Beethoven

Symphony No. 6 in F Major

"PASTORAL"

Opus 68

Performed by

ARTURO TOSCANINI

and the

B. B. C. SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Musical Masterpiece Series

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Beethoven—Symphony No. 6 in F Major

BEETHOVEN'S Sixth Symphony is one of the landmarks of music. Of what is called "programme music," that is, music depicting or describing an emotional or scenic programme, it is the first great example. It was not by any means the first example of programme music: from music's earliest days composers have sought to portray emotions and scenes in instrumental music. In the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book there is a Fantasia by William Byrd which describes, "Fair Weather," "Lightning," "Thunder," "Calm Weather," etc. In 1700, Johann Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor at Leipzig, published a volume of "Musical Representations of some Biblical Stories in Six Sonatas for the Clavier." The French Clavecinists Couperin and Rameau wrote several pieces which, although slender in context and modest in ambition, in that they do not set out to depict subtle or complex emotions or scenes, are the most successful of the early eighteenth century attempts at programme music. Both Gluck and Mozart tried their hands at programme music, the latter with conspicuous success in the Statue music of "Don Giovanni."

Haydn had distinct leanings towards programme music. In "The Creation" and "The Seasons" he misses no opportunity of tone painting, and to Forster, the publisher of his "Seven last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross," he wrote, "The last Words of the Saviour are expressed in such a manner by instrumental music that the deepest impression must be awakened in the most inexperienced."

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony was the first purely orchestral work *of major importance as music* to be written to a definite and declared pictorial basis. He had had, it is true, Napoleon in mind as the central figure of his Third Symphony, the original title of which was apparently intended to be "Grand Symphony written on Bonaparte." He had already, of his own accord, given programmatic indications at the heads of certain works—the "Sonata Pathetique"; the *Adagio* of the Quartet, Op. 18, No. 6, "La Malinconia"; the third movement of Sonata, Op. 26, "Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un Eroe"; but never before had a great composer so boldly stated his pictorial intentions as Beethoven in this Symphony.

It is necessary to note with especial care that Beethoven was not concerned in this Symphony with a literal rendering of the sounds and sights of nature à la Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumble Bee." On the back of the original manuscript of the first violin part, Beethoven's instruction reads: Mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Mahlerie (more expression of feeling than painting), a canon which may well serve as a solution of the eternal conflict of programme versus absolute music.

There is almost every indication that Beethoven took his programme from a Grand Symphony, "Portrait musical de la Nature," by Justin Heinrich Knecht. This work, of which there is a copy in the library of the Royal College of Music, was published in 1784, and the titles of its movements—

"(1) A beautiful country, where the sun shines, gentle zephyrs frolic, brooks cross the valley, birds twitter, a torrent falls from the mountain, the shepherd pipes, the lambs gambol, and the sweet-voiced shepherdess sings.

(2) Suddenly the sky darkens, an oppressive closeness pervades the air, black clouds gather, the wind rises, distant thunder is heard, and the storm slowly approaches.

(3) The tempest bursts in all its fury, the wind howls and the rain beats, the trees groan, and the streams rush furiously.

(4) The storm gradually passes, the clouds disperse, and the sky clears.

(5) Nature raises her joyful voice to heaven in songs of gratitude to the Creator"

are so like those of this Pastoral Symphony that the originality of Beethoven's programme comes under suspicion: and since Sir George Grove has pointed out that Beethoven's earliest Sonatas and this work by Knecht were advertised *on the same page,* it is difficult to give Beethoven the credit for the devising of the programme. Beyond the titles, however, Herr Knecht had nothing which was of use to Beethoven.

Knowing, as we do, Beethoven's passionate love of the countryside, his oft-quoted remarks, "I love a tree more than a man," and "In the country every tree seems to speak to me, saying 'Holy! Holy!' " his love of walking alone through the woods in the neighbourhood of Vienna, the choice of subject occasions no surprise.

The Symphony was first performed on Thursday, 22nd December, 1808, in the Theater an der Wien.

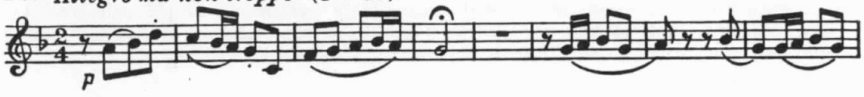
First Movement—*Allegro ma non troppo.*

Erwachen heiterer Gefühle bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande.

(The awakening of cheerful impressions on arriving in the country.)

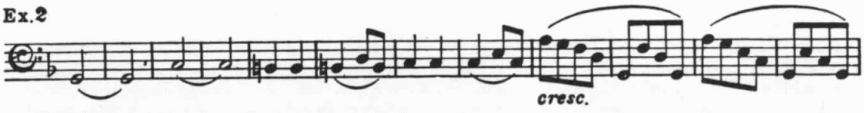
The whole of the first movement is built on the melody played at the outset by the violins.

Ex.1 *Allegro ma non troppo* (♩ = 66)



There is a second subject,

Ex.2



a melody given out by the 'cellos, but Beethoven's chief concern is with his first subject. With extraordinary ingenuity he repeats phrase after phrase, giving each an independent existence by subtly varying its shape. And yet this repetition, which, as one hears it, sounds as if it might go on for ever—is a genial representation of the idea Beethoven had in mind—the quiet delight one feels in wandering through wooded countryside.

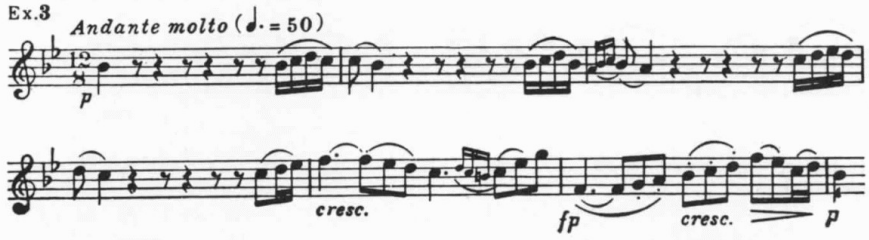
Second Movement—*Andante molto messo.*

Szene am Bach.

(Scene by the Brook.)

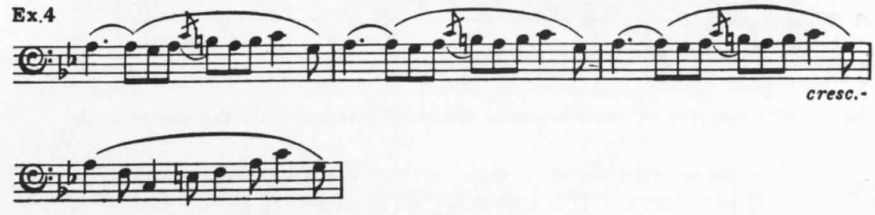
For the slow movement of the Symphony, the scene is set by a brook, and so Beethoven keeps the brook in mind as an almost permanent background by gently moving figures in the lower strings. The first subject is given to us, like to many Beethoven melodies, only after a number of tantalizing false starts.

Ex.3 *Andante molto* (♩. = 50)



The second subject is delightful, both as tune and in the sense it gives of blissful indolence,

Ex.4



and it gains a certain quality of deliberateness from the instrument by which it is first played—the bassoon. The humorous "bird noises" episode in the *Coda,* together with the thunder in the fourth movement, are the features of the work that have always excited the curiosity of the unmusical, who find more pleasure in what Beethoven himself said was but a joke (Mit denen soll es nur Scherz sein) than in the manifold beauties of the rest of the Symphony. The passage in question consists of only eight bars: the flute imitates the nightingale, the oboe the quail, and the clarinet the cuckoo, and Beethoven, having had his joke and indulged in a moment of *Mahlerei,* returns to *Ausdruck der Empfindung.*

THIRD MOVEMENT—*Allegro.*

Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute.

(Jolly gathering of Peasants.)

In this movement, the equivalent of the *Scherzo* of the Symphony, the music depicts the frolics and the simple music of the peasants. The music is simple rusticity, in the hands of a genius. The tunes are naïve. The opening section is obviously concerned with the village fair and its rather elementary music making. The section corresponding to the Trio has been interpreted as a fight between villagers, but the character of the music has so much of the spirit, and bears such rhythmic resemblance to a rough dance still occasionally performed in the villages of Bavaria and Upper Austria, that we may ignore the pugilistic interpretation. The village fair section is repeated and we are led to the Fourth Movement without interruption.

FOURTH MOVEMENT—*Allegro.*

Gewitter, Sturm.

(Tempest, Storm.)

The storm begins without warning. No sharp gusts of wind, no distant rumbles of thunder warn the dancers that their sport is to be short lived. Beethoven cuts the merrymaking short. The movement begins with a low rumbling on the 'cellos and basses. In twenty bars the storm is on us with all its fury. With the strictest economy of means, Beethoven produces magnificent effect. There is no space here to enter into a detailed discussion of the means he employs, but it is interesting to see how telling is his expedient—upon which Berlioz commented so enthusiastically—of giving the 'cellos groups of five semiquavers against groups of four in the bass; and how effective, too, are the descending chromatic passages in the strings.

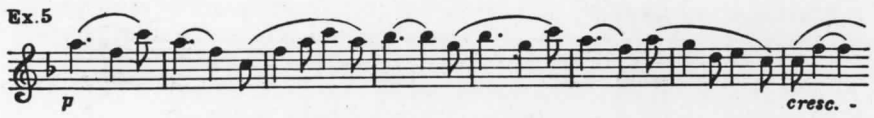
The abating of the storm is admirably realized and the phrase played by the oboe and second violins in octaves (the violin melody used at the beginning of the movement) conveys all the peace and fresh stillness of the countryside after a storm.

FIFTH MOVEMENT—*Allegretto.*

Hirtengesang—Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm.

(The Shepherdess's Hymn—Thanksgiving after the Storm.)

The last movement follows the fourth without a break and begins with a *Ranz des Vaches,* first played by the clarinet and repeated by the horn—an afterthought on Beethoven's part, for the sketch-books show him beginning the movement with the Peasants' Hymn to which this *Ranz des Vaches* leads.



It is a lovely melody announced by the first violins, and from this tune, the *Ranz des Vaches* and the second subject

Beethoven has built a magnificent movement and the most symphonic of the whole work.

W.L.

RCA Victor Division, RCA Manufacturing Company, Inc., Camden, N. J. Printed in U. S. A.