

Kyrie, from “Mass in C Major,” Op. 86

Ludwig von Beethoven (1770-1827)

SATB w/keyboard reduction

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Background information: Kyrie, from the “Mass in C Major,” is the first of six mass movements composed in honor of the wife of Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy II in September of 1807. Although the work was not received well by his patron, (having preferred Haydn’s masses for the same occasion) Beethoven regarded the work highly, telling his publishers, “...I believe I have treated the text as it has seldom been treated.”

There is some dispute between scholars over Beethoven's religious stance, as his letters and the accounts of friends provide conflicting evidence. While he was raised a Roman Catholic and made several well-documented references to his faith, it is known that he never attended religious services. Composer Franz Joseph Haydn, thought Beethoven was an atheist. His friend and biographer Anton Schindler considered him a deist. Furthermore, Beethoven's choice of text in the choral movement of his ninth symphony indicates at least an interest in Pantheism. Although much remains shrouded in mystery, Beethoven may have affirmed his thoughts in his own hand at the beginning of his copy of the Credo of his *Missa Solemnis*: “God above all – God has never deserted me.”

The text is taken from the first part of the Ordinary of the Mass right of the Roman Catholic Church. This acclamatory supplication has retained the original Greek (the word *Kyrie*) from the 4th and 5th centuries. The *Christe eleison* was added by Pope Gregory I (d.604). The familiar ABA tripartite form was first evidenced in the 8th century work the *Ordo of St. Amand*.

<u>Latin</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>Kyrie eleison</i>	Lord have mercy
<i>Christe eleison</i>	Christ have mercy
<i>Kyrie eleison</i>	Lord have mercy

Additional Information:

- Employs the use of 4 soli throughout
- This edition uses piano reduction of the full orchestral score

Elements of Music

Form: Although the inherent form of the *Kyrie* text demands a somewhat of an ABA¹ form, Beethoven challenges the conventional demarcations of each section, obscuring the boundaries both harmonically, melodically, and textually.

- Section A (m. 1-36): Full choir statement of *Kyrie eleison* text, soli group m. 15-25
- Section B (m. 37-68): Soli group/tutti interplay with *Christe eleison* text
- Bridge (m. 70-82): *Kyrie* text w/elements of B section (melody, harmony)
- Section A¹ (m. 83-112): *Kyrie* text w/soli, expanded from A
- Coda (m. 113-132): *Kyrie* text

Alternatively, one could make a case for Sonata form in that:

- There are three main sections,
- The “exposition” uses themes in 2 main tonal centers,
- The “development,” although introducing new material and modulating to a different tonal center, veers further tonally than before,
- The “Bridge” section prepares the “recapitulation,” weaving the harmonic and melodic fragments of B with the text and melody of A,
- Although the A themes are almost stated verbatim, Beethoven expands them to include a chain of suspensions which concludes the section
- The “coda” contains rhythmic elements of both A and B, and reminds the listener of the harmonic journey recently taken before concluding the movement

Rhythm: The rhythm of the melodic lines flow from natural declamation of the text. Short rhythmic ideas are hinted throughout the work, however there is never a sense of a strong “motif” present. Each main theme has its own rhythmic identity, from which other rhythmic fragments are then passed around. The piano reduction acts as a kind of ship’s rudder, at times steering the work (through gentle, flowing 8th note passages), and at times allowing the work to move forward of its own accord.

Melody: Each section of the work contains its certain melodic figures (themes) that may be developed at a later time. Beethoven uses calming stepwise motion, always balancing ascent with descent, though not necessarily in equal length or weight.

- Each theme in section A ascends and descends in a gentle, stepwise fashion, elegantly arching higher until easing down to its conclusion.
- The B theme feels somewhat static, only descending toward its close. The descending “tail” of this theme is repeated in multiple voice parts throughout the section.
- The A¹ section themes are stated and then the second is altered chromatically and rises toward a dramatic, tension-releasing descent.

Harmony: The harmonic structure of this movement seems to constantly (in many forms and lengths) travel away from and then return to a stasis. Beethoven gives the listener steady progressions away from a familiar tonal center alongside short flashes, however he always returns to familiar terrain (harmonically speaking).

- The A section begins firmly rooted in C major, traveling through B major (V) to set up...
- The E major beginning of the B section; which concludes with two 12 measure passages which chromatically journey (E-B65-C#65-f#-E-A-A#dim-em-C7-E64-B-E)
- The next section bridges the gap from E-G7-C
- The A¹ section begins similar to the first, however Beethoven again alters the end of the theme and morphs through B major-Cdim-C-F-G with a chain of suspensions, returning to C.
- The Coda lies firmly in C major with the surprising exception of m.117-122 which arpeggiates an F#dim chord before settling back to C.

Timbre: The tessitura of each vocal line generally lies in comfortable ranges, and does not remain at the extremes for extended periods. Though the piano reduction reduces the richness of the orchestral accompaniment, the integrity of the piece is not compromised. As befitting the text, the vocal timbre should remain restrained, yet not too dark, produced with spacious vowels and forward, but not bright placement. The overall effect should be that of hopeful supplication.

Texture: Beethoven adds several textural oddities that serve to give the listener/performer some pause. The opening measure is stated by only the bass section with the instruments/SAT voices joining at m.2 (a similar event occurs at m. 70). The use of soli allows the texture to progress from 1 single voice (no instruments) to full orchestral/choral forces in a matter of measures. Furthermore, the boundaries of phrases and sections are obscured through a kind of polyphonic dovetailing, though at times full homophonic entrances provide a stark contrast to previous polyphonic writing.

Expression: Perhaps the most dramatic element crucial to the successful performance of this work, there are many subtle examples of Beethoven’s creative intent evident throughout the movement. The dynamic ranges from p-ff, with many moments for crescendo/decrescendo to mimic the vocal lines and/or harmonic progression. Furthermore, because the text consists of three total words, there are numerous instances when group articulation of a particular word or phrase can aid the process of creating the mood. Beethoven’s mysterious tempo marking, “Andante con moto assai vivace quasi Allegretto ma non troppo” leaves some musical decisions to the ensemble, allowing the performers to reach their own conclusions.

The heart of this work lies in our relationship with ambiguity. Through the natural balance of contour and phrase, the calculated control of tension, and deliberate enriching of tonality and form, Beethoven reveals the tension and self-reflection inherent in ambiguity.

Introducing the Piece

1. Question: If I take \$1 and deposit it biweekly in the bank, how much money will have in 1 year?
2. Statement: I have a good boss. What does this mean? (functional, exemplary, pleasing, moral)
Think/pair—which one of you is right?
3. Quote: “Last night I shot an elephant in my pajamas. What he was doing in my pajamas, I’ll never know.” (Groucho Marx)
4. Summary: We’ve got these certain situations in life where things are unclear, foggy, ambiguous. We’re going to look at piece by Beethoven, and throughout our study of this piece, I want you to ask yourself the question, “What’s he trying to say?” (BTW, if you figure it out, let me know. I’ve been listening to this piece all summer and I’d like to know as well!)

Skill Outcome: Students will make/analyze/evaluate artistic decisions about phrasing, articulation, and tempo (rubato).

1. How does a musician make decisions...

...about phrasing? (Larger scale, external)

- a. 3x5 response: take a short poem (Frost: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening) and eliminate any punctuation, spacing, etc. (preferably w/repeated lines); students make choices: punctuation, where to separate, repeat anything? Pair-share, class consensus w/product on board, compare to original, discuss.
- b. Place these words on the board: eleison, Kyrie, Christe (for HW: ask for definitions/language; why might you have heard of these before?)
 - Think/pair/share: what would be some challenges in setting these words to music? (sameness, few words, people have already done it, don't agree with the message, etc)
 - Create a class list
- c. Transfer: opening phrase to pop-up book (high/low point, expansion, time to develop, arch, different sizes, not necessarily uniform, etc)
 - Extra credit: students bring in other transfer examples to phrasing (ie. umbrella, rose, etc.)
- d. m. 2-12. Sing on neutral syllable. Where does it feel like the line comes to a rest?
 - As the choir rehearses m. 49-50, m. 62-62, m. 79-80, ask for group input, trial, evaluation as to the "punctuation" (lift, breath, tenuto, accent, ???)
 - Record various "trials" of student input (their phrasing choices) & allow them to compare and contrast (Venn Diagram sheets)

...about articulation? (smaller scale, internal) expressulation? musicify!

- e. Teacher sings brief phrases two distinct ways (2x each way) and students draw each.
 - What do you notice about your drawings? intensity, space, movement, energy, uniformity?
 - Examples: Alto m. 2-12, Ten. m. 26-33, Bass m. 79-82, Sop. M. 106-112.

2. Tempo/Rubato

- a. Journal/pair/share: What factors go into choosing and appropriate tempo? Ability level, preference, nuance, performing space, result of tempo on interpretation/meaning, practicality
- b. Perform "jubilate deo" round at varying speeds (start moderate, go to extremes), students discuss challenges, preference
 - Perform the work in canon, but allow students to make choices for areas of rubato & discuss)
 - Transfer to m. 70-82, m. 97-112.

Assessment:

- Informal: Journal responses (articulation/punctuation & tempo)
- Formal: Compare/contrast articulation choices sheet (Venn)
- Informal: Student's depictions of articulation & thoughts/descriptions

Cognitive Outcome: Students will explore the compositional principle of tension and release, and discuss/analyze how each is created/employed throughout the work.

Concrete

1. Kinesthetic warm-ups: Examples of creating tension: 2 hand pretzel for shoulder blades, torso twist, bend back finger(s), stretch out facial muscles, hold air (w/o closing throat). List student observations.
 - a. Analyze Warm-ups: commonalities: the setup/preparation, the process of going through it, the time (instant vs. many seconds, over the course of time (being flexible), more subtle/different that instantaneously: otherwise it's just surprise or pain or fear)
 - b. Definitions of tension—in daily life, family, the world (essence); can this be sustained? Is it good?
 - c. Teach a whole class without sitting down (then journal about how you/class reacted & why)
2. Individual rubber bands: figure out the myriad ways for tension release (game: how many ways?)
 - a. Expand (horizontally, vertically, slow/fast)
 - b. Combine, add thickness or length (strength in numbers)

- c. Release (fast/slow, repercussions)
3. Activity: 2 hand solfege & chain of suspensions & discussion of suspension
 - a. For fun, either 1) start w/straight dissonance or 2) don't resolve @ end
 - b. Discuss how it can be prepared/resolved & why this should/shouldn't happen.

Abstract

4. After the piece is learned, search for examples of tension in Kyrie. (discuss where, how, why)
Can/should we categorize/rank these moments? (ie. are some more important than others?)
 - a. Are there different types of musical tension? Vertical, horizontal, setup throughout the piece, ???
5. Play musical examples of tension/release – Lay a Garland (Pearsall), Crucifixus (Lotti) – how can composers create these moments? (ID devices: dissonance, length, surprise, etc)
 - a. Video Clips (Cape Fear clip, toothpick bridge, contortionist, Bach Toccata d minor (the anatomy of tension=like a medical chart?) (think/group/share/compile)

Assessment:

- Informal: Questioning & group discussion of tension/release
- Informal: Journal responses to kinesthetic warm-ups
- Formal: Group work—anatomy of tension discussion/worksheet

Affective Outcome (and Assessments): Students will reflect on their personal feelings toward the concept of ambiguity and tension and their comfort level/experience with it. (All assessments are formal)

1. Think/pair/share, define ambiguity, list situations from your experience where you have experienced it. (Synonyms: unclear, imprecise, uncertain, foggy, inconclusive, vague, puzzling, misleading, double-edged sword, problematic)
 - a. Three choices: optical illusion, piece of art, short story/text (students can choose)
 - i. Journal: What is the point? What is the artist trying to say? How are you similar and different to this work?
 - ii. Group HW: find three examples of ambiguity from your personal music/art collection and include a written defense for each -- OR --
 - iii. Group work: create a story with an ambiguous ending
2. Longer journal reflection: Why don't we as humans like ambiguity? What does our response say about us? Can ambiguity be positive? How?
3. Project: Using your knowledge of and experience with ambiguity, find a way to describe this concept to a stranger without actually "defining it." That is to say, how would you demonstrate this without using a dictionary?
 - a. You can use any medium (music, short story, puzzle, artwork, collage, etc.) as long as you can defend how this represents ambiguity. -- OR --
4. Paper: In ways has Beethoven chosen to be ambiguous? In what ways is he conventional or straightforward?

Music Selection: While Beethoven provided a bridge from the Classical to Romantic period, he also expanded the harmonic and expressive palette for all subsequent composers. The Kyrie from the Mass in C displays elements of both periods (balance, accepted formal structure, standard text) but manages to push the boundaries of form and expression and create a work uniquely his own. The work is accessible to a quality high school ensemble, and can be performed with orchestral or piano accompaniment. Through lyrical, yet interesting vocal lines, expanding harmonic treatment, and wonderfully expressive musical moments, Beethoven has provided sufficient intrigue and power to last for generations.