

Octet for Winds, Op. 103

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

"Music should strike fire from the heart of man, and bring tears from the eyes of woman." - L. van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany in 1770 to a family of seven children and died in Vienna in 1827. Over 20,000 Viennese attended Beethoven's funeral; one of the torchbearers was Franz Schubert, who was buried beside him a year later in 1828.

Beethoven's father was his first teacher and he made his first public performance at age seven in 1778 in Cologne. He later studied with Gottlob Neefe, Haydn, Albrechtsberger, Salieri, among others, and quickly gained a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. Knowing how Leopold Mozart exploited Mozart, Beethoven's father, Johann, also attempted to do the same but without success. Beethoven was never married but there is no doubt that he had had a few romantic relationships during his life time. During the late 1790's, Beethoven noticed that there was a problem with his hearing but was unsuccessful in finding a cure. Although no one knew for certain his actual cause of death, some of the medicine that he had taken contained so much lead that there was common belief that he died of lead-poisoning.

This Octet was believed to have been written between 1792 - 1793 when he was in Bonn and was dedicated to the highly skilled court musicians of Prince Elector Maximilian Franz of Cologne. This work is scored for two oboes, two clarinets, two French horns and two bassoons. This combination of instruments was very popular at the time and it is, in some ways, modelled after the earlier musical form, Tafelmusik, popularized by G. F. Telemann.

The first movement, ***Allegro***, is in sonata - form (Exposition - Development - and Recapitulation) and is full of lovely harmony and memorable counterpoint. The first oboe is given the important role of presenting the main theme, the rhythm of which dominates the entire movement. The bassoon provides a strong Alberti bass in supporting the movement.

The second movement, ***Andante***, opens with a lyrical oboe melody that reminds listeners of an arioso from a Mozart opera. The bassoon then joins the oboe, which creates the effect of an operatic duet. The texture of this movement is very much lighter than the opening movement.

Even though the third movement, ***Minute and Trio***, is based on a Baroque dance, some of the characteristics of future Beethoven's scherzo can be heard here. He also writes a wonderful duet between the clarinet and French horns. The beautiful contrast of tone colours between these two instruments is evident.

The final movement, ***Presto***, is full of energy. Beethoven used the various tone colours of the instruments and created a beautiful picture of sounds. This thicker texture is created by using runs, arpeggios and syncopated chords. Beethoven has written some very challenging parts for all the instruments and the powerful French horns bring the Octet to a commanding conclusion.

Souvenir de Florence, Op. 70

P. I. Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893) was a Russian composer of the Romantic era. He was born in Votkinsk, a small town in present-day Udmurtia. His father, Ilya Petrovich, was the son of a government mining engineer, of Ukrainian descent. His mother, Alexandra, was a Russian woman of partial French ancestry and the second of Ilya's three wives. Pyotr's older brother was dramatist, librettist, and translator Modest Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Tchaikovsky began piano lessons at age four with a local woman and could read music as well as his teacher within three years. However, his parents' passions for his musical talent soon subsided. The family then sent Tchaikovsky to the School of Jurisprudence in St. Petersburg in 1850 in order to secure for him a career as a civil servant. He graduated on May 25, 1859 with the rank of titular counsellor, the lowest rank of the civil service ladder. He began working at the Ministry of Justice the same year and six months later, he became a junior assistant to his department; two months after that, a senior assistant. Tchaikovsky remained there for the rest of his three-year civil service career. During this time, he also attended classes in music theory, harmony, counterpoint and fugue taught by Nikolai Zaremba through the Russian Musical Society (RMS); Anton Rubinstein, director and founder of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, taught him orchestration and composition. He was very impressed by Tchaikovsky's musical talent. Soon after, Tchaikovsky quit his job with the government and began a career as a full time musician/composer.

"**Souvenir de Florence**", Op. 70, is a string sextet scored for two violins, two violas, and two cellos. It was composed in 1890 and had its premiere in November, 1892. The work was titled "Souvenir de Florence" because Tchaikovsky began work on it while visiting Florence, Italy. Tchaikovsky dedicated the work to the St. Petersburg Chamber Music Society in response to his becoming an Honorary Member.

The first movement, **Allegro con spirito**, is in Sonata Form and the main theme is presented as the music begins. The second theme in F Major is much calmer and Tchaikovsky was able to make a perfect transition from the first theme to the second. The music comes to end with a short coda. As the tempo suggests, the music is full of energy and interesting harmony.

The slow movement, **Adagio cantabile e con moto**, is in ABA form and begins with a romantic theme stated by the first violins with pizzicato accompaniment before being taken up by the cello. There is a lovely lyrical duet between the solo violin and solo cello in this movement suggests an intimate dialogue between two lovers.

The third movement is marked **Allegretto corto moderato** and begins with a very distinct Russian melody which every section takes turns interpreting it. The middle section is a trio and the main theme returns before the movement comes to a close.

Even though the piece is intended for a sextet, the music written in the final movement, **Allegro con brio**, may more appropriately played by a full orchestra. Once again, it begins with a folk-like Russian theme played by the first violins followed by a fugue, and then a technically challenging development before the music comes to a satisfying close.