

Serenity in a far more positive and august sense is the hallmark of the *Molto adagio* which now follows. The form of this slow movement recalls that of the *Adagio* in the Ninth Symphony, in that it consists of variations on two strongly contrasted themes; but its character is unique. Beethoven marks the movement 'Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart' ('holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the divinity, in the Lydian mode') but only the first of the two themes is hymn-like in character; the second is a solemn dance, whose wide leaps, profuse ornamentation, and rhythmic variety do indeed suggest a return to physical and mental well-being and even something like the ecstasy of recaptured youth.

The first, hymn-like theme is the clearest reflection that we possess of Beethoven's interest in the modes, which prompted a number of passages in both the *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony. Here, however, he does not use modal harmony as a spice, to give a few bars a specifically different colouring. He contrasts a complete archaic, ecclesiastical-sounding hymn—in fact a chorale in five strains, separated by short contrapuntal ritornellos—with a completely modern, secular dance-like movement. It is as though Beethoven were aware of two aspects of his recovery; the feeling of objective gratitude, which he found it natural to express in a hymn to the God whom he always instinctively envisaged as a father, and the subjective physical and emotional sensations of a *retour à la vie*. In the first statement of the chorale theme there is an austere, hieratic note, a solemnity that could quite as well be funereal as gratificatory

Ex. 22

The mode is plagal hypolydian (F major with B natural instead of flat) and it is scrupulously observed by Beethoven. The narrow span of the melody, its rhythmic simplicity, the predominance of step-wise motion and the frequent crossing of the parts combine with harmonic austerity to create the strongest possible impression of remote, other-worldly solemnity. The framework of two-bar, imitative counterpoint provided by the ritornellos¹ enhances the archaic character of the whole conception, and with it the sense of entering literally a new world when, the chorale having modulated to A major, the second theme (D major 3/8 replacing the modal 4/4 and *andante* succeeding *molto adagio*) appears with Beethoven's marking 'Neue Kraft fühlend' (with the feeling of a new strength)

Ex. 23

¹ Did this design furnish Wagner, consciously or unconsciously, with the model for the opening scene of *Die Meistersinger*?

Here the heavy accents, the wide leaps, the unusual rhythm and the trill (as so often in these last works, a sign of intense inner vitality rising to ecstatic self-abandonment) bring the movement in a single bar out of church into the sun, from the stillness of a devout recollection into the tingling activity of the dance, but David's solemn dance of thanksgiving before the Ark. The profuse ornamentation of grace-notes and trills are the spontaneous, gratuitous burgeonings of the new life, and sometimes even suggest half-coquettish forms of ballet steps (compare the solo violin part in the Benedictus of the Missa Solemnis, Ex. 26, p. 265).

Ex. 24

There is perhaps also a parallel here with the Tempo di Menuetto which forms variation 33 of the Diabelli Variations. There too Beethoven transfigured the formal, artificial world of the eighteenth-century dance, setting its order, or *kosmos*, in the sharpest possible contrast to the controlled *chaos* of the preceding fugue, as he contrasts

it here with the severe monotony of the chorale-theme. By the side of these many dance elements in this D major section is a strong, lyrical expressiveness, to which Beethoven carefully draws attention (*cantabile espressivo*).

In the return of the first theme (*molto adagio*) the first violin is given the chorale, while the other three instruments elaborate contrapuntally the motif of the ritornello.

Ex. 25

This (a) appears in a slightly altered form (b), and the gentle movement of the parts combined with much syncopation and frequent octave intervals provides a full yet transparent tide on which the chorale floats without effort or disturbance. The following variation of the D major theme is entirely ornamental, with re-orchestration (i.e. redistribution of ideas among the four instruments) and still further rhythmic subdivision.

What appears to be a second variation of the chorale is in fact a long coda, based entirely on material from the chorale and its ritornello, which now appears in a third rhythmic shape (Ex. 25 (c)). Only the first five notes of the chorale are used; but Beethoven, who marks the section 'Mit innigster Empfindung' (with the deepest, most intimate feeling) communicates an extraordinary feeling of space, of an immobility that is nevertheless intensely active and alive. This may be compared to the activity of the *vita contemplativa* as Dante describes it in the *Paradiso*.¹ The sudden quivering of the sforzandos and the oscillation of the semiquaver (Ex. 26-x) convey that same contemplative ecstasy which Beethoven expressed in the last variations of opp. 109 and 111. Whereas the percussive, non-sustaining pianoforte needed myriads of notes, the strings need a minimum; but in each case the principle of repetition is important. In every art the mystical, i.e. non-intellectual experience of reality has always found expression in this repetition of formulae that represents the last stage before the silence of consummation. The 'Om mani padme hum' of the Buddhists,

¹ Dante, *Paradiso*, xxvii, ll. 7-10:

O gioia! o ineffabile allegrezza!
O vita intera d'amore e di pace!
O senza brama sicura ricchezza!

the Jesus-prayer of the Orthodox Philokalia and the 'Deus meus et omnia' of the Catholic mystic are all simple methods to keep the mechanism of the conscious, 'lower' mind unobtrusively in play, thereby freeing the contemplative faculty. The long trills and repeated murmuring of the same rhythmic or melodic shape in opp. 109 and 111 (see pp. 185 and 203) perform the same function; and here, as the extension of the music decreases and we seem to be moving towards silence, so the intention becomes correspondingly greater, as *multum in parvo* gradually approaches the great silence of *omnia in nihilo*, the *nada* of the Spanish mystics—

Ex. 26

From the timelessness of this contemplative ecstasy Beethoven turns—like Teresa of Avila to her administrative and kitchen duties—to a baldly factual, neatly rhythmic march movement. Everything about this twenty-four-bar episode is regular: the cadences and their modulations fall where we should expect them, the canonic entries and points of imitation are symmetrically planned. There is no hint of introspection or *arrière-pensée*; this is most emphatically not one of the

mysterious nocturnal marches such as Tchaikovsky and Mahler were to favour, but as functional as the march that accompanies the changing of the guard between Scenes 4 and 5 in Act 1 of *Fidelio*.¹ There is even the hint of a side-drum in the semiquaver figures (Ex. 27, bar 3).

Ex. 27

The clean A major cadence with which the march ends is followed immediately ('attacca subito') by a quickening of tempo and a change to the minor. Eight short chords introduce a quiet but agitated recitative in the first violin, accompanied by tremolando chords in the other strings, surely as plain a reference to the opera as the similar passage in the slow movement of op. 110. But what Beethoven in fact quotes is one of the recitatives from the Ninth Symphony (finale bars 56-8)

¹ The sketch-books (Nottebohm, II, p. 549) suggest, however, that Beethoven did originally imagine something different here. There is the beginning of a 'marcia serioso [*sic*] pathet' that appears among the sketches for this quartet.

Ex. 28

This would surely not have had the character clearly intended by Beethoven when he marked the *Alla marcia assai vivace*, which puts pathos out of court.