awakened feeling for harmony which characterised his music with great emotional depth and power.

Programme notes provided by Peter Bradley-Fulgoni