

In his symphonies, piano sonatas and various chamber music works, Ludwig van Beethoven played a major role in the evolution and rise of the fast and spirited scherzo movement (literally meaning a “joke”) as a replacement for the slower and more dance-like minuet movement. The scherzo turned later in the 19th century into an independent instrumental form; the best known became the four “Scherzi” for piano solo by Frederic Chopin. This development was a wonderful source of inspiration for me both as pianist and composer.

In anticipation of the celebrations for the Beethoven year 2020, I wanted with this work to pay a tribute to this great composer in form, spirit, and in humour. The four capital letters in the title are imagined rather playfully as musical cryptograms that employ German note names (“S” corresponds to “Es” = E-flat, and “H” corresponds to B), thus subsequently forming both the main melodic motif and the harmonic base of the work (E-flat, C, B, E). For the instrumentation — in addition to significant percussion and piano segments — apart from horns and trumpets I haven’t used traditionally paired wind instruments, but rather each one singly. This reinforces the uniqueness and high recognition value of each instrument’s specific and distinctive sound and colour.

As the concert program of the world premiere in Indianapolis, USA, features Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, I allowed myself to quote some of the themes and motifs from this symphony in the course of my work. As an example, the ten notes of Beethoven’s main theme from the first movement are introduced in reverse order by the brass (the counterpoint forms the main motif of “Quasi valzer”). Later we also hear a quotation from Claudio Monteverdi’s “Scherzi musicali” published in 1607, one of the very first compositions carrying this term in its title.

The intertwining parts shape a rather traditional A-B-A-C-A form, the symphonic and chamber music-like sections stand in strong contrast with each other. A sarcastic-grotesque A section is traversed by vigorous, odd rhythms while in the gentle, lyrical B section the solo woodwinds and the strings introduce new melodic material. The C section contains jocular and dramatic features where the brass, percussion and piano come forward. In the conclusory short epilogue, the three main motifs come together.

Dejan Lazić, 2019