

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7 in A, Op. 92

William Steinberg - The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra



William Steinberg (originally Hans Wilhelm Steinberg) (August 1, 1899 – May 16, 1978) was a German conductor. He was born in Cologne, but left Germany for (what is now) Israel in 1936. He decided to leave Germany because the Nazis had removed him from the Frankfurt Opera in 1933 and had limited him to conducting all-Jewish orchestras. Eventually, together with Bronislaw Huberman he founded and conducted the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Steinberg left for the United States in 1938. He conducted the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra from 1945 to 1952. From 1958 to 1960 he conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra. From 1969 to 1972 he conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He was also principal guest conductor of the New York Philharmonic from 1966 to 1968. He is best known for directing the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1952 to 1976. William Steinberg was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He died in New York City.



Ludwig van Beethoven completed this work in 1812, but withheld the first performance until December 8, 1813, in Vienna. It is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, plus timpani and string choir.

1812 was an eventful year for the very famous, seriously deafened Beethoven. July was especially noteworthy. At Teplitz he finally met Goethe (1749–1832), but was disappointed to find (he felt) an aging courtier who was no longer a firebrand or kindred democrat; worse yet, a musical dilettante. A week before that only meeting of German giants, Beethoven had written the letter to his mysterious "immortal beloved" that was discovered posthumously in a secret drawer. Then, toward the end of the year, he meddled unbidden in the affairs of his youngest brother, Johann, who was cohabiting contentedly with a housekeeper. Somehow, he found time to compose the last of his ten sonatas for violin and piano and to complete a new pair of symphonies -- the Seventh and Eighth -- both begun in 1809. He introduced the Seventh at a charity concert for wounded soldiers, and repeated it four nights later by popular demand.

Richard Wagner called Symphony No. 7 "the apotheosis of the dance," meaning of course to praise its Dionysian spirit. But this oxymoron stuck like feathers to hot tar, encouraging irrelevant and awkward choreography (by Isadore Duncan and Léonide Massine among others) and licensing the music appreciation racket to misinterpret Beethoven's intent as well as his content. Wholly abstract and utterly symphonic, the Seventh was his definitive break with stylistic conventions practiced by Mozart, Haydn, and a legion of lesser mortals who copied them. He stretched harmonic rules, and gave breadth to

symphonic forms that Haydn and Mozart anticipated. If, in his orchestral music, Beethoven was the last Austro-German Classicist, he did point those who followed him to the path of Romanticism.

While the *poco sostenuto* introduction begins by observing time-honored rules of harmony, within 62 measures it modulates from A major to the alien keys of C and F major, then back again! The transition from solemn 4/4 meter to 6/8 for the balance of an evergreen *vivace* movement (in sonata form) further exemplifies Beethoven's conceptual stretch.

Coming from the 20-minute funeral march of his earlier *Eroica* Symphony, Beethoven created an *allegretto* "slow" movement. He established a funerary mood (without its being specifically elegiac) through the repetition of a 2/4 rhythmic motif in A minor, the most somber key of the tempered scale. A minor serves more than an expressive function, moreover; it readies us for the reappearance of F major in a tumultuous five-part Scherzo marked *Presto*. Two trios go slower (*assai meno presto*), in D major -- a long distance harmonically in 1812 from the work's A major tonic. The beginning of a third trio turns into a short coda capped by five fortissimo chords.

A major finally returns in the final movement. Here more than anywhere else in his orchestral music, Beethoven became a race-car driver. As in the "slow" movement, the rhythm is 2/4, but sonata-form replaces ABA. And there's a grand coda longer than the exposition, the development, or the reprise, which, furthermore, begins in B minor! But modulations bring it back to A major in time for a heart-pounding final lap with the accelerator pressed to the floor.

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1 Poco Sostenuto 14:26

2 Allegretto 8:30

3 Presto 7:28

4 Allegro Con Brio 6:59

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Command Classics on 35 mm magnetic film.

Recorded By – Robert Fine Producer – Enoch Light



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admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
www.highdeftapetransfers.com