

# 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 written in a standard musical notation with treble and bass clefs, and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamics.

### "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. 132.1/  
Peter Cornelius (1824–1874) 1872  
lib. Text: Peter Cornelius  
engl. Text: Malcolm Hayleigh (1991, 2011) (2011)

The image shows a musical score for the song "Freund Hein". It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for Soprano/Alto and Tenor/Bass. The second system is for Soprano/Alto and Tenor/Bass. The lyrics are in German and English. The score includes musical notation with notes, rests, and dynamics like *pp* and *mf*. There are also performance markings like *rit.* and *tr.*.

**Soprano/Alto**

1. Ich Welt, ich sag die grüß A - ß, so reich im Lich, so voll von... Nicht, ich  
 2. Dem Tod hab ich im Aug ge - sehen, da ward mir Blick, mir so... was, dem  
 3. Und der ich mich den Tod Mord und... Storb, ich sag die Welt in... man - schen, ich

**Tenor/Bass**

1. Ich Welt, ich sag die grüß A - ß, so reich im Lich, so voll von... Nicht, ich  
 2. Dem Tod hab ich im Aug ge - sehen, da ward mir Blick, mir so... was, dem  
 3. Und der ich mich den Tod Mord und... Storb, ich sag die Welt in... man - schen, ich

**Soprano/Alto**

1. Ich Welt, ich sag die grüß A - ß, so reich im Lich, so voll von... Nicht, ich  
 2. Dem Tod hab ich im Aug ge - sehen, da ward mir Blick, mir so... was, dem  
 3. Und der ich mich den Tod Mord und... Storb, ich sag die Welt in... man - schen, ich

**Tenor/Bass**

1. Ich Welt, ich sag die grüß A - ß, so reich im Lich, so voll von... Nicht, ich  
 2. Dem Tod hab ich im Aug ge - sehen, da ward mir Blick, mir so... was, dem  
 3. Und der ich mich den Tod Mord und... Storb, ich sag die Welt in... man - schen, ich

© Guter Klang, Stuttgart  
 Freizeitspende | Leipzig Edition | Carta 3.77146

## 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 and Rodolphe Kreutzer Op. 14  
Kreutzer's Violin's Study Opus No. 15, No. 10

Edizione Musica 1978-1979, by 1982  
Musica Nuova (1984-2001)  
San Paolo 12.1.1

Adagio, molto espressivo (♩ = 60)

The image displays a musical score for Psalm 121, arranged for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of music. Each system includes a vocal line (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Adagio, molto espressivo' with a metronome marking of 60. The score is in Italian, with lyrics in 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 part features a prominent bass line and harmonic support for the vocal lines.

## 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.



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*