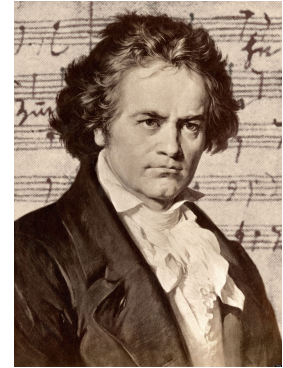


EROICA

Ludwig van
Beethoven

SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN E-FLAT MAJOR

Eroica means "heroic" but what does "heroic" mean? What does it mean to be a hero? What journey must someone go through before he/she can be called a hero? As hard as that is to put into words, is even harder to explain through music - but that exactly what Beethoven did. Even though *Eroica* is two hundred years old, it still takes us on an emotional journey.



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is

HISTORY



In the early 1800s, Beethoven was new to the music scene. His abusive father pushed young Beethoven to become a prodigy (child star) but Ludwig wanted to play music his own way - this led to much conflict between Beethoven and his dad. By the time he reached his late teens, Beethoven was able to study (and live with) with a famous music teacher and was allowed to compose the music he always "felt" was inside of him. It was unlike anything anyone had ever heard at the time. It was complex, powerful, even aggressive.

MESSAGE

This piece contains four movements and each movement conveys a different part of the emotional journey of the hero. To sum up, the journey starts with the hero experiencing the extreme happiness and sadness life can bring. Then the hero experiences goes through a period of intense trial and challenge. The hero then becomes victorious in overcoming the challenges. Finally, Beethoven reminds how sweet victory can be. After the elation comes an appreciation for the accomplishment of overcoming one's trials.

MOVEMENT 1

Beethoven starts by introducing the theme of the piece. The theme is a repeated melody. Variations of the theme (or motifs) are when the composer uses the same notes but switches them around (sometimes even adding additional notes here and there). The different variations on the theme take the listener on a wild journey through emotional extremes.

- We hear HAPPY & LIGHT contrasted with DARK & CONFUSING.

MOVEMENT 2

"Funeral March" - the music replicates the thunder of drums and roar of the crowd as if the coffin of a beloved member of society is making its way through the streets towards its final resting place

- We hear GRIEF and SADNESS.

"Oboe Solo" - in contrast to the public demonstrations of mourning, we now have a solitary, personalized expression of grief.

- We hear COMPLEXITY and CONFUSION.

MOVEMENT 3

Tired of thinking about the past, we are ready to move forward. This movement creates new heroes and revolutions.

- We hear IMAGINATION and CREATIVITY.

MOVEMENT 4

Although filled with fun dances and solos that show off the musician's individual skills, there is an urgency that makes us look at the familiar with new eyes and realize how special it all is.

- We hear TENDERNESS, ACHING, and BEAUTY.

IS NAPOLEON THE HERO?

Originally, Beethoven wrote the symphony in honor of Napoleon. Beethoven agreed with the ideas of liberty, equality and brotherhood that the French Revolution fought for. Beethoven hoped that Napoleon would be a truly great democratic leader. He was severely disappointed when Napoleon declared himself Emperor.

"In writing this symphony, Beethoven had been thinking of Napoleon. At that time Beethoven had the highest esteem for him, and compared him to the greatest rulers of Ancient Rome. We saw this symphony on his table, beautifully copied in manuscript, with the word "Buonaparte" inscribed at the very top of the title-page and "Ludwig van Beethoven" at the very bottom ...

I was the first to tell him the news that Buonaparte had declared himself Emperor, whereupon he [Beethoven] broke into a rage and exclaimed, "So he is no more than a common mortal! Now, too, he will tread under foot all the rights of Man, indulge only his ambition; now he will think himself superior to all men, become a tyrant!" Beethoven went to the table, seized the top of the title-page, tore it in half and threw it on the floor. The page had to be recopied . . ."

~Ferdinand Ries, secretary to Beethoven



IS BEETHOVEN THE HERO?

It is possible that Beethoven was thinking of himself and his personal struggles as well. Just prior to writing this symphony, Beethoven realized he was slowly going deaf. Obviously, this upset him greatly, not just as a musician but he already found it difficult to relate to people, he felt this would make him even more ostracized. He went away to the countryside and literally decided whether to live or die. He decided to live.



OR IS IT US?

A third option would be that the symphony is about each of us. That all of us can be "heroic" as we overcome our struggles and difficulties in life and come out the better for it.