

Beethoven introduced the new symphony at Vienna on April 5, 1803, at a mammoth Akademie in the Theater an der Wien, along with the Third Piano Concerto (completed in 1800), a new oratorio, Christ on the Mount of Olives, and a repeat performance of the First Symphony from 1800. In the third movement of No. 2, the word scherzo appeared symphonically for the first time, although it retained a song and trio form, and was built on the sudden juxtapositions of loud and soft, with changes in their patterns just when he'd seemed to settle on one. The scoring, however, continued to employ traditional pairs of winds and brass, timpani, and strings.

An Adagio molto introduction anticipates the soft-loud contrasts that explode like Chinese firecrackers two movements later, although the sound and shape of it recall Haydn. The exposition begins in measure 35, with a main subject of Mozartian levitation, but thereafter Beethoven asserts his own less courtly and more confrontational personality.

As in the First Symphony, he wrote the first, second, and fourth movements in sonata form. The longest of them is this A major Larghetto in triple meter, if all the repeats are observed. Finding an accommodating tempo can pose problems: largo, after all, means "broad," the slowest tempo in music. Larghetto is a diminutive form -- i.e., not as slow -- but how slow (or not slow) remains the conductor's call.

After Beethoven's surprises in (as well as of) the scherzo, he chortles throughout a finale marked Allegro molto, mostly at his own syncopated jokes. They begin in the first measure and don't let up till the double-bar. Many of his contemporaries were shocked, and several reviled him in print. One Viennese critic, after a repeat performance in 1804, called Symphony No. 2 "a crass monster, a hideously writhing, wounded dragon that refuses to die and, though bleeding in the finale, furiously thrashes about with its stiffened tail." One should always keep posterity in mind whenever a spiky new piece tempts us to dismiss it without a trial (whereas easy-listening pieces tend to spoil as quickly as unrefrigerated seafood, and most should).

Original COMMAND master recorded on 35mm magnetic film



# BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 1 in C major, Op. 21

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36

William Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra



The year 1800 marked a watershed in Beethoven's development. On April 2 in Vienna, he made his debut as a composer of symphonies during a concert he had arranged and financed himself. Beethoven began to work intensively on the symphony in 1799, completing the work the following year. The symphony, though enthusiastically received at its premiere, already carried portents of the composer's coming radicalism. At the time, some observers commented upon the work's prominent use of wind instruments, but few noted the first symphony's masterstroke; it opens with the "wrong" chord -- a dominant seventh of the subdominant key of F major, and not the expected tonic chord of C major. The English musicologist Sir Donald Francis Tovey dubbed this work "a comedy of manners." It is, in some sense, a skit on the deeply engrained style and vocabulary of Classicism itself, though the humor is unquestionably Beethoven's own. The opening movement begins with the celebrated discord mentioned above, which ushers in the slow introduction, questioning and insistent. It leads to the start of the exposition, again interrogatory in character. Fanfares add a martial flavor to the music, which is offset by the more lyrically inclined second subject group. The exposition is repeated, according to Classical convention, and the development that follows is terse and far more acerbic in manner, and does not allow the same contrast between songful and martial elements. Already extremely mature and "studied," this austere development is relieved only when the recapitulation arrives, now with great forcefulness. The imitative dialogues between wind and strings are predictably Classical in style, as is the jubilant coda. The Andante seems more subdued and relaxed, but the manner in which it preserves the latent drama associated with symphonic form is particularly subtle and entertaining. It begins with a fugal motif, derived from the rising tonic triad heard at the start of the first movement's exposition, and used so emphatically in its coda. An ingenious piece of orchestration occurs at the close of the Andante's exposition. Triplet figures in the violins and flute and off-beat accompanying chords are supported by regular drum taps, perhaps pointing forward to the start of the Concerto for violin and orchestra, Op. 61, and to the closing bars of the Concerto for piano and orchestra, No. 5, Op. 73, "Emperor." The third movement's marking raises the question of whether Beethoven could have intended this to be a stately Haydn minuet before he increased the tempo indication. The incisive rhythmic energy suggests something wholly new, and the movement already has the manner of

Beethoven's later scherzi -- it is one in all but name. While a more static episode in D flat follows the main material, and the central trio section is more reserved, it is significant, surely, that several Beethoven manuscripts (including that of his Symphony No. 3 in E flat, "Eroica") contain similar third-movement tempo markings. Tovey likened the explosive start of the finale to the release of "a cat from a bag." The whole orchestra plays a unison fortissimo chord of G, the dominant, an effect that recalls the slow introduction of the first movement. The main motif is derived from nothing more complex than a rising scale on the tonic, but throughout the movement, Beethoven's use of scalar figures becomes increasingly obsessive, as the theme is heard in a variety of keys, and is often heard in inversion when various instruments are in dialogue. The development features a daring harmonic treatment of the scale theme, and Beethoven employs much dense counterpoint before the work ends in a positive and triumphant reassertion of C major.

Measured against the hot-wired First Symphony, the heroic Third, and the heaven-storming Fifth -- all of them written between 1799 and 1808 -- Beethoven's Second is a relaxed work in greater part, akin to the Fourth and Sixth symphonies. This has prompted music listeners ever since to wonder how he could have created a work as buoyant as No. 2 at a time when his worsening deafness had been diagnosed as incurable and irreversible.

The work came to term in 1802 from sketches organized the previous year. Likelier than not, it reflects several happy months in the rural retreat of Heiligenstadt, on the recommendation of an otologist. From one window in his isolated cottage he could see eastward to the Danube, and beyond. Outside, he roamed the fields and surrounding woods freely, yet his mood was "morose" according to Ferdinand Ries, the devoted pupil who visited him there.

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**Symphony No. 1 In C Major, Opus 21 (25:13)**

**1 Adagio Molto, Allegro Con Brio 9:18**

**2 Andante Cantabile Con Moto 6:46**

**3 Menuetto: Allegro Molto E Vivace 3:25**

**4 Adagio, Allegro Molto E Vivace 5:44**

**Symphony No. 2 In D Major, Opus 36 (30:16)**

**5 Adagio Molto, Allegro Con Brio 10:22**

**6 Larghetto 10:17**

**7 Scherzo: Allegro 3:18**

**8 Allegro Molto 6:19**

Recorded by Command Classics 1961 on 35mm film

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