

## RELATIONSHIPS

Beethoven's "Pastoral" symphony is full of wonderful descriptions of Nature. Any analysis of the work must take this into account. However, it is possible to go beyond this simple musical description of landscapes, forests, animals and natural phenomena. Nature includes everything around us and it also includes us, and one of our most basic existential problems is the relationship of the individual with the rest of the world. Our individuality is something we all experience, and we can say that it is a core experience. From the beginning, we seek our mother for nourishment we understand that we are in some way connected with what is out there. This duality is a problem to be solved throughout our lives, as well as a prototype of all other dualities that we will experience. For those who think that this is a problem of modernity, you can see a symbolic representation of duality in the "Font de Gaume" cave in the Dordogne, not far from Lascaux. There you will see, painted on a cave wall more than 13,000 years ago, two bison facing each other, one black and one red.

In many societies the problem of how the individual relates to everything else by imposing a rigid structure where the individual submits like a bee in a hive. Whether this is desirable or not depends on whether one sees this as a solution or a suppression of the original problem. In any case, in the West, with its accent on the individual, this refuge is not enough. In addition, the heroic ethic, which assumes that the only basis for all action is inside the hero, exacerbates this problem. We can understand "Nature" as everything outside each one of us. Although we can rationally accept that we are part of it, when we think of Nature we feel it as outside our individuality, thus setting up an original duality. For that reason, it is possible to see Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, the Pastoral, as an attempt to address this fundamental problem of our existence.

The Pastoral is the only Beethoven symphony in five movements instead of four. This structure makes sense if one sees the first four movements as the presentation of two alternating points of view, with the fifth movement as the synthesis. These two points of view, or perspectives, are, on the one hand that of the individual in the first and third movements, and that of Nature, or the outside world, in the second and fourth. In the first movement, we approach Nature and try to establish a relationship with her. Our attitude is one of positive expectation. However, if we want to develop a profound vision of the work, it is important that it not be simply a “fun” attitude, as is often expressed. This movement must express a search for what is essential in that experience. It is worth noting that the music develops with much repetition of short thematic phrases that remind one of Bruckner, and specifically what Deryck Cooke called the “Bruckner glare”. This repetitive process, often used by Beethoven as well as Bruckner, takes us the core of the issue step by step, accumulating strength and deepening our understanding with each repetition until we reach a climax. For this process to work well, the tempo should not be too fast. We must feel how each repetition gets us closer and closer to our own heart, as well as the heart of the work, with special emphasis on the bass. As is always the case in all of Beethoven’s first movements, we reach strong, climactic affirmation of our being and our individuality in the Coda. This also happens in a repetitive passage.

In the second movement, we change our perspective from our interior to that of Nature. The first experience all humans have of what is out there is the mother, and this is how Nature presents herself. It is interesting to note that in the first bar of this movement, the second violins play this sequence of notes: Bb-F, F-G-F, F-Eb-D, D-C-Bb, Bb. If we eliminate repeated notes, we get the following sequence: Bb-F-G-F-Eb-D-C-Bb, equivalent to the nursery rhyme “Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman”. Our relationship with the mother is the most comfortable and secure that we will ever know. This movement caresses and cuddles us, and we feel happy and secure. It flows in long bars

of 12 crotchets, a mythical space that reminds one of the long verses of epic poetry and giving the mother the possibility of expressing herself with all the love that fills her existence.

We celebrate this happiness with careless abandon in the third movement. Beethoven describes it as a “merry gathering of country folk”. The music certainly expresses fun, dancing and much satisfaction. But we know that life isn’t always like that. Our “mother” Nature quickly turns into a monster, a Gorgon, in the fourth movement. She presents us with a frightening face, with thunder and lightning, showing us a reality much more complex than the one we experienced in the second movement. We should thank Nature for this transformation. Without it, living all the time like in the third movement, we would be idiots.

And now, knowing the extremes, we can engage in the most productive relationship of all: the erotic. This represents the synthesis of the dualities we experienced in the first four movements. In the fifth movement, the insistent repetition of phrases returns, this time driving us towards ecstasy. Not only does it help us to find the essence of our own nature, it also moves us towards an expressive explosion. Beethoven always goes down to the depths in order to reach a climax. It is there that he finds the strength to reach the summit. The same way that he affirms his individuality at the end of his first movements, he uses this principle to reach a climax in his last movements. Here, repetition pushes us towards fullness.

In the fifth movement, Nature presents herself as a woman to a man. We want her and we approach her. We dance with her with increasing frenzy. Finally, in the Coda of this last movement, we unite with her and reach a surprisingly explicit musical climax. I don’t know any other musical example where the physical aspect of the climax is so clearly expressed. In addition, the music makes us feel with eloquence what happens after the ecstasy. Most would agree that Beethoven is a heroic

artist. Many probably think that this symphony is the least heroic of the composer. But a hero can also make love.