

Beethoven and Beer

Friday, March 29 – 7:30 pm

Alexander Prior, conductor

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op.68 "Pastorale"

(39')*

Awakening of Happy Feelings on Arriving in the Country: Allegro ma non troppo

Scene at the Brook: Andante molto mosso

Merry Gathering of Country Folk: Allegro

Thunder, Storm: Allegro

Shepherds' Song, Happy and Grateful Feelings Following the Storm: Allegretto

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Note: There is NO intermission in tonight's performance.

Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op.68 "Pastorale"

Ludwig van Beethoven

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performed: December 22, 1808 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: February 2014

It was to the countryside that Beethoven would always turn to find solace, quietude, serenity, and replenishment for his spirit. His friend Therese von Brunsvik once said, "He loved to be alone with Nature, to make her his only confidante."

The roots of the "*Pastorale*" *Symphony* go back many years before its infamous first performance, in a cold concert hall in Vienna, near Christmas in 1808. Sketches for music that would find its way into the second movement appear in notebooks from 1803, and even then, Beethoven had a scene by a brook in mind, sketching the words, "The larger the stream the deeper the note" next to his musical musings. But Beethoven did not intend his work to be pictorial, or so programmatic that it was little more than musical illustration. While he did append the nickname to the work, it was important that the work was, "more an expression of feelings than tone painting," as he wrote on the work's title page.

While each movement is given the usual Italian tempo markings, Beethoven also included descriptors for each movement, which are useful guides for the listener. The first two movements are long and luxuriant, each built from relatively simple melodic ideas. The first movement's subtitle translates as, "Awakening of happy feelings on arriving in the country." Its measured, unhurried pace is nevertheless sun-dappled and sprightly. The long second movement has the subtitle "Scene at the brook." Not a lot actually transpires in this section, but as the music historian George Grove observed, "Only when the sameness of fields, woods, and streams become distasteful will the 'Pastoral' Symphony weary its hearers."

The final three movements blend one into the other without a pause. The third movement is the jauntiest of the entire work, a rustic dance of country folk, with unexpected key changes and clever instrumental colours. The "Thunderstorm" fourth movement is a few minutes of excitement and even fear. It is only in this short movement that piccolo and timpani are used, representing a keening wind and thunder, respectively. The storm is short-lived, and as the sun once again punctures the sky, the country folk who had been dancing only minutes before have their sense of gratitude at the storm's passing expressed in a jovial and majestic song of thanksgiving. Ironically, the work's first performance took place in an unheated hall on a cold Vienna December night – anything but the sunny, inviting landscape the music so vividly depicts.

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