

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)
Egmont - Incidental Music, Op.84

Narration: Gordon Kalton Williams based on Goethe and Grillparzer

Klärchen (Clara) - soprano
Narrator/Egmont - speaker

Overture
Song: *Die Trommel gerühret* (Beat the drum)
Entr'acte I: Andante – Allegro con brio
Entr'acte II: Larghetto
Song: *Freudvoll und Leidvoll* (To be joyful and sorrowful)
Entr'acte III: Allegro - Marcia: Vivace
Entr'acte IV: Poco sostenuto e risoluto – Andante agitato
Clara's Death: Larghetto
Melodrama
Victory Symphony

Beethoven is associated in the popular mind with the ideals of the French Revolution - liberty, equality and fraternity. Details of his public career support this: the sentiments of the opera *Fidelio*, and the incident in which he tore up the original dedication to Napoleon on the front page of the *Eroica* symphony upon hearing the news of Napoleon's self-coronation ('Now he also will trample on all human rights and indulge his ambition. He will place himself above everybody else and become a tyrant.').

But Beethoven probably identified less with equality than with the idea of a meritocracy. He wrote in 1820, admittedly some years after the *Eroica* and *Fidelio*, that 'The common citizen should be excluded from higher men'. And it was probably the Wise Ruler, personified notably by Don Fernando, the Minister of State in *Fidelio*, who most faithfully reflected his political ideal. Goethe's *Egmont* likewise is no Spartacus. He does not die for the overthrow of the aristocracy. However he does oppose the unnecessarily harsh reinforcement of the status quo. And it is easy to see how Goethe's story, with its politicised heroine (Clara), its depiction in the early scenes of a contented, benignly-ruled live-and-let-live society, and the stand of a brave individual against that society's cruel suppression appealed to Beethoven's particular political orientation.

Lamoral, Count Egmont, was the 16th century hero of the Low Countries. A war hero who had driven back the invading French, he led the people in resisting Spanish domination but was eventually executed by the Spanish in Brussels in 1565. His death was regarded as the harbinger of the eventual revolt and liberation of the northern provinces. Goethe had originally written his play in 1775, and Beethoven was commissioned in 1809 by the Burgtheater in Vienna to write incidental music for the long-awaited Viennese premiere in 1810. Beethoven so admired the work that he refused a fee from the theatre. In the end, besides the overture which is so justly famous, he wrote nine other numbers. The other numbers are rarely played, which is remarkable. Hearing the complete *Egmont* incidental music allows us to grasp the grandness of the theatrical conception in a way that isolated performances of the overture cannot do. Beethoven said to Georg Friedrich Treitschke (one of the revisers of *Fidelio*) in a letter in 1814 that he would happily write more numbers if Treitschke could secure a production at the Wiedener Theatre.

Composers appreciated Goethe's poetry for its concrete imagery, clear narrative exposition, and vibrant rhythms. Beethoven's admiration was reflected in a number of settings of the poet's work. 'The Song of the Flea' (from *Faust*), and the cantata *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* are two examples that spring to mind. However the meeting between the two men at the Bohemian spa of Teplitz in 1812 was rather a tense occasion. Goethe's polished urbanity clashed with the manners of

Beethoven, a self-made man who, when he sensed he was being patronised by an aristocrat, had a habit of exaggerating his rough edges.

A story, perhaps apocryphal, tells of Goethe's annoyance as people bowed to him along a path and of Beethoven's response: 'Don't give it a thought, your Excellency, the compliments are perhaps meant for me.'

Goethe had not heard Beethoven's *Egmont* music by the time of this meeting (his respect for Beethoven's musicianship was limited to his piano-playing), but when he heard the *Egmont* music in a concert performance in 1821 he remarked of the last scene, the melodrama: 'Beethoven has followed my intentions with admirable genius'.

The concert performance in 1821 presented Beethoven's numbers with linking text supplied by Friedrich Mosengeil. In 1834 Franz Grillparzer, the leading Austrian poet of his day, revised this text in unrhymed verse. It is this text which serves as the basis of tonight's presentation. Elements of Goethe's original play which were retained by Grillparzer remain in tonight's version. These are the two song-texts and the melodrama (the orchestrally-accompanied spoken monologue) which ends the play.

While providing an effective through-line and narrative tone for the incidental music, Grillparzer's text removes detail from the political aspect of Goethe's play and leans more heavily towards the romantic relationship between Egmont and Clara. Characters such as Margaret of Parma the Spanish Regent, Machiavelli her advisor, and the Duke of Alva's two henchmen (Gomez and Silva) are omitted. Though tonight's version does not restore those characters the text has been adapted to give some sense of the political dangers at stake in the early part of the story. There is therefore increased opportunity to appreciate the original underscoring effect of Beethoven's music and of the juxtaposing effect of the entr'actes which originally commented on the action just past and foreshadowed the action to come. The re-balancing of the plot-lines also injects deeper motivation into Clara's eventual adoption of a political stance.

The striking thing is that a sense of the original text for which this music was written enhances the genius of the music, and actually increases our appreciation of what Grillparzer described as 'the mighty sounds which a great mind conjured up... when he allied himself to one [whom Grillparzer considered] even greater'.

Gordon Kalton Williams

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A Brief Synopsis

After the familiar Overture the narrator describes the setting of the story, extols Egmont's virtues and introduces Clara (Song: *Die Trommel gerühret*).

Die Trommel gerühret!	Beat the drum!
Das Pfeifchen gespielt!	Sound the fife!
Mein Liebster gewaffnet	My beloved, in armour,
Dem Haufen befiehlt,	commands his troops,
Die Lanze hoch führet	holds high his lance,
Die Leute regieret	rules his men.
Wie klopft mir das Herze!	How my heart beats!
Wie wallt mir das Blut!	How my blood races!
O hatt ich ein Wamslein,	Oh, if only I had doublet
Und Hosen und Hut!	breeches and helmet!
Ich folgt ihm zum Tor raus	I would follow him through the gate
Mit mutigem Schritt,	with valiant tread,
Ging durch die Provinzen,	and march through the provinces,
Ging überall mit.	march all over with him.
Die Feinde schon weichen,	The enemy wavers

Wir schiessen darein	as we fire into them.
Welch Glück sondergleichen,	What joy unequalled
Ein Mannsbild zu sein!	to be a man!

The narrator foreshadows ominous events (Entr'acte I: *Andante - Allegro con brio*). Then expresses the anxiety caused by Egmont's heedlessness. But Egmont is able to forget political dangers in Clara's company (Entr'acte II: *Larghetto*) The threat to Egmont's and Clara's happiness looms closer (Song: *Freudvoll und Leidvoll*).

Freudvoll	To be joyful
Und leidvoll	and sorrowful,
Gedankenvoll sein,	to be pensive,
Langen	to long
Und bangen	and dread
In schwebender Pein,	in lingering pain,
Himmelhoch jauchzend,	to exult to heaven,
Zum Tode betruht,	cast down unto death
Glücklich allein,	happy alone
Ist der Seele, die liebt.	is the soul that loves.

Egmont and Clara spend one last night together (Entr'acte III: *Allegro -*) before the Spanish enter the city (*Marcia: Vivace*). Egmont is trapped (Entr'acte IV: *Poco sostenuto e risoluto -*) and Clara, though weak with grief, tries to rouse her countrymen (*Andante agitato*). Clara dies (Clara's death). Egmont is condemned and passes his last night in prison. In his dreams Egmont sees a vision which portends the eventual liberation of the northern provinces (*Melodrama*), and before his death makes a speech exhorting his countrymen to rise up against the tyrants (*Victory Symphony*).