

# 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).

The image displays a musical score for a vocal arrangement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata'. The score is organized into three systems. The first system consists of four staves, likely representing vocal parts. The second system includes a vocal line with lyrics and piano accompaniment. The third system shows a more complex piano accompaniment with multiple staves. The lyrics are in German and appear to be a Kyrie text. The score is marked with 'piano' and 'pizzicato'.

### "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 Nägeli 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

himself had marked with the heading “Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit” (Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Divinity by a Convalescent), with his poem *Freund Hein*.

## 16 Freund Hein

nach dem Melodrama (3. Satz) aus Beethovens Streichquartett No. 15  
 based on Beethoven's String Quartet No. 15, 3rd mvt.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), op. 132, 3/  
 Peter Cornelius (1824-1874) 1872  
 arr. David Peter Cornelius  
 orig. Text: Minette Mayleigh (1891, 1892) (1893)

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Freund Hein'. It is arranged for Soprano Alto and Tenor Bass. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system has three staves: Soprano Alto (top), Tenor Bass (middle), and a piano accompaniment (bottom). The second system also has three staves for the same parts. The lyrics are in German for the Soprano Alto and English for the Tenor Bass. The music is in 2/4 time and includes dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'mf'.

**Soprano Alto**

1. Ich Weil ich nun die grü A - de, so reich an Lust, so voll sein... Nicht i -  
 2. Denn das hab ich im Aug ge - sehen, da ward mir Blick, mir so we - sent, dem  
 3. Und das ist nicht das - sel Meid und... Stolz, ich sag als sein in Wien - man - schen, ich

**Tenor Bass**

1. I thought it was not a friend, but a foe, who had been my friend...  
 2. I thought it was not a friend, but a foe, who had been my friend...  
 3. I thought it was not a friend, but a foe, who had been my friend...

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## Freund Hein

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.



content of the psalm text.

34. Psalm 121

with the "Cantata" of Felix von Bodenweiser/Christoph Willibald Gluck  
Karlheinz Stockhausen's String Quartet No. 13, 1961

Ergebnisse Methoden 1979-1979, pp. 156-1  
Musikwissenschaft 1979-1979  
von Psalm 121.1

Adagio, molto espressivo (♩ = 60)

The image shows a musical score for Psalm 121, arranged for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment (Right and Left Hand). The tempo is marked 'Adagio, molto espressivo' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 60. The score includes lyrics in German and Latin. The first system covers measures 1-10, the second system covers measures 11-20, and the third system covers measures 21-30. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

Ergebnisse Methoden 1979-1979, pp. 156-1  
Musikwissenschaft 1979-1979  
von Psalm 121.1

## Psalm 121

These arrangements do in fact reveal aspects of the compositions which have previously been concealed. This also applies to many appropriations which have inspired modern arrangers to create versions for choir, ranging from movements of Beethoven's piano music, string quartets and even symphonies. These arrangements offer musicians new (old) ways of approaching his music through song, provide unbiased listeners with an original form of entertainment and represent a lively and creative enrichment to the repertoire.



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*Translated from the German by Lindsay Chalmers-Gerbracht*