

# Sacrilege or Stroke of Genius?

## Beethoven's instrumental works with text settings

*By Sven Hiemke, musicologist*

Beethoven's instrumental works with text settings: an abomination in the eyes of purists! Although these adaptations cause some ostensible experts to turn up their noses, the process actually has a long tradition. The first choral arrangements of Beethoven's music were undertaken by close contemporaries. Ignaz von Seyfried, a friend of Beethoven and Kapellmeister and in-house composer at the Theatre an der Wien for example, made an arrangement of *Drei Equale* for four trombones for male-voice choir, adding texts from the Psalter and by Franz Grillparzer; two of these arrangements were performed among others at Beethoven's funeral. Seyfried's colleague Gottlob Benedict Bierey from Wrocław arranged the first movement of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" as a *Kyrie* and the second movement of his Piano sonata No. 5 as an *Agnus Dei* (both for mixed choir).



### "Moonlight Sonata" as a Kyrie

It seems as though the selection of spiritual and/or liturgical texts was self-evidently ideal in combination with Beethoven's music, but other lyrical texts were also utilized to blend in harmoniously with the composer's cantabile slow movements. An example is provided by the Adagio from the Violin sonata No. 7 in the arrangement by Hans Georg Nægeli with the text of *Tränentrost*. Peter Cornelius also combined the third movement of Beethoven's String Quartet op. 132, displaying similarities to a chorale which the composer

16 Freund Hein

Leibniz von Hannover (1719–1827), esp. 132, 137  
 (Peter Cornelius) (1828–1874) 1812  
 (H. Thos. Peter Cornelius  
 and Thos. Müller-Winkelhof) (1898–1927) 1833

Is this a sign of arrogance? It is all too easily forgotten in this type of evaluation that terms including “original composition” and “musical authenticity” were not coined until the 20th century. In past eras, the attitude towards arrangements was quite different. Adaptation for a different performance framework, simplification for greater access, clarification and the heightening of expressiveness were only some of the motivations prompting diverse types of arrangements. Even Beethoven himself undertook arrangements of his own compositions and works by other composers. Arrangements were occasionally created for educational purposes: Friedrich Silcher, music director in Tübingen,

provided one theme of the *Appassionata* with a text by Friedrich von Matthisson, a poet much valued by Beethoven, in order to acquaint music lovers who lacked the opportunity of hearing the works in their original version, with his themes. In 1830, he published the *Hymne an die Nacht* together with eleven additional arrangements under the collective title *Melodien aus Beethovens Sonaten und Sinfonien zu Liedern für eine Singstimme eingerichtet* (Melodies from Beethoven's Sonatas and Symphonies in song settings for solo voice). Around thirty years later, Silcher's arrangement was adapted by Ignaz Heim for four-voice male choir and has now been published in Jan Schumacher's *Choral Collection Beethoven*. The *Persischer Nachtgesang* contained in the same volume had been Silcher's contribution for the *Beethoven Album. Ein Gedenkbuch dankbarer Liebe und Verehrung für den großen Todten* (A commemorative volume in grateful love and honour for the great deceased) with the participation of 150 individuals from across Europe. Silcher's arrangement combines the *Gesang der Peri* from *Bilder des Orients* by Heinrich Wilhelm Stieglitz with the slow movement from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. The striding rhythm is here transformed into a sort of rocking incantation.

© 1994 by Blackwell Science Ltd, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA

**Hallelujah**

**Soprano**

**Alto**

**Tenor**

**Bass**

**Piano**

**Chorus**

**Verse 1**

**Verse 2**

**Verse 3**

**Verse 4**

**Verse 5**

**Verse 6**

**Verse 7**

**Verse 8**

**Verse 9**

**Verse 10**

**Verse 11**

**Verse 12**

**Verse 13**

**Verse 14**

**Verse 15**

**Verse 16**

**Verse 17**

**Verse 18**

**Verse 19**

**Verse 20**

**Verse 21**

**Verse 22**

**Verse 23**

**Verse 24**

**Verse 25**

**Verse 26**

**Verse 27**

**Verse 28**

**Verse 29**

**Verse 30**

**Verse 31**

**Verse 32**

**Verse 33**

**Verse 34**

**Verse 35**

**Verse 36**

**Verse 37**

**Verse 38**

**Verse 39**

**Verse 40**

**Verse 41**

**Verse 42**

**Verse 43**

**Verse 44**

**Verse 45**

**Verse 46**

**Verse 47**

**Verse 48**

**Verse 49**

**Verse 50**

**Verse 51**

**Verse 52**

**Verse 53**

**Verse 54**

**Verse 55**

**Verse 56**

**Verse 57**

**Verse 58**

**Verse 59**

**Verse 60**

**Verse 61**

**Verse 62**

**Verse 63**

**Verse 64**

**Verse 65**

**Verse 66**

**Verse 67**

**Verse 68**

**Verse 69**

**Verse 70**

**Verse 71**

**Verse 72**

**Verse 73**

**Verse 74**

**Verse 75**

**Verse 76**

**Verse 77**

**Verse 78**

**Verse 79**

**Verse 80**

**Verse 81**

**Verse 82**

**Verse 83**

**Verse 84**

**Verse 85**

**Verse 86**

**Verse 87**

**Verse 88**

**Verse 89**

**Verse 90**

**Verse 91**

**Verse 92**

**Verse 93**

**Verse 94**

**Verse 95**

**Verse 96**

**Verse 97**

**Verse 98**

**Verse 99**

**Verse 100**

**Verse 101**

**Verse 102**

**Verse 103**

**Verse 104**

**Verse 105**

**Verse 106**

**Verse 107**

**Verse 108**

**Verse 109**

**Verse 110**

**Verse 111**

**Verse 112**

**Verse 113**

**Verse 114**

**Verse 115**

**Verse 116**

**Verse 117**

**Verse 118**

**Verse 119**

**Verse 120**

**Verse 121**

**Verse 122**

**Verse 123**

**Verse 124**

**Verse 125**

**Verse 126**

**Verse 127**

**Verse 128**

**Verse 129**

**Verse 130**

**Verse 131**

**Verse 132**

**Verse 133**

**Verse 134**

**Verse 135**

**Verse 136**

**Verse 137**

**Verse 138**

**Verse 139**

**Verse 140**

**Verse 141**

**Verse 142**

**Verse 143**

**Verse 144**

**Verse 145**

**Verse 146**

**Verse 147**

**Verse 148**

**Verse 149**

**Verse 150**

**Verse 151**

**Verse 152**

**Verse 153**

**Verse 154**

**Verse 155**

**Verse 156**

**Verse 157**

**Verse 158**

**Verse 159**

**Verse 160**

**Verse 161**

**Verse 162**

**Verse 163**

**Verse 164**

**Verse 165**

**Verse 166**

**Verse 167**

**Verse 168**

**Verse 169**

**Verse 170**

**Verse 171**

**Verse 172**

**Verse 173**

**Verse 174**

**Verse 175**

**Verse 176**

**Verse 177**

**Verse 178**

**Verse 179**

**Verse 180**

**Verse 181**

**Verse 182**

**Verse 183**

**Verse 184**

**Verse 185**

**Verse 186**

**Verse 187**

**Verse 188**

**Verse 189**

**Verse 190**

**Verse 191**

**Verse 192**

**Verse 193**

**Verse 194**

**Verse 195**

**Verse 196**

**Verse 197**

**Verse 198**

**Verse 199**

**Verse 200**

**Verse 201**

**Verse 202**

**Verse 203**

**Verse 204**

**Verse 205**

**Verse 206**

**Verse 207**

**Verse 208**

**Verse 209**

**Verse 210**

**Verse 211**

**Verse 212**

**Verse 213**

**Verse 214**

**Verse 215**

**Verse 216**

**Verse 217**

**Verse 218**

**Verse 219**

**Verse 220**

**Verse 221**

**Verse 222**

**Verse 223**

**Verse 224**

**Verse 225**

**Verse 226**

**Verse 227**

**Verse 228**

**Verse 229**

**Verse 230**

**Verse 231**

**Verse 232**

**Verse 233**

**Verse 234**

**Verse 235**

**Verse 236**

**Verse 237**

**Verse 238**

**Verse 239**

**Verse 240**

**Verse 241**

**Verse 242**

**Verse 243**

**Verse 244**

**Verse 245**

**Verse 246**

**Verse 247**

**Verse 248**

**Verse 249**

**Verse 250**

**Verse 251**

**Verse 252**

**Verse 253**

**Verse 254**

**Verse 255**

**Verse 256**

**Verse 257**

**Verse 258**

**Verse 259**

**Verse 260**

**Verse 261**

**Verse 262**

**Verse 263**

**Verse 264**

**Verse 265**

**Verse 266**

**Verse 267**

**Verse 268**

**Verse 269**

**Verse 270**

**Verse 271**

**Verse 272**

**Verse**

## Persischer Nachtgesang

Not all arrangements of Beethoven's works would be successful a priori, but the adaptation of his solo songs and even instrumental works for choral forces for the most part highlight the cantabile qualities inherent in these compositions. In some of the arrangements, it seems as though the connection between text and music had always existed: as if Beethoven had for example been originally inspired to compose the wonderfully expressive Cavatina in his String Quartet op. 130 by the text of Psalm 121 ("I lift up mine eyes") which Heribert Breuer only superimposed on this music in the 21st century: as if the composer's confession revealed by his companion Karl Holz that he had "composed [the music] in tears of melancholy" had been prompted by the emotional





Prof. Dr. **Sven Hiemke** is professor of musicology at the Hochschule für Musik in Hamburg. His publications focus on sacred music from the 18th to the 21st century. E-Mail: [sven.hiemke@t-online.de](mailto:sven.hiemke@t-online.de)

*Translated from the German by Lindsay Chalmers-Gerbracht*