

Scored for: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Performance time: Approximately 26 minutes.

Although the orchestra at the premiere of Beethoven's First Symphony was sloppy and spiritless, critics were still able to discover "considerable art, novelty, and a wealth of ideas." Since the first performance in Vienna in 1800, the work has continued to charm audiences. In the first movement, *Adagio molto – allegro con brio*, sustained chords in the woodwinds and ambiguous wanderings by the strings clear like morning mist as the *adagio* introduction resolves into C major and a sunny *allegro*. The bright, ascending first subject is played by the violins. Oboe and flute emerge as soloists in the graceful second subject, which concludes with a plaintive duet between cellos and woodwinds. The development section seizes upon the rising dotted rhythm of the first subject, drawing it through a number of keys before descending to the recapitulation. Twenty-one bars of rousing C major dispel any final doubts about the home key.

The second violins introduce the elegant second movement, *Andante cantabile con moto*, with a tune that Haydn would have been proud to have written. Stately and sure-footed, it moves with the confidence of a courtly dance. Beethoven's voice is clearly audible across the ballroom, however, bringing the timpani quietly into play during a troubled middle section. Order is discreetly restored and the initial tune, with delightful counterpoint, brings the movement to a close.

The third movement, *Menuetto – allegro molto e vivace*, is a "minuet" that is not danceable. Beethoven would later label these movements *scherzo*. The violins rush in with an urgent ascending scale, creating an air of suppressed tension that finally breaks loose in the magical trio. The violins hover impatiently while the imperturbable winds repeat their pulsing chords. In true minuet style, the movement ends as it began, with excitement and speed.

Of the cheerful finale, *Adagio – allegro molto e vivace*, Hector Berlioz once complained, "This is not Beethoven." He should have said that it was not the Beethoven of the *Eroica*, but rather it is Beethoven the student of Haydn. The movement begins with a joke and continues in unflagging good humor. A c major scale hesitantly ascends during the introductory *adagio* section and, after several false starts, finally gathers courage and races into the *allegro*. A dance-like second subject enriches the musical material. It is tempting, though rather more picturesque than true, to interpret such wit and high spirits as Beethoven's symphonic farewell to the Eighteenth Century.