

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

BEETHOVEN EMPEROR CONCERTO THE AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

CONCERTO NO. 5 IN E-FLAT MAJOR FOR
PIANO AND ORCHESTRA, Op. 73,
"Emperor"

Side 1
Allegro (21:58)

Side 2
Adagio un poco mosso
Rondo: Allegro ma non tanto (20:34)

Notes by CHRIS NELSON
Library Editor, Columbia Masterworks

When Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his Fifth, and last, Piano Concerto, he was at the height of his powers as a creative artist. Behind him was the *Sturm und Drang* period during which he had produced such masterpieces as the Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"), Symphony No. 5, the Rasmovsky Quartets, the Waldstein and Appassionata Sonatas, the Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, and his only opera, "Fidelio." In 1809, the composer found himself entering a new and richly creative period which would culminate in the Missa Solemnis, the last piano sonatas and string quartets, and the great Ninth Symphony.

Notations for the Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-Flat Major appear in Beethoven's sketchbooks of 1808, but the major part of composition was accomplished in the summer or early autumn of 1809 under conditions which were anything but conducive to contemplation and creation. On May 11 of that year, the French Army under Napoleon marched upon Vienna and opened siege. During the bombardment that followed, Beethoven fled to the house of his brother Karl on the Raubensteinasse where he crouched in a cellar, holding a pillow over his head to spare his ears the pain of concussion. Following a severe battering, Vienna capitulated and the French moved in to begin a short but oppressive occupation, during which time Beethoven worked not only on this Concerto but on his String Quartet, Op. 74. "The whole course of events has affected me, body and soul," he wrote in a letter. "What a disturbing, wild life around me; nothing but drums, cannons, men, misery of all sorts."

The composer dedicated the Piano Concerto No. 5 to his friend and patron, the Archduke Rudolph. The first performance of the work took place on November 28, 1811, in Leipzig, where it was played by Friedrich Schneider. A review of that performance appeared in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* for January, 1812:

"Beethoven's newest concert . . . is without doubt one of the most original, imaginative, most effective, but also one of the most difficult of all existing concertos. Herr Musikdirektor Schneider played it with such mastery as could scarcely have been believed possible; and this not only in the attention given to facility, clarity, technical certainty and delicacy, but with insight into the spirit and feeling of the work. The orchestra, too, in its unmistakable respect and love for the composer, fulfilled every desire in its playing of the work for the solo performer. So it could not have been otherwise than that the crowded audience was soon put into such a state of enthusiasm that it could hardly contain itself with the ordinary expression of recognition and enjoyment."

The Concerto is in the Public Domain.

Cover photo: Bob Katz

Stereo—MS 6888
Mono—ML 6288



GLENN GOULD LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI

TWO TITANS of the music world met for the first time in this new recording of Beethoven's most triumphant concerto. Maestro Stokowski, 84, brings to this performance the vitality and élan of youth, and the brilliant 34-year-old Gould moulds his reading with maturity and profound insight. Together, these unique and colorful personalities have created a memorable performance which is both a fitting capstone to Glenn Gould's recorded series of the complete Beethoven piano concertos and a fresh triumph in the long and distinguished career of Leopold Stokowski.

Beethoven was generally acknowledged to be one of the foremost virtuosos of his day, and his piano works were written by him for his own public performances. But when this new Concerto was given its important Vienna debut, it was an ex-student of the composer, Karl Czerny, who performed. Historians have surmised that it was Beethoven's increasing deafness that deterred him from performing this Concerto, but it is a matter of record that he performed in public as a pianist long after the date of this concert. A music critic for the *London Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, writing in 1820, suggested that, beginning in 1812 and extending to the end of his career, Beethoven's piano playing had become technically too rough and inexact to do justice to the Fifth Concerto. "Beethoven composed it expressly for himself," wrote the critic. "But his slovenly habits of execution were unequal to the task. The *tutti* introduction is fine, and the executive parts for the pianoforte very various, very difficult, and at times very effective, though frequently incongruous."

The Vienna concert—a benefit for the Society of Noble Ladies of Charity—was a curious affair. It included concert arias and duets, a violin solo and three *tableaux vivants*, representing paintings by Raphael, Poussin and Troyes. Sandwiched between a *cavatina* by a Mlle Sessi and a *tableau* of Esther fainting before Ahasuerus was the Piano Concerto No. 5. A witness at this *mißlinge* wrote at length in praise of the *tableaux*, ending his report with "The pictures offered a glorious treat. A new pianoforte concerto by Beethoven failed."

In such an atmosphere of light diversion, it is not remarkable that little attention was given to Beethoven's new Concerto. Nor was there a dearth of critics to explain the failure of the work. One of them, Ignaz Franz Castelli,

editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Anzeiger*, wrote:

"If this composition failed to receive the applause which it deserved, the reason is to be sought partly in the subjective character of the work, partly in the objective nature of the listeners. Beethoven, full of proud confidence in himself, never writes for the multitude; he demands understanding and feeling, and because of the intentional difficulties, he can receive these only at the hands of the knowing, a majority of whom are not to be found on such occasions."

There are many unconvincing explanations of the work's sobriquet, "Emperor"—but the music is unquestionably imperious, regal and grandiose. The majestic opening themes give the same feeling of limitless space experienced during the opening bars of the "Eroica" Symphony. A further parallel may be drawn between the effect of the two great opening chords of the "Eroica" and that obtained at the very beginning of the Concerto No. 5 by the three fortissimo chords for piano and orchestra, each followed by *cadenza*-like passages for the piano. After the long and stormy development of the main theme, the piano re-enters to engage in a lengthy dialogue with the orchestra. Where a *cadenza* for the solo piano could conventionally be expected, Beethoven has given the direction, "Non si fa una *cadenza*, ma s'attaca subito il seguente" ("Do not make a *cadenza* here but attack the following immediately.") The "following" is a sequence of carefully written-out passages designed to preclude the insertion of inferior *cadenzas* by fellow-pianists and other composers. This material leads directly into the coda.

The slow movement (*Adagio un poco mosso*) has two themes—a serene, almost dreamy, melody for muted violins, and a thoughtful, sustained *cantilena* given to the piano. Toward the close of this movement, there is a suggestion of the principal subject of the *Rondo*, which follows the *Adagio* without pause.

The *Rondo finale* (*Allegro ma non tanto*) is a combination of sonata- and rondo-form. A lyrical melody played by the piano early in the movement and never given to the orchestra, recurs only in the coda, in which the kettledrum acts as companion to the piano.

With this work and the Piano Concerto No. 4, Beethoven brought to fruition his principles of piano-and-orchestra composition. The Piano Concerto No. 5 is a work of emphatic grandeur, a triumphant testament to the artistic integrity of the titan who, in the words of Sir Donald Francis Tovey, "was the first to face the world as a 'free creator.'"

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Ludwig van Beethoven 1770-1827

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 5 in E-flat major op. 73 “Emperor”

Es-Dur · en *mi* bémol majeur

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|---|--|-------|
| 1 | I. Allegro | 21:59 |
| 2 | II. Adagio un poco moto – <i>attacca</i> | 9:23 |
| 3 | III. Rondo. Allegro | 11:15 |

Total Time 42:44

Glenn Gould piano

American Symphony Orchestra

Leopold Stokowski conductor

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xLP 112910 [1], xLP 112911 [2/3] (mono)

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