

Beethoven Blast

December 12, 2015

In two months' time, from 18h00 on Friday evening of Feb. 19 to Sunday mid-day of Feb. 21, there will be held here in Broadstairs a three-day blast of the music of Beethoven. A young American pianist who can read at sight any of his 32 piano sonatas, and loves them all, is crossing the Atlantic to play some of them for us, we do not yet know which.

No doubt he will play the three great favourites, the *Pathétique*, *Moonlight* and *Appassionata*, also the *Waldstein*, but there will be time for him to analyze and present many others. Right now there will be no fixed programme for the three days. There will be room for plenty of questions and discussion and improvisation. A certain bishop will also be contributing to the analysis in some depth of his favourite composer. The purpose of the weekend will be for participants to take away with them an understanding they may not have had before, of how classical music ticks and of what makes Beethoven in particular one of its most famous composers.

But, somebody will object, what has music, especially Revolutionary music, to do with the defence and propagation of the Catholic Faith? The answer here has to be brief. Firstly, let nobody despise music. Both the Catholic Church and the Devil are acutely aware that it is a language uniquely capable of expressing and of shaping what goes on in the human soul, and therefore of influencing the direction which a soul is taking, towards Heaven (by Gregorian chant, for instance) or towards Hell (were not the victims of the recent shooting in Paris just then partaking in a Rock song that called on the Devil?). Almost every human being has some music or other in his soul, and that music normally runs deep, for good or ill. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that if a man does not have in him the music of his religion, he will have in him the religion of his music, e.g. the Devil. Catholics who

realize that the music they love flies not much higher than Pop or Rock, may well seize the opportunity to get a handle on classical music, via a studious blast of Beethoven.

Now it is true that there is a great deal of music higher than Beethoven. He was born under the Old Order, 19 years before the French Revolution broke out in 1789, but he died 38 years later when the modern Revolutionary age was well under way, in 1827, so that his life straddled that tremendous upheaval which he expressed musically in a number of his masterworks, notably in the *Appassionata* piano sonata and in his *Eroica Symphony*, originally dedicated to that hero of the Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte. However, while the relative serenity of the musical masterworks prior to the Revolution is free of its agitation and Romantic disturbance, at the same time it is that much further removed from our own world of today, marinated in the Revolution. Therefore Beethoven can speak to souls of today that find little or no interest in music of the earlier masters. Nor is Beethoven only Revolutionary. The unique power of his best loved masterpieces derives from their Romantic wine being contained and ordered within the classical skins which he inherited from Haydn and Mozart.

To give us an idea of numbers, please let us know if you plan to attend the Beethoven weekend. Off season, local boarding-houses should have plenty of room to overnight. And if male readers would prefer something more directly Catholic, let them sign up as soon as possible for the Ignatian Exercises to be given here by Fr Abraham and myself between 18h00, December 26 and 18h00, December 31.

Kyrie eleison.