

Notes, Week 8 & 9

Beethoven's Last Years & Late Style

Solomon: "The longest crisis in B's life came to an end with his
"victory" in the Court of Appeal in early 1820.

B's output in following years outlined by Solomon

Missa Solemnis op. 123

Piano Sonatas opp. 109, 101, 111

Diabelli Variations, op. 120

Symphony No. 9, op. 125

String Quartets, opp. 127, 120, 131, 132, 135

B's popularity in Vienna still unrivaled

1819 – a dozen Vienna concerts devoted to B's music

1823 proposals from London, St. Petersburg

May 1824 academy concert, at urging of devoted followers in Vienna

Missa Solemnis (excerpts), Ninth Symphony, Consecration of
House Overture

Reviews mixed

Repeat concert May 23 failure

Financial difficulties

Unscrupulous dealings with publishers

Reconciliation w/ Nikolaus Johann & Johanna

Renewed obsession w/ Karl

eventual attempted suicide of Karl

Long deterioration in Gneixendorf, late 1826

"Deathbed" letter in form of reply to 1825 letter from Wegeler

renunciation of nobility pretense (not all birth delusions)

March 1827 codicil leaving bank shares, cash to Karl further modified

to, in effect, leave entire estate to Johanna (intentionally or
unintentionally).

Died March 24, 1827

10,000 plus attended March 29 funeral in Vienna

Elements of Late Style

Extreme Introspection

Three stylistic periods sometimes summarized:

1792-1802 imitation

1803-1812 externalization

1813-1827 reflection

reflective tranquility revealed in many works, Op. 90 piano

sonata

Interest in counterpoint

Op 102 cello sonatas show high degree of contrapuntal writing

Op 101 piano sonata includes quasi-Baroque fugue

frequently found in string quartet writing

Interest in formal variations

Diabelli variations

Grout "working out of themes and motives to utmost of their
potentials"

Dense, sometimes unconventional, dissonant harmony

Plantinga (Diabelli variations): “B’s harmonies shift very rapidly. A maze of nonharmonic pitches sometimes obscures the tonality and produces abrasive dissonances.”

Theme & Variations, Fugue, opposite ends of compositional spectrum

Plantinga: the late style, gradually forged in the teens of the new century, remains something of a puzzle. Whatever his continued allegiance to the sonata, fugue and theme and variations, B now bends their shapes to radically new ends. Sometimes traditional patterns appear enormously concentrated. At the other extreme, familiar procedures achieve unheard-of size and weight. Boundaries between forms grow indistinct. Sonata and variation form are elaborately mingled and fugues show the development of motives associated with sonata mov’ts. Themes may appear on the surface more fragmentary and disjunct; but their elements are transformed and abstracted to yield a musical coherence more profound than ever.

Ninth Symphony

Premiered Karntnertor Theatre, May 1824

Plantinga: “seemingly resulted from gradual coalescence over many years of ideas B had for three different compositions”

1793 when B stated intention of setting entire Schiller’s ode, “To Joy”
1794 song *Gegenliebe*
1808 Choral Fantasy

1817 Ferdinand Ries conveys proposal from London Phil. Society
precedent in Haydn

B contemplated pair of symphonies to complement 5/6, 7/8
9th to be wholly instrumental;
10th to incorporate voices over course of work based on Greek
Cantique Ecclesiastique text re: feast of Bacchus

Simultaneous renewed plans for setting of poem *An die Freude*,
Friedrich Schiller (1785)

1811 sketchbook entry: “Freude schöner Götterfunken
Tochter. Work out overture.”

1822-23 hard work on 1st 3 mov’ts
ideas from earlier pieces, including abandoned string quartet
of 1815
1822 agreed to sell rights for the new symphony to London
society.

Mid 1823 all three projects came together
entirely instrumental symphony
second symphony incorporating voices (cantata,
oratorio)
setting of Schiller’s poem

Schindler recalls event Oct. 1823: the working out of the 4th mov't
however, began a struggle seldom encountered before. The
problem was to find a suitable introduction to Schiller's ode.

see Solomon, Beethoven, 404 on B and the idea of a "utopia"