

FIVE

Beethoven

Beethoven was the grandson of a *Kapellmeister* at the Electoral court in Bonn, where his father was a tenor in the choir; he himself became deputy court organist and a viola player in the court orchestra as a boy who had already made a local reputation as a prodigy and begun to compose. In his late teens he was a prolific composer, and the death of the Emperor Joseph II in 1790 prompted him to compose a memorial cantata, powerfully emphatic, highly emotional music for soloists, choir and orchestra.

Bonn was a very wealthy state, its neutrality bought by subsidies from France and its more powerful German neighbours, and the court music was on a grand scale, so that as a boy Beethoven played in the latest and most ambitious French and Italian operas as well as those of Mozart and the few notable German works by his contemporaries. In 1792 he left Bonn on extended leave to study with Haydn at his patron's expense; a year later the French overran the Elector's territories, and the *Kapelle* of which Beethoven was nominally a member ceased to exist. From that date until the end of his life, Beethoven lived as a freelance piano virtuoso and composer.

Mozart had lived as a freelance for the last nine years of his life, expecting always to find a court which would offer him an appointment worthy of his abilities, and died famous, popular but penniless. A freelance existence seemed to Beethoven, as it had seemed to Mozart, quite unnatural. As late as 1806, when his hearing had failed so disastrously that he could not longer play in public, he negotiated with Napoleon I's brother, the King of the new state of Westphalia, for the post of *Kapellmeister* of the new court and was still, apparently, ready to accept it had not his friends among the Austrian nobility offered him an income to keep him in Vienna.

Beethoven's way of life as a freelance is not irrelevant to the consideration of his orchestral music and the development of the orchestra. His symphonies and concertos were not written to fit into the normal pattern of court music, commissioned by a patron to be performed in a private music-room as part of the social

routine of an established nobility. The first two piano concertos were written when he was the new sensational pianist who was the rage of Vienna, to play at concerts in the programmes of which he was invited to appear; the other three, and all his symphonies, were written only when he wanted to compose works of that kind, and were first heard at public concerts which he organized himself or which were organized for him by wealthy admirers. He did not compose to keep pace with an aristocratic patron's demands but completely at will. When he had a sufficiency of new works to make a concert worthwhile, he would organize the event and present, perhaps, two new symphonies and a new concerto to the public, and add to them anything else on which he had been working which would fit into a long evening of music with an orchestra. Such events he either financed out of his own pocket, expecting a reasonable profit as payment for his labours, or their expenses were paid by wealthy admirers. Such concerts were Beethoven's appeal to the general public. Beethoven was the first composer to make a regular and appreciable income from the publication of his works, and successful public concerts stimulated the sales of his piano works and chamber music.

In addition, public concerts were naturally given in one of the larger theatres or in such large halls as the *Redoutensaal* of the Emperor's court, where a new style of orchestration, more emphatic and more fully scored than that of Haydn or Mozart was necessary; circumstances demanded that he used a bigger orchestra than had been customary in the past, although the additional players that he needed would not always be available for the concerts of aristocrats who wished their own small orchestras to keep abreast with what was soon accepted as a new and immensely powerful style of composition.

Beyond this was the question of the new 'sound ideal' (to adopt a German phrase) of Beethoven's music. He wanted a different style of performance, different qualities of phrasing and emphasis, from those his immediate predecessors had demanded. Beethoven's addresses to the general concert-going public, which his reputation helped to create, is a music as close as music can be to categorical, conceptual statement. This is music in which themes and musical phrases become identifiably symbolic; in Beethoven's music, 'Fate knocks at the door', heroism is a musical statement including a harmonic flaw—its fanfare-like theme immediately sinks out of tune, as it were. Two linked phrases are "The question it is hard to answer": the first is labelled "Must it be so?" and the second, "It must be." Beethoven's orchestra is called to make every point as forcefully as it can be made; in a sense, it is engaged in musical oratory, for it is the voice of a great composer who found it natural

to see moral, ethical and religious statement in musical themes and phrases.

From the First Symphony onwards, Beethoven's music takes its substance from an exploration of key relationships wider than Haydn had found it necessary to attempt and carried out more openly than the explorations of Mozart. The *Eroica Symphony*, in 1803, is in E flat, but the fanfare theme which opens the work by stating its key sinks at once on to C sharp, a note as remote as can be from the main key of the movement, and the reconciliation of C sharp to the world of E flat is the business of the whole enormous movement, a piece far larger than any single movement in a symphony by Haydn or Mozart, just as the entire symphony is as long as almost any two symphonies by either of his great predecessors.

His point of departure was always, until late in his life, the tradition he had inherited. Insofar as he was Haydn's pupil and disciple, the Haydn he knew was the composer of the 'London' Symphonies, *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, the complete master, not the explorer and pioneer of the 1760s and 1770s. Before he wrote the First Symphony, completed in 1800 ready for the first concert which he himself organized in the following year, he had two piano concertos and the cantatas for the death of Joseph II and the accession of Joseph's successor, Leopold II, to his credit, as well as sets of dances for court balls, piano sonatas and chamber music. The dance music adds the piccolo to the orchestra, giving sharper definition to the melodic line, and the last of a set of twelve German Dances is dominated by a splendid post horn solo. Conceivably this dance ended a festive evening, and the use of a post horn hinted to the dancers that they had arrived at the time for travel. The German Dances are lively, enjoyable music in the tradition that a few years later was to lead to the waltz. They were, one feels, composed in the abstract and they laid out for orchestra in the most advantageous (and in a sense, quite conventional) way until the intrusion of the posthorn insists that the composer takes notice of its special qualities and tone colour, just as the early piano concertos seem to be not specially concerned with the special characteristics of any of the orchestral instruments while the solo part is designed to present the powers and personality of the piano itself. All Beethoven's concertos have this feature; the music for the orchestra is beautiful, and all the instruments speak idiomatically, according to their own natures, but subdue their personalities to that of the solo instrument; the solo music in the Violin Concerto arises, it seems, from the character of the violin, while the piano, violin and cello of the Triple Concerto adapt and develop the solo music, as they interchange, in response to their own musical natures.

Beethoven seems never to have been concerned, as later composers were, with orchestration as a specialist branch of composition or with the use of themes which seems to characterize this or that instrument. He knew the capacities of the individual instruments and how the music could most effectively be presented by orchestral instruments, avoiding the themes which lose their power when transferred, say from violin to oboe or cello to bassoon. But apart from this, the individuality of different instruments seems not to have been so intense a preoccupation as the structure and evolution of the musical thought. Beauties of orchestral sound in his music—and they are innumerable—are the result of his care for the development of the musical ideas and not of a sense of the instrument's personality as a thing in itself.

His First Symphony was the first work he presented directly to the general public. Horns and trumpets play their traditional rôles in sustaining the harmony, but they bring him for the first time to a problem which arises from the actual nature of the old brass instruments—their limitations as capable of playing only the notes of the harmonic series in which they are tuned. Beethoven's harmony travels so far from his main key in which the combative, ebullient style demands the power of trumpets which simply cannot, because of their nature, join step by step in his argument. For example, in the coda of the symphony's last movement, the strings seem to be about to restart the movement in the key of D—a world away from the movement's home in C major—after the music seems to have come once to an end in C. While the woodwind seem to be struggling to find their way back to C, the violins decide to play the theme in G major; this passage is marked *crescendo*, and in four and a half bars it leads from *piano* to *fortissimo* and the whole orchestra puts an end to the wandering by roaring out detached chords of C major and its related keys. Naturally, trumpets in C shout into the C major, G major and A major chords, but the rest of the orchestra visits F major, where the trumpets can contribute nothing of any importance; thus they are intermittently silenced by the progress of the harmony until the music settles finally into a jubilant C major. (See Appendix 2, No. 4.)

Such is the strength and penetration of trumpet tone that the absence of the instruments from two important chords is heard as a sudden weakening which, most musicians believe, cannot have been the composer's intention, so that, at least since the days of Wagner, the absent notes have been supplied by the use of valve trumpets which are capable of reaching the missing notes and any other notes within the trumpet's range. Naturally, Beethoven, whose works were achieved through the most painstaking working out of detailed sketches, must have been aware of the effect of silent

trumpets on the orchestral texture at such moments; the problem facing performers is to decide whether he approved of the withdrawals of power forced on him by the nature of the instruments he used, or would he welcome the ability of musicians now to close the instrumental gaps; most modern players and conductors supply the missing notes.

Additions and adjustments to Beethoven's orchestration to allow for the deficiencies of naturally tuned brass instruments can be found in most performances of all Beethoven's orchestral works; occasionally a conductor might play the works simply as they were written, but we tend to take for granted the idea that he would expect us to make good the weaknesses of the instruments he had to use. In the Finale of the Fifth Symphony, after the strange, dark transition from the terror of the Scherzo, Beethoven chooses to write for all the transposing instruments—clarinets, horns and trumpets in C so that the blaze of triumph is announced with all the force his orchestra can muster when trombones are added to the already powerful choir. Later in the movement, however, bassoons are set to carol away in their weak baritone register at a point where logic suggests that horns would be more satisfactory. To give a new theme its full effect, but the register needed is too low to be available to the horns. Had they been capable of playing a new theme in this register, it seems reasonable to assume that he would have scored the theme for horns. But while the conductor is prepared to act on his conjectures about gaps in horn and trumpet parts during period of harmonic movement, the world naturally assumes that conjectures about the rescoring of any passage go beyond the freedom any interpreter can expect to be granted.

Beethoven seems to have avoided, as far as possible, making use of the 'closed' notes which the horn player can reach by the hand-in-bell technique. It may be that Beethoven distrusted the ability of the average player to find these notes and play them cleanly; he may more probably, however, have wished to avoid the sudden contrast in tone arrived at when the bold, round open notes of the horn are suddenly interrupted by the muffled sound of closed notes. The open notes of the horn he used to splendid effect in such passages as the Trio of the Scherzo in the *Eroica Symphony* or how the blissful sense of peace in the last movement of the *Pastoral*, which begins with the clarinet singing a *ranz des vaches*, a cowherd's tune with something of the style of a yodel in its wide intervals, is intensified when a horn ends the movement by singing it from a distance created by the use of a mute.

Though Beethoven could exploit the deficiencies of the horn, turning them into advantages in such passages as their hunting music in the *Eroica*, the trumpets seem always to have been a prob-

lem. Even in the Ninth Symphony he could find no way round their frustrations: the sublime slow movement hears them as a call to action, lower in their register than we usually hear them in Beethoven's work, but pays no attention to their summons, and as the movement dies away it is succeeded by an outburst of wild cacophony marked *fortissimo*, which to Beethoven means with maximum power; he never marked a passage *fff*, double *fortissimo*, so that *fortissimo* itself means the loudest sound the instruments will make. Trumpets in D lead the outcry—*fortissimo* and their pitch ensure that they will ride over the rest of the orchestra only to fall momentarily silent, with a second's loss of power, as the harmony passes out of their range. In this passage, the symphony's four horns are tuned two in D and two in B flat, and the maximum power they yield is that of either B flat or D instruments as the harmony moves out of reach of one pair or the other.

Strictly speaking, it would have been possible for Beethoven to solve these problems once and for all. The special qualities of clarino playing had died with the chaos of the French Revolution, which destroyed many of the smaller German courts in the orchestras of which it had been preserved so long as the trumpet guilds had been powerful enough to maintain their monopoly; the guilds had been powerful enough to prevent any wide cultivation of the instrument, so that there just were not any outsiders who had mastered their traditional techniques; in the same way, the technique of horn playing up to heights above the treble clef—really, it seems, a matter for the virtuoso horn players of Haydn's orchestra at Esterhaz and far too perilous for the general run of players (even Mozart's concertos for his friend Leutgeb did not ask their redoubtable player to scale any great heights)—was lost.

But Haydn's Trumpet Concerto, a delightful work written in 1796 (more than a quarter of a century before the Ninth Symphony), was composed for a keyed trumpet which had been invented in Vienna five years before; it had four brass keys, similar in nature and effect to the keys of woodwind instruments, which had the effect of virtually shortening the tube and thus converting it into other harmonic series, so that the skilled player, moving between the harmonic series available to him, could play a succession of complete octaves and thus act as a melodic instrument over a wide range. Despite Haydn's fine concerto, however, the keyed trumpet was not a success, but in 1815 valve trumpets of the modern type began to appear in Germany. The old trumpet tradition made their acceptance slow, and there is no evidence that Beethoven took any notice of them. Even in France, where old trumpet traditions did not apply so firmly, composers tended to import cornets into the orchestra to supply a brass treble part in the register where trumpet

pets had no complete octave. The valve mechanism, which simply opened new lengths of tube as the pistons were depressed and thus lowered the instrument's harmonic series, was applied to the horn at about the same time, but was equally slow to gain acceptance; as late as 1865 Brahms declared that his Horn Trio was meant for a natural, and not a valved, horn.

Beethoven's addition of trombones to the brass of the orchestra in the Fifth, Sixth and Ninth Symphonies was primarily a means of avoiding fluctuations of dynamic intensity in passages where the harmony moves widely into distant keys when trumpets and horns are forced into silence. Like the strings and woodwind, trombones are capable of playing complete chromatic scales in every key, and while certain types of melody, notably the more intensely lyrical kind, are inappropriate to trombones, such exultantly ebullient tunes as that which open the finale of the Fifth Symphony and, incidentally, marks the début of the trombone in the symphony orchestra, are quite suited to its nature. But until the jubilation of the last movement of the Ninth Symphony is hushed into the solemnity of the vision of mankind united in the worship of a heavenly father, the trombone is used as the horns had been used before, to sustain and bind the harmony in passages where natural horns could not carry out this function.

Beethoven seems to have felt that some explanation of this new addition to the orchestra was necessary. In March, 1808, he wrote to Count Franz von Oppersdorf, to whom he sent copies of many of his works as they were completed and to whom for some time he intended to dedicate the Fifth Symphony (in the end it was the Fourth which carried the dedication) referring to what he must have realized could be regarded as a controversial feature of the score:

The last movement of the symphony has three trombones and a piccolo—and, although, it is true, there are not three kettledrums, yet this combination of instruments will make more noise and, what is more, a more pleasing noise, than six kettledrums.*

"A more pleasing noise," however, is not a final and definitive description of the great addition of volume which Beethoven foresaw. "A more pleasing noise" in the theatre, where the work had its first performance, might well be a very displeasing in Count von Oppersdorf's music-room, but Beethoven does not seem to find it necessary to explain—if the rationalization ever occurred to him—that the evolution of his symphony's harmony, demanded the use of sustaining instruments which are not limited by the notes of a single harmonic series.

* *The Letters of Ludwig van Beethoven*, trans. Emily Anderson, Vol. 1, p. 189.

Actually, the innovation, while solving the harmonic problem, created its own extremely tricky problems of balance. To sustain string tone against the outburst of two trumpets, two horns and three trombones required far more instruments than could be found in most orchestras. Beethoven, mounting a public concert, arranged for the services of the orchestra of the Imperial Opera, of the Theater an der Wien or the Kärntnerthor Theater Orchestra; the Theater an der Wien had an orchestra of forty players in 1801, at the time of Beethoven's First Symphony, and the Kärntnerthor Theater kept about forty-six players. The first performance of the Fifth Symphony, with the Sixth, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Choral Fantasia and several smaller pieces was given in the Theater an der Wien on 22nd December 1808, and for this event the orchestra could have been augmented, as was the orchestra assembled by Beethoven for the concert in the *Redoutensaal*, on 27th February 1814, for the first performance of the Seventh Symphony and *The Battle of Vittoria* together with another collection of smaller works. According to Ludwig Spohr's *Autobiography*, all the musicians in Vienna who could "fiddle, blow or sing" were invited to take part in this later event, but Spohr does not mention the total of the forces assembled. With such an orchestra, it seems likely that a suitable number of string players was collected.

But the small court orchestras still existed in 1808 though the Napoleonic Wars were making their existence increasingly problematical, and though there seems to be no account of Count Oppersdorf's orchestra, the result of a performance by a court orchestra so typical that no one cared to draw attention to it meant a performance which must necessarily have been too unbalanced to be satisfactory. Beethoven's style of composition demanded, though it did not specify or always receive, strings in proportion to the weight of tone pitted against them in a *fortissimo tutti*; this, despite his deafness, was a fact he understood clearly. Beethoven himself explained in a letter to the Emperor's son the Archduke Rudolph, the most exalted of his patrons, pupils and friends, that the Seventh Symphony could not make its true effect with no more than four or five violins in each group.

The process of numerical expansion caused by Beethoven's additions to the orchestra gradually added to the number of strings, with the result that obedience to scores asking for only two flutes and two oboes meant that the voices of woodwind instruments were likely to be lost in all loud passages, but this, as double woodwind were components of the orchestra hallowed by tradition, was simply accepted until the 1860s or '70s, when composers began to ask for a strengthened woodwind section for the sake of more exact balance; in the 1890s, Mahler in Vienna brought down a storm of

abuse on his head by announcing his 'retouching' of Beethoven's scores, by which he meant simply completing the brass parts left incomplete, through the natural deficiencies of Beethoven's instruments, and multiplying the number of woodwind to maintain balance with the rest of the orchestra.

When Beethoven added a piccolo to the line of his woodwind band and a double bassoon to its bass, he seems to have felt these instruments to be quite capable of dealing, at least adequately, without assistance from other departments with passages at least as elaborate as those Mozart and himself had written for flutes, oboes and bassoons. The piccolo makes its entry in Twelve German Dances which he had composed for a court ball in 1795. It recurs in the finale of the Fifth Symphony, suggests the searing flashes of lightning of the 'Storm' of the *Pastoral Symphony*, in 1805 and 1808, and is heard in *Wellington's Sieg* or *The Battle of Vittoria*, a pot-boiling work from 1814 which also demands six trumpets. In 1810, it adds to the excitement of the triumph at the end of the *Egmont Overture* and from then on is a necessity in Beethoven's theatre music. The final version of *Fidelio*, however, omits the piccolo, perhaps because in revising the score in 1814, the insertion of an instrument which had not been used in the original version nine years before might demand too many changes in music which he considered satisfactory. The piccolo adds definition to Beethoven's top line, but it is possible to wonder whether he came to use it more frequently in the middle-period music because the deterioration in his hearing made it increasingly difficult for him to be aware of higher frequencies. It is only in the *Egmont Overture* and the *Pastoral Symphony* that it seems to be quite indispensable because it brings a new personality into the score.

The double bassoon, introduced in the Fifth Symphony and required in a number of later scores including that of the Ninth Symphony, simply added weight to the bass. Beethoven's bassoon parts, unlike those in the earlier works of Mozart and Haydn, do not simply play along with cellos and double basses in a general bass line; Beethoven uses it as the genuine bass of a woodwind choir which can, when necessary, carry the entire burden of his thought and, at other times can blend with the tones of strings and brass if a contrasting tone is not required of them.

Possibly the percussion gained as much as the brass from Beethoven. Berlioz, in his *Treatise on Modern Instrumentation*, published in Paris in 1842, draws attention quite frequently to Beethoven's use of timpani especially when they are instructed to play quietly. A great *crescendo* at the end of the slow movement of the Fourth Symphony is followed by a *pianissimo* which throbs on two notes, C and G a fourth below, in the timpani, before two

final *fortissimo* chords from the full orchestra conclude the movement. The long transition from the *Scherzo* to the *Finale* of the Fifth Symphony is accompanied by a steady, throbbing crotchet beat from the timpani, beating out a recurrent *pianissimo* until the violins, wandering lost above it, manage to struggle from C minor into the major and give the timpani a reason for a great *crescendo* as the light of a great C major chord comes flooding into the tunnel.

From the beginning, Beethoven was inclined to extend the range of the violins. Haydn and Mozart seem to have been reluctant to ask them to climb more than an octave above the note of the open string on which they were playing, that is, to move above the fourth position, but even in the First Symphony, Beethoven sends them higher. Naturally, the Violin Concerto makes demands on its soloist that we can take for granted as being beyond the powers of the rank-and-file violinists in the orchestra, but in the Ninth Symphony not only does he confront violinists, as well as the rest of the orchestra, with difficult problems of co-ordination, balance and ensemble, but he also expected violinists to solve these problems while playing passages which were at heights most of his fiddlers cannot often have been asked to scale and at which the mere problem of remaining in tune may, in the 1820s, have seemed singularly hazardous.

Violins and cellos he treated on the whole with greater reserve. It is interesting to note how rarely either instrument is left to deliver any important theme or melody without support. As a youth in Bonn, Beethoven himself had been a viola player, but in his earlier orchestral works, any important entry finds them assisted either by second violins or by cellos. At the same time, they are expected to cope with very intricate passage work and to maintain good intonation and ensemble while they do so; whatever he had in mind, it was obviously not to make life easy for viola players. But when, for example, the gentle, meditative second theme of the Ninth Symphony's slow movement appears in the second violins, they are joined by violas; the first violins are left to play intricate variations on that theme without any assistance. Violas face a variety of demands: when the woodwind are set to vary the first theme in a passage of splendid richness, the first violins weave a beautiful filigree through the texture while the rest of the strings are left to play a *pizzicato* accompaniment which at one point briefly separates the violas into three parts; there are points at which the accompaniment where both second violins and violas each play independent parts while divided into two groups of each instrument. Not only are cellos and double-basses rarely separated, and then never for more than a few bars, but the cellos' period of exceptional prominence in the Fifth Symphony—its delivery of the

melody of the slow movement over *pizzicato* double-basses—har-
nesses violas and cellos together.

These procedures may possibly have a greater influence on the actual tone colour of such passages in a modern performance than they had in Beethoven's own day; it may well be that violas rarely played independently, and that the cello melody of the Fifth Symphony's *Andante con moto* brings in the violas to double them because of the paucity of violas and cellos in the average orchestra to which Beethoven was accustomed. Many commentators ascribe the doubling in the Fifth Symphony to the composer's distrust of the cellists, but in many other matters where they are involved in difficult accompaniment figures, the composer leaves them alone to face their problems without help, and it is music which is melodically or thematically important which calls up other instruments to their assistance.

The recitative passages for unison cellos and double-basses at the beginning of the choral movement of the Ninth Symphony seemed not to have caused any special consternation among the cellists at the first performance, but later conductors found it impossible to entrust them to the double-basses, which left the cellists to tackle them without the support of the lower octave which adds to their power and authority. Wagner's historic performance of the work in Dresden in 1846 was apparently entirely faithful to the text (apart from the filling of gaps in the brass parts generally regarded as virtuous rather than selfish conductorial additions), naturally played the recitative passages as they were written, but twelve rehearsals for the double basses alone were necessary before Wagner was satisfied.

What in the 1820s was regarded as the near impossibility of these passages was rivalled by many others which pushed every instrument to the limit of its capacities. At the same time, the problems of balance, intonation and ensemble remained nearly insoluble until years after the composer's death. The compelling power and authority of Beethoven's music meant that it was frequently performed and that little by little orchestral players evolved a Beethoven style which at least saw them through in the days of minimal rehearsal. Franz Xaver Gebauer, choirmaster of the Augustinian Church in Vienna, instituted a weekly *Concert Spirituel* with the choir and orchestra of his church, and from 1819 onwards the concerts continued to draw audiences although they were nothing more than unrehearsed sight readings of the works in the programme, and Beethoven's symphonies were among the most popular works played although the performances must have been intolerably bad. It was in performances like Gebauer's that Beethoven's works began to dominate both orchestras and audiences

although the composer's own attitude to them can be judged by his request to the publisher Siegmund Anton Steiner for a couple of "lavatory tickets" when he wanted to attend one of the *Concerts Spirituel*.

One thing about Beethoven's expansion of the orchestra should be noted; the addition of instruments simply to make 'effects' was not among his interests; what he demanded was more melodic and harmonic definition and power. In the music for *The Ruins of Athens*, and in the tenor solo of the Ninth Symphony's Finale, he asked for "Turkish music"—the bass drum, cymbals and triangle which Mozart had used to provide a splash of local colour in the Janissaries' Chorus of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and which Haydn, in London, had demanded in his *Military Symphony* (No. 100). In *The Ruins of Athens*, "Turkish music" had been appropriate as local colour; in the Ninth Symphony it emphasizes the popular jollity appropriate to words which speak of humanity hurrying together down the road to joy. There is no question of such additions being called into action simply as musical effects.

Beethoven's orchestral innovations were apparently called into being in the interests of clarity of thought or weight of emphasis rather than for the sake of sonorous, sensuous beauty; the "better sound" of the Fifth Symphony's piccolo, trombones and double-bassoon does not seem to have been "better" because it was richer in colour. Nevertheless, Beethoven's orchestra produced music of great beauty, as in, for example, the slow movements of the Fifth Piano Concerto, the *Pastoral* and the Ninth Symphonies although Beethoven's orchestration invariably puts sound at the service of meaning.