



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

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Programme Notes

22nd May, 2020



Faure

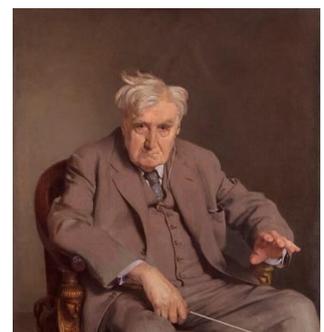


Purcell

BTHVN
2020



Tchaikovsky



Vaughan Williams

About Today's Music Selections



In the 1950s Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe wrote a hit-song “Thank Heavens for Little Girls” – made famous by Maurice Chevalier. Who remembers it? We all do, ... of course! “Thank heaven for little girls. Thank heaven for them all. No matter where; No matter who; Without them What would little boys do”, are the words I remember most. And of course, “Thank heaven for little girls; For little girls get Bigger every day. Thank heaven for little girls They grow up in The most delightful way”.

Similarly, in this time of lock-down and self-distancing, we well may say “Thank heavens for a little music”. How fortunate we are to have the gift and the joy of music to uplift us and see us through this time of quarantine. “Without it what would we bigger boys and girls do?”

For the April edition of “Limelight” magazine, ABC Classic FM presenter, Greta Bradman, interviewed a young English violinist Hugo Ticcianti – currently (or was to be) touring Australia with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and who speaks of the potential of music to heal. In the interview Ticcianti makes the point that “it’s silence which is the greatest healer of all”. My guess is that he sees the listening of music in the silence of concert hall as having a potential for healing.

With a concert hall experience presently beyond our reach, I do hope that you are finding some uplift (and delight, even) from these small twice monthly offerings and are able to set aside some deliberate time (in silence) to take in the beauty and the passion these selections contain. With that sentiment goes the wish that our music listening may help us all grow in a most delightful way as we emerge from this period of isolation.

As for today's music, well, the MSO have given us plenty to choose from this month. One could be tempted to cherry pick from each work that was listed for performance (and I was), but with time not so much of a consideration I have stayed with a limited selection of works as the MSO would have presented them: The well-known and loved suite from Tchaikovsky's “Swan Lake”; Vaughan Williams' “Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus” (I'm sure you will recognise the melody of the main theme); Fauré's Pavane (not to be confused with “Pavane for a Dead Princess – it was Ravel who wrote that work); Excerpts from Purcell's “The Fairy Queen”. and finally Beethoven's ‘Emperor’ Concerto.

There are a couple of renditions floating around cyber space of the Beethoven concerto which have an Australian connection – one with an Australian built piano (Stuart and Sons) and Australian pianist (Gerard Willems) and another with dual British and Australian citizenship holder: pianist Stephen Hough. As I wasn't all that impressed with the sound of the Stuart and Sons piano, the recording you will watch will be with Stephen Hough, accompanied by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. The conductor is Alan Glibert.

So, here's to a pleasant musical experience for you all , and maybe the remaining MSO items for May will see the light of day for us at a later time.

Tchaikovsky Swan Lake Suite



Composed between 1875–76, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's iconic ballet *Swan Lake* was not an immediate hit with audiences and critics. After revisions were made and new productions came and went, now *Swan Lake* is one of the most popular ballets of all time. In 1882, Tchaikovsky considered joining the trend of creating ballet suites from the music from the main show. It's not proven whether he decided to go ahead with it because the concert suite we now know was published after his death by an unknown author.

What we do know is that Tchaikovsky was very interested in the idea. He wrote extensively to his friend Pyotr Jurgenson:

"You know that French composer Delibes has written ballets. Since ballet is a thing without firm foundations, he made a concert suite from it. The other day I thought about my own Swan Lake, and I wanted very much to save this music from oblivion, since it contains some fine things.

And so I decided to make a suite from it, like Delibes. In order to do this I need the whole piano score of the ballet as well as the full score. I don't know whether you yourself have a full score; if not, and if it proves difficult to extract from theatre, just send me the arrangement for now, and afterwards I shall indicate to you which numbers and in which order they were listed. And then, if you wish, this suite could be published in the form of a full score and arrangement for piano duet. Write and let me know what you think of this idea."

Jurgenson liked the idea of making a *Swan Lake* suite and thus the wheels were in motion. No more correspondence suggests what Tchaikovsky chose from this point.

The Music

The *Swan Lake Suite* is comprised of six iconic works that feature in the ballet. As aforementioned, we are not completely sure who chose the order or the pieces due to the mysterious publication marks. Each movement is a stand-alone movement representing various parts of the story:

- I) *Valse* (Act I, No.2)
- II) *Scène* (Act II, No.10)
- III) *Danse des cygnes* (Act III, No.13, Part IV)
- IV) *Scène* (Act II, No.13, Part V)
- V) *Czardas: Danse hongroise* (Act III, No.20)
- VI) *Scène* (Act IV, No.29)

Movement I – *Valse* (Act I, No.2)

The opening movement represents music from the start of the ballet. Opening with pizzicato strings playing a light and bouncy descending sequence, the music rests into a romantic waltz tempo. Led by the strings, the melody flies between the strings and winds.



An explosion from the brass and percussion lead the strings to develop the main motif. A flurry of countermelodies enter the mixing pot, with a sense of organised chaos ensuing before the winds take the reins on the development section. As the orchestra builds for the final climax after another reprise of the opening melody, the movement ends triumphantly and heroically thanks to the bold and bright brass fanfares, trilling winds and shrill strings.

Movement II – Scène (Act II, No.10)



The second movement come from the opening scene of the second act. The music represents the theme of the Swan. The melody, first introduced by a solo oboe, is accompanied by shimmering strings and a whimsical harp.

The atmosphere is relaxed, calm and full of magic. As the orchestra begins to build and unite, the french horns take the iconic theme which offers a new atmosphere. Now heroic, bold and intense the melody is beginning to

unravel. The strings take a romantic swish of the melody before the brass begins to build the tension in the background.

A final explosion of colour as a brass fanfare leads into a cascade of descending scales, the final reprise of the melody is heard primarily from the upper strings. Accentuated by off-beat heavy brass, the melody has turned dramatic and is high in intensity. The movement ends quietly and calmly.

Movement III – Danse des cygnes (Act II, No.13, Part IV)

The iconic third movement is taken from the *Dance of the Swans* interlude in Act II. Opening with bumbling bassoon, the oboes take the lead on the melody. Other winds begin to join with the upper strings playing in the gaps of the melody. This movement is relatively quiet, fast in pace, but ends with a quick final burst from the whole orchestra.



Movement IV – Scène (Act II, No.13, Part V)

Following on from the previous dance, the fourth movement represents the next dimension of the swan's dance. Opening with oboes and flutes accompanied by a harp, the mysterious opening is a stark change from the dance before. A whimsical harp cadenza sings out as a solo violin gets ready for a lullaby-like duet with the harp. The slow movement and quiet dynamic adds to the emotional side of the duet. The instruments grow and retreat together, creating a special dialogue between themselves.

The tempo picks up into a waltz style, the solo violin is now accompanied by pizzicato strings. The character of this movement fluctuates a lot, but ends up finishing quietly with a lower string pizzicato phrase.

Movement V – Pas de Six – Neapolitan Dance (Act III, Nos. 19 & 22)



A trumpet fanfare announces the arrival of Guests for festivities. Siegfried is to choose a bride from six princesses. Pizzicato strings and then woodwinds introduce a waltz picked up by the orchestra as the princesses dance a Pas de Six (he doesn't choose any of them). After the arrival of Von Rothbart with his wicked accomplice, Odile, who is disguised as a black swan to look exactly like Odette and the ensuing dance, a series of national dances take place. One of these is the Neapolitan Dance, introduced here by strings before the melody is taken up by solo trumpet with wind a string accompaniment. Other brass join in before the whole orchestra combines to bring the dance to a conclusion.

Movement VI – Scène (Act IV, No.29)

The final movement of the *Swan Lake Suite* is taken from the final act of the ballet. The tense opening sees the strings and winds interweave with fast moving 7-part phrases. After an exciting wind cadenza, the orchestra stagger in to reach a climax before the same thing happens again. The orchestra builds to a dramatic percussion interlude before the whole ensemble explodes with romantic colour as the theme soars above. Led by the strings at first, the melody is passed to the horns for the hero effect. The orchestra come down as the harp plays a final short interlude to end the suite off in the most magical of ways.

Final Thoughts

The *Swan Lake Suite* comprises some of Tchaikovsky's most-loved music from the popular ballet into a hand six-part suite. From the iconic dance of the swans to the finale scenes, the *Swan Lake Suite* has helped keep this magical music alive in concert halls.

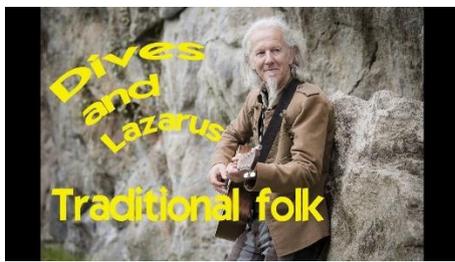
The selected performance is by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Wolfgang Sawallisch. The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDreDwVvBn0&t=439s>

Vaughan Williams – Five Variants on Dives and Lazarus



The story of Dives (Latin for "rich man") and Lazarus (the name is from the Hebrew, Eleazar, which means "one whom God has helped), is recorded in Luke's gospel in the New Testament. A well-known story in Jesus' time (thought to have originated in Egypt), it is all about the character of an unnamed rich man, who had no belief in the afterlife and who devoted himself to luxurious living, choosing to ignore the poor man at his gate, in favour of a life of self-indulgence. Even when he realises his mistake in the afterlife, to his cost, Abraham refuses to send any messenger to the rich man's brothers to warn them of this impending fate; if they were not persuaded by the prophets, they would neither be persuaded by apparitions. The rich man fails in two ways:- by the use of his wealth and his religion. Because his mind was closed to the revelation from God, his heart was closed to the demands of compassion.



This story appeared in musical form in the folk songs of 16th century England and was revived the Child Ballads of the 19th century. The tune to which the original 16th century ballad was set has since had a number of incarnations: in England for the Christmas carol “Come All Ye Faithful Christians”, in Ireland as “The Star of County Down” and in Scotland as “Gilderay”. Some may recognise the tune as “Kingsfold” which Vaughan Williams arranged for the Christian hymn: “I heard the voice of Jesus say.....”.

Many of Vaughan Williams’s most famous compositions were direct settings of famous or newly discovered folk melodies. In the case of his Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, the inspiration was less literal. Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus, for strings and harps was written for the New York World Fair in 1939, when Sir Adrian Boult conducted the first performance in Carnegie Hall.

Vaughan Williams first encountered the folksong Dives and Lazarus in 1893, when he was 21, and he described its effect thus: ‘I had the sense of recognition—here’s something which I have known all my life, only I didn’t know it!’ Later he collected several versions, and in this mature work he displays his affection for the melody in variants which are not exact replicas but reminiscences of various versions in several folksong collections, including his own.



Lazarus is taken to heaven by the angels

As the title suggests this orchestral piece has an introduction which is then followed by five quite contrasted variants.

It is quite clear where each variant begins due to tempo and atmosphere changes. Each section is unique, but all inherently familiar due to the main theme shining out in all of the sections.

Variant I

The work begins with the whole ensemble, with the harp taking a major role in initiating the main theme of the music. The cellos and violas take the main theme here also, and the harp begins to take an accompaniment part.

Variant II

The second variant also highlights Vaughan Williams’ use of the different string choirs, and he places the violins in octaves, with the violas and cellos taking a harmonic accompaniment part here. Throughout the whole piece the harp has a pertinent part as it switches between melody and accompaniment, and always offering rich harmony and beautiful timbre which brings the ensemble to life.

Variant III

The third variant opens with a duet for a solo violin and harp, so if you’re a little lost in the music this section can help you to get back on track! The change of both tempo and time signature also emphasise the change in variants. The third movement moves into a more lively 3/4 time.

Variant IV

Variant 4 comes away from this and brings a much more solemn atmosphere, with the violas leading this sections main melody.

Variant V

The final variant sees the strings subdivided even more so than before, and each part creates this fantastic contrapuntal effect until it reaches the climax, which utilises chromatic movement to get back to the original B Modal Minor. This climax is then answered by the harp and solo violin, before slowly fading away into the distance.

Finally.....

The Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus is a rather ambiguous piece, with the original folk song being anonymous and difficult to trace, and the music being made of 'variants' rather than variations. Vaughan Williams' style here is sophisticated and quintessentially English. The score represents the memories and pensive thoughts of a devoted folk song collector.

This work, then, based on a tune that Vaughan Williams had loved for nearly all of his life, which came from the very soil of England, ageless and anonymous, was played at the composer's funeral service in Westminster Abbey on 19th September 1958.

We listen to the work as recorded by Camerata Chicago Their conductor is Drostan Hall.



The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUeX83Q5PRc>.

But first you may like to hear to original folk song as sung by Maddy Prior.

The YouTube link to her recording is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3JEv4llsBk>



Fauré - Pavane Opus 50

Is Faure's "Pavane" the world's favourite piece of relaxing music? So asked American journalist Austin Gerth in 2015.: "I'm hard-pressed to think of a more relaxing piece of music than Gabriel Faure's Pavane. The orchestral arrangement, taken at a slow, deliberate but delicate tempo, always puts me in a pleasingly melancholy mood, its gently swooning main melody being perfect for a quiet rainy day or an afternoon free of classes. The Pavane is probably not Faure's most important work (that would be his Requiem), but it has become one of his most popular and most commonly performed.



Just a few of the many recordings of Faure's
Pavane - Various labels

Fauré was born in 1845, and he had a long career before his death in 1920, publishing his first piano work at age 18 and only retiring due to encroaching deafness at the age of 75. In the intervening years, he not only composed many works for piano, choir, and orchestra, but also worked, first as a professor and later as director, at the Paris Conservatoire, where he counted George Enescu and Maurice Ravel (who later wrote his own pavane, the Pavane for a Dead Princess) among his students.

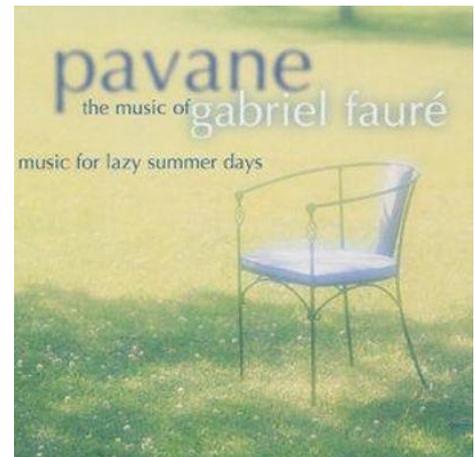
As a young man Fauré studied under composer Camille Saint-Saens and church musician Louis Niedermeyer. Faure would spend the next several decades earning his keep by working as a church organist and giving private lessons, and doing his composing during summers, not unlike Mahler. Faure composed his Pavane during one such summer, in 1886.



The "pavane," from which Fauré's piece borrows its title and its underlying rhythm, is a sixteenth century court dance, performed in pairs, often as part of a wedding procession.

Fauré's Pavane exists in two versions, one for piano and one for a small orchestra and chorus. The piece was initially conceived as an instrumental, but choral parts were added at the suggestion of the Countess Greffulhe, who was a patron of the arts in France, and a supporter of Fauré at the time. It's been suggested that the choral parts were only added to please the Countess, and it is as an orchestral piece — without a choir — that the Pavane is most commonly performed today. The orchestral version is simply the orchestra-and-choir arrangement of the piece with the choral parts left out.

The piece's stately pace, which lends the melody its halting grace, has much to do with its frequently cited calming effect. However, in something of an ironic twist, Fauré apparently intended for his Pavane to be played at a faster tempo, with a quarter note pulse of at least 100 beats per minute. The English conductor Adrian Boult once wrote a letter to *The Musical Times*, complaining about the slowing of the piece's tempo in modern performances — though it doesn't appear that his opinion has been paid very much attention in the ensuing years'.



(Source; Minnesota Public Radio)

Our selection is neither by orchestra nor choir but by the Twelve Cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. One of a kind, this ensemble is known all over the world for its instrumental mastery, the broad spectrum of its repertoire, as well as the stunning tonal variety produced by its individual musicians.

This recording comes from their 40th Anniversary Concert given in the Philharmonie, Berlin, on 9th May 2012

The link to their YouTube recording is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoJlvffQYPA>

Purcell - Excerpts from the Fairy Queen

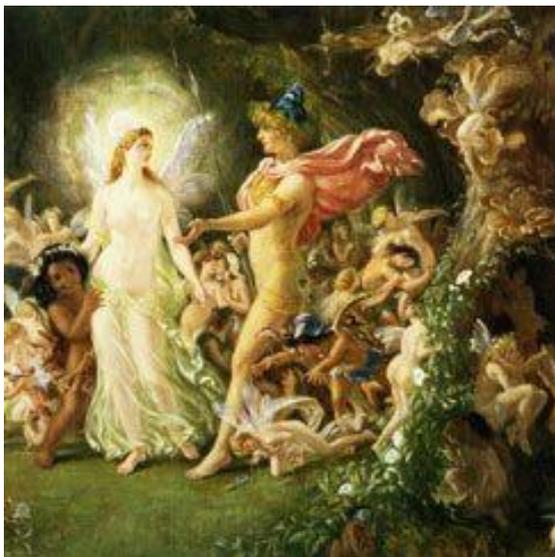


Henry Purcell, was born in Westminster, England 1659 and died there in 1695. Purcell's interest in music began when he was a young child. Rumour has it that he composed well at the age of 9. His earliest work is an ode for King Charles' birthday in 1670. His father was employed at the Chapel Royal, a training ground for court musicians. Henry was a chorister there as a young boy. Among his music teachers was Dr John Blow, organist at Westminster Abbey.

So talented a student was the young Purcell that in 1680 Blow resigned his position at Westminster Abbey in favour of his pupil. Two years later Purcell was appointed organist at the Chapel Royal, a position he was able to hold simultaneously with his commitment with Westminster Abbey. As organist of Westminster Abbey, Purcell played at William and Mary's coronation on 11 April 1689. It is said that spectators watching from the organ loft passed cash to the young composer, causing tension between him and the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

Henry Purcell died on November 21, 1695 in Dean's Yard, Westminster and was laid to rest near the organ of Westminster Abbey. A rumour circulated that he may have been the first and only composer to die from chocolate poisoning! In truth, no one really knows for certain how he died; one theory is that he caught a chill after his wife locked him out the house, but it's likely he died of tuberculosis.

Although his music was never published during his lifetime, his widow managed to accomplish that before she died in 1706



The Fairy Queen is a masque or semi-opera and it was first performed on May 2, 1692 at Queen's Theatre, Dorset Garden in London. More accurately, it is a series of five masques composed for the United Company of the Theatre Royal and it is believed that the libretto is an adaptation of William Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.

A *masque* is a courtly entertainment that flourished during the Baroque period and involved acting, dancing, music and singing on an elaborated stage in which light musical numbers and dance were interspersed with the spoken dialogue of a traditional play.

The plot follows the star-crossed lovers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as they wander through the Forest of Arden amid hilarious confusion and misunderstandings – which also beset the quarrelling king and queen of the fairies. The action is punctuated by elaborate musical entertainments. In Act I a drunken poet blunders in, and is blindfolded and teased by mischievous fairies. At the end of Act II a series of allegorical figures lull the Fairy Queen, Titania, with a Masque of Sleep.



Reconciliation of Titania and Bottom
(art print by Sir Joseph Noel Paton).

The Act III masque conjures up love, in all its rich variety, for the diversion of Titania and her new paramour – Bottom – in his ass's head. In Act IV King Oberon's birthday is celebrated with a sumptuous Masque of the Four Seasons. For the fantastical Masque of Hymen which concludes the final act, with all the characters now happily reconciled, the forest is spectacularly transformed into an exotic oriental garden.

It was music for the songs and dances which Purcell composed, some 60 of them!! . He did not write any music for the libretto. As you may guess, then, the show lasted for quite some time.

One commentator has observed: "What holds our interest more than The Fairy Queen's over-stuffed antics is the music's successful connection with Shakespearian intentions. Young love is portrayed in music wildly comic and meltingly sweet. In a state of frenzied confusion, the internal compasses of lads and lasses spin madly in search of Love's True North. The Fairy Queen takes them on a fantastic musical voyage to magical places where even angels fear to tread.

Purcell's synthesis of English and Continental musical styles was impressive, and Fairy Queen abounds with pleasing melodies, surprising harmonies, rumbling counterpoint, and varied orchestral colourings. Most uniquely, however, its settings of the English language proclaim a powerful and confident world culture emerging in the 17th Century. If Shakespeare gave modern English its literary voice early on, Purcell gave the language its musical voice as the century closed".

We listen to nine excerpts: -

1. 'Prelude' and 2. 'Hornpipe' from the First Music, 3. 'Air' and 4. 'Rondeau' from the Second Music

("First" and "Second Music" were played while the audience were taking their seats);

5. 'Prelude to Act 2' (The "Act Tunes" are played between acts, as the curtain was normally raised at the beginning of a performance and not lowered until the end. After act 1, each act commences with a short symphony (3-5 minutes).

6. Act 3 'Overture: Symphony while the Swans come Forward' (In Act 3 Two great dragons make a bridge over the river. Their bodies form two arches, through which two swans are seen in the river at a great distance).

7. 'Dance for the Fairies' (While a symphony is playing, the two swans come swimming on through the arches to the bank of the river, as if they would land; these turn themselves into fairies, and dance).



Dance of the Fairies
Painting by William Blake



8. 'Dance for the Green Men' (Four savages enter, frighten the fairies away, and dance an entry).

9. 'Monkey's Dance' (In Act 5 a Chinese garden is uncovered. Over it is a hanging garden, which rises by several ascents to the top of the house; it is bounded on either side with pleasant bowers, various trees, strange and birds flying in the air. Six monkeys come from between the trees and dance).

The excerpts are performed by the Bremer Baroque Orchestra (One of the leading German Baroque orchestras, it consists mostly of graduates of the Academy of Early Music in Bremen).

The link to their YouTube performance is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7AbzbN-MqA>

Beethoven Concert No. 5 for Piano and Orchestra (Emperor) Opus 73

What's in a name? Well, lots, I guess. But in the case of the "Emperor of all concertos" Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.5 wasn't named in honour of the self-styled emperor Napoleon as some seem to think. Yes, Beethoven was composing his 5th piano in 1809, while Vienna was under invasion from Napoleon's forces for the second time.



Beethoven was living at the time in a top-floor apartment in an imposing block owned by Baron Pasqualati – right beside the ramparts. He had to seek shelter in the basement of his brother Kasper's home, pressing pillows to his ears to protect any vestige that remained of his hearing.

Once the bombardment had ceased and the Austrian forces had surrendered, the occupiers imposed a "residence tax" on the Viennese. The composer, on whom a sufficiently heavy financial burden had been placed by the departure of those who would guarantee his income, (Prince Kinsky a wealthy officer in the Austrian army; Prince Lobkowitz, a Bohemian aristocrat and the Archduke Rudolph, Cardinal Archbishop of Olomouc) wrote "The whole course of events has affected my body and soul. What a disturbing, wild life around me; a city filled with nothing but drums, cannon, marching men, and misery of all sorts". Not the sort of sentiment that would lead to the dedication of a new work contemporary with the events of the time.



Prince Kinsky



Prince Lobkowitz



Archduke Rudolph

There was, however, no opportunity to present the new concerto. That had to wait until the following year, and then not in Vienna but in Leipzig. When the concerto was finally premiered in Vienna, it was at that concert that one connoisseur, a French army officer, supposedly called this work “an emperor among concertos” (aloud, in the auditorium?).



Johann Baptist Cramer

Although this is often cited as a source of the nickname, verification is lacking. It is more likely that “Emperor” was the brainchild of an early publisher, thought to be one Johann Baptist Cramer, an English pianist with a flair for marketing. Nevertheless, whatever its origin, the sobriquet seems apt for music of such imperious grandeur.

As with previous works, the ‘Emperor’ Concerto opens in a manner unprecedented in a concerto: a series of magnificent flourishes from the soloist in a type of written-out cadenza, set between imposing orchestral chords, before the main theme of the allegro has even been heard. When this arrives, it is a typically Beethovenian idea: punchy, memorable and simple enough to be full of potential for development.

There’s a nobility of spirit to it, too, characteristic of Beethoven’s “heroic” period – the most intense and productive time of his output, extending from about 1803 to 1814. A substantial orchestral exposition sets out the principal ideas before the soloist joins in again; and now the relationship of piano and orchestra is not the classic “individual against the mass” notion of the romantic concerto, but a dialogue of equals. There is no other cadenza; indeed, Beethoven orders his soloists not to improvise one.

The slow movement, in the surprising key of B major (about as far tonally from E flat as it’s possible to go) offers a hushed, sublime opening on the strings; the soloist enters as if in a dreamworld, exploring the byways beyond the melody. The latter passes through a series of varied returns, ending with the piano weaving a web of accompaniment like a glimmer of starlight around the theme.

But all is not over. The music comes to rest on a low note, then slides down by a semitone. From this the piano softly suggests a set of rising chords – from which the finale bursts into life with all colours blazing. This irrepressible rondo looks forward to the jubilant dance-rhythms of the Symphony No. 7 – and its upward-surgings theme with tricky repeated notes almost nods towards the duet from Fidelio in which Leonore and Florestan are reunited: “O Namenlose Freude” (O Nameless Joy).

And so concludes Beethoven’s final piano concerto: not a regretful farewell from one whose legendary abilities at the instrument were foundering on the rocks of his deafness, but a surge of glory from a composer whose capacity for reinventing himself showed itself in every piece. “I shall seize fate by the throat,” he once wrote to his childhood friend Franz Wegeler. “It shall not wholly overcome me. Oh, how beautiful it is to live – to live a thousand times.” Perhaps to write joyfully despite his suffering was his ultimate means of defiance.

Listen now to a performance by Stephen Hough accompanied by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Alan Gilbert. The internet link is:

<https://vimeo.com/200700402>