

***Mass in C* – Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Ludwig van Beethoven looms in music history as a gigantic figure through whose influence one can see a complete transformation of the art of music. Although born during a period in which beauty of sound, balance, symmetry, and lyricism were musical guidelines, Beethoven was also part of the Enlightenment. Rousseau's and Voltaire's writings of the freedoms and rights of man, the spirit of revolution, and the "I" of the Romantic movement all struck a sympathetic nerve in Beethoven, perhaps heightened by the tragedy of his hearing loss. Schopenhauer writes that the Romantic composer reveals the innermost essence of each work and utters the most profound wisdom in a language which reason does not understand. As this Romantic spirit consumed him, Beethoven felt compelled to find expression beyond the boundaries and structures of the Classical era.

The *Mass in C* was written during the middle period of Beethoven's musical career by commission of Prince Nicholas Esterhazy, patron of Franz Joseph Haydn. This was Beethoven's first mass and very much influenced by the aura of Haydn's reputation. The work was not well received by either Esterhazy or Haydn, perhaps due to its somewhat unusual treatment of the mass text. Beethoven seldom separated sacred and secular, and thus the free treatment of the text and the size of the Mass make it problematic for liturgical use. While it retains Classical forms and structures, the varied sonorities and expressive power, especially the alternation of dynamic contrast and the extensive use of *crescendi* and *decrescendi*, are very much of the Romantic idiom. It is the inner intention of the text rather than mere tone painting that Beethoven emphasizes.

