

PROGRAM NOTES

In an era before movies and television, live theatre provided popular entertainment. In the same way that movies and TV are enhanced by the use of a music score, it has long been recognized that theatrical productions could also benefit from such “incidental music” to set the mood, to provide entertainment between scenes, and to open the show. Heinrich Joseph von Collin’s version of the tale of the mythical Coriolan was first presented in Vienna on November 24, 1802, with music taken from Mozart’s *Idomeneo*. Beethoven himself was at this performance, but it wasn’t until five years later that he wrote an overture for the production. However, the dramatic overture was first presented at a marathon concert that also had symphonies 1 through 4, the fourth piano concerto, and some music from *Fidelio* on it. The story of Coriolanus was based on the writing of Plutarch: General Coriolon had led a successful campaign against the Volscians, and was later banished from Rome. He turns against the Romans, and with the help of the Volscians, lays siege to the city. His wife and mother are sent to persuade him to stop, and in recognizing his own disloyalty he commits suicide. **Beethoven’s Overture Coriolan, Op. 62** is really a miniature tone poem which follows the story line even to its quiet, suicidal ending.

Beethoven’s symphonies seem to follow a pattern: the odd-numbered are big, powerful works and the even-numbered slighter and less profound. The Eighth Symphony seems to fit the mold coming as it does after the tremendous masterpiece of the Seventh. The Eighth is entirely different in character, going back once more to a style reminiscent of Haydn and even Mozart. Yet it is a fine symphony. If it had not been preceded by the amazing Seventh or the climactic Ninth, it might stand out as the masterwork that it is. Under the circumstances, the Eighth does suffer a little from neglect.

Beethoven was possibly too concerned with troublesome and non-musical problems when this music was written to abandon himself thoroughly to his inspiration. His deafness was beginning to prey upon his mind. He suffered from a persistent digestive ailment. His brother Johann had involved himself in a sordid affair with the landlord’s daughter, and the hot-tempered Beethoven rushed to Linz to take the matter into his own hands. The result was precisely what he wanted to prevent: his brother married the girl. Then his brother Caspar Carl became severely ill with “consumption”.

The second movement is the shortest symphonic movement Beethoven ever wrote. The elegant opening theme is of interest because it is identical to a little “round” which he composed extemporaneously at a dinner given for him by some friends. Among the guest was Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, a good friend and the inventor of the nemesis of all young musicians, the metronome. Beethoven imitated with staccato notes the ticking of the inexorable metronome in the little round, or canon, which he called “Ta, ta, lieber Mälzel.”

Beethoven himself called his Eighth “my little symphony in F”, but he was infuriated when the public reception of it was lukewarm compared with the enthusiasm for the Seventh. In the words of a writer from an early review in New York, “It is a symphony of laughter – the laughter of a man who has lived and suffered and, scaling the heights, achieved the summit.”

After a leisurely journey from his beloved England through Germany, Austria and Switzerland, **Felix Mendelssohn** arrived in Rome where he stayed for several months. There, he witnessed several great popular festivals with all the color, the dancing and popular songs. What impressed him even more were the gorgeous rites accompanying the coronation of Pope Gregory XVI. The

sights and sounds of Italy, the beautiful Alban hills, the grandeur of Rome and the spectacle of the sea all left their mark upon the music Mendelssohn composed during the Roman visit.

The ***Italian Symphony*** was begun in Italy in 1831 and had its first performance in London two years later. Between 1835 and 1837 the composer completely revised it and in this form it wasn't heard until two years after Mendelssohn had died. With the possible exception of the second movement, called the "Pilgrim's March", it does not depict any specific scenes, but embodies the sum total of Mendelssohn's Italian impressions so far as they could be written down in tones.

~Marty Haub