

# **Program notes: Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 1**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN 1770-1827**

## **Piano Concerto no. 1 in C major, Op. 15**

1. Allegro con brio
2. Largo
3. Allegro scherzando

The C major concerto was actually composed after the B flat work known as no. 2, which was played by Bernard d'Ascoli on his previous appearance with the Brandon Hill Chamber Orchestra last April. The first performance took place in 1798 when Beethoven was beginning to establish a real reputation in Vienna, not only as a composer but also as a brilliant pianist.

As in all the early concertos, Beethoven begins with a simple theme which has the ability to be fully developed later in the movement, but here the surprise comes with the second subject which is in the unexpected key of E flat. After just four bars this second theme is interrupted by woodwind chords which hoist the music up a tone into F minor, and this process is repeated before the themes are skillfully amalgamated in the orchestral exposition. When the soloist eventually comes to this second subject there is no need for it to change key and it is allowed space to blossom into something altogether more shapely and memorable. This withholding of an important melody is a dramatic touch of great effectiveness, bringing as it does the solo part to the fore by the simplest and most dramatic means.

The slow movement is the longest in any Beethoven concerto, and is remarkable for its sustained mood of gentle reconciliation. At times the orchestra seems to threaten to become argumentative, but is at once subdued by the meditative piano, in a way which almost foreshadows the slow movement of the G major fourth concerto. There is a long and beautiful coda. The irrepressible rondo is centered on a theme derived from an uninteresting piano trio which Beethoven had written in 1791 and never intended to publish. The transformation of this undistinguished material into something irresistible is nothing short of miraculous.

After a contrasting theme with off-beat accents Beethoven enjoys his favorite device of suddenly depressing the tonality by a major third. Other episodes insert themselves between the statements of the rondo theme, and the argument is developed with increasing vigor until the pianoforte insists on a final cadenza, following which the work ends swiftly.

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