



BEETHOVEN

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 15

Ludwig van Beethoven (December 1770 – 26 March 1827) was a German composer and pianist. A crucial figure in the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras in Western art music, he remains one of the most famous and influential of all composers. His best known compositions include 9 symphonies, 5 concertos for piano, 32 piano sonatas, and 16 string quartets. Born in Bonn, Beethoven intended to study with Mozart, but sadly only met him once before the master's death in 1791. Beethoven permanently moved to Vienna in 1792 and began studying with Haydn, quickly gaining a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. Haydn's influence is strongly seen in the music of this "early" period, though Beethoven also explored new directions and gradually expanded the scope and ambition of his work. In about 1800 his hearing began to deteriorate, and by the last decade of his life he was almost totally deaf. He gave up conducting and performing in public but continued to compose; many of his most admired works (including 7 of his 9 symphonies) come from these "middle" and "late" periods. Common themes of his "middle" period include heroism, struggle, and triumph, seen through his opera *Fidelio*, *Overture to Egmont*, and his Third and Fifth Symphonies. Works from his "late" period are characterised by their intellectual depth, their formal innovations, and their intense, highly personal expression. The String Quartet, Op. 131 has seven linked movements (instead of the usual four), and the Ninth Symphony adds choral forces to the orchestra in the last movement and embraces Enlightened ideals of brotherhood through Schiller's poem *An die Freude* (To Joy). Almost universally admired by the time of his death, some 20,000 Viennese citizens attended his funeral procession.

The **Piano Concerto No. 2** in B-flat major, Op. 19 was composed primarily between 1787 and 1789, although it did not attain the form it was published as until 1795. The B-flat major Piano Concerto became an important display piece for the young Beethoven as he sought to establish himself after moving from Bonn to Vienna. He was the soloist at its premiere on 29 March 1795, at Vienna's Burgtheater in a concert marking his public debut. While the work as a whole is very much in the concerto style of Mozart, there is a sense of drama and contrast that would be present in many of Beethoven's later works. Beethoven himself apparently did not rate this work particularly highly, remarking to the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister that, along with the Piano Concerto No. 1, it was "not one of my best." Scored for three movements, the first movement begins with a triumphant orchestral opening, and maintains a playfulness while using chromatic passages to show off the soloist's dizzying technique. The second movement is characteristically serene and peaceful, while the closing Rondo brings back the youth-filled playfulness heard in the opening movement.