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A historical study of Beethoven's Choral fantasia opus 80

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A HISTORICAL STUDY OF BEETHOVEN'S
CHORAL FANTASIA
OPUS 80

A Document
Presented To
The Faculty Of The School Of Music And Dance
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of The Requirements For The Degree
Master Of Arts

by
John C. Sutton
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ABSTRACT

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF BEETHOVEN'S *CHORAL FANTASIA*, OPUS 80

by John C. Sutton

This document is a historical study of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*. The work is examined in light of the sociological and political climate of Vienna in the first decade of the 19th century. Beethoven's biography is discussed as it relates to this period in Vienna's musical history with particular attention given to the year 1808, in which the *Choral Fantasia* was composed and first performed.

Emphasis is given to concert preparations, program design, and reports of the first performance. Conclusions are drawn from evidence surrounding this evening and the importance that historic documents suggest it played in the mind and life of the composer.

Finally, the work is studied in relationship to Beethoven's first and last compositional periods, and in relationship to the Ninth Symphony in particular. Comparisons will be drawn between melodic similarities, textual relationships, and style and form.

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a result of my research into the background and genesis of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*, op. 80, in preparation for performance at my graduate conducting recital as part of the Master of Arts degree in Choral Conducting at San José State University. The work was performed with the Sanctuary Choir of Valley Christian Center on May 12, 1995, in Dublin, California.

The composition is unique in its form, construction, and ideas. It is roughly twenty-five minutes long. The chorus is used in the concluding section prior to the final statements of the piano and orchestra. The work can be seen as a battle between Orchestra, Piano and Chorus . . . one in which the Piano wins out. Others have seen it as a conversation between the artist (represented by the piano) and the forces of music (represented by the orchestra and chorus) in a grand dialogue of sound. Criticism of the work is divided between choral devotees and pianists.

In talking to choral people about the work, many were unfamiliar with the piece other than to say, "the choir is kind of just tacked on at the end. It's really more like a piano concerto and not really worth the effort." In talking

to some pianists, the predominant feeling was that it was a piano composition with the choir added at the very end, getting in the way of the exciting finale.

In researching the piece, very little was found on the composition itself. Most scholars mentioned it in passing reference to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, it being a kind of sketch for the later work of his final compositional period. It was the rare discovery to find a periodical article, or even a paragraph dedicated to this interesting and pivotal work. Written for piano, orchestra, soloists, and chorus, the composition was to be the culminating work of a monumental evening of music that Beethoven had planned for many years.

This document studies the work as it grew out of Vienna's historical atmosphere. The social and political climates are considered along with the musical environment of the early 1800s in which it came to life. It is examined in light of Beethoven's plan and purpose for the *Akademie*, which he presented on December 22, 1808, this evening being an important turning point for him and his future, or so he hoped.

The *Choral Fantasia* is discussed in relation to the style, text and place in Beethoven's "so-called" second period. It is examined for the meaning that it held for the

composer. Also considered is the work's relationship and place in Beethoven's overall compositional life and periods. Particular attention is given to the relationship with the song *Gegenliebe* from Beethoven's first compositional period, and the Ninth Symphony, which follows in his final period of creative activity.

Conclusions are drawn regarding the work based on the letters of Beethoven and the hypothesis that is presented by Owen Jander in his research regarding the *Akademie* concert of December 22, 1808. On this night, Beethoven sought to do something that had never been done before in the history of music. He sought to create a dialogue between the composer, the artist, the musicians and the audience. This idea of musical dialogue will be critical in understanding and performing the piece. The writings of Edward Dent regarding this were of enormous value.

CHAPTER 1

BEETHOVEN'S VIENNA: 1790-1810

Social and Political Environment

When Beethoven entered the streets of Vienna for the first time in 1787, he entered the city of Haydn and Mozart, the musical capital of Europe. It was a burgeoning metropolis of roughly 270,000 people and one of the most impressive cities of its time in all of Europe.¹ By the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was the third largest city in Western Europe, trailing only London and Paris in population. Its cosmopolitan atmosphere and spirit made it an exciting destination for people from all walks of life as they gathered in the capital city of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Hungarians, Greeks, Turks, Poles, Bohemians, Czechs, Serbs, Moravians, Armenians, Slovenians, Silesians, and Croats all combined to form a unique ethnic tapestry with the native people of Vienna. This mixture of nationalities and backgrounds "imparted a richness and color

¹ H. C. Robbins Landon, *Mozart and Vienna* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1991), 60.

to Viennese culture and art."² Johann Pezzl, in his book *Sketch of Vienna*, describes the city as follows:

A conglomeration of all European nations. . . . A continuous bustle of people, horses, and wagons. . . . a numerous wealthy and brilliant nobility. . . . A very prosperous middle class. . . .³

This prosperous middle class slowly assumed a leading role in the development and support of the arts as the "transition from the age of feudalism to that of the bourgeoisie passed off smoothly . . . being helped in doing so by the aristocracy's extensive support."⁴

Much of the change and transition that was in process was a result of the revolutions that were occurring at this time. In the areas of science and industry, an explosion of technology and progress was taking place. This period of history saw the development of the spinning jenny (1767), the power loom (1785), the cotton gin (1793), and other important industrial evolutions. This progress allowed for the replacement of hand-made goods with goods made by factories and their workers.

² Alice M. Hanson, *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9.

³ Landon, 60.

⁴ Stanley Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), s.v. "Vienna, 4: 1740-1830," by Theophil Antonicek.

During this period of time, the philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), had been prominent in shaping public thought and discourse with his views on art and beauty. He proposed specific ideas in the matters of music, standards of form and concept, and the origin of genius. Many, however, opposed him. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), a former student of Kant's, was influential in pointing philosophical thought toward the growing desire to champion the individual. He believed in emotional involvement and engagement with music and contemplated the transcendent power of music itself, regardless of form or function. No one embodied this idea of emotional involvement to music, this surrender to the emotional experience, more than Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-98). In his pivotal work, *Phantasien über die Kunst*, he wrote:

Music is the breath of the spiritual in its highest form, its finest manifestation, the invisible stream as it were from which the soul draws sustenance for its deepest dreams. Music engulfs the human spirit. It means both everything and nothing. It is a finer and perhaps subtler medium than language. The spirit can no longer use it as a vehicle, as a means to an end, for it is substance itself and this is why it lives and moves in its own enchanted realm.⁵

Wackenroder exemplifies the changing spirit of philosophical thought as the reformation of change continued.

⁵ Peter le Huray and James Day, ed, *Music and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 250, citing Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Phantasien über die Kunst*.

On the political front, the French Revolution had begun in 1789 and would continue until 1794, only to be followed by the dictatorship of Napoleon and his later occupation of Vienna in 1815. This impacted the changes taking place in other areas of Viennese thought and life and underscored their significance and purpose. This fight of the people came on the heels of the American Revolution (1776), which reinforced the growing desire for democracy and the will to abandon the ancient systems of aristocracy and feudalism.

Beethoven's works have often been associated with the French Revolution, his music said to contain the "revolutionary spirit" of the people.⁶ His life and work helped to break the mold of the "classical composer" and pave the way for the next generation. In speaking of the French Revolution, Robert Garretson in his book *Choral Music: History, Style and Performance Practice* describes its effect on composers and their music:

Previously, composers had for many centuries worked under the patronage of either the Church or princely courts. Under this system, composers generally wrote music to please their patrons. They were careful not to let their music become too personal in nature. With the breakdown of the patronage system, composers were free to express themselves individually. They were no longer inhibited or restricted by a patron's demands, and were able to please their equals--the general public. With their greater freedom, composers sought out new and unique means of expression. This led to a

⁶ Beate Angelika Kraus, "Beethoven and the Revolution: the view of the French musical press," in *Music and the French Revolution* ed. Malcolm Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 310.

greater display of emotion, heretofore largely restrained.⁷

In this new found environment, Beethoven was to find a neoteric audience, different from Mozart's or Haydn's. The French Revolution opened the door to the middle class to discover music and to move towards independence in thought, economics, and personal freedom.

Helping to bring this about, Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) initiated reforms to replace the feudal system and to provide incentives for farmers to buy their own land and property. These reforms ultimately led to the introduction of highly profitable silk textiles, sugar refining, porcelain manufacturing, and other industries into Vienna. This new middle class of citizenry brought new taxes into the imperial treasury as well as a spirit of entrepreneurship into the capital. The working classes were now motivated and had a legitimate chance to succeed. With these reforms, there was new opportunity for personal economic freedom, whereas before their efforts had always benefitted the aristocracy.

For Beethoven and his contemporaries, this new class of citizens would play an important role in the development and support of the arts, particularly music, as the private

⁷ Robert L. Garretson, *Choral Music: History, Style and Performance Practice* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 103.

music room of the aristocracy gave way to the public concert hall and musical theater. Alfred Einstein writes of this revolution in his book *Music in the Romantic Era* and states that:

This revolution--and it was precisely that--corresponds closely to the . . . leveling of classes, the abolition of aristocratic prerogatives, the advance of the lowest classes of society, the creation of the *citoyen*. The musical amateur gave way to the *citoyen* of the concert hall.⁸

In addition to the new opportunities being afforded the middle class in economics, educational opportunities were also being offered to them as never before. In *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna*, Alice Hansen writes that "by 1774, Maria Theresa had established over five hundred new primary schools."⁹ In addition to these schools, advanced and specialized learning was available to the sons of noblemen for military and diplomatic training, medical training, and the study of foreign languages. Hansen also notes that along with these, "the University made Vienna a center for learning and a gathering place for some of the empire's most gifted students."¹⁰

⁸ Alfred Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947), 14.

⁹ Hansen, 5.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In the midst of this enlightenment and new-found beginning for the middle class, however, the grim realities of life in the eighteenth century continued unabated. For most people in Vienna, life was difficult and harsh. The average citizen of Vienna found the day-in and day-out of life to be an ongoing struggle. The infant mortality rate was high and expectancy of a long life was rare. For an average Viennese male the life expectancy was between 36-40 years old. For a woman, 41-46 years.¹¹ By these figures, Beethoven would have been considered quite an old man dying at the age of fifty-six. And the deaths of Mozart and Schubert at thirty-five and thirty-two respectively seem closer to normal than perhaps the tragic status "they died young" that has usually been assigned to them.

Much of this can be traced to the impure drinking water that served much of Vienna. The city's water supply was contaminated by the routine floods of the Danube River and the general lack of public sanitation.¹² Other factors of the early mortality rate include chronic illnesses and disease that went undetected or untreated. For some, the treatment by the local physician hastened their arrival in a Viennese cemetery. Others were taken by the periodic

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Ibid., 13.

epidemics that would sweep the city with such outbreaks as smallpox, cholera, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, and other types of diseases. Yet, in spite of these grim realities of life, music flourished in this city as in no other.

Musical Life and Culture

"One can never enter any fashionable house or society without hearing a duet, a trio, a finale from one of the . . . operas being sung or rendered on the keyboard. Even shopkeepers and cellar-hands whistle arias from the *Barber* and *Cosa rara* wherever you go" ¹³

These descriptions by Johann Pezzl help to paint a very visual picture of the musical scene of Vienna, and of the fact that both the aristocracy and the average citizen of Vienna had access to and knowledge of contemporary musical happenings at this time.

Vienna was known far and wide as the music capital of Europe. It was a place of great musical importance, and to truly succeed as a musician, one had to succeed in Vienna. Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) described it this way in 1822:

And so it came that Vienna was established as the Areopagus where alone musical art was to be judged, where artists were to stand before the judgment-seat, where laurels were to be given or withheld, where verdicts were to be delivered and reputations made; and Vienna, although blinded now and then by the dazzle of

¹³ Landon, 137.

false glitter, or led astray by fashion's fancies, deserved its honours.¹⁴

Vienna was able to support five theaters located throughout the city¹⁵ (see Appendix 1). These theaters were important to Viennese society, functioning as a backdrop for social contacts, political pursuits, and business ventures. It was a reason to gather in an environment of music and drama. Women paraded the latest fashions while courtesans attracted new lovers.¹⁶ In fact, in Viennese society at this time, the theater was the only place where crowds were permitted to assemble lawfully.¹⁷ The events at the theater (both inside and outside) were the topic of the next day's conversations, discussions, and rumors.

Of the five theaters in Vienna, the *Theater an der Wien* was the largest, having a capacity for 2,200 people.¹⁸ It and the other theaters of the city presented the favorite works of Viennese audiences and produced a steady stream of entertainment that featured both musical and theatrical

¹⁴ Hanson, 82.

¹⁵ Ibid., 61.

¹⁶ Ibid., 70.

¹⁷ It was permitted for people to gather for religious or state ceremonies. Otherwise, public gatherings were against the law.

¹⁸ The Theater an der Wien accommodated 700 in seats with room in the standing galleries for up to 1,500 people.

offerings, with opera being the overwhelming favorite. Italian and French opera was the latest craze, much to the disappointment of foreign visitors who typically expected to hear something German on their visit in Vienna. Anton Schindler (1795-1864), Beethoven's biographer, used the words "intoxication," "frenzy," and "fanaticism" to describe the city's reception to the operas imported from France and Italy.¹⁹ Viennese theaters offered the best that Europe had to offer in terms of musical talent and stage productions.

Touring virtuosi were sure to pay a visit to Viennese audiences. Artists like the violinist George Bridgewater from England, the horn virtuoso Johann Wenzel Stich (Punto), and the pianists Wölffl and Cramer were just a few of the many who stopped in Vienna on their concert tours of Europe. These visits by the musical giants of Europe helped to expand the repertoire of their particular instrument as well as treated the audiences of Vienna to first-class concert recitals.

For Beethoven and other musicians in the city, the four main opportunities for employment were (1) to work for the state or a private institution,²⁰ (2) to give public and

¹⁹ Hanson, 66.

²⁰ This might include playing for a theater, a church, military band or the like, or being employed in a private orchestra by one of the city's many noblemen or counts.

private concert performances, (3) to compose music for sale, or (4) to teach. As with most opportunities, there were advantages and disadvantages to each endeavor as the Viennese musician sought to earn a living in a very competitive musical city.

In the area of composition, Vienna was a composer's paradise. One could choose from a variety of forms and compositional styles in which to write as all types and genres of music flourished in the city. From the private salon to the music stage in the theater, the musical opportunities in Vienna were boundless. Beethoven's work alone illustrates this point as he wrote in the popular and accessible genres of his day, composing for orchestra, solo instruments with orchestra, wind band, chamber music for strings, chamber music for winds and strings, chamber music with piano, piano sonatas and shorter piano forms, four-hand piano works, dances, opera, incidental music, ballets, oratorio, choral works, solo voice pieces with orchestra, canons, miscellaneous pieces, and songs. Vienna was a composer's paradise.

With all of this musical activity in the city, it comes as no surprise that Vienna became a haven for professional music copyists as well as music publishers and makers of instruments. Many came and established musical businesses

and enterprises, serving the musicians and musical institutions of this great city, the musical capital of Europe.

CHAPTER 2

BEETHOVEN'S PLACE IN THE MUSICAL LIFE OF VIENNA

Acceptance by Viennese Audiences

Beethoven earned unusual respect and fame *during* his lifetime as his work became known throughout Western Europe and beyond. It wasn't long after his arrival that Vienna became known as the city of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. In *The Beethoven Compendium*, Anne-Louise Coldicott writes that "Beethoven's genius was widely recognized during his lifetime . . . with his early music [making] an immediate impact, particularly on the young."¹ Thayer, in his monumental biography of Beethoven, wrote that among Beethoven's contemporaries, "He was always marveled at and respected as an extraordinary being and his greatness was suspected even by those who did not understand him" ²

¹ Anne-Louise Coldicott, "Reception: Contemporary Assessments," in *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* ed. Barry Cooper (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 292.

² Elliot Forbes, ed. *Thayer's Life of Beethoven* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 444-45.

His fame and popularity are borne out time and time again by contemporary accounts as Beethoven grew to become a giant among the musical class of Vienna. He first became known by his incredible piano playing³ and his ability to improvise.⁴ He so pushed the limits of the instrument that "he extended the piano's technical potential, constantly [furnishing] new stimuli for his other works."⁵ Beethoven was a frequent guest in the homes and salons of the aristocracy as he participated in concerts and musical soirees. In these guest appearances, the audience's interest was not so much in Beethoven's compositions as it was in his fiery piano performances. Denis McCaldin writes in *The Beethoven Reader* that "For them, Beethoven was of interest less as a composer than as a brilliant concert artist, a virtuoso pianist and improviser; though there was consequently a demand for his instrumental music,"⁶ Beethoven's entrance into the musical life of Vienna was through his piano skill and artistry. It was this popularity that opened the door for Viennese audiences to

³ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* s.v. "Vienna, 4: 1740-1830," by Theophil Antonicek, 722.

⁴ Barry Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 14.

⁵ *The New Grove* s.v. "Vienna," by Theophil Antonicek, 722.

⁶ Denis McCaldin, "The Choral Music," in *The Beethoven Reader*, ed. Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 387.

accept, or at least develop a curiosity regarding his compositions. His works were performed in the theaters and concert halls throughout Vienna, and he was a regular participant in the famous charity concerts given for the poor of the city.⁷ These benefits were often arranged by the Court Councilor Joseph Hartl "who frequently bargained with musicians for their services at the fund-raisers for the poor of the theater in return for a concert of their own."⁸

While Beethoven extended the technical resources of the nineteenth-century piano, at the same time he also challenged the ability of the Viennese public in their attempt to understand his compositions. Although his first compositions won almost immediate acceptance and fame, his later works took longer to gain acceptance and musical understanding by the Viennese public. His music began to push and challenge the compositional forms he had inherited. But even Beethoven's critics, who chastised him for his wealth of ideas, with their lack of brevity and their technical difficulties, somehow knew even then that they

⁷ Mary Sue Morrow, *Concert Life in Haydn's Vienna: Aspects of a Developing Musical and Social Institution* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1989), 127.

⁸ Ibid., 71.

were being afforded the opportunity to hear music that had "staying power."

By the year 1800, only eight years after arriving in Vienna, Beethoven was hearing his works performed at major public concerts.⁹ On April 2, 1800, he gave his first benefit concert in Vienna. This evening of music included the premieres of his Symphony No. 1 in C Major, op. 21, the Septet in Eb Major, op. 20, for four strings and three wind instruments, plus a performance of his Piano Concerto (No. 1?). The evening also included works by Haydn and Mozart (see Appendix 2). It would be a while longer before Beethoven would have the confidence and drawing power with Viennese audiences to sustain a successful evening of music with his compositions alone. This contemporary assessment by Dr. Franz Gerhard Wegeler, a close friend of the composer, gives us some further insight into the reception that Beethoven's music received from the Viennese public.

The first performances of [Beethoven's] major works were usually given before receptive, informal gatherings of musicians and music-lovers. Seemingly neither critics nor the general public were entirely enthusiastic about the large orchestral works, but reports from as far afield as Leipzig, Berlin, Mannheim and Prague over the next few years give an indication that they were widely performed, with only *Christus am Oelberge*, the Triple Concerto and *Fidelio* being consistently criticized. The reviewer of the Second

⁹ This was Beethoven's second trip to Vienna, one that would result in him establishing the Austrian capital as his permanent home. He first travelled to Vienna in 1787, but the stay was for only two weeks due to the deteriorating health of his mother.

Symphony in the AMZ [*Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*] complained of its length and other aspects, but ended his report: "However, all of that is so outweighed by the powerful, fiery spirit alive in this colossal product, by the wealth of new ideas and by their almost entirely original treatment, as well as by the profundity of artistic learnedness, that one can prophesy for this work that it will endure and will always be heard with renewed pleasure long after a thousand fashionable ditties now being celebrated have been buried."¹⁰

His Role and Influence

Although it is without question that Beethoven came to the attention of Vienna's concert-going public for his powerful and passionate virtuosity on the piano, it was his love of composing that was his life-long driving force. He had a distinctly romantic view of the compositional process, linking him much more with the philosophers Herder and Wackenroder than with Kant. As early as 1783, he characterized the compositional process in terms that would later be played out in the *Choral Fantasia*: "My muse in hours of sacred inspiration has often whispered to me: 'Make the attempt, just put down on paper the harmonies of your soul!' . . . My muse insisted--I obeyed and I composed."¹¹ At some point, Beethoven came to a crucial

¹⁰ Coldicott, "Reception: Contemporary Assessments," *The Beethoven Compendium*, 293.

¹¹ Emily Anderson, ed., *The Letters of Beethoven* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1961), 1410.

decision regarding his compositions and creative direction. It was to shape his life and become the pathway from which he would never waver.

On one level, he regarded composition as necessary for earning a living, but the prime motivation lay much deeper. It seems that from an early age he felt an urge to compose, and this urge remained with him throughout his lifeHe [referred] to his [compositional] talent commanding him, or more poetically to sacrificing himself to art or to the heavenly Muses. His desire to achieve greatness or even immortality through his compositions also played its part in stimulating his creative drive, and in addition he felt a certain sense of mission to be accomplished.¹²

This need and drive was further intensified by Beethoven's growing loss of hearing. In 1802, we read in his own words his emotional pain and concern regarding this infirmity as he communicated his feelings in the famous *Heiligenstadt Testament*. Beginning sometime around 1797, his hearing loss began and grew steadily worse year by year. This condition affected his social interaction and sense of personal identity, and also his ability to perform and maintain his reputation as a virtuoso pianist. His loss of hearing placed a greater need and burden on him to succeed as a composer as he quickly deteriorated in his ability to perform and work with orchestras.

This driving force and the need to release his inner musical promptings often placed Beethoven at odds with the

¹² Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process*, 19.

conventional concert-going public. But his unique approach to composition was also what made him so intriguing to that very same public. They didn't quite understand him or always agree with him. Yet, somehow they knew he possessed a special talent, that what they were hearing had the touch of greatness upon it. Mary Sue Morrow summarizes this balancing act that the people of Vienna faced in her book *Concert Life in Haydn's Vienna*:

With regard to the acceptance of his works, [Beethoven] enjoyed an immediate and steady popularity on concert programs from the time of his arrival through 1810. Part of any problems faced by works like his Symphony No. 3 had to do with the fact that they did not fit into the existing concert format: Their length and difficulty were at odds with the time allotted to them by custom on both the programs and in rehearsals. They simply demanded a structure that was not yet in existence; that they were nonetheless popular points to the willingness of the Viennese to accept and assimilate new ideas and styles.¹³

Philip Downs observed in *Classical Music* that "for many in the nineteenth century, Beethoven was revered as the man who freed music from the tyranny of sonata form and formalistic thinking."¹⁴ He was seen as a liberator of music as he himself was liberated from the typical aspects of composition.¹⁵ Indeed, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and

¹³ Morrow, 236.

¹⁴ Philip G. Downs, *Classical Music: The Era of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 579.

all those who would follow in Beethoven's compositional footsteps would pay tribute to him again and again.

Not only in these terms, but even in terms of the audience itself, Beethoven himself expressed these sentiments. In a letter to Carl Friedrich Peters in 1822, Beethoven writes that "what people demand does not always suit the wishes of the composer."¹⁵ This freedom from typical forms and thinking, combined with Beethoven's need to conquer new musical horizons, was to play a part in his shaping of the composition that became the *Choral Fantasia*, op. 80.

¹⁵ Up to this point, most music had been fairly purposeful and functional in its reason for being composed. Beethoven opened the door to the Romantic Era and for music to speak on its own terms in its own way.

¹⁶ Emily Anderson, ed., *The Letters of Beethoven* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1961), 980.

CHAPTER 3

DECEMBER 22, 1808

Genesis and Background

As early as 1803, Beethoven had begun to sketch ideas for compositions that would ultimately take roughly five years to work out before being presented in final form.¹ This was typical of his compositional process.

As the sketchbooks frequently indicate, there was often a long period between Beethoven's initial conception of a work and its completion. In addition, experiments begun on one piece often appear to be consolidated in a second which builds upon the experience of the first.²

Beethoven's initial plan was to compose a great piece that would be the crowning touch to his long awaited musical *Akademie*. These evenings of music were set up by individual performers who assumed all of the liabilities and received any profit that was made. This evening, in the planning stages for at least several years, was a very important night for Beethoven. He anticipated a great concert in which he would present his original compositions, and his

¹ Owen Jander, "Beethoven's Akademie of December 22, 1808," *Beethoven in Vienna: The Second Style Period, 1803-1812* (Historical Keyboard Society of Wisconsin 1994): 12.

² McCaldin, "The Choral Music," in *The Beethoven Reader*, 388n.

alone. There would be no Haydn or Mozart on the program, only Beethoven! It would be an evening of premieres for his new compositions and would span the range from sacred to secular, including symphonic works, choral compositions, arias, and of course feature something spectacular for the piano. This five-year span of working out his ideas is consistent with Beethoven's "overriding desire [to] not just . . . create music, but to create music of the highest artistic worth. . . . [His] sketches reveal a constant striving for perfection--a struggle to try and reach something unattainable. . . ." ³

Beethoven had presented an earlier benefit concert on April 5, 1803, in which he premiered his Symphony No. 2 in D Major, op. 36, the Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, op. 37, and his oratorio, *Christus am Oelberge*, op. 85. The growing confidence of the composer is related by Thayer in his *Life of Beethoven*.

Beethoven must have felt no small confidence in the power of his name to awaken the curiosity and interest of the musical public, for according to the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, he doubled the prices of the first chairs, tripled those of the reserved and demanded 12 ducats (instead of 4 florins) for each box. ⁴

³ Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process*, 21.

⁴ Forbes, ed., *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, 329 (emphasis is mine).

The bravado and courage paid off as his concert on this occasion was a financial success rewarding him with 1,800 florins.

Beethoven's Dream and Intent

Was there more to this evening of December 22, 1808, than just a "benefit concert for Herr Beethoven?" Owen Jander, in his article *Beethoven's Akademie of December 22, 1808*, details the deliberate care that had gone into this program. This concert had been in the planning for several years and included compositions that had their conception years earlier.⁵ For Beethoven, there seemed to be a lot at stake on this night. At the very least, he had invested a great deal of his life and energy into the compositions for this one *akademie*. He surely had high expectations for the music. Did he have high hopes as well for the results that this evening would bring to him and his career? With the problem of his increasing deafness and his ability to perform with others in doubt, was this evening to be a cornerstone for his future career, not as a performer, but as a composer? Was much of his future riding on this one

⁵ Jander, "Beethoven's Akademie of December 22, 1808," 16. Jander goes all the way to link this evening to the year 1802 and Beethoven's 'Heiligenstadt Testament' crisis. He suggests that Beethoven's words, "It seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt within me," from the 'Testament' were in hopes of being fulfilled on this night.

evening? Circumstances and evidence lead us to conclude that the *Akademie* of 1808 was of great significance to Beethoven for these reasons and perhaps one more.

It is widely known that Beethoven at times expressed his frustration with the Viennese audiences and their reception to his music, as well as his financial lot and standing in Vienna's musical community. At one time or another, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven all expressed displeasure with the reception they received in Europe's musical capital.⁶ Were these just the typical comments that most composers share at one time or another (the suffering artist who is never understood by the public they wish to serve) or were the statements accurate portrayals of Beethoven's inner feelings?

There is strong evidence to support that he indeed planned to leave Vienna and in fact was already making concrete plans to do so. In correspondence between the Fall of 1808 and early 1809, Beethoven received *and accepted* a position offered him by the newly appointed King of Westphalia.⁷ In a letter to Breitkopf & Härtel written

⁶ Morrow, 233-36.

⁷ The fact that this is Napoleon Bonaparte's youngest brother Jerome is the weak link in this line of reasoning. However, the written evidence that Beethoven leaves with us as to his *having accepted* the position, forces us to look at this possibility seriously.

from Vienna on January 7, 1809, Beethoven confirmed his intention to leave Vienna.

At last owing to intrigues and cabals and meannesses of all kinds I am compelled to leave my German fatherland which is still in its way unique. For I have accepted an offer from His Royal Majesty of Westphalia to settle there as Kapellmeister at a yearly salary of 600 gold ducats--I have just sent off by today's post my assurance that I will go, and am only awaiting my certificate of appointment; whereupon I shall make my preparations for the journey,

This invitation from Jerome Bonaparte had come in the Fall of 1808. Thayer calls it "one of the most singular events in Beethoven's life."⁹ In any event, Beethoven refers to the offer in two letters written in November of that same year to Count Franz von Oppersdorff and to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein.¹⁰ Whether Beethoven was sincere in his remarks or whether he was dropping this information in an effort to rally support for his artistic work, we cannot be certain. Whichever line of thinking one decides to embrace, the evidence suggests that this evening of music carried the utmost importance to Beethoven. Perhaps this evening was Beethoven's grand farewell--his personal "good-bye and good riddance to Vienna." There is the possibility that he wished to grant his audience another opportunity to embrace

⁸ Anderson, 211.

⁹ Forbes, 442.

¹⁰ Anderson, 199-200. Both of these men would have had close contact with the musical patrons and aristocracy of Vienna.

his work. Whatever the ultimate motive was, Thayer is correct in his analysis that the opportunity posed by Jerome Bonaparte moved this evening from a benefit concert for Beethoven and the usual hopes for success, to something much greater.¹¹

The Evening's Program

In the Akademie of 1808, Beethoven planned to present the premieres of the Symphony No. 6 in F Major, op. 68 (*Pastorale*), the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, op. 58, the Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, op. 67, and performances of the aria *Ah! perfido*, the Gloria and Sanctus movements from the Mass in C Major, op. 86, and a Piano Fantasia that Beethoven planned to improvise that night in the custom of the Viennese tradition.¹² As the concert drew near, Beethoven conceived the idea of an additional piece for the program. This was an idea that he had toyed with for quite some time, that of putting together a work utilizing the orchestra and chorus and featuring his improvisational skill at the pianoforte. This would serve as a grand finale which

¹¹ Beethoven was persuaded to remain in Vienna for the remainder of his life due to the intervention of the Archduke Rudolph, the Prince Lobkowitz, and the Prince Ferdinand Kinsky, and their life-time annuity of four-thousand florins.

¹² This was later to be written out and published as Fantasia, op. 77.

would feature all of the forces for the evening's concert, unifying them in a final tapestry of sound and bringing the evening to an exciting conclusion.

Other evidence that the evening had been long in the planning and had special significance for Beethoven is apparent upon closer examination of the program itself.

Again, Owen Jander notes that:

The original program . . . employed a clearly unified tonal plan: it was a "concert in C Major" with the *Pastorale* Symphony in F Major (the subdominant key), the piano concerto in G major (the dominant key), and the C Minor symphony beginning in the minor mode but then very importantly concluding in the proud key of C Major.¹³

This would finally be the evening that Beethoven had long awaited; an evening planned so masterfully that it would touch the audience in a way that no composer had yet achieved. The program consisted only of his works. There was no Mozart. There was no Haydn. Only Beethoven's works would be performed this evening. With this concert, he would stand alone as artist and for him, more importantly, as composer. Finally, he hoped he could say that he had made his way in Vienna, the city of music. In this atmosphere of creativity, hope and need, the *Choral Fantasia*, op. 80, was created.

¹³ Jander, "Beethoven's Akademie of December 22, 1808," 12.

Written rapidly in the early weeks of December, 1808, Beethoven drew upon an earlier melody that he had written sometime in 1794-95. Set to a text by Gottfried August Bürger, this composition was published posthumously as the double-song, *Seufzer eines Ungeliebten; Gegenliebe* (WoO 118). Using the melody from the *Gegenliebe* section, Beethoven went to work, and by the day of the concert the parts were nearly ready to perform.¹⁴

Historical Accounts of the Evening and First Performance

Owen Jander describes the evening of December 22, 1808, as "the most amazing concert in the history of Western music."¹⁵ The concert which had begun at half-past six lasted over four hours. The accounts of the evening from all sources are mixed at best, as Beethoven encountered difficulties on a number of issues ranging from the temperature in the theater, the length of the evening, to a disgruntled orchestra that refused to work with him.

The date for the event itself served to be problematic as Beethoven's concert conflicted with another important

¹⁴ Seyfried relates that for the rehearsal, the voice-parts were wet as usual. See Forbes, ed., 448. An additional comment made concerning the orchestral parts "on which the ink was still wet," is found in *Ludwig van Beethoven*, Joseph Schmidt-Görg and Hans Schmidt, eds, (Hamburg: Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft MBH, 1970), 242.

¹⁵ Jander, "Beethoven's Akademie of December 22, 1808," 12.

concert in Vienna the very same evening. Haydn's *Ritorno di Tobia* was performed at a charity concert for the Widows and Orphans Fund at another theater in the city.¹⁶ Its impact on Beethoven's concert is unknown, but a statement by Reichardt alludes to the effect on the performing forces for the evening: "Singers and orchestra were composed of heterogeneous elements."¹⁷

This suggests that the normal "house" orchestra that Beethoven would have used from the Theater an der Wien was unavailable and that he was forced to use a "pick-up" group that night, not the normal group of players who would be used to rehearsing and playing together.¹⁸ In any event, there were problems from the start. The concert featured premieres of *four* major works, and the orchestra, if not sight-reading, would at the very least be unfamiliar with

¹⁶ These concerts were a traditional musical and social event for the Viennese public. It is not unlikely that the effects of this "competing concert" could have been very great. In any event, *Thayers Life of Beethoven*, (Forbes, ed.), relates that "Beethoven was very angry," 450.

¹⁷ Forbes, 448 (emphasis is mine).

¹⁸ In his article "The Orchestra in Beethoven's Vienna," *Early Music* 16 (February 1988): 5, Clive Brown discusses the importance of dilettanti in the musical life of Vienna. These amateur musicians would accompany visiting concert artists and participate in orchestral ventures when needed. It is a strong possibility that some of these musicians were a part of the orchestra that night.

the compositions. That Beethoven was not known for his rehearsal technique would be a classic understatement.

Throughout the early 1800s there are numerous citations of Beethoven's problems or run-ins with orchestras that he engaged or worked with. Marek discusses this in his book, *Beethoven: Biography of a Genius*. Relating a specific incident, he writes:

At a previous concert--the charity concert of November 15 [1808]--Beethoven had already run into trouble with the orchestra. His behavior was hardly diplomatic; possibly too his beat was not the simplest to follow. The orchestra had insisted that he should not conduct. At the rehearsal, then, he had to remain in an anteroom, impatiently pacing up and down. Later the quarrel was smoothed over and Beethoven conducted the performance, but [speaking of the December 22 group] it was not a friendly orchestra he now faced and which was expected to grapple with the new music.¹⁹

Earlier incidents confirm that this was not an unusual occurrence and that Beethoven's emotional involvement with the music sometimes made him less than easy for an orchestra to follow accurately.²⁰

In any event, the *Choral Fantasia* came at the conclusion of a long, cold evening and fell on the ears of a weary audience who had already been through the premiers of

¹⁹ George R. Marek, *Beethoven: Biography of a Genius* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969), 386.

²⁰ Anne-Louise Coldicott, "Beethoven as an Individual," in *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* ed. Barry Cooper (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 134.

three new works.²¹ There was little for their ears to find that was familiar. With the lack of rehearsal time, Beethoven's fractured relationship and reputation with the orchestra, and their own questionable make-up, it is not surprising that the premiere of the *Choral Fantasia* did not go well.

Every contemporary account speaks of a break-down of some kind. Exactly who was at fault and what the specific cause was, we will probably never know. When the evening was concluded the orchestra had been humiliated and the concert was not spoken of with any adjectives we can perceive as successful. Thayer quotes several accounts concerning the first performance. Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried wrote:

When the master brought out his orchestral Fantasia with choruses, he arranged with me at the somewhat hurried rehearsal, with wet voice-parts as usual, that the second variation should be played without the repeat. In the evening, however, absorbed in his creation, he forgot all about the instructions which he had given, repeated the first part while the orchestra accompanied the second, which sounded not altogether edifying. A trifle too late, the Concertmaster, Unrath, noticed the mistake, looked in surprise at his lost companions, stopped playing and called out dryly: "Again!" A little displeased, the violinist Anton Wranitsky asked "With repeats?" "Yes," came the answer, and now the thing went straight as a string.²²

²¹ Morrow points out that the length of this evening was excessive from that which Viennese audiences were accustomed. She cites several instances that seem to suggest a typical concert lasting from two, to two-and-a-half hours. See 144-47.

²² Forbes, 448-49.

Seyfried went on to relate:

At first he could not understand that he had in a manner humiliated the musicians. He thought it was a duty to correct an error that had been made and that the audience was entitled to hear everything properly played, for its money. But he readily and heartily begged the pardon of the orchestra for the humiliation to which he had subjected it, and was honest to spread the story himself and assume all responsibility for his own absence of mind.²³

Other accounts of the evening relate similar stories. A reviewer from the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* commented on the new work as follows:

The wind-instruments varied the theme which Beethoven had previously played on the pianoforte. The turn came to the oboes. The clarinets, if I am not mistaken, make a mistake in the count and enter at once. A curious mixture of tones results. Beethoven jumps up, tries to silence the clarinets, but does not succeed until he has called out quite loudly and rather ill-temperedly: "Stop, stop! That will not do! Again-again!"²⁴

Carl Czerny's recollection of the evening was equally dramatic. "In the Pianoforte Fantasia with chorus he called out at the mistake: 'Wrong, badly played, wrong, again!' Several musicians wanted to go away."²⁵ Johann Emanuel Dolezalek states that "he jumped up, ran to the desks and pointed out the place."²⁶ Ignaz Moscheles gives us the most

²³ Ibid., 449.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

musically specific account of the performance breakdown,
recalling:

I remember having been present at the performance in question, seated in a corner of the gallery, in the Theater-an-der-Wein. During the last movement of the Fantasia I perceived that, like a run-away carriage going down-hill, an overturn was inevitable. Almost immediately after it was, that I saw Beethoven give the signal for stopping. His voice was not heard; but he had probably given directions where to begin again, and after a moment's respectful silence on the part of the audience, the orchestra recommenced and the performance proceeded without further mistakes or stoppage. To those who are acquainted with the work, it may be interesting to know the precise point at which the mistake occurred. It was in the passage where for several²⁷ pages every three bars make up a triple rhythm.

It was a night that did not go well to say the least. The high hopes that Beethoven had place in this evening were never realized. The financial return for the benefit is not reported. Thayer cites a directive from Prince Esterhazy nearly a month following the concert that Beethoven was to be paid one hundred gulden "in support of his musical akademie."²⁸ Whether this sum is the actual income earned by Beethoven on that night or whether it is the act of a supportive patron is not clear. Whatever the financial aspects of the evening were, one thing is clear; musically, it was a very disappointing evening for Beethoven. It was a

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

far cry from what he had worked for and dreamed of as he presented his new works and musical ideas to the Viennese public, or, as he bade them farewell. Either way, it was one of the last times that the people of Vienna would have the opportunity to hear him play the piano in a public concert.²⁹

²⁹ F. E. Kirby, "Beethoven and the 'Geselliges Lied,'" *Music and Letters* 47 (April 1966): 122.

CHAPTER 4

CHORAL FANTASIA, OPUS 80

The Composition: Structure and Form

Fantasia: A term adopted in the Renaissance for an instrumental composition whose form and invention spring solely from the fantasy and skill of the author who created it.¹

Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*, Op. 80 was a fulfillment of the existing definition of a fantasia at the time, but like so many of his other compositions, he went beyond the definition, breaking the mold and creating something entirely new. As this piece was to be the "grand finale" of the concert, Beethoven used forces already hired for the evening's other pieces and wrote the *Choral Fantasia*, not just for a solo instrument, but for every singer and instrumentalist who had been engaged. Tables 1 and 2 show the scoring intended for the *Choral Fantasia* along with the compositional structure, tempo indications, and key relationships.

¹ Stanley Sadie, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), s.v. "Fantasia," by Christopher D. S. Field.

TABLE 1
SCORING FOR THE *CHORAL FANTASIA, OPUS 80*

<u>Orchestra</u> ²		<u>Choral Forces</u>
Strings	6, 6, 4, 3, 3	SATB Choir
Flute	2	
Oboe	2	<u>Solo Voices</u>
Clarinet	2	SSATTB
Bassoon	2	
Horn	2	
Trumpet	2	<u>Solo Piano</u>
Timpani	1	Beethoven

² This corresponds to the size of the orchestra that was maintained at the Theater an der Wien during the year 1808. Morrow states in *Concert Life in Haydn's Vienna* that "Vienna had no official standing orchestra during the eighteenth century except for those associated with the theaters. Since they may have provided the players for concerts given in the theaters their size and composition can give us an idea of the strength of the average concert ensemble." See 174-86 for additional comments.

TABLE 2.

THE COMPOSITIONAL STRUCTURE
TEMPO INDICATIONS, MEASURES, AND KEY RELATIONSHIPS OF THE
CHORAL FANTASIA, OPUS 80.

Tempo Indications	Measures	Key Relationships
<i>Adagio</i>	1-26	Solo piano improvisation centered on C minor.
Finale: <i>Allegra</i>	27-52	Introductory material with the orchestra.
<i>Meno Allegro</i>	53-184	Statement of the theme with variations; centered on C major.
<i>Molto Allegra</i>	185-290	Further development and variation; centered on C minor.
<i>Adagio non troppo</i>	291-321	Further variations in slow 6/8 meter, centered on A major.
<i>Marcia, assai vivace</i>	322-388	Variations with development, centered on F major.
<i>Allegra</i>	389-398	Introductory material re-stated, centered on C minor.
<i>Allegretto, ma non troppo, quasi Andante con moto</i>	398-489	Orchestra is joined by the soloists, followed by the choral forces, all joined stating the theme on a text by Kuffner, centered on C major.
<i>Presta</i>	490-612	This section serves as a coda

Source: Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), vol. 2, *Symphonies (II), Variations and Orchestral Polyphony*, 133.

The genesis of the work seems to be Beethoven's desire to compose a new kind of fantasia, one that had never been created or imagined. This would be a work that would feature his keyboard virtuosity and fulfill the concert expectations that Viennese audiences of the time had come to anticipate. However, this fantasia would be something entirely new, something that Viennese audiences had never before experienced. He desired to create a fantasy that would involve the entire performing cast for the evening, the entire orchestra who had brought his two symphonies to life for the first time and his fourth piano concerto, all of the chorus who had sang selections from his Mass in C, and the soloist who had sung the aria *Ah! perfido*. Early in December he set out to write such a piece.

That the work was hastily written, there seems little doubt. Thayer's extensive quote of Czerny relates several important if not obvious clues. "The poet Kuffner was called upon to write the words in a hurry according to Beethoven's hints."³ "It was finished so late that it could scarcely be sufficiently rehearsed."⁴ This last fact was

³ Forbes, ed., 451. This is disputed by several scholars as inaccurate or, at the very least, highly questionable with Gustav Nottebohm (d. 1882) providing the most helpful comments. This text is not to be found in Kuffner's *Collected Works*. The poet usually cited as an alternative is Georg Friedrich Treitschke.

⁴ Ibid., 448.

to have a crucial bearing on its first performance. One characteristic that distinguishes the *Choral Fantasia* from most of Beethoven's other compositions is the fact that it was continuously in progress. Thayer writes, "The *Choral Fantasia* was obviously finished only a short time before its performance and is plainly one of the few compositions on which Beethoven worked continuously after once beginning it."⁵

Published by Breitkopf & Härtel in July of 1811, the work was dedicated to King Maximilian Joseph of Bavaria for unknown reasons.

The Composition: Artistic Intent and Compositional Ideas

Already, we know that the program's tonal center for this night was important to Beethoven in its symbolism and key relationships. Keeping this plan, and following the example of the Fifth Symphony, Beethoven began the *Choral Fantasia* in the key of C Minor and moves it through transition and development to its glorious conclusion in C Major.

From Beethoven's letters and writings regarding his overall compositional process, we know that this work was to

⁵ Ibid., 451.

communicate something of his emotion and spirit. Already stated is his belief that the "muses," the creative force within him, the god of music, sought to use him in bridging the gulf between man and the "other." Beethoven saw this work as a dialogue between himself, the artist creating at the piano, and the muses, using the forces of the orchestra and symphony to create a cosmic dialogue.⁶ In the composition's design, the forces of the muse enter following a long period of improvisation on the piano that Beethoven (the artist) would improvise that evening.⁷

Edward Dent has expressed the intent of the piece as one in which "the pianist in the Choral Fantasia represents the poet," and subsequently begins a musical dialogue with the different elements of the orchestra until all of them join in the song and telling of the story.⁸ This culminates with the anticipated arrival of the soloists and chorus, which together acclaim the power of music to take one to the spheres where there is a heavenly music to be found. It was one of Beethoven's most noble and repeated compositional

⁶ Jander, "Beethoven's Akademie of December 22, 1808," 16.

⁷ He wrote out the cadenzas and improvisational passages in April of the following year (1809).

⁸ Edward J. Dent, "The Choral Fantasia," *The Musical Quarterly* 8 (April 1927): 117.

thoughts as he again reached out to a world in which he felt so isolated.

The Composition: Melodic Motives and Development

It was not uncommon for Beethoven to borrow melodic ideas or to paraphrase previously written material as a starting point for something new. This is true for the *Choral Fantasia*, op. 80. The foundation for the melody and subsequent variations comes from a previously written song from the mid-1790s called *Gegenliebe*. The relationship and specific similarities to this earlier work will be discussed in Chapter 5. This earlier melody is used for the main thematic idea and as the beginning point for the many variations (fantasias) that take place in the course of the work. The theme returns at the closing as the soloists and chorus sound out the joyous melodic refrain. Jander draws upon contemporary sources to again remind us how Beethoven used the melody to convey a "greater intent."

The Artist, at the piano, is Beethoven himself. In his opening piano solo, in a burst of enthusiasm, he arrives at only trivial ideas, worthy of quick rejection. Then, he stalks the composer's Muse, with whom he pleads for assistance. The Muse comes through, with the first hints of an "inspired" theme, which is immediately⁹ developed in a series of quickly expanding variations.

⁹ Jander, 16. Cited by Jander, this comes from an anonymous reviewer, writing for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. It is one of the longest reviews that a work of Beethoven's ever received.

Following the original announcement of the theme on the piano, Beethoven begins the "fantasia" process, building up layer-by-layer, orchestra-section-by-orchestra-section, always using the dialogue of the piano to play off of the expanding orchestral variations and developments. In the *New Oxford History of Music*, the melodic development with the performing forces is described like this:

After the original announcement on the piano he calls upon his resources progressively, first adding solo woodwind, then solos strings until the full orchestra tutti is reached. After that point the theme passes through a wide variety of disguises, ranging through many keys and showing unsuspected melodic and rhythmic potentialities, until an arpeggio sweep on the piano . . . suggests that the composer has yet other forces in reserve. Here again they are released by degrees, solo voices entering first against a background of merry roulades from the piano, then the full chorus and orchestra combined take up the refrain.¹⁰

That such a wealth of ideas could come from such a simple song, composed over ten years prior to this creative outburst, shows the significance and hidden quality of this earlier song *Gegenliebe*.

The Composition: Relationship to Other Works

Musicologists and compositional biographers often assign three general periods for a composer's work, dividing

¹⁰ Gerald Abraham, ed., *New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), vol. 8, *The Age of Beethoven: 1790-1830*, 600.

their creative output into a Beginning or Early Period, a Middle Period, and a Late Period.

For Beethoven's compositional work, this hypothesis was first suggested by Louis Schlösser (1800-1886) in 1828. His stance was taken up by Fétis in 1837 and finally elaborated and popularized by Lenz in his *Beethoven et ses trois styles* in 1852.¹¹ This evolution of thought ultimately proposed a first formative period ending around 1802, a second period lasting until around 1812 and a transcendent third period from 1813 to 1827. Obviously, such a general scheme does not take into account all the considerations that are necessary. Modern scholars Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson argue in *The New Grove Beethoven*, that "allowance must be made not only for the general development of a composer's style, but also for the inner necessities of certain genres and the effects of his experience with them . . . works in genres which he [Beethoven] was attacking for the first time may have less 'advanced' stylistic features than works of the same date in familiar, much used genres."¹²

¹¹ Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson, *The New Grove Beethoven*, The Composer Biography Series (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 89.

¹² Ibid., 90.

By the general compositional periods outlined, Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia* would fall in his second period. This is his most prolific period, and one of the most exciting as he breaks new ground in the areas of harmony, thematic development, and compositional form. To gain perspective on the work, however, one cannot overlook the obvious similarities that the final theme of the *Choral Fantasy* shares with the double-song from Beethoven's early period, the *Gegenliebe* of WoO 118. In addition, many scholars point to the obvious relationship that Beethoven himself alluded to between the *Choral Fantasia* and the monumental Ninth Symphony. In several letters to publishers and individuals in 1824, he described his monumental Ninth Symphony as "in the style of my fantasia for piano with chorus, but on a far grander scale."¹³ This adds to the evidence of Beethoven's ability to use musical thoughts from the past as building blocks for the future. Beethoven scholar Denis McCaldin writes that "experiments begun on one piece often appear to be consolidated in a second which builds upon the experience of the first. Thus the *Choral Fantasia* is related to the Ninth Symphony [as] the Mass in C

¹³ Anderson, 1114.

[is related] to the *Missa solemnis*."¹⁴ This thought is echoed again and again in most Beethoven scholarship.

There is without doubt a musical similarity between the *Gegenliebe* song (WoO 118) of Beethoven's early period and the *Choral Fantasia* of his second compositional period. The two melodic themes are practically identical in their length of phrase and in their harmonic suggestions. Both are set in C major and in 2/4 meter. The first eight measures are identical save for a dotted eighth and sixteenth note (measure 7) and an appoggiatura (measure 8) in the *Gegenliebe*. The next four measures continue to mirror each other (except for another appoggiatura in the *Gegenliebe*) before a departure of any kind takes place. But even then, both melodies are moving towards the same destination and place of resolution. They even share the same challenging vocal movement for the sopranos to the high A (a2) except for the approach in the *Fantasia* being more difficult and more interesting, a reflection of Beethoven's maturation as a composer. Even with thirteen to fourteen years separating them in the compositional process, their obvious kinship and similarity of roots is apparent.

¹⁴ McCaldin, "The Choral Music," 388.

That Beethoven himself links the *Choral Fantasia* to the Ninth Symphony in his correspondence is significant; however, the musical evidence is even more compelling. This has been written about and proposed by many scholars, but the link of building blocks goes back farther than the *Fantasia*. If the Ninth is linked to the *Fantasia*, then the Ninth must therefore be linked thematically to the song *Gegenliebe*. In *The Beethoven Reader*, Denis McCaldin makes this same connection:

The likeness between this theme [Gegenliebe] and that of the finale of the [Ninth] Symphony has often been noted; their most obvious similarities are that they both move mainly by step wise motion and have second phrases which are almost identical.¹⁵

It appears that this is a song theme/melodic idea that stayed with Beethoven throughout his life, finding its conception and birth in the *Gegenliebe* (early compositional period), experiencing growth and further expansion in the *Choral Fantasia* (middle period), and ultimate fulfillment and expression in the finale of the Ninth Symphony (mature period). This simple melody is musically important to Beethoven and serves as an excellent representation of his growth and development as a composer. In this one musical

¹⁵ McCaldin, "The Choral Music," 389.

phrase, we see and find evidence of Beethoven's evolution in thematic ideas, harmonic expression, and development of form.

The Composition: Textual Content and Relationships

Beethoven himself does not seem particularly tied to the text of the *Choral Fantasia* (see Table 3). Already described is the haste with which it was written for the December 1808 *Akademie*. Beethoven confirms this in his correspondence to Breitkopf & Härtel on August 21, 1810. However, the more revealing statement is his willingness to change the text if the publisher thought that it would be wise or needed. This has to be a *financial* consideration rather than a *musical* one. That Beethoven would not acquiesce to anyone on his musical ideas has been noted, but if the publisher thought that it would help sell a few more copies and the idea was not important to Beethoven, he indicates a willingness to change.

Perhaps you would like to have a different text, since both the text and the music were composed at top speed, so much so that I could not even copy out a score. But if a different text were used, the word '*Kraft*' would have to be retained or replaced by some other exactly similar expression.¹⁶

Beethoven's partial ambiguity on the text is fairly clear. He really does not care if the text is retained as long as a

¹⁶ Anderson, 288.

suitable replacement is found. There are not many places in Beethoven's correspondence where he asks the publisher, "What do you think?" Even with this quote from the composer himself, the text played an important role for him on the night of the first performance. It is clear that he had certain intentions and ideas to communicate. The poet Kuffner was engaged to provide the text for the melody and "devised words" for the composition, following Beethoven's instructions.¹⁷ This text is strong in its assertion of joy and power when love and strength are united.

The text for *Gegenliebe* was written by Gottfried August Bürger and is actually a part of a double-song called *Seufzer eins Ungeliebten* and *Gegenliebe* (Sighs of an Unloved One and Love Returned). This song-pair contrasts the emotions of one whose love does not find a response, and the person whose love finds a home and is returned in kind. Beethoven used the keys of C minor and C major to help him set the words in the appropriate mood and feeling.¹⁸

As has been noted, there is much speculation regarding Beethoven's difficulties in finding a fulfilling love

¹⁷ Barry Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process*, 31.

¹⁸ These two keys were the two main contrasting keys of the *Choral Fantasia*, op. 80. There is also an interesting discussion in the Owen Jander article that has previously been quoted regarding the use of keys and their relationship for the entire *Akademie* of 1808. He proposes that Beethoven had a unified tonal plan for the entire evening in mind. See Jander, 12.

relationship and the sexual ambiguity that surrounded him. I cannot help but think that this melody and the words he first set it to perhaps continued to play upon him for the rest of his life. Looking at the text of *Gegenliebe* with that in mind, it is ironic to say the least.

The text for the similar melodic theme in the Ninth Symphony are attributed to Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), the famous poet and playwright. Words were always important to Beethoven and he seemed to select his librettists carefully. He was an ardent reader and lover of literature. In his letter to Breitkopf and Härtel of August 8, 1809, he wrote, "Perhaps you can arrange for me to receive editions of Goethe's and Schiller's complete works. . . . These two poets are my favorites, as are also Ossian and Homer," ¹⁹ Although he never met Schiller, Beethoven greatly admired his work and often quoted from him. In 1824, he acquired a twenty-one volume set of Schiller's works for a gift to his nephew Karl. ²⁰ The "Ode to Freedom," the textual foundation for the finale of the Ninth Symphony, was written by Johann Schiller. ²¹

¹⁹ Anderson, 241-42.

²⁰ Cooper, "Beethoven's Beliefs and Opinions," in *The Beethoven Compendium*, 149.

²¹ McCaldin, 389.

Beethoven, however, used only a portion of the Schiller text that has become known as "Ode to Joy" (see Appendix 4)²².

Although none of the texts are related in terms of content and in spite of the fact that they were all authored by different writers, there is still a striking similarity in their optimism and belief in the goodness of mankind and of hope for the future. All three texts are looking forward and remind even the most casual reader of the best that man can be whether in a relationship, or in something infinitely greater than life's secrets have to offer us.

The Composition: Style and Form Relationships

The joyful, positive spirit of the three texts is only the beginning of the unity found in the three works. Previously mentioned is the melodic kinship that the main melody offers us for review and of which scholars have written and given examples.²³ However, to be fair, the primary kinship that the three pieces exhibit are in these two areas alone. After textual and melodic considerations, the *Gegenliebe* moves quickly to the sidelines as a long distance relative of the other two. It could only possibly

²² Cooper, *The Beethoven Compendium*, 52.

²³ Gerald Abraham, ed., *New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), vol. 8, *The Age of Beethoven: 1790-1830*, 130. There is offered evidence of the part that this musical theme played in Beethoven's music, not only in the pieces already cited, but in fragments and other unused sketches.

say of the Ninth Symphony, "I saw him from a distance once . . . a long time ago."

However, there are other similarities and evidence of relationship between the Ninth Symphony and the *Choral Fantasia*.²⁴ Both are works that combine orchestral forces with that of the chorus in a spirit of unity and cooperation. Both chorus and orchestra are integral parts of these works and not simply accompaniment for the other. They are uniquely woven together in a new fabric of sound. This was a unique concept at the time and one that Beethoven had been toying with awhile before bringing it to life.²⁵ In the Romantic period that was to follow, other composers would attempt to emulate the unique legacy that Beethoven had left them, that of the orchestra and choir blending together in a new medium of sound and not just serving to accompany one another.

Barry Cooper in his book *Beethoven and the Creative Process* states that:

The [Choral Fantasia] is remarkable for its high degree of originality in structure and overall concept. The finale of the [Ninth Symphony], though unquestionably greater and more advanced, is perhaps less highly

²⁴ Leilani Kathryn Lutes, "Beethoven's Re-uses of his own Compositions, 1782-1826," Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1975. Note: In this study, Lutes identifies twelve similarities between the two works.

²⁵ Sketchbooks indicate initial plans for a work of this kind began sometime in 1803.

original in that it borrows so many ideas from [the Choral Fantasia]; . . . it [the Ninth Symphony] might well have been inconceivable without the precedent of the Choral Fantasia.²⁶

This statement recognizes the significance and importance of the *Choral Fantasia* in Beethoven's development and evolution as a composer. In this work, Beethoven pushes the limits of form and style that were known at the time and found a creative compositional ground that would serve as a beginning point for new ideas that would come in his later compositions.

²⁶ Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 72.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Contrary to some who have dismissed the *Choral Fantasia* as a misguided experiment on Beethoven's part, I am in agreement with Cooper in believing that this work is one of Beethoven's most significant and inventive compositions. The *Choral Fantasia* is a critical work in Beethoven's development and evolution. With it, he paved the way for the successful integration of the chorus and synthesis of total sound which he attained in his immortal Ninth Symphony. The *Choral Fantasia* is the cornerstone upon which the Ninth rests. However, I firmly suggest that the *Fantasia* must also have a life of its own apart from its relationship to the Ninth Symphony. Every great creation has the ability to stand on its own and have a distinctiveness apart from what has come before or will follow after.

Following its premier in 1808, the *Choral Fantasia* was a popular concert piece and as noted at a performance in 1812, the work received one of the longest contemporary

reviews of any of Beethoven's compositions.¹ Only after Beethoven's final symphony was written, did some come to see the *Choral Fantasia* as a misguided venture or experiment that failed. It has struggled to find a place of its own, and frankly has been misunderstood.

"The *Choral Fantasia* is neither a concerto for the pianoforte nor just a setting of a poem to music for a chorus. It is an improvisation and a vision."² To perform the piece properly, the work must be understood in light of the intentions of the composer. There is a moral purpose to it with a specific meaning and intention. For Beethoven, the composition was a vehicle for him to express his thoughts and feelings on life, love, the human condition, and the universe beyond.

It is Beethoven whom we must imagine seated at the pianoforte, evoking for us his vision of the poet's life, swaying us as the orator sways the crowd, catching us up into the glorious company of the elect who shall follow him to the fashioning of a newer and happier world.³

This vision is in contrast to the choral directors who have abandoned the piece because it does not require enough of the chorus. In this narrow perspective the greater

¹ Owen Jander, "Adolph Bernhard Marx: Victim of the Post-Schering Syndrome." p. 18. Jander suspects that this review was written by a friend favorable to Beethoven.

² *The Beethoven Companion*, 649.

³ *The Beethoven Companion*, 654.

picture is unnoticed. Likewise, modern pianists have dismissed the work as being a "confused concerto" with the addition of the chorus for no apparent good reason. We miss the idea and vision that Beethoven intended with such singular thinking.

Having taught the work to an amateur chorus and conducted the work in performance, I must say that it is a powerful musical experience when understood in the perspective of "dialogue." The work does not truly come alive without all of the elements of the performance in place. Without the piano and orchestra, the choral parts seem like an appendage stuck on at the end. The meaning is lost even though the text is joyful and buoyant. Working with the pianist, without the orchestra and chorus, was like putting together a puzzle with certain pieces missing, and that is precisely the point.

In the *Choral Fantasy*, Beethoven has constructed a musical dialogue that needs all participants in place to complete the thought and tell the story that he envisions. This is not the only work of Beethoven's which fosters dialogue. However, it is one of the few which does it on such a grand scale and in such a convincing manner. In the *Choral Fantasy*, there is a true synthesis and union of sound which is achieved by the piano soloist, orchestra, and vocal soloists and chorus. The work unites the performers and the

audience in a musical dialogue which fosters and achieves Beethoven's highest aim, that we might join together with the "artist" and the "Muses" to discover something greater than ourselves and touch the infinite beyond.

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APPENDIX 1

THEATERS AND CONCERT HALLS OF 19TH CENTURY VIENNA

	<u>Seating Capacity</u>
1. Nationaltheater nächst der k.k. Burg (Burgtheater)	1000-1350
2. K.k. Joftheater nächst dem Kärntnerthor (Kärntnerthor Theater)	1000
3. Theater an der Wien	2200
4. Theater in der Josefstadt	
5. Theater in der Leopoldstadt	385

APPENDIX 2

BEETHOVEN'S FIRST BENEFIT CONCERT GIVEN IN VIENNA

APRIL 2, 1800 CONCERT PROGRAM

Today, Wednesday April 2 1800 Herr Ludwig van Beethoven will have the honour to give a grand concert for his benefit in the Royal Imperial Court Theatre beside the Burg. The pieces which will be performed are the following:

1. A Grand Symphony by the late Kapellmeister Mozart.
2. An aria from "The Creation" by the Princely Kapellmeister Herr Haydn, sung by Mlle Saal.
3. A Grand Concerto for the pianoforte, played and composed by Herr Ludwig van Beethoven.
4. A Septet, most humbly and obediently dedicated to Her Majesty the Empress, and composed by Herr Ludwig van Beethoven for four stringed and three wind instruments, played by Herren Schuppanzigh, Schreiber, Schindlechter, Bär, Nickel. Matauschen and Dietzel.
5. A Duet from Haydn's 'Creation' sung by Herr and Mlle Saal.
6. Herr Ludwig van Beethoven will improvise on the pianoforte.
7. A new Grand Symphony with complete orchestra, composed by Herr Ludwig van Beethoven.

Tickets for boxes and stalls are to be had of Herr van Beethoven at his lodgings in the Tiefen Graben No. 241, third floor, and of the box-keeper.

Source: Anne-Louise Coldicott, "Beethoven's musical environment," in *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* ed. Barry Cooper (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 90.

APPENDIX 3

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF *ODE TO JOY* TEXT FROM THE NINTH SYMPHONY

"O brothers, these sad tones no longer!
Rather raise we now together our voices,
And joyful be our song!"

Joy, thou spark from flame immortal
Daughter of Elysium!
Drunk with fire, O heav'n born Goddess,
We invade thy halidom!

Let thy magic bring together
All whom earth-born laws divide;
All mankind shall be as brothers
'Neath thy tender wings and wide.

He that's had that best good fortune,
To his friend a friend to be,
He that's won a noble woman,
Let him join our Jubilee!
Ay, and who a single other
Soul on earth can call his own;
But let him who ne'er achieved it
Steal away in tears alone.

Joy doth every living creature
Draw from Nature's ample breast;
All the good and all the evil
Follow on her roseate quest.
Kisses doth she give, and vintage,
Friends who firm in death have stood;
Joy of life the worm receiveth,
And the Angels dwell with God!

Glad as burning suns that glorious
Through the heavenly spaces sway,
Haste ye brothers, on your way,
Joyous as a knight victorious.
O embrace now all you millions,
With one kiss for all the world.
Brothers, high beyond all stars
Surely dwells a loving Father.

Kneel before him, all you millions
Know your true Creator, man!
Seek him high beyond all stars,
High beyond all stars adore Him.

Source: Scherman, Thomas K. and Louis Biancolli, *The Beethoven Companion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 927-928.

APPENDIX 4

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHORAL FANTASIA TEXT

Strains of secret music hover
Round the wisely listening ear;
Eyes that Beauty once has opened
Find her flowers everywhere.

Happy souls, by her enlightened!
Sweet content is theirs and joy;
Toss'd no more on passion's tempest,
Wafted toward the life on high.

When the singer's notes are wedded
To the poet's word of might,
Forth from formless void and darkness
Breaks the new created light.

Blest are those to whom 'tis granted
To behold that wondrous ray,
Why by Truth, and Beauty guided
Find the realm of endless day.

Every seed of noble nature
That within their hearts was sown
Wakes to nobler life and fragrance
In that glorious light alone.

There the seer of inward visions,
Borne aloft on Music's wings,
Hears a thousand echoing voices
To his own in answer ring.

Haste, O soul, that voice to follow,
Haste, O soul, that joy to share,
Led by Love, by Strength and Beauty
On to Music's final sphere.

Source: Scherman, Thomas K. and Louis Biancolli, *The Beethoven Companion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972), 650-651.

APPENDIX 5

LISTENING SOURCES

Ludwig van Beethoven, Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor," Choral Fantasy, Emanuel Ax and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Andre Previn, conductor, RCA 9026-61714-2, CD.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 3, "Choral Fantasy," Rudolf Serkin and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Seiji Ozawa, conductor, Telarc CD-80063.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Beethoven: Ode to Joy & Choral Fantasia, John Alldis Choir & New Philharmonia Orchestra, Daniel Barenboim, piano, Otto Klemperer, conductor, Angel LP S-36815.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Choral Fantasia in C, Op. 80, Leipzig Radio Chorus, Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra, Peter Rosel, piano, Hubert Kegel, conductor, Capriccio CD 10 150.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5; Choral Fantasia, Op. 80, London Philharmonic Orchestra Chorus, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Alfred Brendel, piano, Bernard Haitink, conductor, Philips CD 434 148-2.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5; Choral Fantasia, Op. 80, Schutz Chorus, London Classical Players, Melvyn Tan, piano, Roger Norrington, conductor, EMI 49965-2, CD.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Choral Fantasia, Op. 80 and Missa Solemnis in D, Op. 123, Westminster Choir College Choir, New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Rudolph Serkin, piano, Leonard Bernstein, conductor, SM2K 47522, CD.