

Beethoven's "Eroica"

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Hector Berlioz: *Roman Carnival Overture*, Op. 9

Berlioz's *Roman Carnival Overture* is actually an out-take from his first opera, which was loosely based on the life of the 16th-century Italian sculptor, goldsmith, soldier, author and musician Benvenuto Cellini. When the opera *Benvenuto Cellini* failed in Paris in 1838, Berlioz salvaged some of its music by extracting this overture for concert performance. It adheres to his preferred single movement form: an effervescent champagne cork opening, followed by a lyrical, melodious slower section, then concluding with a flashy allegro. In this case, the opening measures are a vibrant Italian saltarello, whose irrepressible rhythm dominates the thrilling conclusion as well.

Anna Clyne: *ATLAS* for Solo Piano and Orchestra (East Coast Premiere; New Jersey Symphony Co-Commission)

Britain's Anna Clyne is a versatile composer who has worked in film, dance, popular music, and electronica. Her new piano concerto, *ATLAS*, reflects her fascination with visual art. She writes: "Set in four movements, [it is] inspired by (and titled after) the monumental four-volume publication *ATLAS*, which maps the ideas, processes, and inspirations of the German artist Gerhard Richter." Spanning photographs, drawings, and sketches from 1962 to 2013, *ATLAS* is a comprehensive summary of Richter's art. "My music responds to the imagery contained in these four volumes," says Clyne, "to create a musical montage and a lucid narrative."

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55 ("Eroica")

A hallmark of great music is its ability to say something powerful to us no matter how many times we have heard it. For a few listeners, this will be a first acquaintance with Beethoven's magnificent "Eroica" Symphony, which is certain to make a powerful impression. For most of us, a performance of this masterwork is a visit with an old and dear friend. Now more than two centuries old, the "Eroica" sounds fresh and immediate throughout its forty-seven minute duration. Concise motives are building blocks for the heroic first movement. Principal oboe is the soloist in the somber *Marcia funebre*. Beethoven limits himself to one theme in the

scherzo, but puts it through its paces. Listen for the horns' section solo in the "hunting call" trio. Beethoven used the famous finale theme for two other variations sets. Heroism, surprise, drama, solemnity, humor: the "Eroica" has them all.

Hector Berlioz: *Roman Carnival Overture*, Op. 9

Hector Berlioz

Born: December 11, 1803, in La-Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France

Died: March 8, 1869, in Paris, France

Composed: 1844, using materials from his 1838 opera

World Premiere: February 3, 1844, in Paris

Duration: 8 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, four horns, two bassoons, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, timpani, cymbals, tambourines, triangle and strings

Italian topic for a French opera

In the nineteenth century, Paris was music's Mecca, and the Paris Opéra was a proving ground for all composers of every nationality. Success there was the ultimate goal. For most of his career, Hector Berlioz was better known as a music critic than he was as a composer, like most of his contemporaries he sought the recognition and prestige that only a grand opera could give him. With the ground-breaking *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) and other successes under his belt, he set to work in the mid-1830s on an opera based on the memoirs of the colorful sixteenth-century Florentine-born goldsmith, rake, and memoirist Benvenuto Cellini. Through political connections and with a considerable amount of lobbying, Berlioz secured a production at the Opéra, where *Benvenuto Cellini* opened in September 1838.

The opera bombed. Critics lambasted it; the singers hated it; the conductor François Habeneck was disinclined to put in the extra effort that the complex and difficult music required. After only a handful of feeble performances the opera was withdrawn. *Benvenuto Cellini* languished in ignominy until the late twentieth century, when the renaissance of interest in Berlioz's music drew attention to its fiery and imaginative music.

Salvage operation: rescuing an overture

Berlioz knew that he had excellent musical material within the score. Both a businessman and an energetic self-promoter, he decided in 1843 to draw some music from *Benvenuto Cellini* and compile it into a concert overture, which might in its turn be parlayed into a successful performance vehicle. At the same time, the new compilation would provide an orchestral introduction to the opera's second act, should a revival outside France take place. The result was the *Roman Carnival Overture*, which did little for the failed stage work, but has become one of the most popular of all Berlioz's orchestral works, surpassed only by the splendid *Symphonie fantastique*.

Superb showpiece

Like most of Berlioz's overtures, it opens with a brilliant orchestral flourish that shows off the virtuoso capabilities of the large ensemble and seizes audience attention immediately. It then cedes to a more lyrical section, in this case with an English horn proclaiming the melody from the first act love duet between the hero Cellini and his love interest, Teresa. The balance of the overture derives mostly from a lively saltarello (the same dance with which Mendelssohn concludes his "Italian" Symphony) that forms the core of Benvenuto Cellini's great carnival scenes. In the opera, it is a full-blown ensemble. While the overture follows the original quite closely, it finds a natural habitat in Berlioz's colorful orchestration. An increasing emphasis on brass as the piece gathers momentum adds to the effectiveness. The overture is a superb showpiece that makes it easy to understand why it strengthened Berlioz's reputation as a brilliant orchestrator.

Anna Clyne: *ATLAS* for Solo Piano and Orchestra (East Coast Premiere; New Jersey Symphony Co-Commission)

Anna Clyne

Born: March 9, 1980, in London, England

Composed: 2023

World Premiere: March 28, 2024, at the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas, Texas; Fabio Luisi conducted the Dallas Symphony Orchestra with Jeremy Denk performing solo piano

Duration: 30 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets (second doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons (second doubling contrabassoon), two horns, two trumpets, trombone, tuba, timpani, a large percussion complement, solo piano and strings

Still in her early forties, Brooklyn-based Anna Clyne has already served as composer-in-residence for the Chicago Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Berkeley Symphony, l'Orchestre National d'Île-de-France, and the Orlando Philharmonic. She currently teaches at Mannes/The New School in Manhattan, and stays busy fulfilling commissions. In 2022 she was the most frequently performed female British composer – and the eighth most frequently performed living composer worldwide.

Clyne completed her first composition at age 11, subsequently pursuing formal music study at the University of Edinburgh. She earned a Master's in Composition from the Manhattan School of Music, where her teachers included Marina Adamia, Marjan Mozetich and Julia Wolfe.

Clyne works in both acoustic and electro-acoustic music. In summer 2023, the Cabrillo Festival of International Music premiered Clyne's *Wild Geese* for orchestra, a work merging conventional orchestra with computer-controlled processes, a project she developed in collaboration with audio engineer Jody Elff. She has also collaborated with choreographers, filmmakers, and visual artists.

ATLAS is the most recent example of her work with artists. Clyne took her impetus from the German contemporary artist Gerhard Richter. Her composer's note elaborates:

“Set in four movements, my first piano concerto is inspired by (and titled after) the monumental, four-volume publication *ATLAS*, which maps the ideas, processes, and inspirations of the German artist Gerhard Richter. Conceived and closely edited by Richter himself, this comprehensive compendium cuts straight to the heart of the artist’s thinking, collecting more than 5,000 photographs, drawings and sketches that he has compiled or created since the moment of his creative breakthrough in 1962. My music responds to the imagery contained in these four volumes to create a musical montage and a lucid narrative. Examples of the imagery are listed below.”

VOLUME I (1962-1974)

Photographic Experiments 1969

Stars 1968

Spheres 1968

Fire 1968

Photographic Details of Colour Samples 1970

Cities (in Sketches of a Room) 1968

Clouds (in Sketches of a Room) 1970

VOLUME II (1966-1988)

Sketches (Constellations) 1967

Sketches (Numbers) 1978

Sketches (Colour Charts) 1966

Colour Fields 1973

Still Lifes (Skull) 1983

Abstract Pictures 1977

Still Lifes (Apples and Bottle) 1984-88

VOLUME III (1978-2006)

Various Motifs 1978/84/88

Cathedral Corner 1984/88

Sketches (Connecting Piece) 1989

Sketches (Frames) 1990

The Black Forest 1991

Railway Embankment 1990-94

Houses in the Snow (Sils-Maria) 2004

VOLUME IV (2002-2013)

Tree Trunks 2002
 Beach and Tideland 2002
 Sun 2002
 Glass Planes 2006
 Various Structures and Silicate 2006
 Structure “Pearls” 2006
 Strip Studies 2010

— Anna Clyne

Clyne’s four movements are vivid evocations. Volume I alternately sparkles and swirls with big chords, bold gestures, and cascades of sound. Its construction is a collage of four principal ideas, which furnish the material for a quasi-improvisatory solo cadenza toward the end of the movement. Volume II has a Wagnerian expanse, with waves of sound and swell and subside. Some repetitive patterns are reminiscent of minimalism, but constant variation in the orchestral complement adds aural interest. Much of the piano part consists of octave unison between the two hands.

Volume III opens with an orchestral introduction in driving irregular rhythms. Clyne escalates her montage-like approach, shifting moods in kaleidoscopic dialogue between piano and orchestra. The piano’s initial entrance is sardonic, establishing a circus atmosphere that recurs later as what Clyne calls a “tipsy waltz.” Her percussion includes high-hat, emphasizing her connection to the vernacular. Counterbalancing the popular aspect is a Bach-like melodic figure that alternates with a chorale.

Volume IV begins atmospheric and dream-like, before morphing into a jazzy imitative passage. Clyne is masterful at fading into and out of different images in her cinematic approach. Another Bachian figure develops into a fugato at the end, merging with a chorale for an amped-up close.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 in E-flat Major, Op. 55 (“Eroica”)

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1803–1804

World Premiere: Private performances in 1804 for Prince Lobkowitz. Beethoven conducted the first public performance in Vienna on 7 April 1805 at the Theater an der Wien

Duration: 47 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings

When Beethoven began his Third Symphony, Napoleon Bonaparte was First Consul of France. Beethoven idealized Napoleon, perceiving him as the hero of revolutionary France, and planned to dedicate the

symphony to the French leader. The work's original subtitle was "Bonaparte." That changed when Napoleon declared himself Emperor in May 1804. Beethoven exploded in protest. According to his amanuensis Ferdinand Ries, he cried out:

"Is he then, too, nothing more than an ordinary human being? Now he, too, will trample on all the rights of man and indulge only his ambition. He will exalt himself above all others, become a tyrant."

He then tore the title page of his new symphony in pieces. When he recopied it, he wrote "Sinfonia eroica." It was published 1806 with the subtitle "To celebrate the memory of a great man."

"Eroica" means "heroic" in Italian, and the symphony is monumental in every sense. When Beethoven completed it in summer 1803, it was the longest symphony ever written. The "Eroica" was pivotal in Beethoven's development not only as a symphonist but also as a composer. With this one work, he divested many 18th-century conventions and vaulted forward into uncharted territory.

Two *fortissimo* chords announce immediately that we are to sit up and take notice; this is not background music. More than two centuries later, their effect is still electrifying, setting the tone for the entire work. The development section is exceedingly long —the longest in Beethoven, in fact —and, directly after its climax, introduces an entirely new theme for flute and oboe, in the remote key of E-minor. Beethoven recalls that theme in the recapitulation, where it becomes the subject of a coda so extensive that it nearly matches the development in length.

The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge referred to the famous slow movement march as "a funeral procession in deep purple." It features one of the great oboe solos in the orchestral repertoire. Beethoven also provided rich material for bassoon and flute. In the quasi-military section in major mode, we can hear intimations of the Fifth Symphony, which would follow the "Eroica" by four years. Timpani is a powerful presence in this slow movement, functioning both as bass and even occasionally as a melodic instrument, rather than mere punctuation.

After a whirlwind scherzo that reduces three beats to one per measure (and features the entire horn section in its Trio), Beethoven ices his cake with variations. The theme was familiar to Viennese audiences from Beethoven's ballet score, *The Creatures of Prometheus* (1800). Nobility of spirit, capricious humor, funeral march, fugue, poignant tenderness: all these and more find their way into Beethoven's cosmic finale, his ultimate tribute to the unnamed hero.

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