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■Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

■Missa solemnis D Major Op. 123 (74')

In the history of Western music, the musical settings of the Mass Ordinary had played a significant role especially during the Renaissance period, in which the compositional technique that required to create such pieces became highly developed and elaborated. The possibility of polyphony was fully explored, numerous composers writing extremely complicated music that is often scored for six or more independent-but-interwove vocal parts. Imitative (contrapuntal) music became the most prevalent feature of the sacred music, influencing many generations of musicians to follow. In the eighteenth century, composers began adopting operatic elements into their compositions of sacred music. This was a rather curious phenomenon, since operas were regarded purely secular, and such music had traditionally been considered to be inferior to religious compositions. In the Age of Enlightenment, however, the popularization of church music was necessary for the religious establishments to retain their authority, and the inclusion of operatic features into sacred music was in some ways unavoidable. In the end, the Mass became a place where composers could exhibit all types of compositional skills.

In the case of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* in D Major, Op. 123, the composer's intentions became progressively clear: Beethoven, composing the piece during his final years of his life, wanted it to be his artistic testament. The Mass had been intended to be performed at the installation ceremony of the Archduke Rudolph, who became Archbishop of Olmütz (now Olomouc, Czech Republic) on March 9, 1820—the Archduke, the younger brother of Emperor Franz I, was one of Beethoven's piano and composition students as well as enthusiastic supporters. Beethoven, however, was not able to finish it before the ceremony partly because he was determined to make the piece monumental. He needed much more time than he anticipated. To refine the work, Beethoven even studied masterworks by past composers like Palestrina, Bach, Händel, and Mozart. The

first public performance of the Mass took place in St. Petersburg in April 1824. In Vienna, however, only a portion of the composition was heard during Beethoven's lifetime.

Following the tradition, *Missa solemnis* has five substantial movements, titled Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. Each of these contains several sections. Kyrie, for instance, has three parts: the gentle sounding opening "*Kyrie eleison*" is followed by "*Christe eleison*" in a minor key, and a varied version of the opening "*Kyrie eleison*" returns to end the movement. Gloria, one of the two largest movements of the Mass, has six parts: "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*," "*Gratias agimus tibi*," "*Domine Deus*," "*Qui tollis*," "*Quoniam*," and "*In Gloria Dei Patris*," of which the last consists of a large scale fugue performed by the whole choir and orchestra. Credo, another grand movement, opens with a powerful fugue. It also contains sharply contrasted somber sections that reflect the sufferings of Jesus Christ. The movement ends with another grand fugue. Sanctus begins softly, a feature that is highly unusual in such movements. Before initiating the "*Benedictus*" section, Beethoven inserts a brief instrumental interlude. *Missa solemnis* concludes with the Agnus Dei movement, reflecting a gentle supplication for mercy.

[Akira Ishii]