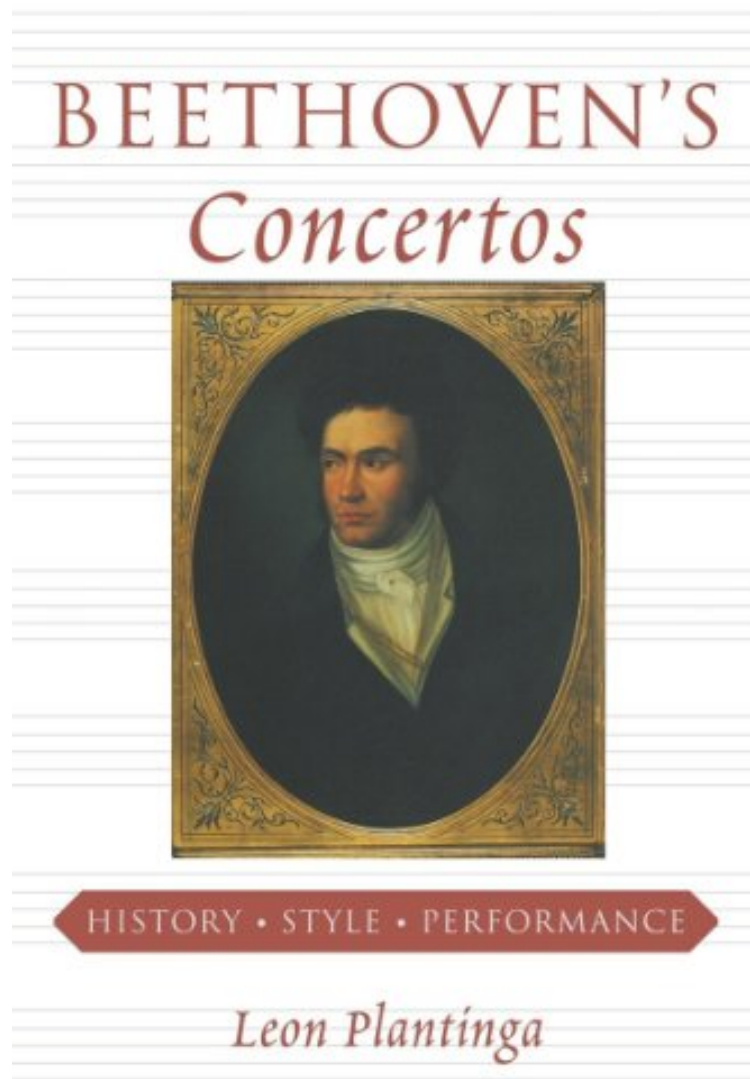


## Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance

*Leon Plantinga*

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**Leon Plantinga : Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beethoven's Concertos: History, Style, Performance:

15 of 17 people found the following review helpful. Deep analysis for the non-specialist By J Scott Morrison Leon Plantinga writes clearly and does not clutter his prose with arcane musicological terminology. Yet he presents insights into this music that cannot be obtained elsewhere. A separate booklet, included with the book, presents numerous

examples in music type for those who wish to see the precise points in the scores mentioned in the text. 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Learned Study of Beethoven's Concertos By Robin Friedman The seven Beethoven concertos, five for piano, one for violin, and one for piano, violin, and cello are among the most familiar works in music. The fourth and fifth piano concertos and the violin concerto were among the works that introduced me to classical music many years ago. I have returned to the concertos many times, most recently in writing a series of reviews on of the piano concertos. I wanted the benefit of a study to assist my listening and turned to this thoroughly detailed book by Leon Plantinga, "Beethoven's Concertos" History, Style, Performance". (1999) The book taught me a great deal. Plantinga is Professor of Music at Yale University, and he has written extensively on the classical and romantic periods in music history. Plantinga's book begins with a basic introduction to the concerto form as Beethoven inherited it from his predecessors and developed it in his own compositions. This is followed by two largely biographical chapters which discuss Beethoven's exposure to the concerto while growing to adulthood in Bonn and in his early years in Vienna. Each of the seven concertos is then discussed in detail in lengthy chapters. Plantinga concludes with observations on performance practices in the Beethoven concertos. The study both treats Beethoven's concertos as a group, showing how Beethoven's treatment of the form changed as he progressed, and also is a guide to each individual work. Plantinga shows how the concerto evolved in Beethoven's hands from works he wrote for his own performance and published only later to musical texts that existed separately from their performance by a particular artist for a specific occasion. Thus, Beethoven performed the piano concertos no. 2 and no. 1 many times during his early years in Vienna but published them relatively late, in 1801. Orchestral parts were written out in more detail than the solo part, which Beethoven frequently changed and improvised at the keyboard. In the latter concertos, beginning with the fourth piano concerto, Beethoven began to shift towards publication at the outset rather than to performance and then publication much later. Plantinga has a great deal to say about the performance of the concertos and about the contemporary interest in "period" style performances. I have been listening to several period recordings recently. Plantinga warns only against supposing that period readings are the only or the "authentic" way to perform these glorious concertos. These works, even the latter concertos, include great room for improvisation and different styles. Even the tuning of the instruments did not always follow the equal temperament that is invariably used today. The soloist frequently conducted the early concertos at least from the piano and the soloist also played or was expected to accompany the orchestra during the tutti (ensemble) sections. Period performance, Plantinga suggests, are in fact a type of modernism which tries to expunge romanticism from the playing of Beethoven's concertos. Plantinga himself does not show much sympathy with period readings. While I have grown to enjoy period performances, they are not the only legitimate approach to these inexhaustible works. I also learned a great deal from Plantinga's treatment of each individual work. For each concerto, Plantinga gives background as to its composition and performance history and detailed musical analyses of each movement. I particularly enjoyed Plantinga's treatment of the origin of the pivotal piano concerto no. 3 in C minor, Opus 37. Plantinga argues that this work was written during the period in which Beethoven wrote his second symphony (1802- 1803) rather than much earlier as is sometimes supposed. In his treatment of the work itself, Plantinga shows the great advances musically that it made over its predecessors. Plantinga is also good in his discussion of the early piano concerto no. 2 and in his detailed treatment of the possible programmatic readings of the second movement of the piano concerto no. 4. The work is full of detailed musical examples, and they are presented in a separate booklet, rather than in the text. The entire slow movement of the fourth piano concerto is included, as are key thematic passages from the other concertos. I found it useful to use the booklet as I listened to the concertos. Plantinga sees the Beethoven concertos as exemplifying a spirit of heroism, struggle, and high moral purpose that is somewhat out of temper with our skeptical age. It takes an effort of sympathetic understanding to respond to this music. Plantinga writes (p.8) that late 20th Century alienation "threatens our perception of Beethoven's persistent vision of heroic struggle towards human perfection... The real struggle is an internal one, and the triumph exists largely in the moral sphere -- a domain with which art to Beethoven's mind, was always inextricably intertwined." These are inspiring words with which to begin to hear Beethoven for the first or for the hundredth time. In its depth and musical sophistication, this would not be a good book with which to begin to know the Beethoven concertos. But the book is accessible to lay readers. For those who have lived with the Beethoven concertos and want to revisit them in detail, Plantinga's study is an excellent choice. Robin Friedman 11 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Deep analysis, period. Non-specialists beware! By abigail The kudos given this work by the above reviewers are well-deserved. Do not be misled, however, into thinking that an affection, or even a passion, for Beethoven guarantees your appreciation of Plantinga's sophisticated analysis. Do not buy this book if you do not have a fairly strong command of music theory and terminology.

A winning combination of scholarship and intuition and an unparalleled guide to understanding and performing these works. Emanuel Ax In his concertos Beethoven joined in a sort of human expression that seems almost universal: a discourse of the individual and the group, or of leader and followers who sometimes work together in harmony and sometimes appear pitted one against the other (early definitions of the concerto, indeed, were divided as to which was the main idea of the genre cooperation or conflict). In his concertos Beethoven typically cast himself as leader; the

concerto was for him mainly a youthful preoccupation intimately bound up with his prowess and ambition as a public pianist. The hope is that a wide-ranging consideration of the historical context will serve to cast new light upon the music itself, which remains the central focus of this study.