

Ludwig van
BEETHOVEN

The Creatures of Prometheus

Version for Piano

Warren Lee



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus, Op. 43, Hess 90
‘The Creatures of Prometheus’ – Version for Piano

Born in Bonn in 1770, Ludwig van Beethoven was the eldest son of a singer in the musical establishment of the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne, and grandson of the Archbishop’s former Kapellmeister, whose name he took. The household was not a happy one. Beethoven’s father became increasingly inadequate both as a singer and as a father and husband, with his wife always ready to draw invidious comparisons between him and his own father. Beethoven, however, was trained as a musician, however erratically, and duly entered the service of the Archbishop, serving as an organist and as a string player in the archiepiscopal orchestra. He was already winning some distinction in Bonn, when, in 1787, he was first sent to Vienna, to study with Mozart. The illness of his mother forced an early return from this venture and her subsequent death left him with responsibility for his younger brothers, in view of his father’s domestic and professional failures. In 1792 Beethoven was sent once more to Vienna, now to study with Haydn, whom he had met in Bonn.

Beethoven’s early career in Vienna was helped very considerably by the circumstances of his move there. The Archbishop was a son of the Empress Maria Theresa and there were introductions to leading members of society in the imperial capital. Here, Beethoven was able to establish an early position for himself as a pianist of remarkable ability, coupled with a clear genius in the necessarily related arts of improvisation and composition. The onset of deafness at the turn of the century seemed an irony of fate. It led Beethoven gradually away from a career as a virtuoso performer and into an area of composition where he was able to make remarkable changes and extensions of existing practice. Deafness tended to accentuate his eccentricities and paranoia, which became extreme as time went on. At the same time it allowed him to develop his gifts for counterpoint. He continued to revolutionise forms inherited from his predecessors, notably Haydn and Mozart, expanding these almost to bursting point, and introducing

innovation after innovation as he grew older. He died in 1827, his death the occasion of public mourning in Vienna.

Nephew of the composer Luigi Boccherini, the dancer and choreographer Salvatore Viganò won considerable success in Vienna with ballets that he described as *coreodramma*, involving an element of naturalism in a narrative dramatic structure. It was for Viganò that Beethoven was commissioned to provide music for the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, which was staged in Vienna at the Burgtheater in March 1801. A piano version of the score was published in the same year as *Op. 24*, a numbering that later had to be changed, and with a dedication to ‘Princess Maria Christine Lichnowsky’, the wife of Beethoven’s patron, Prince Karl Lichnowsky. The score of the *Overture* and orchestral parts were published in 1804 by Hoffmeister. The libretto has not survived, but something of the narrative may be derived from the theatre playbill, and from Beethoven’s sketch book. In mythology Prometheus is not only the victim of divine justice when he is punished by Zeus for the theft of fire for mankind, chained to a rock in the Caucasus, where daily an eagle pecked out his liver, but is also credited with the creation of mankind. It is on this that Viganò bases his drama, although in a Milan restaging in 1813 he used the fuller legend and different music.

This allegorical ballet is based on the myth of Prometheus. The Greek philosophers who knew him tell the story thus: they depict Prometheus as a lofty spirit who, finding the human beings of his time in a state of ignorance, refined them through art and knowledge and gave them laws of right conduct. In accordance with this source, the ballet presents two animate statues who, by the power of harmony, are made susceptible to all the passions of human existence. Prometheus takes them to Parnassus to receive instruction from Apollo, god of the arts, who commands Amphion, Arion and Orpheus to teach them music, Melpomene and Thalia tragedy and comedy. Terpsichore,

muse of dance, aids Pan who introduces them to the *Pastoral Dance* which he has invented, and from Bacchus they learn his invention – the *Heroic Dance*.

In Act I Prometheus enters, running through the forest to the two clay figures he has made and pursued by the wrath of Zeus. The *Introduction* that links the *Overture* [1] to the following number represents a storm [2]. The two inanimate clay figures, representing man and woman, come to life, but lack reason and feeling. The figures try to escape from Prometheus, but are finally captured [3]–[5].

Act II is set in pastoral Greece, where, on Mount Parnassus, Prometheus seeks the aid of Apollo, with the nine Muses, the three Graces and Bacchus. The clay figures start tentatively to come to life [6]. The flute-playing Muse Euterpe starts to play, with the legendary semi-divine musicians, Orpheus, Amphion and Arion to teach the newly created figures music, Amphion on the lyre (the harp), Arion with the bassoon and Orpheus with clarinet. Apollo is

represented by the cello [7]. The figures start to gambol and disport themselves [8]. Terpsichore and the Graces teach the dance [9], and Pan the pastoral dance. Bacchus and his followers, in warlike mode, enter [10], and Melpomene adds a reminder of human mortality and, for the moment, death to Prometheus [11]. Pan’s lilting *Pastorale* follows convention [12] and there are dances for the Italian primo ballerino Gaetano Gioia [Gioia] [13]–[14], briefly in Vienna. The three leading figures of the ballet appear in grotesque masks [15]. There is a solo for the prima ballerina, Maria Casentini, the female clay figure of the plot [16]. The creator of the ballet, Salvatore Viganò, who presumably danced the title-role, has a solo [17]. The *Finale* [18] brings the very familiar *Prometheus* theme, later to be used in the ‘*Eroica*’ *Symphony* and the ‘*Eroica*’ *Variations*, in a conclusion of heroic optimism for humanity.

Keith Anderson



Warren Lee

Warren Lee made his debut with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of six. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London and the Yale School of Music, he was the First Prize winner of the Stravinsky Awards International Piano Competition and the Grand Prix Ivo Pogorelich in 1995. He has performed on four continents, often in collaboration with international artists and leading orchestras. His recordings for Universal Music (Hong Kong) and Naxos have garnered favourable reviews worldwide. A Steinway Artist as well as an award-winning composer, Warren Lee received the Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award in Hong Kong in 2012 and was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2015 for his contribution to the music profession. In 2017 he received the Ian Mininberg Distinguished Alumni Award from the Yale School of Music. For more information, please visit

www.warren-lee.com

Photo © Lam He-man

Ludwig van Beethoven was commissioned by the dancer and choreographer Salvatore Viganò to write the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* – an allegorical story based on the myth of Prometheus – and the composer's piano version of the orchestral score was published not long after its premiere in 1801. Beethoven turned his symphonic style and skill in pictorial representation to conjure scenes of stormy excitement alongside elegant dances and the sublime aura of beauty surrounding the legendary musicians Orpheus, Amphion and Arion. The *Finale* is crowned by a theme that would later be used in the '*Eroica*' Symphony.

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus, Op. 43, Hess 90 'The Creatures of Prometheus' Version for Piano (1801)

1 Overture	5:10	9 Grave	4:55
Act I		10 Allegro con brio	8:08
2 Introduzione, 'La Tempesta': Allegro non troppo	2:13	11 Adagio	3:25
3 Poco adagio	3:07	12 Pastorale: Allegro	2:57
4 Adagio – Allegro con brio	1:56	13 Coro di Gioja: Andante	0:22
5 Allegro vivace	2:29	14 Solo di Gioja: Maestoso	3:18
Act II		15 Terzetto i grotteschi: Allegro	3:59
6 Maestoso – Andante	1:15	16 Solo della Cassentini: Andante	4:57
7 Adagio – Andante quasi allegretto	6:14	17 Coro e Solo di Viganò: Andantino	4:34
8 Un poco adagio – Allegretto	1:26	18 Finale: Allegretto	6:53

Warren Lee, Piano

Recorded: 18 November 2018 at Wyastone Concert Hall, Monmouth, UK
Producer, engineer and editor: Philip Rowlands • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson
Cover image (modified) © Gil Dufresne / Dreamstime.com



8.573974

DDD

Playing Time
67:36



Made in Germany
www.naxos.com

© & © 2019 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd
Booklet notes in English