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Cast

4 actors are required

LvB Beethoven

Actor 1

Various older male characters including:

- An experienced sailor
- Friends and acquaintances of Beethoven in Vienna
- The Baron de Trémont, a Napoleonic diplomat
- Dr. Ernst Chladni, a famous scientist

Actor 2

Various younger male characters including:

- A younger sailor
- Friends and acquaintances of Beethoven in Vienna
- E.T.A.Hoffmann, a great early Romantic writer

Actor 3

Various female characters including:

- A young French revolutionary
- Friends and acquaintances of Beethoven in Vienna
- Bettina von Arnim, an admirer of artists
- Josephine Brunsvik, a woman loved by Beethoven

Pianist

playing a fortepiano of the early 1800s
[a modern pianoforte may be substituted]

This show is presented in 9 discrete scenes; each is in a distinct style.

Scene 1 - On board a sailing ship at sea

Like a tableau, very still and poetic.

Scene 2 - Revolution

In a public place in a big city during a revolution. Bold placard theatre, fast moving, like a giant flipbook.

Scene 3 - In a theater in old Vienna

BBC costume drama, social gossip, frivolous with lots of laughs.

Scene 4 - In a Viennese coffee-house, where intellectuals have gathered

Filled with melodrama and grandly expressed opinions but with an unexpectedly romantic walk through a Vienna park in the middle.

Scene 5 - In Beethoven's apartment above the city walls

Another costume drama but this time more earnest, filled with characters who have come to visit the famous composer and gaze on his strangeness.

Scene 6 - In the countryside

A walk through a pastoral landscape. It begins on a hot day, goes through the night with stars twinkling, then dawn and a new hot day turning into a storm.

Scene 7 - The storm

Anxiety-ridden melodrama, with an expectation of disaster.

Scene 8 - Back in the city streets

A vast imperial triumph. The city could be Vienna or Paris.

Scene 9 - A scientific experiment

A scientific inquiry into the power of sound to change the human soul, beginning in Napoleon's study in the Tuileries Palace in Paris, then changing back into Beethoven's study in Vienna.

Each of these scenes has a tripartite structure of its own:

- 1 Ship... desk and letter... ship
- 2 Revolution... Napoleon's rise... Beethoven's disappointment
- 3 Vienna at Christmas... the long concert... the Fifth symphony
- 4 Hoffmann's review... Bettina's walk in the park... Hoffmann explaining
- 5 The stairs to the apartment... the apartment... Beethoven improvising
- 6 The trip to the country... the night... the dawn...
- 7 The storm... Josephine... transition to the last movement
- 8 The triumphal march... the connectedness... the Ancient Greeks
- 9 Chladni's experiments... Chladni and Napoleon... Beethoven's triumph

Scene 1 - On board a sailing-ship at sea

Two sailors beneath the sails, staring out to sea. They are horrified.

ME1: Fortepiano - opening of Meeresstille, to downbeat of bar 7

VO1

(With long silences between the lines)

ACTOR 1

[an experienced sailor]

Deep stillness reigns within the water.
Motionless lies the sea.

ACTOR 2

[a younger sailor]

All around... a surface made of glass...

ME2: Fortepiano - Meeresstille, from bar 14 to bar 17

VO2

ACTOR 2

Not a breath of air!

ACTOR 1

Only fearful... deathly... silence!

(A light comes up on LvB at his desk)

(Ludwig von Beethoven, at his desk, writing.

Pauses between sentences.

A feeling of surrounding silence)

LvB

Silence...
To my brothers, Carl and...

(He cannot bring himself to write the second name)

You... who think... or say... I am malevolent...
stubborn... misanthropic...
you do not know the secret cause....

From childhood,
my heart and mind were disposed to gentleness and goodness...
I was always eager to accomplish great deeds...

But I have been forced to isolate myself... to live in loneliness...

How could I say: 'Speak louder... shout... for I am deaf!'
How could I admit infirmity in the one sense
which should have been more perfect in me than in all other men?

[*pause*]

This last year I have been living in the countryside...
commanded by my intelligent physician
to spare my hearing as much as possible...

But what humiliation when someone stood beside me
and in the distance heard a shepherd's flute...
and I heard nothing...

[*pause*]

(Over the music, the sailors move downstage)

ME3: Orchestra - Meeresstille, from bar 72 to last beat of bar 77 [cellos and basses, then violas and violins 2]

VO3

ACTOR 1

(Knowing what this means)

Wind! The mists are clearing! The sky is bright!

ACTOR 2

The waves are parting!

ME4: Orchestra - Meeresstille, from bar 78 to downbeat of bar 79 [violins 1 and violas]

VO4

ACTORS 1 & 2

(Shouting in excitement)

There is land ahead!

Scene 2 - Revolution

(A young female revolutionary runs on)

ACTOR 3

[A young revolutionary]

All morning, since nine, there has been a cry everywhere...

'To the Bastille¹!'

ACTOR 1

[A sage]

Paris... July the Fourteenth...1789...

ACTOR 2

[A young poet]

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive...

¹ pronounced 'Basteel'

ACTOR 1

Without this Revolution,
one would not know what to make of an age like ours at all....

ACTOR 2

But to be young was very heaven!

ACTOR 1

We hail this French Revolution
as shipwrecked mariners might the sternest rock,
in a world otherwise all of baseless sea and waves...

(Through the music, the actors line up downstage)

ME5 Orchestra - First 4 bars of Cantata for the death of Joseph II

(Formally, like a recitation)

VO5

ACTOR 1

1793...

ACTOR 2

The Murder of Marat!² The Reign of Terror!

ACTOR 3

Robespierre... guillotined!

ACTOR 2

1795... The Directory!

ACTOR 1

1799...

² pronounced 'Ma-RAH'

ACTORS 1 & 2

The 18th of Brumaire³...

ACTOR 3

Napoleon seizes power!

ME6: Orchestra - Symphony 1, Movement 4, opening octave G only

VO6

ACTOR 1

Summer, 1800...

ACTOR 2

Napoleon's army has crossed the Alps... and into Italy...

ACTOR 1

1802...

ACTOR 3

He has declared himself... First Consul...

ACTORS 1, 2 & 3

For Life!

ME7 Orchestra - Symphony 2, Opening 2 notes only - octave D

³ pronounced 'Broo-mare'

VO7

LvB

I esteem him greatly...

For me... he is like one of the Ancient Roman Consuls!

ACTOR 2

[A disciple of Beethoven]

I saw the Third Symphony on his table...

(Pointing at the score)

'Buonaparte'... on the title page!

ME8 Orchestra - Symphony 3, opening 2 bars only - E flat chords

VO8

ACTOR 2

(towards LvB, despondent)

Today... Napoleon has proclaimed himself... Emperor of the French...

LvB

Now he is like other men...

He will become a tyrant and trample on the rights of man!

(He scrawls out the dedication on the title page)

ACTOR 2

At Austerlitz⁴... he has defeated the Austrians and the Russians...

ACTOR 1

And now his army is right here... in Vienna.

ME9 Orchestra - Symphony 4, opening bars to downbeat of bar 6

⁴ pronounced 'Ow-ster-lits'

VO9

ACTOR 3

There has been another battle...
At Jena⁵... Napoleon has annihilated the Prussians...

LvB

(imagining himself defeating Napoleon)

It is a pity I do not understand the art of war as I do the art of music...
for then I would annihilate him!

ME10 Orchestra - Coriolan overture, opening 7 bars

Scene 3 - An evening in the theatre

(Candle light flickers and it is freezing cold. A fashionable crowd has gathered in the theatre. They are laughing.)

VO10

ACTOR 1

[an enthusiastic music-lover]

Vienna...1808...

ACTOR 3

[A society lady]

Christmas time!

(The fortepianist begins strumming and playing quietly in the background)

ME11 Fortepiano – Beethoven F major variations, op.34, bars 1-18, stopping on C major chord

⁵ pronounced 'Yay-na'

ACTOR 2

[A fashionable young man]

(Over the music)

All last week, the theatres have been closed
and the evenings devoted exclusively to music.

ACTOR 3

Three days ago, there was a benefit...
organized by Beethoven... in the Theater an der Wien⁶...
at which only his own music was performed...

ACTOR 1

I had a most generous offer from Prince Lobkowitz⁷
of a seat in his box.

ACTOR 2

(Complaining...)

The concert lasted four whole hours!

ACTOR 3

(Gaily)

From 6.30 to 10.30 in the evening...

ACTOR 2

And... it was freezing cold...

ACTOR 3

One can have too much... even of a very good thing!

⁶ pronounced 'Tay-ater an der Veen'

⁷ pronounced 'Lob-ko-vits'

ACTOR 1

We could not leave before the end...
The Prince's box is in the front row just above the orchestra,
and there was the composer... directly below us!

ACTOR 2

Conducting!

*(It is a new art, and they are amused and mystified by it.
The fortepiano music suddenly stops.)*

ACTOR 3

Poor man!

I gather he was to receive his entire annual income
from this one concert...

LvB

(Muttering to himself...)

So many unpleasantnesses... Corrections without end...

ACTOR 3

I am sure there is nothing more annoying or more vulgar
than putting on a concert...

LvB

So much stupidity... and so much expense!

(Raising his voice...)

Is music to be a free art or is it not?...

ACTOR 2

There was not even one complete rehearsal!

ACTOR 1

All the music was of the very greatest difficulty!
And every note the work of this indefatigable genius...

ME12 Fortepiano, opening of Pastoral Symphony, Hummel arr., bars 1-14

VO12

*(Over the music, beginning after 6 bars or so,
relishing the word 'Pastoral')*

ACTOR 1

...beginning with a new Pastoral Symphony...
...each movement perfectly developed... gorgeous... brilliant...

*(The music suddenly stops,
quoting the title of the movement, with pleasure and appreciation.)*

'Awakening of cheerful feelings... upon arrival in the countryside...'

ACTOR 2

This symphony is as long as an entire concert where I come from...

ACTOR 1

(Brightly)

...and it was immediately followed by an Italian aria...

ME13 Fortepiano - opening of piano arrangement of A Perfido!, upbeat of bar 1 to second beat of bar 4

ACTOR 2

(Over the music)

Also very long...

VO13

ACTOR 1

(A little lasciviously)

...performed by such a charming young Bohemian girl...
seventeen years old and with a lovely voice...

ACTOR 2

She was trembling more than singing...

ACTOR 3

She can hardly be blamed.
We were all shivering, wrapped in furs and cloaks!

ACTOR 1

And then a Gloria...

ME14 Fortepiano - first 3 bars of Gloria from Mass in C, piano arrangement

VO14

ACTOR 1

...for orchestra and voices!

ACTOR 3

Quite spoiled by the performance...

ACTOR 1

...and a new Concerto for the pianoforte...

ACTOR 2

Of monstrous difficulty!

ACTOR 1

(Patronisingly)

Beethoven played marvellously...

He made the instrument sing with a pathos that went deep into the heart.

ME15 Fortepiano - opening of 4th concerto to bar 5

ACTOR 2

And after the intermission... another symphony...

ACTOR 1

Fully developed!

ACTOR 2

And much too long!

ACTOR 3

He piles ideas upon one another so wildly...

ACTOR 2

The result is a kind of artificial darkness!

(Actors 2 & 3 move away)

ACTOR 1

A gentleman seated in the box next to ours
told me he noticed at the rehearsal...

...the cello part alone was thirty-four pages long!

LvB

Everyone in Vienna is a scoundrel...
from the Emperor to a bootblack...

(Changing the tone)

And no doubt the 'critics' will soon be sending
abusive articles to the newspapers...

ME16 Orchestra - Symphony 5 from beginning to bar 58

VO16

LvB

The Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung... July... 1810

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

(with the utmost solemnity and to the audience)

I have before me one of the most important works
by the master whose pre-eminence as an instrumental composer
it is doubtful anyone would now dispute...

(LvB is amazed by these words about him. ETAH continues to address the audience)

Therefore...let none of you take it amiss
if I should exceed what you might consider
the limits of conventional appraisal
and strive to put into words all the profound sensations
this musical composition has given rise to within me...

LvB

(looking at the AMZ)

Who wrote this?

ACTOR 1
[a friend]

Hoffmann... Ernst Theodore Amadeus Hoffmann...

LvB

Hoffmann?... A composer!

ACTOR 1

And a writer... and a painter...

ACTOR 3
[a keen reader]

And a master of the fantastic and the supernatural...

LvB

Such interest on the part of a man like him
endowed with such excellent qualities
is very gratifying...

ACTOR 2

(Lecturing to the audience)

Let me begin by clarifying...

'Music'... as an independent art... is a name
properly applied only to instrumental music,
which scorns all assistance, all admixture from the other arts...
and by doing so reveals to man an unknown realm, a world...
quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him,

a world...
in which he leaves behind
all feelings circumscribed by intellect
in order to embrace the inexpressible...

LvB

(Delighted, trying to get Hoffmann's attention)

Mr Hoffmann, I gather from my friends
that you have shown some interest in my music...

ACTOR 2

(With mounting energy)

It is not merely the newest, most revolutionary improvements
in the means of expression...

the greater perfection of instruments, the greater virtuosity of
performers...

but a deeper awareness of the peculiar nature of music,
that has enabled the great composers of our time
to raise instrumental music to its present level...

LvB

(Delighted, trying to get Hoffmann's attention)

Ernst Theodore Amadeus Hoffmann,
I wish you everything that is beautiful and good...

ACTOR 2

(Mounting delirium)

If Haydn led us dancing through green forest glades...
and Mozart deep into the realm of spirits...

in this symphony, Beethoven has unveiled before us... the
immeasurable...

LvB

(Deliriously agreeing and with pride)

Yes, indeed!

Music is an entrance into a higher world of knowledge
which comprehends man but which man cannot comprehend...

ACTOR 2

This symphony unfolds the essence of romanticism...
sweeping the listener irresistibly
into the spirit-kingdom of the infinite...

LvB

Music mediates... between the life of the mind... and the life...

(Suddenly becoming aware)

of the senses!

ACTOR 3

[Bettina von Arnim]

Yesterday I walked with him
into a glorious summer garden in full bloom...

The hot-beds and the glass-houses were open...
and the perfume was bewildering...

In the oppressive sunshine, he stopped and turned to me...

LvB

(to Bettina, with intensity)

I must discharge melody in all directions...
...pursue it, capture it again passionately...
see it flying away and disappearing in a mass of varied agitations...
seize on it again with renewed passion...

I cannot tear myself from it!

I am impelled to multiply it... and... to conquer it...

ME17 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bar 59 to 94

VO17

LvB

And behold, a symphony!...

The sweet blend of manifold forms
flowing in a mighty stream to its destination...

ACTOR 2

(with bitter scorn)

Our aesthetic lords and masters frequently complain
of an utter lack of unity and inner coherence in Shakespeare...

They fail to understand that only the profoundest contemplation
can show the splendid tree, buds and leaves, blossom and fruit,
all springing from a single seed...

And so it is with Beethoven...
only the most penetrating study of the inner structure of his music
can reveal its lofty level of rational awareness...

*(The other actors quickly gather round the piano as Hoffmann breathlessly
explains this music to his admirers and the audience)*

Let me show you...

This entire symphony begins from a seed...
only two bars long...

ME18 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, first 2 bars

VO18

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

Immediately repeated... down a step...

ME19 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 3-5

VO19

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

Nothing is yet certain... not even the key...
It could be... E flat major!

ME20 Fortepiano - E flat major cadence to opening of Eroica

VO20

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

(in great excitement)

Only in bar seven... is the true key-note revealed... C!

ME21 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 6 to downbeat of 10

VO21

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

And from here the music leads in a surging wave...

ME22 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1 from 2nd beat of bar 10 to bar 21

VO22

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

To a silence!... a fermata on the dominant...
giving presentiments... of unknown mysteries...

ME23 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 22-24 downbeat

VO23

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

Only an extremely reliable, well-trained orchestra...
animated by a *single* spirit... could attempt to play such music...

ME24 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 29 2nd beat to 58

VO24

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

Two horns... imitate the main idea...

ME25 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 59-60

VO25

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

And lead immediately... and ineluctably... to a second theme...

ME26 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 59-74

VO26

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

This is certainly more melodious!

But it still preserves the mood of anxious restless yearning
expressed by the whole movement...

ME27 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 65-66 cellos and basses

VO27

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

And now the first theme again!
But this time changed... transposed...

ME28 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 125-128

VO28

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

And leading to chords... and sudden silences...
from the whole orchestra...

sounds that depict the breast, constricted and affrighted,
struggling for air...

ME29 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 168-220

VO29

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

(Confirming what we have heard, and acting out the music)

And now...

like a friendly figure moving through the clouds
and shining through the darkness of the night...
the music has become calmer...
and dissolved into individual chords... softer... softer...

But then... out of these ominous, eerie sounds...
tiny alternating phrases arise once more...
creating an irresistible surge...
a swelling torrent whose waves break higher and higher...

ME30 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 369 2nd beat-397 downbeat
VO30

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

(With a cry of triumph)

Surely, there can be no simpler idea than this in all of music!

ME31 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bars 1-2

VO31

LvB

It came to me... from a yellow-hammer's song...

(The yellowhammer's song begins. Allow time to hear it.)

I heard it... walking through a park in the middle of Vienna...

(With a sense of amusement, after listening to the birdsong)

Thus Fate knocks at the door!

(The yellowhammer's song begins to die away)

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

One might think such ingredients would result in something disjointed... hard to follow...

ME32 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, bar 268

VO32

ACTOR 2
[E.T.A.Hoffmann]

But on the contrary...
it is the underlying pattern... the structure...
and these constant repetitions...chords... and silences...
that keep the spirit in a state of ineffable longing...

By this we know...
that this whole movement was not
merely conceived in the imagination...
it was thought through in a single breath!

ME33 Orchestra - Sym 5, mvt 1, from 2nd 8th note of bar 475 to end of the movement