
 **CINCINNATI**
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PAAVO JÄRVI • MUSIC DIRECTOR

Fourth Subscription Program of the 113th Season, 2007–2008

*Thursday, October 11, 7:30 p.m.; Friday, October 12, 11 a.m.;
Saturday, October 13, 8 p.m.*

PAAVO JÄRVI *conducting*
VADIM REPIN, *violinist*

Mahler

TODTENFEIER

Mahler

SYMPHONY NUMBER 10 (Adagio)

— INTERMISSION —

Mahler/
arr. Britten

WHAT THE WILD FLOWERS TELL ME

Beethoven

CONCERTO IN D MAJOR FOR VIOLIN
AND ORCHESTRA, Opus 61

Allegro ma non troppo
Larghetto—
Allegro

*These are the first CSO subscription performances of the
Mahler/Britten What the Wildflowers Tell Me.*

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*The use of photographic, recording, and other audiovisual devices
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*These concerts will end at approximately 12:45 p.m. Friday,
9:30 p.m. Thursday, 1 p.m. Friday, 10 p.m. Saturday.*

*Classical WGUC-FM 90.9 will broadcast this concert
Sunday, January 20, 7:30 p.m.*

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Gustav Mahler
TODTENFEIER

*Mahler was born on July 7, 1860, in Kalischt, Bohemia; he died on May 18, 1911, in Vienna. He began *Todtenfeier* in the summer of 1888 and completed it on September 10 of that year. It was first performed by the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin under Jesús López-Cobos in 1983. **CSO Premiere / Most Recent Performances:** April 1991, Jesús López-Cobos conducting / March 2001, Jesús López-Cobos conducting.*

Todtenfeier (“Funeral Ceremony”) is an early version of the first movement of Mahler’s Second Symphony. It was composed in 1888, whereas the remainder of the Symphony was written in 1893–94. Although Mahler probably conceived *Todtenfeier* from the first as a movement of a larger work, he did toy with the idea of presenting it separately. In 1891 he tried to get it published as an independent piece. He also played it at the piano for some friends, explaining that it was self-contained. Furthermore, three months after the premiere of the entire Symphony, Mahler conducted the first movement by itself, calling it the symphonic poem *Todtenfeier*. This performance was not of the work as heard at these concerts, however, but of its final form as found in the Symphony. The 1888 version was not performed until 1983, when it was played by the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin under Jesús López-Cobos. It was published in 1988, a century after its composition. The first American performance was given by the Philharmonia Orchestra of the College-Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati, conducted by Gerhard Samuel.

Because of its differences from the first movement of the Second Symphony, a performance of *Todtenfeier* offers to those who know the Symphony a fascinating glimpse into the composer’s workshop. We hear an intermediate stage in the conception of this powerful movement, and we understand in what ways its final form was an advance over the 1888 version. The revisions include the slightly lesser length of the symphony version, its larger orchestra, some different tonal progressions, the elimination of some repetitious figures, plus some structural modifications. The low register is stronger in the Symphony, because of the addition of a contrabassoon and because Mahler took the string basses down to low C, which requires instruments with special extensions or with five strings.

keynote

Mahler was intensely concerned with the potentials, challenges, and problems of program music. He always sought outside inspiration for his composing, yet he often expressed reluctance to share the sources of his music with the public. Thus he wrote detailed programs for the first three symphonies but withheld them from publication. He denounced Liszt’s and Strauss’s overt transference of stories into music, yet he readily acknowledged his need to rely on inspiration outside of music. He wrote to a critic:

Just as I find it banal to invent music to fit a program, I regard it as unsatisfying and unfruitful to try to give a piece of music to a program. The fact that the *impulse* toward a musical creation is an experience of the composer does not change anything... Nevertheless, for the first time, when my manner is still strange to the listener, it is good for him to receive a few milestones and signposts for the journey — or, shall we say, a star map in order to comprehend the night sky with all its luminous worlds. But such a description cannot offer more.

The outside “impulse” toward the creation of *Todtenfeier* was a dramatic epic in four parts by Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, the final section of which is autobiographical. The poet was in love with

a woman named Maria, who was already engaged. After three years, she married someone else. Mickiewicz became deeply depressed. He read Goethe's *Werther*, the novel of unrequited love and suicide that affected many 19th-century romantics, and he worked out his despondency in the poem. He created a character named Gustav, who is in love with a fictional Maria. Gustav takes his life when she marries someone else.

Mahler was particularly interested in this poem because it had recently been translated into German by his friend Siegfried Lipiner, who titled it *Todtenfeier*. According to Lipiner, through his suicide the character Gustav transcends his human frailties and achieves salvation. Mahler identified with the poem's hero not only because he shared his first name but also because he found himself in a similar circumstance: he was involved in a doomed love affair.

In 1886, just a short time after his ill-fated liaison with Johanna Richter (for whom he wrote the *Songs of a Wayfarer*), the young composer-conductor met Baron Karl von Weber, grandson of composer Karl Maria von Weber, Mahler admired Weber's music. Baron von Weber had in his possession the sketches of his grandfather's unfinished comic opera *Die drei Pintos*. The Baron asked Mahler if he would be interested in completing the work. The composer studied the sketches and agreed to undertake the project. He became obsessed with the work, even to the point of neglecting his conducting duties. But the project was good for him. It got him to concentrate his energies on composing, even though he was writing someone else's music, and soon he transferred those energies to the creation of *Todtenfeier*.

Practically every day he went to the home of Baron and Mrs. Weber in order to play at the piano what he had accomplished. A friendship grew between Mahler and the Baron, and something more than friendship began between the composer and Mrs. von Weber. They began a torrid affair. Although she was seven years older than Mahler and had a husband and three children, she seriously considered eloping with him. The lovers feared a scandal, but they found each other irresistible. A true romantic, Mahler contemplated suicide. According to the composer's friend Fritz Löhr, this "was a period in Mahler's life of unsurpassed spiritual agitation." He sought solace in intense artistic creation, as does the character Gustav in Mickiewicz's poem.

In an extended analysis, musicologist Stephen Hefling demonstrates that the symphonic poem *Todtenfeier* was carefully modeled on the epic poem *Todtenfeier*. Hefling's argument is too complex to relate here, but it does lead to two interesting questions:

(1) "Is this movement (and perhaps much of Mahler's work) merely a self-consciously predetermined mimesis of extramusical events — precisely the sort of program music Mahler condemned and claimed he did not write?" After an exhaustive study of the influence of the poem on the music, the musicologist concludes, "The poem was a catalyst: its fluctuating moods could be generally reflected by the nature and disposition of the musical material, and its overall dramatic shape could be subsumed into tripartite sonata form.... But the specific course of the symphonic movement had ultimately to be determined on musical grounds."

(2) Hefling also asks, "Why did Mahler never reveal the connection [between the piece and the poem], even in his won programs for the Second Symphony?" The musicologist speculates that the composer was cautious about discussing the programmatic content of *Todtenfeier* because of the close parallel between events in the poem and those in his life. He feared, in other words, that a story about unfulfilled love would be taken as a public admission of his affair with Marion von Weber. He was concerned, furthermore, that a composition based on the theme of suicide would be linked to his younger brother Otto, a composer who had recently shot himself to death in the wake of an unhappy love affair.

Thus Mahler chose to conceal the details of *Todtenfeier's* inspiration. But he did allow a less personal but nonetheless meaningful description to become known, at least to close friends:

I have called the first movement "Funeral Ceremony" and, in case you want to know, it is the hero of my First Symphony whom I bear to his grave, and upon the clear recollection of whose life I gaze from a higher vantage point. At the same time, there is the great question: "Why hast thou lived? Why hast thou suffered? Is all this only a great and ghastly joke?" — We *must* solve these problems in one way or another, if we are to continue living — yes, even if we are to continue dying! He in whose life this call has once resounded must give an answer.

After a performance of the Second Symphony in 1900, the ambivalent composer once again spoke out against symphonic programs:

Away with programs; they arouse false expectations.... If the composer has impressed upon the hearer the feelings that flowed through him, then his goal is achieved. For the language of music has drawn close to words, but has proclaimed unceasingly more than they are able to express.

According to musicologist Hefling, Mahler understood the difference between music in the service of drama and music as drama.

In the symphonic tradition Mahler espoused, musical process projecting cogent form *is* the drama, be its tone heroic, tragic, or pastoral; the *Todtenfeier* climax is both the expressive *and* the structural culmination of the movement. Thus, to paraphrase Lipiner, Mahler's personal experience had to become "an opportune cause to create types,"... — passages whose feeling would be generally understood, but which nonetheless could and would be integrated into the formal process as a whole. And that process meant the continuous, dynamic interrelation of form, feeling, and musical development.

Mahler SYMPHONY NUMBER 10 (Adagio)

Mahler was born on July 7, 1860 in Kalischt, Bohemia; he died on May 18, 1911 in Vienna. Mahler began the Tenth Symphony in the summer of 1910; it remained unfinished at his death. The first and third movements, as edited by Ernst Křenek, were first conducted by Franz Schalk in Vienna on October 14, 1924. CSO Premiere / Most Recent Performances: January 1960 (two-movement version), Max Rudolf conducting / December 1989 (Adagio only), Gary Bertini conducting.

Had Gustav Mahler lived to complete his Symphony No. 10, it would undoubtedly have become a historically significant work. It would have been both the ultimate distillation of Mahler's style and an important influence on the twentieth-century techniques it anticipates. It might have been the last truly romantic work by a major composer who did not have to decide deliberately either to adopt or to bypass twentieth-century atonality. As it is, however, the Tenth occupies a strange position in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. However great its influence might have been, it was in fact nil, because the work was all but unknown to Schoenberg, Webern, Stravinsky, et al., at the time they were forging a new language.

Mahler began to sketch the Symphony in the summer of 1910, while completing the Ninth. He intended to finish it the next sum-

mer, as his conducting duties always kept him from composing at other times of the year. But he died in the spring of 1911, leaving a partially completed work.

By the Tenth Symphony, Mahler's opulent style had undergone a refinement, a purification. His romanticism had become tempered by a degree of classical restraint. Gone were the earlier symphonies' cowbells, off-stage brass bands, hammer blows, and mammoth choruses. A chamberlike style of orchestration is apparent on many of the fully scored pages of the Tenth, and an economy of materials is evident as well. Much of the first movement, for example, grows directly out of the opening soliloquy for violas. Rigorous derivation of a large movement from a single line is a technique not only of past masters, but also of 20th-century twelve-tone composers. Thus the piece looks forward to an era Mahler would never know: highly chromatic melodic lines contain most of the 12 tones, nonstructural pungent dissonances are added purely for effect, and the intense chord that forms the climax of the first movement contains nine different tones (by comparison, a stringent dissonance for Beethoven would probably contain no more than five different notes). Mahler was clearly in touch with the future as well as the past.

Mahler was deeply disturbed at the time he sketched the five movements of this huge work. He morbidly feared that he was dying, yet he began to feel that he had never lived. "I have lived my life on paper," he wrote. When his wife, Alma, had a passionate affair with architect Walter Gropius (whom she eventually married after the composer's death), Mahler realized that his marriage had suffered, in part because of his neuroses. But how could he regain his wife's affections? How could he apologize for his cruelties to Alma? He could write a symphony around the themes of despair, regret, anguish, death, and resignation, and yet he could conclude it in an atmosphere of peace and hope. That he associated such emotions with the Tenth Symphony is evident to anyone who hears it. That he linked these feelings to Alma is clear from the manuscript, on which he scrawled impassioned outbursts, often addressed to her.

On the second page of the third movement, originally called "Purgatorio or Inferno," the doomed composer scribbled, "Death! Trans[figuration?]" On the third page, "O God! O God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" Later we find, "Mercy!" and "Thy will be done!" The title page of the fourth movement bears this inscription: "The devil leads me in a dance; madness seizes me, accursed that I am, annihilates me so that I forget to be, so that I cease to exist, so that I dis..." At the drumbeat that ends that movement, he wrote, "You alone know what it means. Ah! Ah! Ah! Farewell, my lyre. Farewell, farewell, farewell. Ah, well. Ah. Ah." Alma later explained that the source of that stark drumbeat, which also begins the finale, was the solitary drum accompanying the funeral of a fireman who had been killed near the Mahlers' New York hotel. The composer, watching from his hotel window, recognized in the fireman's funeral procession his own. Alma saw his face contort in anguish, as tears ran uncontrollably down his face.

In yet another way death was linked with the Tenth Symphony. The composer had always believed that he, like Beethoven, Schubert, and Bruckner, was destined to compose nine symphonies. He felt that if he could finish the Tenth he would have outsmarted death. This superstition caused him not to number the song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*. Thus the Ninth was really his tenth, and he boasted that he had outwitted death. But the superstition held; there are only nine numbered, completed symphonies by Mahler. Psychoanalyst Theodore Reik, in his book *The Haunting Melody*, explains that Mahler saw father images in the earlier composers who had died after nine symphonies. According to classical Freudian theory, the son has a deep-seated wish to replace the father, and so, according to Reik, Mahler subconsciously felt that to die after completing nine symphonies would be to displace and hence to

equal the earlier masters. Mahler's superstition became a desire to meet the masters on their terms — a real death wish.

Mahler actually had a first-hand experience with Freudian analysis. When, during his final months, he came to feel the hollowness of his life and his marriage, he sought the help of Freud himself. The two men spent an afternoon together in August 1910. Freud, who had little interest in music, was impressed by Mahler's quick grasp of psychoanalysis. Thus Freud felt he was able to accomplish some good, despite the impossibility of protracted treatment.

Under Freud's guidance, Mahler relived a traumatic childhood experience. His father had always been cruel to his mother. Once, during a particularly vehement clash between his parents, the young Mahler fled the house in terror. He came into the street, only to be greeted by a hurdy-gurdy playing the popular Austrian tune "Ach, du lieber Augustin." This frightening yet ludicrous juxtaposition of the emotionally charged with the trivial left an indelible impression on the boy. During his afternoon with Freud, Mahler came to understand this incident as the source of the frequent conjunction of tragedy and amusement in his music. He felt that the intrusions of ordinary melodies — the so-called banalities of his music — were expressions of this youthful experience. Once he came to understand why the commonplace had become as meaningful to him as the profound or tragic, Mahler purged his style of this confrontation of opposites. The Tenth Symphony contains no stark juxtapositions of tragedy and farce.

Mahler was full of turmoil as he raced to complete the Tenth Symphony. He felt fear of death, remorse for his one-sided life, a new understanding of his personality and of his music, regret for the way he had treated his wife, and resolution to make the next months atone for the mistakes of his life. It was a time for renewed life, yet it became a time for death. Instead of juxtaposing the sublime and the banal, the Tenth Symphony places tragedy next to tranquility, despair next to peace, and resignation next to rejuvenation.

A shroud of mystery descended over the Tenth Symphony after the composer died in 1911. Mahler's first biographer, Paul Stefan, wrote (about a work he had never seen) that it could never be performed. Arnold Schoenberg, in a memorial lecture, perpetuated Mahler's superstition about nine symphonies: "The Ninth is a limit. He who wants to go beyond it must die. It is as if something might be imparted to us in a Tenth for which we are not yet ready. Those who have written a Ninth have stood too near to the hereafter. Perhaps the riddles of the world would be solved, if one of those who knew them were to compose a Tenth. But that is probably never to happen." This superstitious fear of Mahler's Tenth was echoed by conductor Bruno Walter, who conducted the posthumous premieres of *Das Lied* and the Ninth but refused even to look at the Tenth. Mahler's friend and second biographer, Richard Specht, wrote that the Tenth "will never come to performance. Mahler asked that it be burnt after his death. His widow could not resolve to do this,... but it is quite impossible that anyone... could complete a score from his mute symbols." Alma decided to suppress the manuscript.

The sketches lay virtually unknown for several years. In 1924 Alma felt that the time was finally right to unveil Mahler's last symphony. She asked the young composer Ernst Křenek to prepare as much as possible of the work for publication and performance. Křenek made performing versions of the first and third movements. Alban Berg checked Křenek's work and offered several criticisms, which somehow never found their way into the published score. The two movements were conducted in Vienna by Franz Schalk and in Prague by Alexander Zemlinsky. Also in 1924 a facsimile of several of the sketches was published.

The performances and publications were controversial. Some people were awed by the majesty of the music, even in its incomplete state. Others felt that it was impossible to know how Mahler

might have changed the work had he lived, and thus to perform it in its unfinished state was a travesty.

Several composers who knew Mahler's style well were approached about actually completing the five-movement Symphony Schoenberg, Berg, and Shostakovich all refused. An accomplished composer knows how hard it is to enter another composer's mind and art. Shostakovich's response was typical: "In spite of my love for this composer, I cannot take upon myself this huge task. This calls for deep penetration into the spiritual world of the composer, as well as his creative and individual style. For me this would be impossible." In the 1940s and '50s, however, several musicologists worked on reconstructing the Tenth Symphony — Frederick Block, Clinton Carpenter, Joe Wheeler, Hans Wollschläger, and Deryck Cooke. Although the versions by Cooke and Carpenter are performed today [a completion composed by Remo Mazzetti, Jr., in 1983-1985 was performed by the CSO under Jesús López-Cobos in February 2000] they must be heard as performing editions of an unfinished piece, not as an artificial completion. Only the first movement, the Adagio, was fully composed and fully scored by the composer. It is no surprise that its level of inspiration, coherence, subtlety, and power is not matched in the remaining movements, even as reconstructed by well-meaning scholars. Only performances of the first movement can approach true authenticity.

This movement attempts something virtually no other large romantic piece tries: to remain in one key for much of its length. About eighty percent of the movement is in the key of F-sharp (major or minor). Variety comes not from change of key but from an incredible richness of harmonies and dissonances within that one key. The effect is otherworldly beauty and deep intensity.

— Jonathan D. Kramer

Mahler/arr. Benjamin Britten
WHAT THE WILD FLOWERS TELL ME (An arrangement
of the Second Movement of Gustav Mahler's Symphony
Number 3 for Reduced Orchestra)

Britten was born on November 22, 1913, in Lowestoft, Suffolk, England; he died on December 4, 1976, in Aldeburgh, Suffolk. Mahler composed his Symphony No. 3 in 1895-1896 and conducted its premiere on June 6, 1902 in Krefeld, Germany. Britten arranged the second movement for reduced orchestra in 1941; it was first heard on November 14, 1942 on a BBC Home Service broadcast by the BBC Scottish Orchestra, conducted by Guy Warrack. CSO Premiere / Most Recent Performances: These are the first CSO subscription performances of What the Wild Flowers Tell Me.

By August 1930, when he was admitted to London's Royal College of Music, Benjamin Britten had completed an oratorio, a string quartet, ten piano sonatas, three piano suites, six quartets, dozens of songs and reams of juvenile miscellanea. He was 17. Just before the start of term, his mother took young Ben the 80 miles from the family home in Lowestoft, on the Norfolk coast, to London, and settled him into a boarding house in Bayswater, across from Kensington Gardens. ("It is rather a nice place but rather full of old ladies," the teenager confided to his diary.) To help counter his apprehension about being on his own in the big city ("Oh, God, I wish Mother were here"), Britten immediately immersed himself in London's rich musical life. The day after classes started at the RCM, he attended a Proms concert at Queen's Hall. He reported home...

...I saw from the program that I had to hear a symphony by Mahler. I naturally groaned in anticipation of 45 minutes of boredom. But what I heard was not what I expected to hear.... The scoring startled me. It was mainly "soloistic" and entirely clean and transparent. The coloring seemed calculated to the smallest shade, and the result was wonderfully resonant.... The form was so cunningly contrived; every development surprised one and yet sounded inevitable. Above all, the material was remarkable, and the melodic shapes highly original, with much rhythmic and harmonic tension from beginning to end. I'll make every effort to hear Mahler's music.

Performances of Mahler's music were infrequent during those first decades following his death in 1911 and recordings virtually non-existent — it was not until the 1960s that Mahler was admitted to the standard orchestral repertory — but Britten heard what performances were available (he declared a performance of the Fourth Symphony that Anton Webern conducted in London in 1933 to be "like a lovely spring day") and studied the scores assiduously: *Das Lied von der Erde* "has the beauty of loneliness and pain, of strength and freedom"; *Kindertotenlieder* made him "feel it is worth having lived, if only for those little miracles"; he supposed "there may be more beautiful bits of music than Mahler's Fifth — but I don't know them." The composer Lennox Berkeley recalled that Britten was almost beside himself with excitement when he showed up at his flat one day with the huge stack of shellac 78s that comprised the pioneering recording of the Ninth Symphony which Bruno Walter, Mahler's brilliant conducting protégé, made with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1938. Britten took inspiration (though rarely specific compositional techniques) for his works from Mahler and performed his music throughout his career. He included songs by Mahler in a broadcast recital that he gave with the Swiss-born soprano Sophie Wyss in 1936, and frequently programmed and conducted his music at his Aldeburgh Music Festival in later years. He recorded the Fourth Symphony with soprano Joan Carlyle and the London Symphony Orchestra in 1961, two songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* with Elly Ameling in 1969, and *The Songs of a Wayfarer* with Anna Reynolds and the English Chamber Orchestra in 1972. In 1958, he dedicated his *Nocturne* for Tenor, Seven Obligato Instruments and Strings to Mahler's widow, Alma.

In 1941, during the three unsettled years when Britten was living in America and trying to accommodate his pacifist views to his homeland's war effort (he was formally declared a conscientious objector when he returned home in 1942 and performed in hospitals, shelters and bombed-out villages while continuing to compose for the rest of the war), he made an arrangement for small orchestra of the second movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 3 that his publisher, Boosey & Hawkes in London, suggested might gain some war-time performances for the work (and some royalties for Britten).

Mahler's Third Symphony is divided into two large parts, the first occupied solely by the vast first movement (subtitled, in the composer's sketches, "Pan awakes; Summer marches in"), the remaining five evoking Nature's bounties, or, more accurately, the composer's musico/emotional responses to them. He called the second movement ("What the flowers of the meadow tell me") a "minuet," though it is really more a halcyon country dance than a recreation of Mozartian elegance. Excerpted from the Symphony, it is gentle and melodic, but in its original setting its deliberate naïveté provides an expressive and formal contrast to the overwhelming music that precedes it.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Ludwig van Beethoven
CONCERTO IN D MAJOR FOR VIOLIN AND
ORCHESTRA, Opus 61

Beethoven was born on December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany; he died on March 26, 1827, in Vienna. He began the Violin Concerto in 1806 and finished it just in time for its first performance on December 23, 1806. The soloist for this Vienna premiere was Franz Clement. CSO Premiere / Most Recent Performances: 1895, Henry Schradyeck, conductor and soloist / May 2006, Paavo Järvi conducting; Henning Kraggerud, violin.

Violinist Franz Clement was one of the most gifted musicians in Beethoven's Vienna. He had made his mark as a child by performing at the Vienna Imperial Opera House from the age of nine, and by playing concertos under the baton of Haydn in London two years later. He made frequent international concert tours. When Beethoven first heard the 14-year-old boy perform in 1794, the composer wrote to the prodigy:

Continue along the road on which you have already made such a fine and magnificent journey. Nature and art have combined to make a great artist of you. Follow them both and, never fear, you will reach greatness, the highest goal that an artist can desire in the world. All my good wishes for your happiness, dear child, and come back soon so that I can hear your clear, magnificent playing once again.

Clement fulfilled Beethoven's hopes. He grew up to become concertmaster and conductor of the Vienna Opera. Beethoven entrusted to him conducting the first performance of the *Eroica* Symphony.

Clement had a phenomenal musical memory. The composer Ludwig Spohr recalled how Clement perfectly reproduced long stretches of an oratorio having heard only two rehearsals and one performance. Clement made a piano reduction of Haydn's large oratorio *The Creation* — from memory! And, when the first version of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* was a failure and a group of musicians met to decide how to salvage the work, Clement sat at the keyboard and played the entire score from memory.

Clement decided to give a benefit concert in December 1806. He asked Beethoven to contribute a violin concerto, and the composer readily agreed, for Clement was one of the few musicians in Vienna he respected — and from whom he would accept criticism. The numerous changes in the manuscript bear witness to their frequent editorial sessions. Since the composer was not himself a violinist, he had to rely on Clement's expertise in practical matters.

As was often the case with Beethoven, the work was completed only at the last minute. Clement had often gone over the solo part with the composer, but there was not enough time for even a single full rehearsal with orchestra. Miraculously, the performance was not a fiasco — Clement's keen memory of the sketches compensated for the lack of practicing time. But it could not have been a completely convincing performance either, as the unfavorable reviews would seem to indicate. The situation was furthermore not helped by Clement's tendency to show off. He actually played a sonata of his own between the first and second movements of the concerto, and, in order to keep the audience's interest, he played it on only one string of a violin held upside down!

The audience reaction was lukewarm. Even if the performance had been well rehearsed and not interrupted by Clement's silly display of ego, the concerto still might have puzzled its original listeners. It was far longer and more complex than any previous violin concerto. The concertos of Mozart, for example, are modest in comparison. But Beethoven's work is expansive and symphonic. One critic, while praising Clement's performance, wrote of the concerto, "The musical argument is often quite loose, and the unending repetition of certain rather ordinary passages might easily become wearisome."

There was a second, somewhat more successful performance a year later, but in the following 30 years there were no more than a half dozen performances. It was not until another boy, Joseph Joachim, played the concerto in 1844 (at the age of 13) under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn that the work was fully appreciated. Henceforth it entered the standard repertoire of every concert violinist.

keynote

The critic's "unending repetition of certain rather ordinary passages" no doubt refers to the principal motive of the first movement. Heard quietly at the outset in solo timpani, this figure is the simplest possible musical gesture — five evenly played repetitions of the same note. The figure may be commonplace, but its subsequent development is hardly simplistic. The simplicity of the motive allows it to be used in a variety of contexts, lending an undercurrent of tension to this otherwise gentle movement. Beethoven unifies the movement by the pervasive use of this figure. There is scarcely a page of the score that does not contain this motive — whether blatantly orchestrated as at the recapitulation, tucked away within a melodic line as in the second theme, speeded up as in repeated sixteenth-note passages, or hidden in an accompanimental line.

The first movement creates inner tension in another manner. It makes us wait as long as possible before the violin enters. We must wait even longer before hearing the entire lyrical second theme played by the solo instrument: it comes directly after the cadenza, with a wonderfully peaceful feeling.

These undercurrents of tension subtly disturb the beautifully melodic, wonderfully lyrical, almost pastoral melodies of this movement. Despite these tensions, though, the movement moves at a leisurely pace. Notice, for example, how long the music remains on one harmony (the dominant) when the soloist first enters. It is almost as if Beethoven stops time for a moment, to let the violin slowly assert itself.

The slow movement is a dialogue between the solo instrument, which usually plays florid figures, and the orchestra, whose music is generally unadorned. At the end, the music turns suddenly almost operatic in what turns out to be a direct transition into the finale.

The finale opens with a straightforward rondo tune for the solo instrument. Beethoven instructs the soloist to play this melody solely on the G string, the lowest string on the violin, despite the tune's frequent rise into the registers of the A and D strings. The result, besides being difficult to perform well, is a special nasal timbre which lends this folk-like tune its special character. The movement presents contrasting ideas but returns inevitably to this main theme.

The ending is particularly clever. The music seems to have nothing more to say. It simplifies and seems about to die away, when the solo instrument returns for one final quiet suggestion of the main tune. Then, at the last possible moment, the full orchestra plays two loud, short concluding chords.

— Jonathan D. Kramer