

# The Eroica Symphony

## Symphony No.3 - Ludwig Van Beethoven



### The Facts

Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, otherwise known as the Eroica ('Heroic') Symphony, is a symphony in four movements.

The symphony was written between 1802 and 1804 and premiered in Vienna on 7 April 1805.

The work signals the beginning of Beethoven's 'middle period', or 'heroic period' and is credited with bridging the gap between the Classical and Romantic eras of music.

### The Symphony

#### 1 Movement

*Allegro con brio* – a movement almost as long as a whole symphony would typically have been at the time, that begins with two "thunderbolts" from the whole orchestra

#### 2 Movement

*Marcia funebre: Adagio assai* – an extended 18th-century funeral march, Scherzo

#### 3 Movement

*Allegro vivace* – a fast, lively movement, much shorter than the others

#### 4 Movement

*Finale: Allegro molto* – a set of variations on a theme.

Beethoven originally dedicated his Symphony No. 3 to Napoleon Bonaparte but was enraged when Napoleon declared himself Emperor and angrily tore out the title page, giving the symphony the new title "Eroica". It seems Beethoven may also have withdrawn the dedication out of concern that he would lose his composer's fee.

Beethoven began composing the symphony soon after writing the *Heiligenstadt Testament* – a letter in which he laid bare his distress at losing his hearing, his poor health and his depression and revealed that he was contemplating suicide. The document widely influenced the composition of his Symphony No. 3, which reflects his emotional turmoil.

### The Creation of the Symphony

The symphony is scored for:  
two flutes  
two oboes  
two clarinets  
two bassoons  
three horns  
two trumpets  
timpani  
strings

Reactions to the revolutionary new work were mixed, with some declaring it a masterpiece and others failing to see any artistic merit. One audience member was heard shouting "I'll give another Kreutzer if the thing will only stop!", referring to Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata.

The first movement of the Eroica Symphony bears an uncanny resemblance to the overture of Mozart's opera *Bastien und Bastienne*, which Mozart wrote when he was 12 and which Beethoven probably would not have heard.

Beethoven's friend and secretary, Ferdinand Ries said "At the first rehearsal of the Symphony, which was terrible, but at which the horn player made his entry correctly, I stood beside Beethoven and, thinking that a blunder had been made I said: 'Can't the damned hornist count? It sounds horribly false!' I think I came pretty close to getting a box on the ear. Beethoven did not forgive that little slip for a long time."

It is believed that Beethoven constructed the Eroica Symphony back to front.

