

Beethoven SYMPHONY No. 8, IN F, Op. 93

J. S. Bach PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR

Berlioz BENVENUTO CELLINI: OVERTURE

SIDE 1

Beethoven SYMPHONY No. 8, IN F

There seems to have been a curious ebb and flow in the inspiration, the power, and the moods that were Beethoven's. The Eighth Symphony, charming as it is, no more represents the mature and full-statured Beethoven than does the First. The heroic proportions and valorous spirit that distinguished the Third, the fierce and godlike rages of the Fifth, the vigor and bacchanalian abandon of the Seventh — there is little of any of these qualities to be discovered in the Eighth, nor is there much that could be regarded as evidence of the forthcoming Ninth and last of the symphonies. Perhaps these even-numbered symphonies were the result of the sheer urge to create that certainly drove Beethoven in every waking hour; and perhaps the incidence of the creative urge, and of material out of which to fashion his creature, were not simultaneous. Beethoven had, nevertheless, so mastered the form and the medium that even such habitual workings of the spirit, as exhibited in the present symphony, take on the aspect of masterpieces.

Beethoven was perhaps too concerned with troublesome and unmusical things, when this music was written, to abandon himself thoroughly to his inspiration. His dream, already a hindrance in his profession, was beginning to prey upon his mind. His brother, Johann, had involved himself in an affair with the landlord's daughter, and the hot-tempered Beethoven rushed to Linz to take the matter into his own hands: so successful was he that the result was precisely what he had wished to prevent. His brother married the girl. There is something at once droll and pathetic in Beethoven's botheaded and tactless interference in his young brother's love affairs. Although he loved ladies of quality, he was none too discriminating in his own amours — he died of an affection rarely contracted from respectable individuals — yet he rushed ineffectually to prevent a liaison, not to mention a marriage, between his brother and a girl of the servant class.

However disturbing these circumstances were, they did not prevent Beethoven from completing, during the year 1812, the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies: a trio for

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

Pierre Monteux Conductor

piano, violin, and 'cello; a sonata for violin and piano, and certain less important works. The Eighth Symphony was not performed, however, until more than a year later. It was first presented at a concert in Vienna, on Sunday, February 27, 1814. A little more than thirty years later it was played by the Philharmonic Society of New York, in November, 1844. It was not favorably received at its first performance; however, the overfrequent playing of the favorites has the advantage of turning attention, ultimately, to the less-known symphonies, and for this reason, perhaps, the Eighth is appearing more frequently on symphony programs. It is worthy of frequent hearing, and certainly repays in pleasure the most careful attention.

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SIDE 2

Band 1 J. S. Bach-Respiigli PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR

Although Bach's great *Passacaglia and Fugue* is one of the most famous organ classics, it was not originally written for that instrument. It was composed for the double-manual harpsichord and re-written for organ, presumably during the latter part of Bach's stay in Weimar (1708-17). Albert Schweitzer has commented of the work, "Its

polyphonic structure is so thoroughly suited to the organ that we can hardly understand nowadays how anyone could have ventured to play it on a stringed instrument."

The term *passacaglia*, Spanish in origin, means *pass along the street*, and was originally given to an old Spanish street dance. Its chief characteristic was the reiterated of a "ground" or bass theme, over which a rich musical tapestry was woven. In the *chaconne*, the theme may move upward from the basses in the course of the variations which follow. Actually, in Bach's *Passacaglia*, the theme occurs away from its position in the basses on two occasions, a fact that has resulted in much controversy as to terminology. There are those who insist upon referring to this work as a *chaconne* rather than a *passacaglia*.

Ottorino Respighi made his orchestral transcription of the *Passacaglia and Fugue* at the request of Arturo Toscanini. As such, it was first performed on April 16, 1930, by the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. The Italian composer, who called his version an *interpretation orchestrale*, had no intention of recreating an organ effect. It is purely an orchestral composition.

Band 2 Berlioz BENVENUTO CELLINI: OVERTURE

In many ways, the *Benvenuto Cellini: Overture* offers a remarkable example of the contradictory nature inherent in much of Berlioz' work. The opera to which it serves as introduction was a miserable failure, but the appeal of the ornate *Overture* has made it a staple of the orchestral repertoire. As Berlioz himself has written on the occasion of the opera's premiere in 1838, "The overture received exaggerated applause, but the rest was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity." Undoubtedly, the life of Cellini did not supply a sufficient framework on which to build an opera, nor was the libretto of the most outstanding variety. Yet, in the *Overture*, we are able to hear the inter-related workings of Berlioz' genius: a full-bodied treatment which did much to further the instrumentation of the modern orchestra; a superhuman vigor; a fascinating elaboration. Its drama is not necessarily related to that of the opera; the emotions it expresses are fully able to stand on their own.

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BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 8, in F, Op. 93

J. S. BACH

Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor

BERLIOZ

Benvenuto Cellini Overture

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra PIERRE MONTEUX, conductor