An Analysis of Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis"

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which were made during the second half of the eighteenth century. Still, it would appear that the clavichords of Silbermann and of his pupil Friderici, dating from the first half of the eighteenth century, have seldom been rivalled and never been surpassed, as far as nicety of mechanism, accuracy of touch, and delicacy of expression are concerned. As regards the harpsichord, its highest degree of perfection in tone and touch was evidently attained at an earlier period. At all events, it may be doubted whether the famous Rucker's harpsichords, dating from the seventeenth century, have in this respect ever been eclipsed by the grand and full-toned harpsichords which were made towards the end of the eighteenth century, especially in England, and which, it must be admitted, are remarkably fine.

In short, it would appear that the best clavichords and harpsichords were in existence at the time of Bach and Handel; and we know from the biographical notices transmitted to us that these eminent musicians had, as might indeed be expected, instruments by the most distinguished makers.

But it is unnecessary to discuss this question further here; I merely draw attention to it because an acquaintance with the history of these instruments seems to me important for obtaining a correct appreciation of our classical music composed for the precursors of the pianoforte. With this music every musician, and especially every professional pianist, ought to be familiar; and it is chiefly the desire to assist, in however small a degree, in promoting the study of classical instrumental music which has induced me to give a detailed description of the clavichords in my possession.

Messrs. Broadwood have kindly consented to my proposal to place the *Gebundene Klavier* (Clavichord No. 4) in one of their rooms in Great Pulteney Street, where it may be seen during the present month (September). I therefore invite my musical friends—and my musical enemies also, if I have any—to go and examine it; or, still better, to play on it Bach's fugues precisely as he himself played them on the clavichord.

AN ANALYSIS OF BEETHOVEN'S "MISSA SOLEMNIS."

By FR. NIECKS.

IN the April number of THE MUSICAL TIMES I endeavoured to characterise Beethoven and his "Missa Solemnis"; now I wish to supplement those general remarks by an analysis of this work. The mention of a few dates and circumstances relative to the history of its birth and existence may not be deemed an inappropriate prelude to an exposition of the internal structure and pervading spirit. Beethoven began the composition of his Opus 123 in the winter of 1818-1819, and on February 27, 1822, announced its completion in a letter to his pupil, the Archduke Rudolph, into whose hands a copy of the score was delivered on March 19, 1822. Schindler relates that the composer put the finishing touch to the "Missa" in the summer of that year, when he was staying at Baden, near Vienna. At any rate the work attained completion two years too late for its original destination, namely, to be performed at the installation of the Archduke Rudolph as Archbishop of Olmütz, an event which took place on March 20, 1820. Almost the only pleasant fact on record of Beethoven's life at that time is the satisfactory state of his health. "Forgive the confusion," he writes from Vienna, on April 16, 1819, to Ferdinand Ries, in London, "if you knew my situation you would not be astonished at it. Rather at what I here accomplish in spite of it." And again on May 25: "Do not forget the quintett,

Op. 104, and the Sonata, and the money; I meant to say, The honorarium, *avec ou sans honneur*." Schindler informs us that the pension which Beethoven received from the Archduke Rudolph and the Princess Kinski and Lobkowitz had shrunk to £90 a year; and that besides this sum he had only the proceeds of the sale of four sonatas—Op. 106, completed in 1819, and Op. 109, 110, and 111, composed in the winter of 1821-1822—the only important works, if we add to them the Overture in C, Op. 124, which he wrote during the time he was busy with the Mass. The particulars of this account may not be quite correct—the pension, for instance, was in reality £136—but the fact that the master's income during the years 1818-1822 was inadequate to supply his wants can, unfortunately, not be doubted. Thayer calculates that in the spring of 1823 Beethoven's debts amounted to 7,000 florins. In the year 1820 such was the composer's lack of money that he had to content himself for four days with a glass of beer and some rolls for dinner. Of course he might have sold the shares he had bought in the prosperous time of the Congress; but these were to be a legacy for that scapegrace, his nephew, and must not be touched. An idea of his domestic felicity may be formed by throwing a glance at his diary of the year 1819: "January 31.—Given notice to the housekeeper. February 15.—The cook has come. March 8.—Given 14 days' notice to the cook. March 22.—The new housekeeper has come. May 12.—Arrived at Mödling [village near Vienna]. *Miser et pauvre sum.*" And so on in the same key. But the master was tried by more grievous troubles than pecuniary difficulties, mean privations, and the teasing annoyances of housekeeping. A lawsuit between him and his sister-in-law, begun in 1816 and not ended till 1820, was especially a cause of great vexation and bitterness to him. His nephew had been recommended to his care by his dying brother, but the mother of the boy, whom Beethoven held to be a woman of doubtful moral character, disputed the guardianship with him. The earnestness and conscientiousness with which the composer undertook the charge of his nephew's education are characteristic of the man. This new duty engrossed his thoughts and influenced his actions, it incited him to live and work. All these circumstances contemporaneous with the composition of the Mass must be taken into account, and also his previous career with its sad sufferings—the hardship of his childhood, his bodily diseases, above all the loss of hearing, with the consequent social isolation, &c.—for they show us how his soul was strung and tuned, and what agents were at work to produce music such as is heard in the "Missa Solemnis." Let us take note of two extracts from the diary which Beethoven kept at this time: "Hard is thy situation at present; but He above is, oh, He *is*, and without him nothing is."—"God, God, my Refuge, my Rock, Thou seest my heart! Oh hear, ever ineffable One, hear me, Thy unhappy, most unhappy of all mortals."

In a letter addressed to, but never received by Cherubini, dated March 15, 1823, Beethoven writes:—

"I recently completed a grand solemn Mass, and have resolved to offer it to the various European Courts, as it is not my intention to publish it at present. I have, therefore, asked the King of France, through the French Embassy here, to subscribe to this work, and I feel certain that his majesty would, at your recommendation, agree to do so.

"My critical situation demands that I should not solely fix my eyes upon Heaven, as is my wont; on the contrary, it would have me fix them also upon earth, here below, for the necessities of life."

The Courts which subscribed for a MS. copy of the score, at the price of fifty ducats—Austria was not honoured with an offer—were France, Russia, Prussia, Saxony, and Darmstadt. Two more copies were taken by Prince Anton Radziwill and J. N. Schelble, for the Cäcilien Verein at Frankfurt. From Lenz's "Kritischer Katalog" it would appear that also Prince Nicholas Borissovitch Galitzin was in possession of a copy, for which he had paid fifty ducats. King Louis XVIII. of France, on receiving the score, presented the composer with a heavy gold medal, bearing on one side the bust of his majesty and on the other the inscription, "*Donné par le Roi à Monsieur Beethoven.*" The master was especially pleased with this mark of appreciation, because he thought he owed it to the recommendation of Cherubini, a composer whom he much admired. In 1825 Beethoven sold the Mass to the publisher Schott, of Mainz, for 1,000 florins. The title and dedication run thus: "*Missa composita et serenissimo ac eminentissimo Domino Rudolpho Joanni Caesareo Principi et Archiduci Austriae S. R. E. Tit. s. Petri in monte aureo, Cardinali et Archiepiscopo Olivicensi profundissima cum veneratione dedicata a Ludovico van Beethoven.*" The composer never heard a complete performance of his work; but at a concert which he was induced to give at the Kärnthnerthor Theatre, Vienna, on May 7, 1824, there were performed under his direction, besides the Ninth Symphony, and the Overture, Op. 124, the Kyrie, Credo, Agnus Dei, and Dona from the "Missa Solemnis," which, in order to satisfy the censor, who objected to the word "Missa," appeared on the programme as "Three great Hymns with solos and chorus." It was at this concert that the singer, Mdle. Ungher, had to turn the deaf composer round that he might see the applause of the audience which he could not hear. The honour of having for the first time performed the complete work does not belong to Germany, but to Russia, where it was given on March 26, 1824. A note prefaced to Peters's edition of the score informs us that in Cologne the first performance took place on May 27, 1844; in Leipzig, on March 21, 1845; in Bonn, on August 10, 1845. Turning over the leaves of an old Vienna periodical, I came across a notice which mentions a performance of the work, in 1831, at Wandsdorf, near Rumburg, in Bohemia, by 109 singers and players, under the direction of the schoolmaster, J. V. Richter. During the last twenty years the work has been somewhat more frequently heard. Riedel's Society, at Leipzig, performed it twelve times in the course of twenty-five years. Germany distinguished herself especially in 1870, the Beethoven centenary: the Mass was performed in May, at Weimar (Tonkünstler-Versammlung); in September, at Bonn; in December, at Vienna (in the Saal der Musikfreunde); in the same month at Leipzig (Riedel's Society); and in other places. In England the "Missa Solemnis" was produced by the Philharmonic Society (under Costa) in 1846; by the Sacred Harmonic Society, twice (likewise under Costa), in 1861; and by Barnby's Choir, at St. James's Hall, in 1870. The rareness of the performances of this extraordinary work is attributable to various causes: to its length, which disqualifies it for church purposes; to its difficulties, which can be overcome only by the best executants, and after long, devout practice; to the composer's disregard of the natural limits and capabilities of the voice; and, lastly, to its sublime character and deep spiritual import, which were in advance of the age in which it was written, and for the great majority of concert-goers will always be inappreciable. But Beethoven was in no wise a practical man; his ideal was always dearer to him than vulgar success. Schindler, in writing of the time when the

master began the composition of this Mass, says the Credo assumed, contrary to his plan, such dimensions that if he continued his path with his customary consistence it was impossible to foresee when the work would be completed. Indeed, hardly a third of the Mass was finished when the Archduke left for Olmütz. Beethoven does not allow himself to be determined by outward circumstances. This is a characteristic of the man and his art. He creates spontaneously, and his ideas suggest to him adequate forms and means. In 1823 Count Dietrichstein invited him to write a Mass for the Emperor. The Count, broaching this matter to Beethoven's friend, Count Lichnowski, said that the composer was at full liberty to follow the dictates of his genius, nevertheless he thinks he ought to mention that his majesty has such and such tastes (among other things he does not like fugues), that only certain instruments should be employed, and no solos for tenor and bass be introduced. [The resources of the imperial chapel were limited; the solo department, for instance, was represented by two boys, who sang the treble and alto solos.] Beethoven seemed to be pleased at this invitation, and agreed to write the desired Mass; but—let us note this—he never set to work to fulfil his promise. May we not presume with good reason that the restraints were too much for him? that he could or would not put Pegasus in the yoke? The master had such a hatred of everything that looked like restraint that even in times of distress he disregarded advantageous proposals from societies and publishers which were worthy of his genius and left a wide scope for his fancy.

What strikes the hearer or reader of Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" first and chiefly, is its vastness. In number of bars it is surpassed by Cherubini's Solemn Mass in D minor, the longest mass existing, and also by Bach's "Hohe Messe," in B minor. Beethoven's work contains 1,929 bars; Bach's, 2,261; and Cherubini's, 2,563. [The first and the last figures are taken from Bellasis's book on Cherubini; the second is my own. I guarantee the correctness of none of them.] But what does the number of bars signify? They do not even imply a proportionate superiority in length. Indeed, in speaking of the vastness of the work, I thought less of the measurable material than of the ungaugeable spirit. Lenz, in his critical catalogue of the works of Beethoven, takes as the motto for the notice of the "Missa" a passage from Schlosser's "On the Tragedies of Æschylus"—"In their plan, as well as in their details, more than humanly sublime and almost awfully lofty"—which defines the character of the work strikingly. But size alone cannot produce this effect. Indeed, these gigantic forms are instinct with intensest life, expressive of superhuman strength—they reveal a wonderful insight and foresight of things human and divine. Of this, however, we shall be better able to judge after we have examined the various parts of the work, as then we shall be in a position to overlook the whole structure. And now we will proceed to the analysis.

Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis," Op. 123, in D major, which is written for four solo voices, four-part chorus, full band (including four horns, three trombones, and double-bassoon), and organ (a *ripieno* part, nowhere of an individual, *obbligato* character), consists of five great divisions, each a complex of movements, namely, the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Credo, the Sanctus and Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei and Dona.

The Kyrie is laid out in three sections. The first of them, the setting of the words "Kyrie eleison," is an *Assai sostenuto* C, in D major (eighty-five bars).

To the marking of the movement the composer adds "*mit Andacht*" (with devotion). The reader will remember what the master wrote on the cover of the MS. of the Kyrie (in a former article, April number, p. 194. I wrote "*Credo*," which was a slip of the pen), "from the heart it comes, to the heart it shall penetrate." It is also worth noting that Beethoven conducted this part of the Mass in a stooping posture. All this proves that the man was really in earnest, and that composition meant with him something more than craftsmanship. The instrumental introduction contains the *motivi* out of which the first and third sections of the Kyrie are built up. The band (the trombones and double-bassoon excepted, which remain unemployed in this division) and organ open the movement with the solemn, majestic, rhythmical *motivo*—

A hush follows, which is made the more impressive by the interrupting soft chords (first the strings alone, then the strings, trumpets, and drums); at the fifth bar the strings take up a slow legato phrase, whereupon, at the next bar, the wood winds and horns join them with the *motivo* (No. 1, b), which soon gives place to the *motivo* (No. 1, c), accompanied by the strings with the *motivo* (No. 1, d). One more *motivo* (No. 1, e), I shall quote, a subordinate one like (d), but an important element—a devotional substratum—in the general complexion of this section. At the second half of the twenty-first bar the chorus, band, and organ intone the "*Kyrie*," rising at every new invocation with a grander and more massive accumulation of sounds above the steadfast tonic, whilst the solo voices, one after another, break in and check the bold utterances with their wailing appeals—the thought of man's littleness starting up in the midst of his contemplation of God's lordliness. The *motivo* (a) pictures to us, as it were, the omnipotence of the Ruler of the world; the *motivo* (b), man's frailty and helplessness. The word "*eleison*" is set to the supplicatory *motivo* (c), which is supported by the synonymous (d). I may mention further the metamorphosis of the *motivo* (c) shown at (f), and the employment of the voices in octaves and unisons with which the composer, here and elsewhere in this work, produces great effects.

The Assai sostenuto leads into an Andante assai ben marcato, 3, in B minor (forty-two bars), which forms the second section of the Kyrie. The characteristic *motivi* of this section are two in number, the invocation "*Christe*" (a) and the supplication "*Eleison*" (b)—

Out of this simple and, to all appearance, poor material, Beethoven has constructed a very complex and superlatively beautiful movement. The voices move with the greatest independence, the two *motivi* being always interwoven; first, the orchestra introduces them, then the solo voices take them up, and a little later the chorus comes in. Thus there

are eight individual vocal parts, and the orchestra is more than a reduplication of them. This maze of voices suggests a multitudinous congregation, and realises well the urgency and fervour of their prayer. But mark the difference in the conception of the Kyrie eleison and the Christe eleison; in the former the King and Judge is addressed, in the latter the Saviour and Intercessor. In the one case we stand afar off with fear and trembling, in the other we draw near trustfully. In the third section (Kyrie eleison) the material of the first receives a new elaboration, with the object of intensifying the first expression. A very fine passage begins in the eighteenth bar—the wood winds and horns breathe out sweetly and softly the syncopated *motivo*, or sustain notes, the strings accompany with chords (crotchets divided by rests), the trumpets and drums put in here and there a few subdued sounds, whilst first the trebles, then the tenors, and, lastly, the altos pronounce Kyrie, with the rhythmically diminished first *motivo*—

The modulation to E flat major, which occurs here, is truly lovely. And now the prayer becomes more and more urgent, as the modulations, the persistence in the syncopated phrase, the emphasising (No. 3, b) of the melodic outline of *motivo* (No. 1, c), the imitations that press on each other, &c., show.

The violence of the excitement gradually subsides, there are still heard some passionate appeals, but at last all thinking and feeling is absorbed by a calm devotional contemplation. The distinctive expression of the words "*Kyrie*" and "*eleison*," preserved throughout this section, must not be overlooked. Beethoven succeeded in his intention—this Kyrie penetrates to the heart. But the subtle spirit that wings its way from heart to heart cannot be described in words. The most exquisite beauties cannot be recorded, at least, not adequately. I may, however, say this. In whatever frame of mind the Kyrie finds us, before the last "*eleison*" has died away our hardness will be softened, our pride will be humbled. These feelings may be transient; still, they are precious seeds that may be productive of glorious fruits. One thinks with a shudder that this noble composition was on the point of being lost. When, after the removal to Döblin in the spring of 1821, Beethoven sorted his MSS., the Kyrie was missing. For several days the search for it was without result. Happily, however, it had not fared with the Kyrie as with Carlyle's first MS. of the "*French Revolution*," which a charwoman found in the office of the careless friend to whom it had been lent, and made use of for lighting the fire. And what had become of the Kyrie? The housekeeper had wrapped in it Beethoven's old boots; indeed nothing more suitable for the purpose than these fine large sheets—nothing, as far as appearance went, less worthy of preservation than these unsightly hieroglyphics. Let us not be too hard on the practical-minded woman.

(To be continued.)

THE GREAT COMPOSERS, SKETCHED BY THEMSELVES.

BY JOSEPH BENNETT.

No. VI.—MENDELSSOHN (continued from page 418).

In December, 1831, Mendelssohn, who had then reached his twenty-second year, was in Paris, busily observing and brightly commenting upon the artistic life of the gay capital. Taking advantage of the young man's presence at what he evidently looked