



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

Benalla & District Inc.



Programme Notes

14th August, 2020



BTHVN
2020



About Today's Music Selections

Everyone's entitled to a holiday, from the Prime Minister down. That includes, too, I guess, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. There weren't any concert performances by the orchestra scheduled for August. Which leaves us with an opportunity to brush-up on our Beethoven. Which means, then, that both programmes this month will be given over to Beethoven compositions.

But which?? I started out with the intention of seeing what others, world-wide, had planned as part of the Beethoven 2020 celebrations. Hadn't gone very far before I realised that ever so many of the planned concerts and festivals throughout the world, including those to honour the legacy of Beethoven, have also had to be cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of these is the Solsberg Festival in Switzerland, which I hadn't heard of before. A little research revealed it's the brainchild of Argentinian-born cellist Sol Gabetta who featured in our presentation back in June of the Saint-Saens Cello Concerto



Sol Gabetta, quite some years ago now, made her home in Switzerland. In 2006, she founded this Festival – a festival of chamber music – in the ancient Swiss town of Olsberg and fulfilled her dream of creating a month of music-making in stunning surroundings and with repertoire that excites her and her fellow musicians. The “surroundings” include the baroque abbey church in Olsberg and the parish church of St. Martin in the neighbouring province of Rheinfelden on the border with Germany.

<.....Sol Gabetta

These venues provide an incomparably solemn setting for the festival, which takes place in June of each year.

The artists performing with Sol Gabetta each year comprise a new generation of leading international soloists who have each won major international awards and are at the height of a brilliant career. With this small-scale but exquisite festival, the Basel region has added a veritable gem to the musical landscape of north-west Switzerland.



Interior, Abbey Church, Olsberg

What caught my eye was that Sol Gabetta, with her 2020 festival cancelled, quickly, in the spirit of necessity being the mother of invention, was able put in place two substitute concerts (with smaller audiences obeying the distancing requirements), which have subsequently been streamed on YouTube.

It is from the first of these concerts that two of the Beethoven works presented in this session have come. Sol Gabetta has teamed up with German clarinettist Sabine Meyer and Korean pianist Seong-Jin Cho to present two Trios for Cello, Clarinet and Piano: the B flat major trio and the E flat major Trio – opus 11 and 38 respectively.



Sabine Meyer

According to 'our ABC', Sabine Meyer is one of the reasons solo clarinettists exist at all. One of the first women to be offered principal positions with leading European orchestras, her extraordinary abilities took her on an exclusive path to become one of the most famous clarinet soloists ever.

In 1982 Herbert von Karajan, Music Director of the Berlin Philharmonic appointed Meyer to a position with the orchestra, making her only the second female member. At the end of her probationary period, the musicians of the orchestra voted against her by a vote of 73 to 4 insisting the reason was that her tone did not blend with the other members of the section. Other observers, including Karajan, believed that the true reason was her gender. In 1983, after nine months, Meyer left the orchestra to become a full-time solo clarinettist.

Meyer has been a much-celebrated soloist with more than three hundred orchestras internationally. She has given guest performances with all the top-level orchestras in Germany and has been engaged by the world's leading orchestras.

Seong-Jin Cho was brought to the world's attention in 2015 when he won the First Prize at the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw. This same competition launched the careers of world-class artists such as Martha Argerich, Maurizio Pollini, and Krystian Zimmernan.



Seong-Jin Cho

Born in 1994 in Seoul, Seong-Jin Cho started learning the piano at 6 and gave his first public recital at age 11. In 2009, he became the youngest-ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition. In 2011, he won Third Prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 17. In 2012, he moved to Paris to study at the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique from which he graduated in 2015.

An active recitalist, he performs in many of the world's most prestigious concert halls and is currently based in Berlin

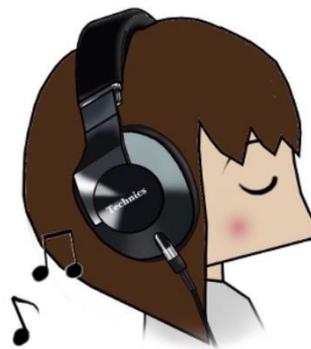
Stepping away from Solsberg, our major Beethoven composition takes us to the Auditorium of Radio France for a performance of the 3rd Piano Concerto. I am very much indebted to Colin Barnes for drawing this recording to my attention some little while ago. Since then, I have waiting for an opportunity to present it and in the meantime have enjoyed it many times. I'm sure you will enjoy it, too.



The recording features yet another rising star on the music circuit in German/Japanese pianist Alice Sara Ott - born in 1988 in Munich, Germany, to a German father and Japanese mother. As a young girl Alice decided she wanted to become a pianist after being

taken to a concert when she was three years old. She started piano lessons the following year and studied at the Salzburg Mozarteum from the age of 12. Subsequently Alice has won awards at a number of piano competitions, including first prize at the 2004 Pianello Val Tidone Competition. She has become one of the world's most in-demand classical pianists and has worked with a number of leading orchestras and conductors.

Her talent, though is not limited to a global career as a high-level performing artist. Alice also expresses her diverse creativity through a number of design and brand partnerships beyond the borders of classical music.



She was personally requested to design a signature line of high-end leather bags for JOST, one of Germany's premium brands. Alice has been global brand ambassador for Technics, the hi-fi audio brand of Panasonic Corporation, and has an ongoing collaboration with the French luxury jewellery house, Chaumet.

But not all is wine and roses for her. Shortly after the performance we are about to witness, Alice announced on social media she has been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. But that has not retarded her progress and continues this day to take bookings for concert performances well into the future.

I'm sure you will enjoy her interpretation of this concerto as I have. She has a number of other recording on YouTube which you may like to discover, too.

And so to the 3 musical items of this presentation

Ludwig van Beethoven

Trio in B flat major for Cello, Clarinet and Piano, Opus 11 ("Gassenhauer")

In a light and cheerful vein this early work shows a composer eager to please. Composed in 1798, a few years after he settled in Vienna, the Op.11 Trio was intended to please the drawing-room sensibilities of the Viennese public. To help ensure its success Beethoven based the last movement on a well-known tune *Pria ch'io l'impegno* – a melody he borrowed from the comic opera "L'amor marinaro Il Corsaro" by Joseph Weigl.



Joseph Weigl; Lithograph by Josef Kriehuber,

Joseph Weigl (1766–1846) was at one-time Kapellmeister at the court theatre in Vienna. The song, "*Pria ch'io l'impegno*" (Before I go to work, I must have something to eat), was a runaway hit, becoming a Viennese "Gassenhauer," or alley song, whistled and sung by workers and buskers in the streets. Beethoven's Op. 11, therefore, is sometimes known as the "Gassenhauer Trio."

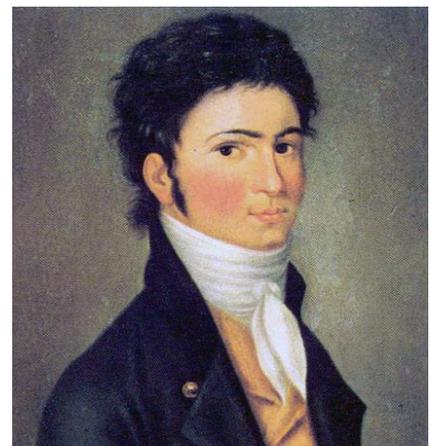
Throughout his career, Beethoven would pen scores of variation sets culminating in some of the most epic and unsurpassed testaments of the genre revealing that he was an inexhaustible wellspring of profound invention.

Apparently while composing the finale, Beethoven was unaware that Weigl was the original composer of the tune and became rather irritated upon discovering the fact. Thereafter, Beethoven intended to separate the variations from the trio as a standalone piece and compose an alternate finale, though he never followed through.

The trio is a wonderful work finely balanced across all three instruments in a true chamber texture, though, not surprisingly, the piano, Beethoven's own instrument, may well enjoy the most virtuosity. You may be able to hear some similarity with the writing of Mozart here. It's clearly **not** Mozart, but there's a Classical-era ebullience and lightness about it. This is, after all, 'drawing-room music.'

The first movement is a sparkling and vivacious sonata form sporting catchy tunes, bold key changes, and an adventurous development leading to a recap with elaborations and some interesting adjustments in scoring for a fresh, final take.

The second movement may well be the most surprising for its serene composure and uncomplicated lyricism exchanged lovingly between the instruments. It's been described as like a lullaby, beginning with cello, then clarinet, and finally piano. This movement, too, is in sonata form, but the development is very brief. Besides just being a beautiful, serene little corner of this piece, all three players seem more or less on equal ground; it's not complex or ornate, but the dialogue seems to put everyone on the same plane, for a warm, round approach to this shortest movement.



Beethoven in 1801, portrait by Carl Traugott Riedel

The finale concludes with the famous theme and variations and here Beethoven shows a familiar face by subjecting an easy, popular tune to nine variations of rather astonishing range and ingenuity including what might be considered a few “false” endings leading to yet more departures. (Source: earsense.org)

The nine variations are as follows:

1. Piano solo- Beethoven shows off not only his deftness at variations, but his skill at writing for (and probably at some time or other playing) the piano.
2. Cello, clarinet
3. A reunion of sorts, with all three members in kind of a game of tag, with up- and downward moving figures
4. The first of two minor-key variations, which balances out some of the jovial character of the other variations but does seem a bit abrupt in the sudden change of mood.
5. Piano puts a stop to the melancholy, and the rest of the trio joins.
6. The theme is “most clearly perceptible” in this variation.
7. The second minor-key variation, led by cello.
8. Here, only the broad outline of the theme remains.
9. The final variation presents the theme again before finishing up by giving us a coda.

(Acknowledgement: fugueforthought.de)



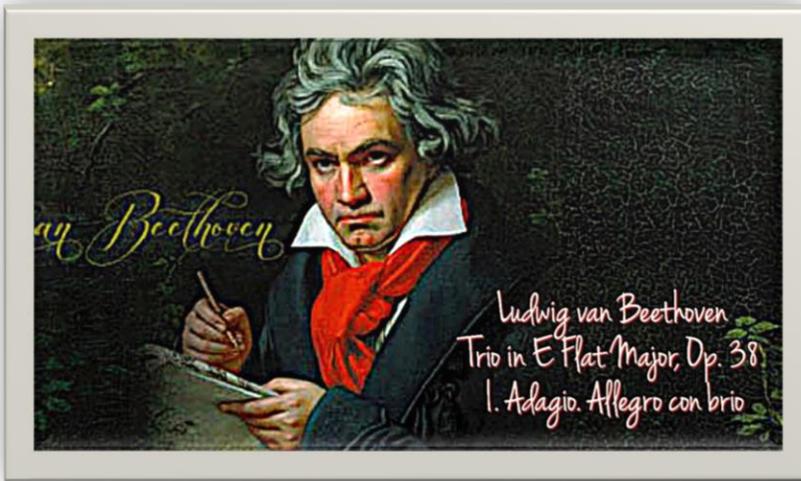
The recording may be accessed on YouTube via the following link which is also the link for the next Trio.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O1f-X0FlIc&t=2010s>

A video rendition of the song “Pria ch’io l’impegno” by a trio of another kind is also included for your enjoyment. It can be found on YouTube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUQUg3YICKs>

Trio in E flat major for Clarinet, Piano and Cello, Opus 38



If you have kept the notes and recordings for the April 24th programme this year it may be helpful to re-acquaint yourself with Beethoven's Septet Opus 20 before listening to this trio.

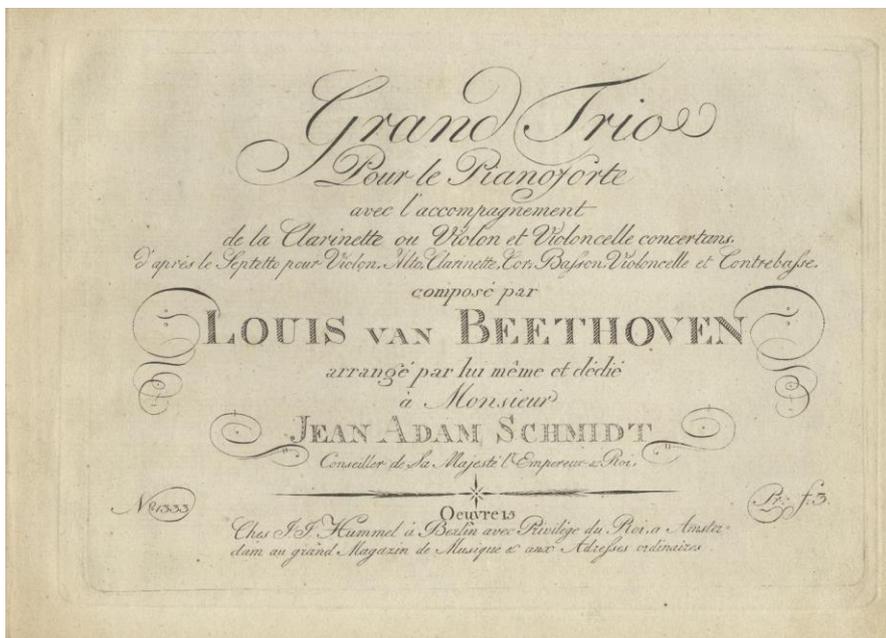
The septet, written around 1800, while it did much to launch Beethoven's career, came to be disliked by Beethoven because it's 'Mozartian' character led many to believe that it was indeed written by Mozart. Much as Beethoven revered Mozart's musical genius, the attribution of his septet to Mozart was enough to make him fume every time.

Public acclaim for the work, however, led publishers and orchestrators to release numerous arrangements of the septet for various ensembles. The ever "anxious-to-please" Beethoven, given that making some extra money was never far from his mind, decided to create his own arrangement of the work for smaller forces, and the trio version was published as Op 38 in 1805. Beethoven would have clearly felt that this was the combination that was going to sell the most copies.

At the same time, however, it is thought that Beethoven would have preferred the bassoon rather than the cello in the trio combination, as the bassoon would retain that very special link it has with clarinet in the original septet, which is a feature of that work. Also, the original Opus 20 bassoon passages sound very much 'at home' on the instrument for which they were written, and the horn solos from the septet would have been highly effective on the bassoon in a trio arrangement. But then, as now, there were far fewer bassoonists around than cellists, and in opting for cello over bassoon, Beethoven was clearly not being too fussy about precise instrumentation. Especially where money is concerned!

The re-voicing, then, gives (for the most part) the septet's string parts to the piano, much of the original clarinet part is preserved, and while most of the trio's cello part is derived from the bassoon part of the septet, with occasional passages from the cello and horn parts from the septet added in.

Another angle to the origin of the Opus 38 Trio is that Beethoven made this trio arrangement for Dr. Johann Schmidt, his new physician and also a good violinist.



His daughter was a talented pianist, and the two, with a cellist friend, often played this music in early nineteenth-century Vienna, probably at private gatherings and at concerts in their home. Beethoven gave exclusive rights to the score to Dr. Schmidt for one year.

There are six movements in all:

1. Adagio – Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio cantabile
- III. Tempo di Menuetto
- IV. Andante con Variazioni
- V. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace
- VI. Andante con molto alla marcia – Presto

The Trio starts its first movement with a slow introduction, leading to a sonata-form Allegro con brio, its first subject followed by a gentler second, then a recapitulation of both and an extended coda. From the spacious elegance of the adagio introduction leading into the energy, expression and momentum of the allegro con brio, we are on a very similar musical journey to the septet itself.

The slow movement, adagio cantabile, remains as a wonderfully melodic vehicle for the clarinet's lyrical qualities, while the minuet (Tempo di Menuetto) is every bit as characterful, using a melody well enough known from its appearance in a later piano sonata (Opus 49, No.2).

The next movement consists of a theme once thought to be a folk-song, and five variations. There follows a Scherzo – giving a clear demonstration of the difference between scherzo and minuet.

A brief march, in true divertimento style, opens the last movement, soon replaced by an energetic presto with the famous violin cadenza faithfully reproduced on the piano.

(Sources: hyperion-records.co.uk; allmusic.com; naxos.com).



The performance, as was the previous work, is from the June 26 Solsberg concert this year with Sabine Meyer, Sol Gabetta and Seong-Jin Cho.

(YouTube link as above).

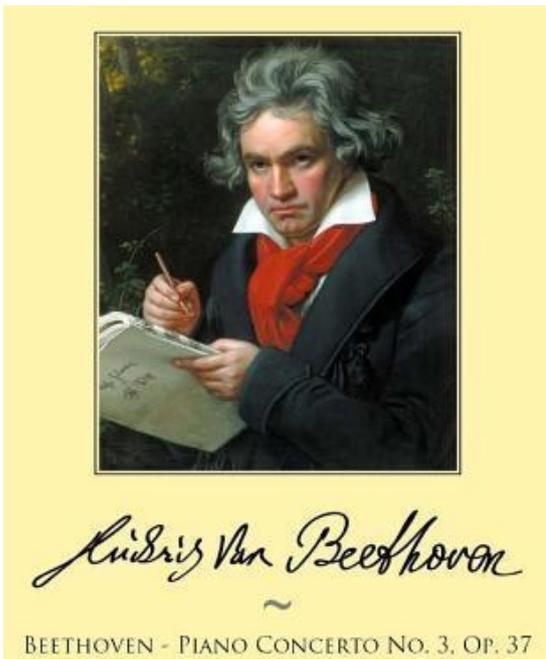
The E flat major Trio Starts at 20 minutes 40 seconds into the recording

<.....Olsberg Village

Ludwig van Beethoven

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in C minor Opus 37

An Emerging Giant—The Power of Beethoven's 3rd piano Concerto



How fast 250 years goes by, and today everybody's going nuts over the anniversary of Beethoven's birth. If you haven't been hit over the head by a symphony or sonata by Ludwig lately, you'd have to be living in a cave. The music world can't play enough Beethoven in 2020, and that's a good thing, considering how well his music continues to grab our modern ears.

Asked what stands out most about the third of Beethoven's five keyboard concertos, a soloist, some years ago, commented that: "It's really the first concerto where Beethoven shakes his fist at the world. It's when he leaves Mozart behind, and becomes Beethoven."

Those words stuck. Here is music of an emerging giant, his journey before him as he steps from his youthful Viennese period into uncharted territory of a nascent romantic era.

(Source: floridaorchestra.org)

The earliest sketch for Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto dates to as early as 1796, when he was touring as an up-and-coming piano virtuoso in Prague and Berlin with one of his earlier piano concertos. As with many of Beethoven's compositions, however, it would be years before the Third Concerto took its final shape. Though for a time scholars believed that the concerto was written in 1800 (thanks to the disappearance of several sketchbooks and Beethoven's atrocious handwriting), most experts now believe the bulk of the work on the concerto took place during the autumn of 1802, making it contemporary with Beethoven's Second Symphony, Christ on the Mount of Olives, the Violin Sonatas Opus 30, the Piano Sonatas Opus 31—and the Heiligenstadt Testament.



In 1802, a 32-year-old Beethoven retreated away from Vienna to the countryside town of Heiligenstadt, in hope of recovering from a steady loss of hearing that had already begun 3 years before.

At the end of this stay, Beethoven was faced with the fact that his hearing may never be restored again; and from this came an outpouring of his deepest struggles in one of his most carefully studied letters, the 'Heiligenstadt Testament' where he wrote of his yearning to end his suffering by suicide.

But art holds him back.

It seemed impossible for him to leave the world until he had produced all that was within him. And from then, came a new resolve and a fresh burst of energy. Beethoven produced in the next decade, his 3rd Symphony 'Eroica', his 5th Symphony, the 'Razumovsky Quartets', the Violin Concerto, his 4th Piano Concerto, and the 'Waldstein' and 'Appassionata' Piano Sonatas, in what would be a period marked by great heroism and a new expansiveness.

WHAT HUMILIATION WHEN SOMEONE WHO STOOD NEXT TO ME HEARD A FLUTE IN THE DISTANCE AND I HEARD NOTHING, OR WHEN SOMEONE HEARD THE SHEPHERD BOY SINGING AND AGAIN I HEARD NOTHING. SUCH MISFORTUNE BROUGHT ME TO THE EDGE OF DESPAIR, AND I MIGHT HAVE BROUGHT AN END TO MY LIFE—ONLY MY ART HELD ME BACK.

- LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN -

LIBQUOTES.COM

The Testament (written in the Viennese suburb of Heiligenstadt) is an important letter Beethoven wrote to his brothers in which he grapples with his advancing hearing loss, contemplates suicide and ultimately decides to persevere for the sake of his art.

It is tempting to hear this struggle reflected in the dark, C minor tonality of the concerto, and such an interpretation can by no means be ruled out; however, given the wide variety of moods evoked by the many pieces he wrote around the same time and the fact that that the concerto was first conceived many years before, such an autobiographical reading of the piece must be considered with some reservations. Most believe that the real impact of Beethoven's crisis can be heard in his revolutionary Symphony No. 3 of the following year (named "Eroica" or "Heroic").

Nevertheless, Beethoven's intense inner world would have doubtlessly informed his performance of the work at its premiere in April 1803.

Drums of War

Many commentators have noted the military, march-like character of the work's opening, suggesting the French Revolution and rise of Napoleon as an alternative source of inspiration:



(Beethoven, having grown up in Bonn on the edges of the French revolution, had long admired republican ideals of hope and personal freedom. Beethoven's admiration changed when Napoleon turned out to be a tyrant and "the scourge of Austria." When the score for the Eroica was finished in early 1804, Beethoven dedicated the work to him only to later erase the name 'Bonaparte' from the manuscript of the symphony and replace it with 'Eroica', meaning 'Heroic').

Speaking of manuscript, Beethoven's handwriting was not always the clearest.



For many years scholars believed that this inscription on the first page of the 3rd concerto manuscript said "1800," and they believed the concerto was for the most part written in that year. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the last digit is in fact a "3," indicating that Beethoven completed the concerto in 1803.

As a gifted improviser, Beethoven sometimes neglected to write down some sections of the solo parts of his concertos until after he had played them. The manuscript of the beginning shows that he originally only wrote down the melody. The harmonies and an ornamented variation on the second measure were filled in later in a darker ink.



(Franz Wegeler, whom Beethoven met when they were both boys growing up in Bonn, and the first person he could call a friend, tells an amusing account of the premiere of the concerto at which Beethoven was the soloist:

"In the playing of the concerto movements, he asked me to turn the pages for him; but – heaven help me! That was easier said than done. I saw almost nothing but empty leaves; at the most on one page or the other a few Egyptian hieroglyphs, wholly unintelligible to me, scribbled down to serve as clues for him; for he played nearly all of the solo part from memory, since, as was so often the case, he had not had time to put it all down on paper. He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages and my scarcely concealed anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly as he laughed heartily at the jovial supper which we ate afterwards". –

(Wegeler's account is transcribed from the notes of an ABC CD set of the complete Beethoven Concertos).

Now, to the music itself:



Beginning the first movement's orchestral introduction, this melodic idea, (that of the Napoleonic Revolution) characterized by a rhythmic, drum-like tattoo, occurs in Beethoven's earliest sketches. It enters softly, but soon leads a powerful transition to a contrasting second theme: a singing melody in the relative major.

The dark mood of the opening then returns, preparing the way for the soloist's dramatic entrance. The soloist then plays (his or her) own versions of the two main themes, embellished with virtuoso passagework.

After an orchestral passage, a more developmental section begins with an exquisite alternation between soloist and orchestra based on the main theme.

Further developments lead to a reprise of the main themes and a cadenza, an extended solo for the pianist alone. A gifted improviser, Beethoven would have invented this passage in performance (along with much of the rest of the piano part, as the sketchiness of his original manuscript shows), but in later years when he was no longer performing in public, he wrote down a version of it for other pianists to play. After the traditional trills that end the cadenza, the orchestra re-enters with the timpani quietly playing the rhythmic motif from the opening idea. Interestingly, both this moment, one of the most original in the concerto, and the overlapping of the opening idea with itself in the cadenza, are found in Beethoven's earliest sketch for the composition, suggesting that these were the germinal seeds for the rest of the piece.

After the first movement comes to a stormy ending in C minor, the beginning of the slow second movement in the distant key of E major is utterly arresting. Beethoven's student, Carl Czerny, said that the opening theme "must sound like a holy, distant, and celestial Harmony." This hymn-like, soulful melody is introduced by the piano alone. The orchestra then takes it up and completes it, leading to a lovely cantilena that modulates to B major. Piano arpeggios and fragmentary motifs in the flute and bassoon pass through several keys, leading to a reprise of the main theme.

The last note of the slow movement, a G-sharp, is immediately reinterpreted as an A-flat as the soloist begins the finale, plunging the music back into the dark tonality of C minor. This is just the first of many rough-edged musical jokes in a movement filled with surprises. The main theme alternates with contrasting episodes, including several jaunty, major-key tunes and even a learned fugue based on the main theme. In the end, the music turns to a merry, C major coda, as if assuring us that all that came before was only in jest. Together the soloist and orchestra race to an ending full of triumphant laughter. (Calvin Dotsey -Programme notes for a performance by the Houston Symphony Orchestra).

The YouTube link to this recording is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM0HgmptYIY&t=662s>