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Kelly Oecheli

BEETHOVEN

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*Overture to Egmont*

AND

*Overture to Leonore, No. 3*

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BOTH CONDUCTED BY

*Herbert von Karajan*

WITH

THE PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA OF LONDON

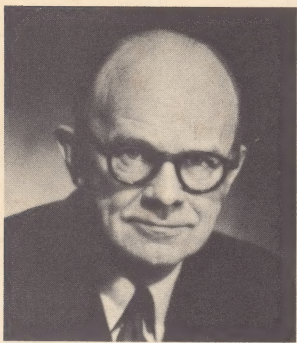
AN ANGEL RECORDING

Analyses written and conducted by THOMAS SCHERMAN

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# BEETHOVEN



DEEMS TAYLOR

NOTES BY DEEMS TAYLOR

[REPRINTED FROM *For the Record*]

## Overture to EGMONT

ON January 1, 1808, when Court Councillor Josef Härtl took over the management of the two Vienna Court Theaters, he decided to introduce some novelty into the dramatic repertoire by producing plays by Goethe and Schiller, with incidental music. The pair that he selected were Schiller's *William Tell* and Goethe's *Egmont*; and the composers he approached were Adalbert Gyrowetz and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Legend has it that Beethoven was anxious to write the music for *Tell*, but that Gyrowetz, as the elder musician, was given first choice, and elected to write music for the Schiller play, leaving *Egmont* for Beethoven. "Legend" is probably the right word, for we know that Beethoven admired Goethe's play so much that he refused to accept any payment for the music.

His incidental score comprised an overture, four entr'actes, two songs, a passage known as *Clärchen's Death*, a "melodrama" (lines spoken over music) and a final "triumph symphony." The first performance took place in the Hofburg Theater on the evening of May 24, 1810. Twenty-one days later, June 14, 1810, Schiller's *Tell* was produced with Gyrowetz's music. It was described by a contemporary critic as "characteristic and written with intelligence." He did not mention *Egmont* or Beethoven.

In writing the overture, Beethoven makes only one reference to the other numbers in the score. That reference is to the climactic scene of the play, when Egmont is led out to execution. Suddenly the orchestra and chorus join in a tremendous paean of victory, a sign that the ideals for which the hero stands remain undying. It is this finale that Beethoven uses as the coda of his great overture.

When the overture was published, in 1811, Beethoven sent a copy to Goethe, together with a letter in which he observed that he approached the poet "only with the deepest reverence, and with an inexpressibly deep, deep feeling for [his] noble creations." He also asked Goethe for an opinion as to the merits of the work, saying that even an unfavorable comment

would be profitable to himself and his art. Goethe's reply, if there was one, is not available. No matter. Beethoven has been receiving a reply, from millions, for a century and a half. The play is all but forgotten. The overture remains.

## Overture to LEONORE, No. 3

EARLY in October, 1805, Ulm had fallen to the French. On the 30th, Bernadotte entered Salzburg. In Vienna, meanwhile, the intelligentsia — most of the people who took any interest in serious music — did not wait for Napoleon's arrival. They fled the city. The Empress of Austria left Vienna on November 9. On the 13th the French Army entered the city with flags flying and bands playing. Such was the atmosphere in which Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* opened at the Theater an der Wien on November 20, 1805, with the composer conducting from the piano.

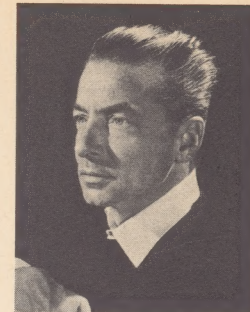
The political scene was not the only handicap under which *Fidelio* labored. The singers complained of the difficulties of the score, and the orchestra was insufficiently rehearsed. The opera was a flat failure. What audience there was consisted mainly of French officers and privates. The French, naturally, did not understand the German text. *Fidelio* was withdrawn after three performances.

Immediately following the last performance, a group of Beethoven's friends, headed by his great patron Prince Lichnowsky, gathered to see what they could do to save the opera. It was a long and — on Beethoven's side — acrimonious session. At first the composer stubbornly refused to change a single note. However, they finally got him to agree to compressing the three acts into two, and to taking out three numbers. As to the overture: it became apparent that certain passages were too much for the strings and wood winds, so Beethoven set about rewriting these, and ended by writing an entirely new overture, *Leonore*, No. 3.

The third *Leonore* overture has always been a subject of controversy. It is so much more powerful than most of the rest of the *Fidelio* music that it tends to upset the dramatic balance of the opera. If it is played as a conventional overture, little that ensues comes up to it. If it is played between the acts — and it sometimes is — the second act is anticlimactic. Better, perhaps, to omit it from the opera and play it only where it belongs: on the concert stage.

Wagner wrote: "The third *Leonore* overture, far from furnishing a mere musical introduction to the drama, in itself presents the drama more completely and movingly than we find in the ensuing disjointed stage action." One of Beethoven's modern biographers says that "*Fidelio's* supreme service to aesthetic history was done in turning Beethoven's attention to the dramatic overture, a field in which he brilliantly shone. There is more real dramatic art in this overture than in the entire bulky score of the opera for which it was designed as a prelude."

Herbert  
von Karajan



*The Saturday Review* referred to this Angel recording as an "exquisitely played and highly sophisticated reading"; and the *Cincinnati Times-Star* called it "about the most stirring performance . . . you are ever likely to hear." These are typical of many other reviews.

As to the conductor, Maestro von Karajan directed the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra on its triumphal tour of the United States and Canada in February and March, 1955, and led the first American tour of The Philharmonia Orchestra of London (which is heard in this Angel recording).

Born in Salzburg, the city of Mozart, von Karajan makes his home in Switzerland and centers his musical activities in London, where he is the regular conductor of the Philharmonia. In recent years his performances have spread his name and fame over the entire musical world.

Although still in his 40s, von Karajan has frequently been compared by music connoisseurs abroad with such figures as Bruno Walter and the late Toscanini. Joseph Wechsberg, in the *New York Herald Tribune*, wrote: "He is perhaps the world's greatest European conductor."



THOMAS SCHERMAN, who wrote the analyses of these works and who narrates and conducts the music on the Analysis side of this record, is music director of MUSIC-APPRECIATION RECORDS. He is best known as the founder and conductor of The Little Orchestra Society of New York, but has also served as guest conductor with other orchestras in England, Europe and the United States.



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