

## Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

B. December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany

D. March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

*Premiered on February 27, 1814, in the Large Redoutensaale at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna with the composer conducting.*

*Scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two French horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. (approx. 27 minutes)*

Beethoven typically composed symphonies in pairs: a larger one paired with a smaller, lighter one. In 1812, he completed both his Seventh and Eighth symphonies. The premiere of the Seventh symphony, in December 1813, was a great success. Not so with the Eighth, premiered two months later. It was performed between two larger works; one was the Seventh. Because of its lighter content the Eighth symphony was overshadowed. When his protégé, Karl Czerny, noted the greater popularity of the Seventh, Beethoven retorted, "That's because the Eighth is so much better."

Beethoven referred to the Eighth as "my little one", written in an "unbuttoned mood." Apparently, the mood was one of ease as he composed this humorous, light-hearted work. Throughout, it is celebratory, despite the circumstances of his increasing deafness, the estrangement of his brother, and the departure of his "immortal beloved," all occurring this same year.

The Eighth was the only one of his symphonies composed without a movement in the minor mode, and it follows neither Eighteenth- or Nineteenth-century forms. The first movement, *Allegro vivace con brio*, begins strong and continues robust throughout. Beethoven replaced the usual, slow second movement, with a brisk *Allegretto scherzando*, normally used as a third movement. This movement is a parody on the newly invented metronome, built by his good friend Johann Nepomuk Mälzel (earlier, Mälzel constructed some ear trumpets, to assist Beethoven with his hearing). The even staccato 16<sup>th</sup> notes continue steadily throughout this movement - until shaken by the 64<sup>th</sup> note motif - sounding like a metronome malfunction!

Though the third movement would normally be a Scherzo, Beethoven used a minuet, *Tempo di menuetto*, reminiscent of Eighteenth-century minuet movements. Again Beethoven shows his playfulness as the trumpet and drum, lost in daydream, begin the main theme a bar "too early."

The finale, *Allegro vivace*, continues a fast paced light-heartedness. The coda in this movement is one of the most elaborate codas of all Beethoven's works; in fact, it is longer than the rest of the movement.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 on October 24, 2004 at Orchestra Hall with conductor Roberto Abbado.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Beethoven, Symphony No. 8, Claudio Abbado conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Deutsche Grammophon 445542.

*Program note by Kelly Yoakam, master's candidate in Musicology at Michigan State University.*