

LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN (b. 1770, Bonn; d. 1827, Vienna)

### **Overture “Leonore No.3” Op. 72a**

Leonore is the heroine and namesake of Beethoven's only opera. Disguising herself as a young man - "Fidelio" - Leonore courageously rescues her husband Floristan from the prison where he is being held as a political prisoner. The story was based on the real-life experience of French author Jean-Nicolas Bouilly. Beethoven recast the setting to 17th Century Spain under pressure from the Austrian censors, a result of the political upheavals occurring in France at the time.

The Theater an der Wien commissioned the opera in 1803, but difficulties in staging it, plus the invasion of Austria by Napoleon five days prior to the first performance resulted in a disastrous failure. Deeply disappointed, Beethoven re-worked the opera, shortening it to tighten the dramatic effect and renaming it *Fidelio*, by which name it is of course known today. Beethoven eventually wrote four different overtures. He preferred to call the first three "Leonore" rather than "Fidelio." He composed Leonore No. 3 for the 1806 revival.

The most loved of the four overtures, No. 3 borrows primarily from the beautiful aria in which the prisoner, Florestan, beseeches the heavens for freedom. One of the overture's most profound moments is the off-stage trumpet calls heralding Florestan's release. That Leonore No. 3 lends itself to being performed independently as a concert piece is a credit to Beethoven's sense of form and drama. Wagner commented that “in the time and tide of Western music, admittedly this work had a resounding impact.” Leonore No. 3 was "less an overture to a music drama than a music drama itself."

### **Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Opus 60 (1806)**

Beethoven's Fourth Symphony is often overshadowed by its better-known counterparts, the heroic Third and the powerful, brooding Fifth symphonies. In the Third Symphony Beethoven expanded the symphonic form far beyond its traditional boundaries. The Fourth is in every way a smaller, more intimate work. Rather than continue experimenting with form, Beethoven returned to the more traditional symphonic structure. As biographer Lewis Lockwood noted, “[Beethoven's] decision to return to a smaller scale, to reduce length and density but also to invest a smaller framework with subtlety, action and lyricism showed that, paradoxically, he was aiming to broaden his new symphonic framework still further by showing that the epic, heroic model was only one of a number of possible aesthetic alternatives.”

Beethoven wrote his Fourth Symphony during the summer of 1806 while a guest of Prince Lichnowsky at the Prince's home in Silesia. As Beethoven's hearing deteriorated he became even more erratic and difficult; he often sequestered himself for days at a time in his room as he worked out the musical themes clamoring in his head. His stay with Prince Lichnowsky was cut short when Beethoven refused point-blank to play for a fellow-guest, a French general. Despite the entreaties of his host, Beethoven stormed out

of the castle. The following day, Beethoven sent Lichnowsky a curt note: “Prince! What you are, you are by accident of birth. What I am, I am through myself. There have been and will be thousands of princes. There is only one Beethoven.” The Fourth Symphony was first performed in March 1807, on a private concert that also featured the Fourth Piano Concerto, at the home of Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz.

The Fourth Symphony is contemporaneous with the Fifth: more precisely, Beethoven interrupted his work on the Fifth to compose the Fourth, so that in the chronology the former brackets the latter. Listening to the opening of the Fourth, we are immediately struck by how different in character this strange groping in darkness is from that most famous of all symphonic beginnings, that of the Fifth. Is what happens in the Fourth, as some have felt and suggested, music that reflects the disorientation of deafness?

The conductor and the musicians playing the Fourth Symphony see that the key signature says B-flat major, but what we hear is clearly B-flat minor. The most musical of the guests at the Lobkowitz residence premiere in 1807 would have been more aware than most of us today of how slowly this music moves—not so much in terms of notes per minute, as in the passage of harmonic events.

The harmony is close to standing still, and the effect of suspended motion is underlined by the pianissimo that lasts—as Beethoven reminds us four times—unbroken through the first twelve measures. These twelve measures lead us, with exquisitely wrought suspense, back to the beginning; what comes next is, however, quite different, and we are taken on some most mysterious paths before the music bursts into the bright daylight of B-flat major and a quick tempo.

The material of this quick music is of almost studied neutrality, which can in fact also be said of the introduction—the material itself, not what Beethoven does with it. The life of the ebullient movement resides in the contrast between those passages where the harmonies change slowly (as they mostly do) and others where harmonic territory is traversed at a great rate, in the syncopations, in the explosions of fortissimo, and in such colorful details as the stalking pianissimo half-notes.

The lead-back into the recapitulation wonderfully combines wit and mystery, full of subtle reminders of some of the introduction’s wildest harmonic indiscretions. The game involves returning safely to B-flat major after the voyages of the development.

Beethoven often enjoys reaching a harmonic resolution whose arrival we can sense just a bit before we get there: sometimes the effect is dramatic, sometimes humorous. Here he gives us this effect writ large. We suddenly discover that while all the musical gestures still suggest the process of arrival, of moving toward resolution, we have in fact already reached our harmonic destination—only the theme is tardy in arriving. Beethoven makes sure, though, to erase any aberrations by ending the movement with an exceptionally long and emphatic assertion of the home key.

The Adagio is an expansive, rapt song; rarely does Beethoven so often demand cantabile from his musicians. Before the song begins we hear a measure of ticking accompaniment in the second violins. This accompaniment refuses to disappear, remaining an insistent presence and a fascinating foil to the flowing melodies. Few listeners today would agree, but Schumann perceived the effect as humorous, and in an article on “The Comic Spirit in Music” he calls it “a veritable Falstaff, especially when it appears in the bass or the timpani.” Not until the Ninth Symphony would Beethoven write another symphony with a really slow “slow movement.”

Concerned with bringing his scherzos (in this symphony still called “Menuetto”) in line with the expanding scale of his symphonies, quartets, and trios, Beethoven began to arrange a double trip through the scherzo-trio-scherzo cycle, leaving us with a hybrid scherzo-trio-scherzo-trio-scherzo form. The ferociously energetic scherzo is fired by cross-rhythms that cut athwart the 3/4 measures with two-beat phrases. The trio is based on a dialogue in which the violins offer distinctly impertinent answers—flicking grace notes and pointed accents—to the dolce propositions of the woodwinds and horns.

The finale is a comedy worthy of Haydn. This Allegro ma non troppo, even though the metronome mark indicates a pretty fast clip, is a more relaxed kind of movement than the first Allegro vivace. In the development Beethoven also reminds us that he has not forgotten the harmonic games of the first movement.

The failure of Beethoven’s composition lessons with Haydn when he first moved to Vienna is a famous bit of music-historical lore, but we must not forget that Beethoven learned eagerly and productively from Haydn’s music—and to the very end of his life. The Symphony No.4, for which Haydn’s No.102 was clearly the model, is a touching and delightful case in point.

The Symphony No. 4 is scored for a single flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings.

On a blog website entitled Iris’s Thought Garden, I found this little gem:

So, I watched Utah Symphony perform Beethoven's Fourth Symphony and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto last night. The pianist was wonderful, and he had huge jowls that shook whenever he got really into the piece. I had to take a minute to laugh at the program notes, though. Just take this paragraph from the Fourth Symphony description, for example:

*. . . Over a rhythmic pattern that pervades much of the movement, the ravishing principal theme of the Adagio unfolds with infinite grace and rarefied beauty...Beethoven called the bumptious, frolicsome third movement a Minuetto, but it is a scherzo in all but name. The whiplash alternations of loud and soft, the stabbing accents, the rapid tempo and motoric energy all point to a Beethoven scherzo...The finale is a wonderful mix of quicksilver, lightening exuberance, coiled energy, and perpetual motion.*

Who comes up with such descriptions anyway? The adjectives were a little over the top. After the symphony, I turned to my friend and commented, "I found the third movement especially bumptious and frolicsome."

My other favorite program comment was about the concerto. It said:

. . . *The finale offers the most virtuosic opportunities yet, and concludes with the soloist roaring his way up and down the keyboard in a stunning display of pianistic pyrotechnics.*

Alas, I was disappointed when the piano did not set fire as promised. Pyrotechnics...pshaw!

A nice reminder to us that our writing should make sense!

### **Roumi Petrova: Cello Concerto #1 “Seven Beats”**

The Concerto explores different rhythmic patterns based on the unusual combination of seven beats per measure. The seven beats are organized in groups containing 2 or 3 beats each, and this creates an irregular rhythmic pattern. The first movement is set in 7/8, the second in 7/4 and the finale in 7/16. For thousands of years, these rhythms were vital part of Eastern Europe’s folk traditions. Irregular rhythms are mostly present in the musical heritage of Bulgaria and Romania, the two countries who recently joined the EU. Although not widely known, the irregular rhythms exist within every human being: after all, the human heartbeat follows a pattern of 2 uneven beats. With “Seven Beats” Petrova celebrates the vitality of these rhythms. She uses simple but tuneful themes, short phrases and modal harmonies to create the strong folk flavor of the Concerto.

The first movement, *Between the Black and the White*, dwells on the relations between two opposites, employing the Major and Minor as a metaphor. Depending on the context, the two opposites either struggle against each other, or easily transform to resemble one another. The universal idea of two opposites that are variations of the same thing is represented by both themes constantly switching between the modes of Major and Minor.

The second movement, *Ritual*, pictures a procession going towards an altar where a sacrifice will take place. The closer the mob gets to the altar, the more fearless and deterrent it becomes. However, this determination is shaken in the lyrical Cadenza. When the focus shifts from the ritual to the victim, the point of view becomes intimate and personal. Can we sacrifice others for our ideals? The muted ending of *Ritual* leaves the question open.

The meditative interlude *Epiphany* begins in subdued colors and opens up to bring enlightenment. After the catharsis, darkness recedes, light prevails and festive mood sets the beginning of *Celebration*, the final movement. It is a celebration of life written in the playful rhythm of 7/16, in Rondo form with two Episodes. The combination of irregular

rhythms, classic harmonies and virtuoso passages in the solo cello creates a picture of joyful feast.

**Roumi Petrova: Composer, Violist, Music Educator**

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Critically acclaimed as “The Bulgarian Mozart”, Roumi Petrova was born in Bulgaria, but since her graduate years she lives abroad. Years of study and work on three different continents have shaped this truly cosmopolitan artist.

As a graduate student at The Academy of Music and Dance Arts in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, Mrs. Petrova toured the UK, France, Austria and Switzerland with her group, The Forte String Quartet. After finishing her studies at The Academy of Music, Mrs. Petrova emigrated to South Africa and joined the Pretoria National Opera. She consequently performed with The Cape Town Symphony and The Natal Philharmonic in Durban. Parallel to the orchestra work, Mrs. Petrova completed another M MUS degree at The University of Pretoria, South Africa, and became an active chamber music performer.

During her years in South Africa, Mrs. Petrova discovered her passion for composing. Being a devoted chamber musician herself, she naturally turned to the chamber ensembles as a favorite medium. Mrs. Petrova found that despite leaving her native country to live permanently overseas, she still had a strong connection to the folk traditions, and thus formed her own voice, deeply rooted in the folklore.

In 1999, Mrs. Petrova moved with her family to New York. She restored The Forte String Quartet and continued performing with the ensemble throughout the East Coast, while teaching at The Brooklyn Conservatory of Music and conducting The Brooklyn Conservatory Community Orchestra. Mrs. Petrova participated in a number of educational projects for the NYC Public Schools and together with The Forte String Quartet launched the FSQ Educational Concert Series. The project became very popular and she consequently wrote a musical for young children, “Alex in String-land”, which was successfully performed both in New York and as part of the Forte Quartet’s educational tours in Connecticut and Maine.

Among Ms. Petrova’s foremost works are Symphonic Overture “Prayer for Rain”, Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra, Poem for Violin and String Orchestra, five String Quartets, Piano Quartet, Piano Quintet, two Piano Trios, two Sonatas for Violoncello and Piano, and many instrumental pieces. She receives commissions from different ensembles such as The Long Island Festival Orchestra, Illuminada Trio, Pierrot Consort, Bulgarian Virtuosi Artists, and The North Shore Symphony.

Ms. Petrova’s compositions have been performed in major music halls in New York, London, Moscow and Shanghai, and broadcasted on many national radio and TV

stations, including the Bulgarian National Radio, Radio Free Europe, The New York Public Radio, The New Jersey Public Radio and CUNY TV.

**Discography:**

“Project Bacillus Bulgaricus” Chamber works by Roumi Petrova  
Featuring The Forte String Quartet, Bulgarian Piano Trio and Yuri Kharenko, violin  
Produced by Petrovart Publishing 2003

Roumi Petrova “Enchanted Rhythms” Music for Cello and Piano from Bulgaria  
Featuring Kalin Ivanov, cello and Elena Antimova, piano  
Produced by MSR Classics 2006

“Eastern Connection” Music with Balkan Flavor by Roumi Petrova  
Featuring The Forte String Quartet and Marina Roghozhina, piano  
To be released in 2007