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# BEETHOVEN

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EGMONT  
Overture for Orchestra  
Op. 84



Eulenburg

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

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# EGMONT

Overture for Orchestra  
Op. 84

Edited by/Herausgegeben von  
Max Unger



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## PREFACE

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The music for Goethe's "Egmont" was written by the composer to the order of the management of the *Hoftheater* in Vienna between the end of 1809 and the spring of 1810, however – according to his own statement – without accepting payment from the management, and “merely for love of the poet”. The overture was probably the last piece to be written, as is rightly assumed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of A. W. Thayer's great Beethoven biography, edited by H. Deiters und H. Riemann. According to the ascertainment of Eugen Kilian, published in the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung* of 1921, the incidental music was not used for the first time at the first Vienna performance of the drama on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1810, but at a subsequent performance on the 15<sup>th</sup> June of the same year. This also removes the uncertainty hitherto attached to the time of writing of the letter with which the master for the first time offered the music to Breitkopf & Härtel on the 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1810. This letter includes the words: “But reply immediately, so that I shall be put off no longer, all the more since Egmont is being performed a few days hence and I shall be approached for the music...” As Riemann, when editing the above mentioned volume, still had to assume the 24<sup>th</sup> May as being the day of performance, he believed that the name of the month should read “May” instead of “June”; but this assumption is settled by Kilian's findings.

In a letter to the Leipzig publishing house dated 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1810, Beethoven decided on the dedication of the Egmont music to the Archduke Rudolph, but for

unknown reasons, maybe only by mistake, it was omitted; at about the same time he sent the manuscript score to Leipzig to be engraved. The fact that this must have been the original score may be gathered from the following passage of a letter to the publishers dated 15<sup>th</sup> October of that year: “Should the last piece in Egmont not carry the title *Siegessymphonie* (Victory Symphony), then have this heading added. Hurry up with it and then let me know as soon as you no longer need the original score, because I shall then ask you to send it from Leipzig to Goethe whom I have already advised accordingly... I would have sent him a copy from here, but as I have not yet so trained a copyist on whom I could entirely rely, and I should be sure of the ordeal of looking it through, I thought it would be better and cost me less time...” Evidently Breitkopf & Härtel required the original manuscript up to the publication of the edition in parts in January of next year, and only then did they carry out the order. Curiously enough the trail of the original manuscript is then lost. Perhaps we may assume that the poet turned it over to the theatre archives in Weimar where it may subsequently have been lost. A few numbers written in Beethoven's own hand, now kept in the Prussian State Library, cannot for outer and inner reasons have been copy for the engraver. A copy of the entire Egmont music, corrected throughout by the composer, is at present the property of Frau Maria Floersheim, daughter of the late Frankfurt collector, Louis Koch.

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The overture was published during Beethoven's lifetime in orchestral parts in December, 1810 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition in September, 1822), and the piano score in February, 1811. The first edition of the score was only published by Breitkopf & Härtel in July, 1831 (cp. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Beethovens Goethe-Kompositionen Kippenberg-Jahrbuch*, vol. 8, 1930, p. 116 seq.). The review of the music which appeared unsigned in July, 1813, in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* of the Leipzig publishers is from E. Th. A. Hoffmann's pen. Although many contentions in it are contestable, and especially some of those concerning the idea of the overture, it does belong – if there is such a thing – to the immortal music-critical achievements. Hoffmann, the most prominent among the early critics who immediately recognized the eminence of the composer, begins the review with the classical words: "It is indeed a gratifying aspect to see two great masters united in a wonderful work and a happy fulfilment of every expectation of the shrewd connoisseur."

The overture offers an instructive example of Beethoven's conception of musical introductions to dramatic works. In contrast to E. Th. A. Hoffmann, who held the opinion the master had intended to glorify in music the love of Egmont and Klärchen, the actual facts are proper-

ly explained in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Thayer's book: The greater part of the overture – the introduction and the *Allegro* in 3/4 – illustrates the contrast between brutal force and imploring lament, between the Spanish tyrants and the enslaved Netherlanders. Shortly before the 4/4-movement in F major Egmont's head falls by a sharp stroke of the sword.

1st and 2nd Violin.



A dimly short transition in the wood wind, retaliation draws close, and soon the triumphant flourishes of liberty resound. It is, moreover, the same fundamental idea, which Beethoven loved so much, as in "Fidelio". The thematic relations between the opening bars and the *allegro* part, which are pointed out in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of Thayer, will be easily detected in the score by a musical reader.

The outer form of the work is appropriate to the usual classical form of the overture, which is that of the first movement of a sonata. The development is unusually short, and the whole composition a classical example of rounded form and concise musical expression.

Max Unger