

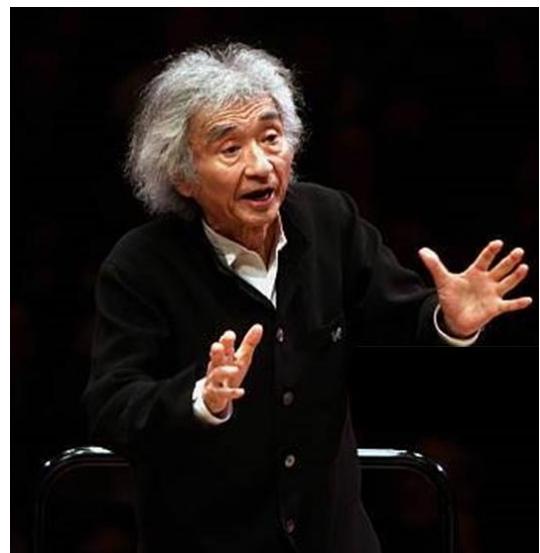


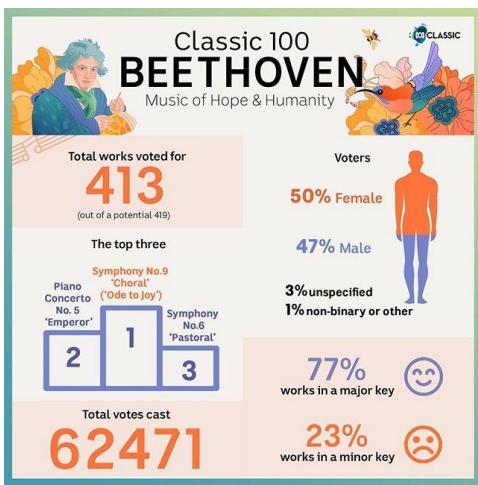
UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE
Benalla & District Inc.



BTHVN 2020

Programme Notes 28th August, 2020





About Today's Music Selections

Although Beethoven is famous for his symphonic writing (borne out only just recently in the ABC survey of the top 100 Beethoven compositions where all of his nine symphonies were voted in the top 50 - with four of them featuring in the top 5) - they are, nevertheless, only nine out of his more than 650 known works.

As if to emphasise the importance in Beethoven's mind of some of his other works, there is an interesting footnote to his chamber compositions:- that as one of

the leading pianists of his generation, Beethoven took it for granted that he would be the first to perform his own violin sonatas, cello sonatas and piano trios with leading string players; this was his personal chamber music, personal in a way that his string trios and string quartets could never be.

Continuing our "Beethoven Brush-up", it seems right, then, that we open today's presentation, as last time, with one of his many sonatas. Moreover, since so enjoyable was our excursion to the Solsberg concert of 26th June, why not stay in Solsberg and hear something of the second concert just two days later on 28th June? This second concert was to feature Sol Gabetta with Norwegian violinist Hilde Frang and Argentinian-born (now Swiss resident) pianist Nelson Goerner in works by Mendelssohn and Schubert. With the sudden unavailability of Frang and Goerner for health reasons, pianist Seong-Jin Cho agreed to stay on.

In their concert, then, instead of the planned performance of Mendelssohn and Schubert, Sol Gabetta and Seong-Jin Cho were able to perform Beethoven's Opus 69 Sonata for Cello and Piano, and Mendelssohn's Song Without Words for Violoncello and Piano, op.109.

In keeping with the intention to present an all Beethoven programme we will forgo the Mendelssohn this time round, although for those who wish to see it you simply have to click on the YouTube link given for the Beethoven work.

"Of all the musical styles, the Piano Sonata is the only one that Beethoven worked on more or less consistently throughout his life. No large gaps as with the Symphonies or String Quartets". So stated renowned English broadcaster and British Classic FM host John Suchet (Yes, he is the brother of actor David Suchet of Poirot fame). John Suchet is a fan of Beethoven and has become one of the UK's leading experts on Beethoven and his works, publishing no less than five books about the composer. According to Suchet among the 32 piano sonatas there isn't a weak one among them, and some are among the most important pieces he ever wrote. They contain every emotion Beethoven was capable of expressing.



John Suchet

It seems, then, too strong an opinion to ignore. But to which of the Piano Sonatas should we turn? Suchet is of the opinion that the most important of the early Sonatas is the Pathétique. So perhaps we should follow his lead.

For a performance of this work, then, I have chosen Valentina Lisitsa, a Ukrainian pianist who together with her future husband, studied at a private music academy in the Ukraine. In 1991 they travelled to the USA where together they won the first prize in The Murray Dranoff Two Piano Competition in Miami, Florida. Marrying the following year and staying in the USA (in North Carolina) the couple made their New York debut at the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Centre in 1995. Since then they have moved to France, and then to Italy, and now share their time between Moscow and Rome.

Valentina Lisitsa has an unusual “Rise to Fame” story to tell:



In 2007, while still only aged in her early 30s, she found her career was floundering. The concert bookings weren't coming in and she didn't have any recordings to speak of. And then, she started uploading videos of her performances to YouTube.....and the rest is history, as they say.

The brilliant Ukrainian pianist is not only the first “YouTube star” of classical music; more importantly, she is the first classical artist to have converted her internet success into a global concert career in the principal venues of Europe, the USA, South America and Asia.

Having become one of the most frequently viewed pianists on YouTube, Lisitsa can now not only sell out concert halls; her recordings are best-sellers and she is indisputably one of the classical world's biggest stars.

As for “most frequently viewed”, one estimate states there have been more than 200 million YouTube views and some 500,000 subscribers to her channel. As one of the most watched classical musicians on the internet, her use of digital innovation to champion classical music and performance saw the Royal Albert Hall, so impressed by her YouTube success, take an unprecedented step of opening its doors for Valentina's London debut on 19 June 2012. That concert, recorded and filmed by Decca Classics, became her first release on the label; it was also Google's first-ever live HD stream. Needless to say, the concert was sold out.

Of her playing, a music critic for the Washington Post wrote: “It's striking that her playing is relatively straightforward. ‘Straightforward’ is an inadequate term for virtuosity. She does not tart the music up. She does not seek to create a persona, much less impose one on what she is playing. She offers readings that are, when you penetrate through the satin curtains of the soft playing and the thunder of the loud playing, fundamentally honest and direct. You feel you're getting a strong performer but also a sense of what the piece is like rather than of how Lisitsa plays it”.

Lisitsa has now recorded all 32 Beethoven Piano Sonatas, the first volume of which are available for download from Apple Music.

It wasn't the favourite Beethoven symphony in the ABC Classic FM survey of his top 100 compositions, but it wasn't far away. Beethoven's 3rd Symphony came in at No 8 in the voting – the fifth most popular of the nine, behind the 9th, 6th, 7th and 5th. But in its day – the early part of the 19th century – it was something else again. Audiences of 1804 found it to be a "horribly long" and "most difficult" piece of music. Others saw it as a turning point in musical history – a work which changed the musical world and later, others again came to view it as perhaps Beethoven's defining work, one in which orchestral music moved into another dimension with a breadth of conception and emotional baggage and range beyond anything previously dreamed of.

But more of that later.



The performance selected is also “different”: a Japanese orchestra and conductor. The orchestra is the Seito Kinen and the conductor is its founder, Seiji Ozawa. Ozawa is not the first conductor to form his own orchestra. What’s different is the man himself. He is no natural genius. Unlike most, if not all other, conductors, he doesn’t even play a single musical instrument. His success has been the fruit of hard work and continuous study, a trait he no doubt learned or inherited from his father who, by dint of sheer hard work, became a dentist and set off for Manchuria at the age of 23, opening a practice in Changchun. It was here that his father met his wife to be, before moving to Mukden in Japanese-occupied Manchuria – present-day Shenyang in the People’s Republic of China – where the young Seiji was born – the third boy of the family.

Ozawa did not start out as part of Japan’s musical elite. He didn’t set foot on Japanese soil until he was six years old. His first encounter with music was at the age of 5, when his mother gave him an accordion as a Christmas present, and he only began piano lessons when he was 10. The family had returned to Japan in 1941 and was living in Tachikawa, a western suburb of Tokyo. The home did not have a piano, and when the family was given one by relatives, it took his older brothers three days to haul it from Yokohama to Tachikawa in a handcart.

Ozawa dreamed of becoming a pianist, but his late start put him at a disadvantage. In December 1949, he happened to attend a concert at Tokyo featuring Leonid Kreutzer conducting the Japan Symphony Orchestra (today the NHK Symphony Orchestra) and playing the piano. This experience opened Ozawa’s eyes to the allure of conducting. At the age of 15, he began studying under the music educator and cellist Saitō Hideo (1902–74), a distant maternal relative.

Fate often has a hand in people's lives, and that was certainly the case for Ozawa. Saitō nurtured many eminent conductors and string players at the Tōhō Gakuen School of Music, and Ozawa looked up to him as a mentor throughout his life. Further studies followed at Tōhō Gakuen, (a Tokyo based music school for children) which Saitō had been instrumental in founding. He advanced to its junior college in 1955 but eventually started to feel the need to study in Europe to round out his musical education.

And off to Europe he went. Acting decisively as usual, in February 1959, Ozawa, age 23, left for France aboard a freighter, entered the International Besançon Competition for Young Conductors after he arrived and came away with the top prize. This was the first step of his brilliant career. He went on to study under Herbert von Karajan and Leonard Bernstein, the only conductor to have studied under both.

Things did not go so well for him on return to Japan. Hired to conduct the NHK Symphony Orchestra in 1962 for a six-month term, Ozawa, then aged 27, was boycotted by some of the orchestra's musicians. Perhaps miffed at the thought of playing under such a young conductor, some members declared that Ozawa was brash or lacked humility and refused to play under him. He ultimately gave up on Japan and set his sights on the global stage.



Ozawa in 1963 -age 28

Ozawa began to make his mark on the world stage the next year. In 1963, he was a success at the Ravinia Festival, organized by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, as a last-minute stand-in. He went on to serve as that festival's music director from 1964 to 1968.



Seiji with Herbert von Karajan, music director of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, in 1982

He successively became music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 1965; conducted at the Salzburg Festival and at regular performances of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic; was artistic director of the Tanglewood Festival from 1970 to 2002 and as music director of the San Francisco Symphony from 1970 to 1976. In 1973, he began an unprecedented stint almost 30 years long as music director of the Boston Symphony, over which he presided until 2002.

In 2002 he became music director at the Vienna State Opera, a position he held until 2010. His recordings were also spectacularly successful for classical music. In particular, the CD of his 2002 New Year Concert with the Vienna Philharmonic sold 800,000 copies in Japan and 1 million worldwide.

In the meantime, all was not lost in Japan. After his initial rocky period, Ozawa resumed musical activity there and in 1987 founded the Saitō Kinen Orchestra, composed of former students of his mentor, helping it to develop into a world-class orchestra. In 2000, he established the Seiji Ozawa Music Academy to nurture young musicians.

And so to today's music.....

Ludwig van Beethoven - Sonata in A minor for Cello and Piano Opus 69

It is rare to see the words “frivolous” and “Beethoven” appear together in the same sentence, but that’s a word one student of Beethoven’s musical output used when he came to the Opus 69 Cello Sonata. His view is that while, by their very nature, pieces such as the Ninth Symphony and Grosse Fugue seem to exude a profound weightiness and automatically warrant descriptors like “monumental,” “pillar,” or “masterwork.”, it can be easy to forget that Beethoven repeatedly showcased a lighter, even playful side in his music.

The importance of his more serious musical expressions cannot be overstated or ignored. Considering the dashes of frivolity present throughout Beethoven’s output can paint us a much richer picture. The lighter side of Beethoven’s compositional voice is particularly evident in the third of his five Cello Sonatas. (Aspen Music Festival 2020).

Another observer supports this view saying: “Beethoven may have made his name in music history for his restless moods and Dionysian fury but there is another side to him that his A major Sonata Op. 69 represents well a Mozartean world of balance and equilibrium.....”.

(Programme notes for a performance the Vancouver Recital Society).



Steven Isserlis

Renowned British cellist Steven Isserlis says that “to play Beethoven’s five cello sonatas is the trace his life’s story”. He claims “Beethoven’s nine symphonies represent the greatest challenge a conductor will face in his or her career, and pianists Beethoven’s 32 piano sonatas”.”. “Cellists”, he says “have slightly less enormous tasks. Beethoven left only five cello sonatas, but they are every bit as central (to the cellist’s repertoire)”. Isserlis goes on to say that while “the first two cello sonatas are real concert pieces, large in scale, full of exciting effects that would have left the Berliners gasping, they are really sonatas for piano with cello, not the other way round”. “The third sonata, the A major, Op 69, inhabits a different world altogether”. “Previous cello sonatas had either been cello solos with continuo accompaniment”.... “Here, every theme is perfectly conceived for both instruments; Beethoven had invented a new genre”.

(Source: The Guardian – January 2007).

The Cello Sonata in A Op. 69 was composed in 1808 when Beethoven was virtually deaf. The work is a masterpiece and is perhaps the most beloved of his cello works.

“The third sonata opens with one of Beethoven’s most seductive themes, an invitation to an evening of pleasure. While the listener is never quite sure in the first two sonatas for this instrument whether Beethoven really loved the cello or was just writing for a convenient player, here he leaves no room for doubt. The music is glorious. What’s more he takes a leap of faith in his musicians by giving the cello and piano virtually equal parts and trusting them to get along together. The mood of A major is always his happiest.



The structure, on the other hand, is weirdly unbalanced. The opening movement takes up fully half the work. The third movement is just 18 bars long, lasting less than two minutes. The finale finds the composer at his most boisterous, urging us to share his exuberance.

(Norman Lebrecht writing in "Slipped Disc", May, 2020).



"The cello and piano are treated as equals in this sonata and as such it is the first true piece of chamber music. Unusually, the cello begins the sonata alone. Throughout, there are little ornamental bits marked "ad libitum," to be performed at the liberty of the player. Beethoven uses forceful accented rhythmic patterns in the demonic Scherzo, keeping everyone guessing as to what the meter is. Also of note is the fact that the brisk last movement requires the cellist to play in the stratosphere — the high range of the instrument, which shows off the technique of the cellist. Beethoven develops the melodic and harmonic realms in a way that is architecturally much more spacious and expansive than previous compositions. Beethoven dedicated this sonata to his friend Ignaz Gleichenstein who played the cello well. Baron Gleichenstein had taken over running Beethoven's affairs when Beethoven's personal assistant left Vienna in 1805".

(Janet Horvath writing in music magazine "Interlude" – January, 2014.

The above are simply a handful of comments on this sonata drawn from a variety of sources. Hopefully it will help our appreciation of the performance from Solsberg a few weeks ago given by Sol Gabetta and Seong-Jin Cho.

The recording can be accessed on YouTube by pasting this link into your search engine:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWSXFUiDPDQ&t=984s>



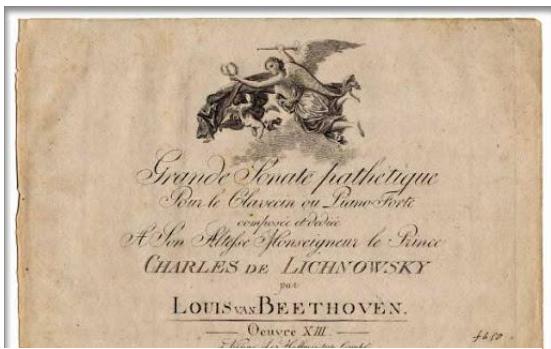
Prince Lichnowsky

Beethoven wrote the Pathétique sonata in 1798, when he was 27 years old. It was his 8th piano sonata (he certainly churned them out!). He published it properly the next year as his Opus 13, with a dedication to his buddy the Austrian Prince Karl von Lichnowsky.

The composer wrote the sonata at a rather interesting time in musical history...

Back in 1798, it was still the glory days of the 'Classical era'. Composers at the time were spinning out highly technical, exquisitely formal musical trinkets in the styles perfected by the likes of Mozart and Haydn.

But Beethoven was already showing a gleam of his future rule-smashing self. The Pathétique follows all the composing rules of the day, but has an extra dimension of expression and emotion which strikes the heart. Beethoven the 'master of passion' is starting to emerge!



Cover of the score of the Pathétique Sonata arranged for a beginner. As a boy Beethoven was known as Louis.

It was this melancholy character that inspired the piece's nickname: "Pathetique". It's one of Beethoven's most moving piano sonatas, but it wasn't the composer's idea to call it that. Beethoven's publisher heard the sonata and instantly felt its emotion and gave it the title 'Grande Sonate Pathetique' – as in, evoking pathos – and the name stuck.

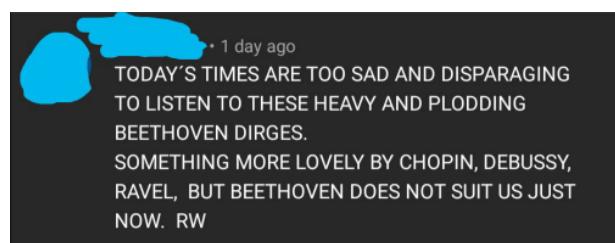
The slow, dramatic introduction just drips with pain, and it's followed by a restless, racing, head-to-the-ground Allegro that's full of anxiety and dark thoughts. The middle movement is simply bliss – some of Beethoven's most beautiful writing – before a quick, troubled rondo finale finishes things off. The 'Pathetique' was an important early success for Beethoven (he was 27 when wrote it). And the sonata is in C minor – the same key as Beethoven's stormy Fifth Symphony. (ABC Classic FM).

This was the earliest of Beethoven's piano sonatas to reach warhorse status. The work is cast in three movements:

Grave: Allegro di molto e con brio (serious, very quick with energy). Starting heavily, this dark movement soon turns fast-paced with a memorable melody. We return several times to the dramatically suspenseful opening crashes, before finishing in a ferocious blaze. The movement is in Beethoven's favourite key of C minor, the key in which he wrote most of his gloomy and powerful music.

Adagio cantabile (slow and singing). This calm section features one of Beethoven's most beautiful melodies. The warm, sweet, reflective tune seems to waft straight from the composer's heart. Words can't really describe it, so just take a listen yourself! This melody is played three times, each time with a more complex accompaniment. There are also little contrasting sections which give away the fact the sonata was written in the 18th century. If they weren't there, the movement easily sounds like it could have come 100 years later!

Rondo: Allegro (quick). This fast, jolly, little movement has a completely different character to the previous two. It has a sort of devilish comedy to it. The main melody is extremely similar to the fast melody of the first movement. We also hear a little snippet of the singing melody from movement number 2, so in a way this movement brings everything from the sonata together. (Acknowledgement: favorite-classical-composers.com).



Found following a recent (i.e during the Covid-19 lockdown) performance of the Pathétique Sonata by Valentina Lisitsa)



The YouTube link for the earlier (2014) recording we hear of Valentina Lisitsa's performance is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qO8yfBLNVjU>

Ludwig van Beethoven – Symphony No.3 in E flat major Opus 55 ("Eroica")

"O you men who think or say that I am hostile, peevish, or misanthropic, how greatly you wrong me. You do not know the secret cause that makes me seem so to you. From childhood on, my heart and soul were full of tender feelings of goodwill, and I was always inclined to accomplish great deeds. But just think, for six years now I have had an incurable condition, made worse by incompetent doctors, from year to year deceived with hopes of getting better, finally forced to face the prospect of a lasting infirmity (whose cure will perhaps take years or even be impossible)". (Beethoven in the "Heiligenstadt Testament," in which he poured out his heart as his hearing began to disappear).

The Heiligenstadt Testament has exerted a tremendous influence on posterity's view of Beethoven. It rapidly became a powerful tool by which to understand and interpret Beethoven's music, especially a work like the "Eroica," which dates from this time and ushers in a new phase in his career. The "Eroica" seems to express in music the struggles that Beethoven, never a fluent writer, had tried to put in prose.



A young Napoleon at the time of the Revolution

Beethoven's Third Symphony is regarded as a turning point in musical history, and it marks the beginning of his career's second period. As the French Revolution spilled over the borders of France, it quite naturally began to affect the lives of virtually all European citizens. Beethoven, who was at that time a poor, lower-middle class musician living in Bonn, Germany, was no exception.

The tenets of the revolution—liberty, equality, and fraternity—became the basis for his own personal artistic credo.

He aspired to become the first great musician to be totally free of patronage, to be considered the equal of princes, and to foster the ideal of universal brotherhood in his works.

He originally titled the piece "Bonaparte" out of admiration for Napoleon and the values of liberty, equality, fraternity, espoused in the revolution. But when Napoleon declared himself emperor in 1804, Beethoven became so disillusioned with him that he is alleged to have stated: "Is he too, then, nothing more than an ordinary human being? Now he, too, will trample on the rights of man, and indulge only his ambition?" and literally scratched



the name "Napoleon" from the composition's manuscript (above) and gave the symphony its current name "Eroica" or "Heroic" instead. In place of Napoleon, Beethoven dedicated the work (as with the Pathétique Sonata) to his friend and music patron Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, and it was at his palace that the symphony was first performed in August 1804.

The "Eroica" was long, technically challenging and aimed at more than entertainment – components that initially confused critics.

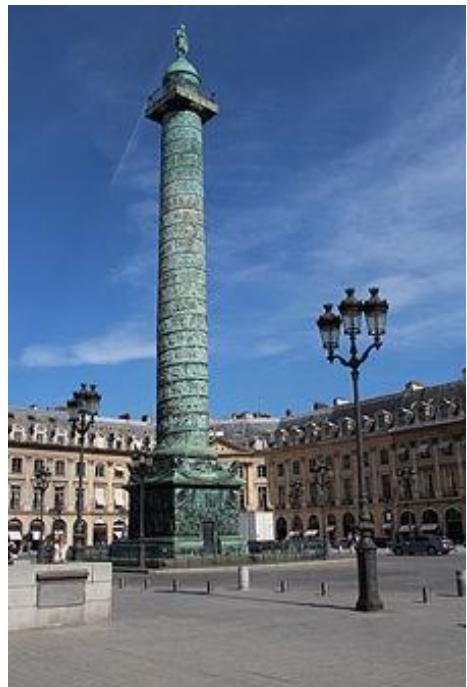
The "second" or "middle" period of Beethoven's career, usually called his "heroic" phase, lasted from around from 1803 to about 1812. Pianist, composer, teacher and Beethoven pupil, Carl Czerny, relates that he (Beethoven) had expressed dissatisfaction with some early works and wanted to pursue a "new path.", telling a publisher that some of his new piano pieces were written in a "completely new manner." These were years of astounding—perhaps we could say, heroic—productivity, hence the title given to these years. "Heroic" because although Beethoven at first tried to hide his hearing problems, then to deny them, and then again to fight them, those efforts were short-lived as he began to come to terms with his affliction.

When he wrote in the Heiligenstadt Testament ""I came near to ending my own life, only my art held me back", he went on to say: "it seemed to me impossible to leave this world until I have produced everything I feel it has been granted to me to achieve".



The courtyard of the house in Heiligenstadt near Vienna where Beethoven strove to come to terms with his deafness in the summer of 1802.

By 1806 he wrote in the sketches of one of the Opus 59 string quartets: "Let your deafness no longer be a secret—even in art."



In 1805 Napoleon defeated Austria at Austerlitz. Inspired by Trajan's Column in Rome, he ordered this column to be built in Place Vendôme, Paris, adorned with scenes of his military triumphs and topped by a statue of himself as emperor in Roman attire. The current statue is a copy of the original.

To give some context that Beethoven was at the most prolific stage of his career, these were the years when he wrote a number of his symphonies (among other works). As early as 1803, while composing the Eroica, he sketched some ideas that he later used in the Sixth Symphony. Over the next few years composition of the Pastoral overlapped with that of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, as well as with other major projects such as his opera Fidelio. "I live only in my notes, and with one work barely finished, the other is already started; the way I write now I often find myself working on three, four things at the same time", he wrote to a friend.



The Theatre an der Wien in Vienna was the scene of the premiere of several of Beethoven's works, including that of the Third Symphony in April 1805. For the two previous years, Beethoven had lived in an apartment within the theatre complex.

a theme from Beethoven's ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*.

The symphony begins with two fortissimo E-flat major chords followed immediately by a simple theme constructed out of the notes from the chord. Virtually all of the melodic material in the work is built from this single chord. Additionally, there are many striking harmonic details, such as the exploration of distantly related keys and the use of dissonant chords. Underlying the entire work, and adding one more layer of complexity, is a continual conflict between duple and triple meter. The first movement, in particular, frequently places accents every two beats even though the music is notated three beats to the measure.

Never before in the history of music had a composer produced such a revolutionary work. Although volumes have been written about the *Eroica*, words cannot adequately describe its greatness. What Nietzsche said about Beethoven's music most certainly holds true in the case of the *Eroica*: "Beethoven's music is music about music." Fourteen years after the work was premiered, a close friend of Beethoven asked which of the symphonies (eight at the time) was his favourite. The unhesitating response was, "The *Eroica*."

(Source acknowledgement for some of the above is National Public Radio – USA (npr.org) and the Redlands Symphony in the USA (redlandssymphony.com)).

Pictured right is the Saito Kinen Orchestra conducted by Seiji Ozawa in a performance of Beethoven's 3rd Symphony. The video of the performance can be accessed on YouTube at:



Against that backdrop, then, let's turn to the music, about which we'll be brief, but saying first of all that the players, critics, and listeners of the time all found the work extraordinarily difficult. It was clear from the beginning that this was no ordinary symphony. The exposition of the first movement was more than twice as long as any previous symphony. In classical symphonies, it was unusual to find a funeral march in the place of a song-like slow movement. The third movement was no longer the traditional minuet and trio, but a relentlessly driving scherzo with a contrasting trio for hunting horns. The last movement was a set of variations on