

## **Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73, “Emperor”**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

B. December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany

D. March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

*Premiered in November 1810 by the Gewandhaus Orchestra with soloist Freidrich Schnieder.*

*Scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings, and solo piano (approx. 38 minutes).*

In March 1809, Ludwig Van Beethoven had reason to be joyous. He had just received a lifetime annuity from the Princes Lobkowitz and Kinsky and Archduke Rudolf Johann Joseph Rainer Habsburg. In fact, this timely display of confidence in Beethoven’s musical art enabled him to complete his Fifth Piano Concerto, the “Emperor.” This brief respite soon ended, though, as Napoleon launched his second siege of Vienna in May of the same year. Beethoven’s last piano concerto would not be publicly performed until November 1810 in Leipzig by a young organist named Friedrich Schneider. This was the first (and only) of Beethoven’s piano concertos not premiered by the composer himself. Beethoven’s hearing-loss had continued to worsen, and he was now unable to perform at the standard he imposed upon himself. The work later received its Viennese premiere by one of Beethoven’s students, Carl Czerny - famous then as a performer/composer and remembered today for his etudes, still used by most piano students.

The Fifth Piano Concerto was, in fact, dedicated to the Archduke. Rudolf filled more than one void in Beethoven’s life; he acted not only as a patron, but also as a student (of piano and composition) and friend. Several other Beethoven compositions including the Triple Concerto, *Missa Solemnis*, and the “Archduke” Trio - bear dedications to Archduke Rudolf as well. The name “Emperor” was, as one might suspect, not original to the work. Some suggest it was added at the behest of Johann Baptist Cramer, a pianist, composer, publisher and longtime friend of Beethoven.

The “Emperor” Concerto is in the key of E-flat major - the same key Beethoven chose for his “Eroica” Symphony. Fittingly, an air of heroicism can be heard throughout the expansive concerto, beginning in the first few bars. The opening *Allegro*, at over 20 minutes long, begins with a tutti chord that unexpectedly leads into a brief cadenza for piano. Nineteenth-century audiences would have expected to hear a full introduction and exposition of themes before the pianist was given a chance to show his or her mettle. One can only imagine the reaction when, some five seconds into the piece, the pianist leapt into a full-fledged cadenza! The cadenza is followed by two more tutti chords, which are each, in turn, answered by solo piano. Upon closer investigation, this introduction acts as a basic I-IV-V7-I harmonic progression, elaborated by virtuosic piano cadenzas. Soon, the first violins enter with the first theme, a regal melody echoed in the clarinet. A contrasting second theme and extended coda set the stage for the pianist, who repeats, ornaments, and varies the previous thematic material. In addition, the piano gets a triumphant third theme all to itself. The form that encompasses this material, a three-part

sonata structure based on the double exposition pattern for classical concertos, allows Beethoven to further differentiate the soloist and the orchestra while more deeply exploring the thematic material.

The second movement, labeled *Adagio un poco mosso* and in the key of B major, is calm and reflective. In contrast to the opening movement, which is full of dotted-rhythms and triumphant bombast, this movement allows the pianist to explore other extremes. A softest *pianissimo* introduction flowers into a resplendent and tuneful melody. This movement leads directly into the third and final movement without pause (and quite cleverly), as Beethoven asks for the bassoons to slide from a b-natural to a b-flat, preparing the dominant (B-flat major) for the impending E-flat major *Rondo*. The *Rondo* presents itself in seven parts, always returning to the exuberant initial theme (first stated by the piano). The entire movement continually drives forward, in part due to the compound 6/8 meter, and ends with a cadenza for piano followed by a vigorous orchestral response.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Beethoven's Piano Concert No. 5 in E-flat major on September 17, 2004 at Orchestra Hall under Neeme Järvi with soloist Per Tengstrand.

DSO SHOP @THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor," Emanuel Ax (piano), André Previn conducting the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, RCA 55267.

*Program note by Michael Mauskapf, doctorate student at the University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre & Dance.*