

1. Allegro ma non troppo
2. Larghetto
3. Allegro

Beethoven composed his only violin concerto in 1806 for Franz Clement, leader and conductor of the orchestra at the Theater an der Wien. The work was written in haste and apparently premiered under conditions that were less than ideal, as Clement, who appears to have been almost entirely unprepared, performed the solo part virtually at sight. It must have been a curious concert, since as well as the new and under-rehearsed concerto, Clement played a piece of his own composition, on one string with the violin held upside-down! Perhaps as a result of this unfortunate beginning the concerto found no real following during Beethoven's lifetime, entering the repertoire only after its rediscovery in 1844 by the young virtuoso Josef Joachim.

An orchestral introduction presents the main themes of the opening *allegro ma non troppo*, whose unprecedented opening on five repeated drum beats permeates the whole movement, in a variety of guises. The overall mood is not showy, but serene and reflective, at times seemingly overlaid with a deep sadness. A notable feature of the movement is the interplay of major and minor versions of the same idea, a treatment characteristic of Beethoven's works in D, from the Second to the Ninth Symphony. Here it imbues the music with a bitter-sweet flavor, allowing the composer to indulge in an unusual degree of lyric expansion without too much literal repetition. The movement is substantial (as long as an entire Mozart violin concerto) and includes a cadenza for the soloist towards the end.

The second movement is shorter, and although its design is essentially simple, is remarkable for its distinctive revision of the variation-set concept. Rather than stating the theme once and subjecting it to a series of increasingly complex revisions, as was the conventional case, the theme is repeated verbatim in each of the variations, shifting only in instrumental color, while the solo violin provides an ever more intricate commentary. The soloist never actually states the theme; instead, the final variation consists of an entirely new tune, stated once against the original theme, then itself varied as the original theme subsides.

The Rondo finale is based on one of the happiest tunes that Beethoven ever wrote, announced at the outset by the soloist, first low down on the G string, then in the highest compass, before the orchestra is allowed to take ownership. A number of other themes are interspersed among the reappearances of this main tune, most notably a minor key version which is passed to the bassoon, following which it is decorated by the soloist. The short cadenza is followed by a surprising deflection to the key of A flat major, the beginning of a long, jubilant coda founded on

transformations of the main theme. The violin gets one last, charming pianissimo solo just before the stirring final chords, which were no doubt calculated to earn Clement those bravos that Beethoven's pupil Czerny noted that he was greeted with at the end of his performance on that December evening in 1806.