

“I give preference to your house above all others”

Beethoven and the Leipzig Music Publishing House Breitkopf & Härtel

Special Exhibition at the Beethoven House, Bonn
24th May to 18th August 2007

Breitkopf & Härtel, founded in 1719 in Leipzig, is the world’s oldest existing music publishing house. It played a special role in Ludwig van Beethoven’s life, for in the years 1808-12 it was his main publisher, which brought out the first editions of 25 of his works, including such important ones as the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and the Fifth Piano Concerto. In addition, Breitkopf & Härtel published the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (General Musical Journal), the most important music journal of that time, which played a major part in shaping not only Beethoven’s contemporary image but also that of subsequent times. After Beethoven’s death Breitkopf & Härtel also made an important contribution to his critical reception with the printing of the first complete edition of his works and numerous other publications. This exhibition, with the catalogue offering more detail, is intended to illustrate the close relationship between the composer and the publishers.

“You, being a more philanthropic and far better educated man than all other music publishers, must surely have the ultimate aim of not just paying the artist a pittance, but rather of leading him along the way, so that he may achieve without distraction that which is in him and which the world awaits of him. It is not arrogance when I say that I choose you above all others. I have been approached often enough, even from Leipzig, here by agents acting on the authority of publishers from there, and recently in person, when they were prepared to pay me what I ask, but I have turned down all offers to show the particular pleasure I take from dealing with you, or with your mind at least (for I know nothing of the heart) and that I shall gladly forego something in order to preserve this bond”.

Beethoven paid this challenging compliment on 21st August 1810 to Gottfried Christoph Härtel, the owner of the publishing house Breitkopf & Härtel. It reflects the fundamental importance which a publisher had for the artist as well as the special esteem in which he held that particular publisher, of whose status Beethoven was as equally convinced as of the fact that this status should be mirrored in artist-friendly fees.

Room 6 (1st floor)

On display here as an introduction to the exhibition is a manuscript of the six Partitas for piano by Johann Sebastian Bach BWV 825-830, which Beethoven’s most important benefactor during the first years in Vienna transcribed personally as a student. Count Karl von Lichnowsky copied them from Bach’s later biographer Johann Nikolaus Forkel. It can be assumed that Beethoven knew this manuscript and used it for playing and study. In 1809 the composer asked Breitkopf & Härtel to send him all available scores of Bach’s music. Lichnowsky studied in the late 1770s in Leipzig, where he also contributed to a friend’s album. He always enjoyed returning to his place of study and later lobbied for the young composer in the city of publishing and fairs, as well as acting as a courier for him.

Room 7

Showcase 1: Breitkopf & Härtel owned two impressive buildings in the city centre of Leipzig, known as the *Goldener Bär* and the *Silbener Bär*. The bear, which had given its name to the tavern located there in earlier times, is still to be found in the company’s signet. The publishing house began at an early date to produce a catalogue offering not only an immense number of manuscripts but also its own as well as other companies’ printed scores. The 15th supplement (1782-1784) to this catalogue contains a reference to the first printed Beethoven composition: Variations for Piano, by the 11 year-old composer. The edition itself is on display in Room 2. The first composition published by Breitkopf & Härtel was the String Quintet op. 29 in 1802. Härtel always had his rights of ownership confirmed in writing by Beethoven. This was necessary after a Viennese publisher had illicitly printed the work, which almost led to the breaking-off of the business relationship between Beethoven and Härtel even before it had properly begun. Also on display is a copy of the first copperplate portrait of the 30 year-old Beethoven, which the publishing house began selling in 1802 and which they published in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1804. To its left is a outline plan of the city of Leipzig, which at that time was already the most important publishing, printing and business fair centre on the Continent. Only the terrible destruction of the Second World War brought about a drastic change. But Leipzig was also an important musical centre, not only because of its music publishing houses but also on account of its music scene. Between 1796 and 1811 three of Beethoven’s works were first performed here. The programme flyers for those concerts are on display on the walls.

Showcase 2: Beethoven considered his Variations for Piano in F major op. 34 and E flat major op. 35 to be of greater importance than his earlier variation cycles, because they were composed in “a new way” based on themes of his own. He noted this on the title page of the original manuscript of Opus 35, which today is known as the “Eroica Variations”, since Beethoven later used the theme again for the last movement of his Third Symphony. In the letter written in December 1802 Beethoven eloquently vents his anger about his former colleague at the Bonn court orchestra Anton Reicha, who in his opinion had boastingly propagated a “nouvelle methode” with regard to his own work. However, Beethoven’s wish that a reference to the originality of his works be made in an introduction to the first printed edition went unfulfilled. Both original handwritten scores served the engraver at the Leipzig publishing house as a master for the first editions which were published in 1803.

Showcase 3: Beethoven’s regard for the publisher is reflected in an intensive and copious correspondence. With one exception, all Beethoven’s letters have since found their way into the Beethoven House’s collection. The large letter dated 18th November 1806, in which the composer explains his marketing strategy to the publisher, is from the publishing house’s Wiesbaden archive. Härtel had exclusive representation in mind, but Beethoven would not accept that. He wanted to market his works himself in England and Scotland and was not prepared to forego the high fees which could be earned there. In return, Härtel could have secured the rights for Germany and France to the works sold in Britain, but he was not interested in such an arrangement and no agreement was reached. Then, in August 1808, Härtel travelled to Vienna to negotiate personally with Beethoven and to intensify the business relationship. He presented the composer with the princely sum of 100 ducats in cash for the Opera 67-70, the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Sonata for Cello in A major and two piano trios. He had his ownership of the works confirmed in writing by Beethoven and took the engraver’s copy for both symphonies back with him to Leipzig. He had had to wait too often for long promised works.

Showcase 4: Härtel was a publisher of great vision, who at an early date began to consider copyright protection, which was not reliably regulated among publishers until the so-called Act of Convention of 1829. The great publishing contract of 1810 (from the archives of Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden) is in this respect a document of great importance. In it the publishing house’s ownership of the rights to 23 works, from

the Fifth Symphony op. 67 to the Mass in C major op. 86 and two songs without opus numbers, is confirmed in writing. As late as 1855 the publishers asked the composer and pianist Ignaz Moscheles, who had been well acquainted with Beethoven, and the cantor of St. Thomas church, Moritz Hauptmann, to verify the authenticity of Beethoven’s signature and even had their verification certified by the commercial court in Leipzig. Since there had already been discussion during Beethoven’s lifetime about a complete edition of his works, which never came about due to the large number of original publishers and the legal problems involved, this document displayed here was worth its weight in gold. On the other hand, good publishers’ fees and reliable relationships with the publishers were for freelance composers the basis of their existence. On 21st August 1810, when the contract was in place, he had written to Härtel: “It is not, as you believe, my ultimate object to become a musical usurer, who writes only to become rich, Heaven forbid, but I do love an independent life, which I can only lead with a modest fortune, and besides, the fee must afford the artist some honour, as must be reflected in everything he undertakes”.

Showcase 5 illustrates the development process from the original handwritten score to the first printed edition, taking the Sixth Symphony “Pastoral” as an example. First, Beethoven wrote sketches and drafts. These flowed into a manuscript of the complete work which he wrote down himself. He then gave that to a copyist to write out a clean, legible version. The two manuscripts are on display in the middle of the showcase. In his letter of 8th June 1808 Beethoven offered the work together with three others to Breitkopf & Härtel for 900 guilders, in the hope of finally coming to an agreement with the renowned publishing house after a series of unsuccessful negotiations: “Make sure that we come together once and stay together”. His hope was fulfilled and he duly gave the copied score to the publisher. It provided the working basis for the engraver, who etched the music score inversely onto copper-lead plates from which prints were made. The result was the first printed edition which appeared in 1809 in the form of parts for the individual sections of the orchestra. A complete score followed only shortly before Beethoven’s death. It is more suitable for studying and for conducting than the individual parts.

Showcase 6 contains sources for the Sonata for Piano and Cello in A major op. 69, the first cello sonata which achieved a perfect balance between the two instruments. Beethoven succeeded only after a hard struggle, as is impressively

documented in the original manuscript of the first movement. This manuscript was of course unsuitable as a master for the engraver, so Beethoven wrote the work down again and had a copy made of that manuscript. The original edition was wrongly printed with the opus number 59, but as can be seen here the publishers corrected this by hand. The edition also contained mistakes in the score, of which Beethoven informed the publishers by letter in late June 1809 with the included list of corrections.

Showcase 7: Gottfried Christoph Härtel was of particular importance to Beethoven in his capacity as publisher of the *General Musical Journal (Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung)*. This appeared from 1798, was soon recognised as the most important music journal and played a decisive role in making Beethoven at first well-known and then famous. The numerous articles still have an influence on the view we have of the composer today. Editor of the paper was Friedrich Rochlitz (his portrait is on the wall), who was also jointly responsible for the organisation of the concert programme at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. At first, Beethoven's works were reviewed somewhat negatively and insensibly, about which he complained in his letter of 22nd April 1801: "Recommend to your critic more caution and intelligence, particularly with respect to the works of younger authors, for some may be deterred by his criticism who would otherwise progress much further. As far as I am concerned, I am to be sure a long way from approaching such perfection as could bear no censure, but still at the beginning the cries of your critic were nonetheless so humiliating [...] but now pax vobiscum – may peace be with you and myself". A revolutionary new language, rich in sympathy, fantasy and imagery, was introduced into music criticism by E.T.A. Hoffman. His comprehensive review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in the 1810 edition of the journal has become world-famous. Only an eminent writer, who at the same time was an excellent composer, could have produced such a masterly assessment of a work which for its time was so unusual. Only four years previously Beethoven's Third Symphony had received a negative review in the same newspaper, which led to the ironic comments about Rochlitz in the composer's letter. But when Rochlitz visited Beethoven in Vienna in 1822 in order, unsuccessfully, to negotiate on behalf of Breitkopf & Härtel about the plan for a "Faust" opera, the relationship between the two had certainly long since become more relaxed. Two days after Beethoven's death an extensive obituary appeared in the journal, in which Rochlitz underlined the composer's

epoch-making importance. Incidentally, from 1817 onward Beethoven received a free copy of the newspaper.

Showcase 8: One of the most important of Beethoven's works published by Breitkopf & Härtel was the Sonata "Les Adieux" op. 81a (which should really be called "Das Lebewohl" or "The Farewell"). The composer wrote it for his scholar and benefactor Archduke Rudolph of Austria when he was forced to flee Vienna before the approaching Napoleonic troops. Beethoven wanted the cover in two languages but failed to make himself clear and the work was printed with two covers, one German and the other French. The harsh criticism contained in his letter of 9th October 1811 is certainly revealing, although it does fail to take into account the part he himself played in the mix-up: "I have just received the "Lebe Wohl" etc., and I see there are indeed other copies, with a French title. Why then, for "lebe wohl" has a completely different meaning from "les adieux" – the first being addressed from the heart to one person alone, whereas the second refers to the whole assembly of complete cities. The "Lebewohl" was not dedicated to the Archduke, which is why the year and date when I wrote it are not printed. In future you shall keep all headlines unchanged, as I have put them down". Originally the edition was to appear in two batches, for Beethoven's instructions had again been equivocal. The copy with the French cover is unique and was only discovered in 2004. In it the second part with a new numbering of pages at the beginning of the second movement originates from the first printing-stage. This copy, which is of great interest in terms of music bibliography, was purchased for the Beethoven House three years ago thanks to the generous financial support of Breitkopf & Härtel. The particular popularity of the work and the vigorous publishing activity surrounding it are reflected in the adaptation for orchestra by Gottlob Benedikt Bierey which appeared in 1831.

Room 12 (at the end of the tour on the ground floor):

Vitrine 1: Härtel's esteem for Beethoven is also apparent in the last authentic portrait of Beethoven, which he commissioned from Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller in 1823. There are two versions of the picture (as a pendant there is a portrait of Härtel from around 1790 hanging on the wall to the right). The Leipzig picture was unfortunately destroyed in the Second World War, but hanging on the wall is a copy made shortly after the original by Louis Grünler. Breitkopf & Härtel published an etching by Sichling from the original painting after 1850, and a coloured print in 1929. The copy

made by the Bonn artist Willy Fassbender for the Beethoven House in 1930 hangs in the lecture room.

Even though the actual publishing relationship ended in 1812 for what were basically non-connected reasons, Beethoven certainly never forgot the publishing house. Only a year before the composer's death, the violinist Karl Holz wrote in a conversation notebook that Breitkopf & Härtel had made a fortune from his Second Symphony, because on the first day of publication they had completely sold out the edition of 2,000 copies of the piano duet version. Conversely, Breitkopf & Härtel remained associated with Beethoven after his death. A list produced by the publishers in 1842 makes reference to no fewer than 110 editions. In that year too the first edition of the Leonore Overture No. 2 was published. It was edited by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, with additions and corrections made necessary by the fact that the only manuscript copy available as a source for his edition was incomplete. A deletion made by Beethoven on page 83 was reversed by Mendelssohn with the hand-written comment "Should stay in, FMB".

Showcase 2: The publishing house raised a monument to Beethoven and to itself with the Complete Edition of Beethoven's Compositions, published in the unbelievably short period between 1862 and 1865. Numerous works are published here for the first time, including the long cadenza of the first movement of the First Piano Concerto, the autograph manuscript of which was acquired by the publishers after Beethoven's death and later became part of the H.C. Bodmer Collection.

Showcase 3: At the suggestion of the publishers, Franz Liszt produced a number of musically varied arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies and a selection of his airs. Furthermore, in the 19th and 20th centuries the Leipzig publishers have brought out many standard works of reference on Beethoven, beginning in 1851 with the first thematic catalogue and continuing to the supplements to the Complete Edition, which appeared between 1959 and 1971. Today Beethoven still plays a central role in the publishing house's activities. The glass book-case contains only a small selection of the company's impressive number of publications on the subject of Beethoven.

The Studio for Digital Archives contains more than 100 relevant documents (autograph music scores, manuscript copies, letters, confirmations of ownership etc.) which are available for viewing and which comprehensively illustrate

the particularly close and fertile business relationship between Beethoven and the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel.

A richly illustrated catalogue, which is on sale in the museum shop, has been published to accompany this exhibition.

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