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BEETHOVEN

SYMPHONY No. 7, IN A

Arturo Toscanini

conducting the

*Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra
of New York*

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A Treasury of Immortal Performances

BEETHOVEN

SYMPHONY No. 7, IN A, Op. 92**Arturo Toscanini***conducting the Philharmonic-Symphony
Orchestra of New York*

THE seventh of Beethoven's nine symphonies was written during one of the composer's more and more frequent periods of spiritual travail. His deafness was daily growing worse; a love affair had but recently been broken off; and the political situation, in which Beethoven was always interested, was not at all reassuring.

These circumstances perhaps helped to solidify certain traits in the character of the composer which had been developing for some time. The symphony reflects them. It is touched with the boisterous, often crude humor of its author; it is not without a mordant bitterness, yet a bitterness, penetrating as it is, that is never precisely pessimism, and certainly never despair.

Beethoven himself, despite his increasing deafness, conducted the first performance of the *Seventh Symphony*, from manuscript, on December 8, 1813, at the concert hall of the University of Vienna. It is interesting—and refreshing—to note that, notwithstanding the composer's difficulty in hearing, and his often ill-timed and sometimes absurdly exaggerated gestures, the symphony was received with acclaim.

FIRST MOVEMENT

The magnificent introduction to the movement presents the themes very clearly indeed. The first comes at the very beginning, separating itself, in the thin voice of the oboe, from the mighty opening chord. As it slowly progresses, in long elliptical phrases, the full orchestra emphasizes its periods with powerful chords. Presently the strings intone ascending scales in *crescendo*, the basses alone holding aloof from these until the apex of their power is reached. Now the second theme of the introduction, again in the penetrating voice of the oboe, sounds rather sadly and wistfully, but the orchestra derives from it figures of tremendous breadth and power. In the midst of this development comes a sudden pause. A nervous flicker of string tone . . . an impatient ejaculation from the full orchestra . . . tentative, hesitating reduplicated notes in the upper woodwind . . . and suddenly the main theme of the movement proper appears in the silken

tones of the flute. Now we begin to perceive the reason for designating the seventh as the "dance symphony," for this quaint little theme, so soon to be the foundation for a vast and infinitely varied structure of tone, is unmistakably imitative of a folk dance.

Toward the end there is a new burst of revelry . . . an occasional curious hesitation, as if the composer distrusted, momentarily, his ability to remain keyed to sardonic humor, and stood undecidedly on the brink of melancholy. But there is fierce vehemence and power at the end.

SECOND MOVEMENT

The second movement happily falls short of being a funeral march. The first theme, ushered in by a somber chord in the horns and woodwind, is gloomy and ominous, but the counter-theme, though still in the minor mode, lends a brightening touch of hopefulness. There is always a gleam of light in Beethoven's darkness.

With rigid economy of material, the composer achieves in the second movement certain amazing contrasts. The softly-stepping basses suggest an atmosphere of mystery, and yet almost the same figure, assigned to the brighter ranges of the string section, is bright with hope, vehement in exhortation, passionate in pleading. The rhythms of the two themes—one persistent and strongly marked, the other fluent and flexible as a stream—are oddly contradictory, yet fitted together as perfectly and as wonderfully as the angular and refractory fragments of a mosaic are brought together to form figures of gracious curve and motion.

There are further contrasts—in color and tonality as well as in rhythm, and as the movement draws to a close there is a slowly pervading light. The original themes are glorified and sublimated in the mysterious tones of the horn and in the floating unreality of the upper woodwind ranges . . . a final daring touch of *grotesquerie* in the plucked notes near the end . . . and at last an unexpected alteration in accent that brings the movement to its conclusion.

THIRD MOVEMENT

Here are wonderfully vigorous and elastic rhythms; rugged gaiety, sustained exuberance, and expression of the most fundamental joys of life, all of which contribute to the construction of music which in its own way is quite as moving, quite as expressive and impressive, as the soberly melodious

slow movements. Grant that the mood of Beethoven was more often sad than joyous; the joyous mood, when it does come, is none the less truly Beethoven!

The first theme approaches wildness almost as closely as Beethoven could, yet underneath it is possible to see the perfectly ordered structure. Brilliant orchestral color is freely applied, especially when fragments of thematic material are repeated in different sections of the orchestra. Superb climaxes develop with the ascending scales . . . and suddenly the swift scales are reversed to give a new effect.

Perhaps the most striking contrast is effected, however, when the boisterous opening section of the movement is repeated, in tones of ethereal delicacy, yet with every original detail of accent and phrasing perfectly imitated. It is dream-like—reminiscent—or like seeing through the mist of years some beauty once beheld in all its vivid, glowing splendor.

The contrasting theme is much slower, and rather solemn. We hear it in a combination of clarinet, bassoon, and horn, with the last most prominent; and against it is poised a long-sustained note of the violins. Later the theme is presented in a similar figure, but with most of the orchestra intoning it against the long quivering flame of tone put out by the trumpet.

The second division of the movement reveals development of the themes so clearly posited in the opening section. As the end is approached a prayerful spirit is breathed gently into the music . . . only to be elbowed roughly aside by the violent chords in full orchestra that bring the movement to a close.

FOURTH MOVEMENT

The powerful opening chord in the string section is answered and reduplicated even more powerfully by the remainder of the orchestra . . . again the same figure . . . and with scarcely a pause the wild dancelike first theme leaps into dynamic life . . . a bacchanal indeed!

Here the "dance symphony" reaches its apotheosis. There is an almost savage, primitive joy in these measures, a fierce exaltation of the purely physical that could be expressed only through rhythm. Here we become, whether we will or no, a part of the rhythm created and driven along by the composer, conductor, and orchestra; something involuntary, something deep within us, leaps and moves to the headlong abandoned onrush of this music.

The second theme, which appears after less than half the first division of the movement has been played, is almost as bacchanalian and contagious as the first, and it leads to even wilder revels. But suddenly, there is a mysterious change, so subtly effected that we are scarcely conscious of the means employed. The original subject reappears, now in the tender, tremulous accents of the flute . . . infinitely gentle, pensive, yet still touched by joy. It is but a bit of by-play . . . a highlight, a momentary distraction . . . and the wild dance goes on until the end.

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HIS MASTER'S VOICE

Beethoven
SYMPHONY No. 7, IN A, Op. 92

LCT
1013

Non-
Breakable

SIDE
1

Band 1—First Movement: Poco sostenuto
Band 2—Second Movement: Allegretto

Arturo Toscanini
and the Philharmonic Symphony
Orchestra of New York

EO-LRC-4024

RCA VICTOR DIVISION, RADIO CORPORATION OF AMERICA, CAMDEN, N. J. MADE IN U.S.A.

LONG PLAY

33 1/3

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"HIS MASTER'S VOICE"

Beethoven
SYMPHONY No. 7, IN A, Op. 92

LCT 1013 **Non-Breakable** **SIDE 2**

Band 1—Third Movement: Presto: Presto, meno assai: Presto
Band 2—Fourth Movement: Allegro con brio

Arturo Toscanini
and the Philharmonic Symphony
Orchestra of New York

EO-LRC-4025

LONG PLAY

33 1/3

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