



Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

Symphony No. 3 in E flat, 'Eroica', Op. 55

1. Allegro con brio (*quick, with spirit*)
2. Marcia funebre (*funeral march*). Adagio assai (*very slow*)
3. Scherzo. Allegro vivace (*quick and lively*)
4. Finale. Allegro molto (*very fast*)

Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony is one of those works in which Western musical history turns a new and significant corner. When he composed it, between making the first sketches around October 1802 and finishing the score about a year later, Haydn was still working, though he had completed the last of his great series of symphonies eight years before. Beethoven's own two first symphonies, though announcing the arrival of a startling new personality, continued the Mozart/Haydn symphonic tradition. But in the 'Eroica' Symphony he expanded both the emotional range and the scale of the Viennese symphony to an exceptional degree.

It is a big work in its range and depth of thought and emotion as well as its duration. Beethoven's need to work out ideas in music

of unprecedented dimensions and complexity brings us to his original intention to dedicate the work to Napoleon. In 1803 Beethoven, while a loyal Viennese citizen, could nevertheless still plausibly admire Napoleon as the man who brought order out of the chaos of the French Revolution and a champion of liberty who rose from humble origins to challenge the absolutist monarchies of eighteenth-century Europe. About this time he considered moving to Paris, giving a further incentive for the dedication. In May 1804 the French Senate announced Napoleon was to be created hereditary emperor. A few months later Beethoven was still telling his publisher that the title was 'Bonaparte'; it was only after Napoleon's coronation, in December, that he angrily scratched out the words "entitled Bonaparte" on the title page.

The earliest known use of 'Eroica' in connection with the work was when it was first published in October 1806 with the inscription: "Heroic Symphony...composed to celebrate the memory of a great man." No mention of Napoleon there, at least, not directly, and we have no evidence to suggest what might have been going through Beethoven's mind in the meantime. It is doubtful that a tribute to Napoleon would have generated a work of such astonishing force and originality if it had not also drawn on more complex thoughts and ideas. In the summer before beginning work on the 'Eroica' he had been through the emotional crisis brought on by recognition that his encroaching deafness was likely to be incurable. The struggle is movingly charted in the despairing letter to his brothers (which he never sent) known as the 'Heiligenstadt Testament', however he emerged not just triumphant but defiant.

Two whipcrack chords from the full orchestra are all Beethoven needs to set out on this strange, wild journey. A subdued, purposeful theme on the cellos begins moving through the notes of an E flat major chord, but soon lands on a C sharp, which doesn't belong. Its destabilising influence gives an additional push to the music's forward