

L. van Beethoven, *Prometheus Creatures Overture*, Op. 43



Ludwig van Beethoven (c. 16 December 1770 – 26 March 1827) was a German composer and pianist. He was a crucial figure in the transitional period between the Classical and Romantic eras in Western classical music, and remains one of the most acclaimed and influential composers of all time. Born in Bonn, Germany, he moved to Vienna, Austria in his early twenties and settled there, studying with Joseph Haydn and quickly gaining a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. His hearing began to deteriorate in the late 1790s, yet he continued to compose, conduct, and perform, even after becoming completely deaf.

Beethoven's ballet score *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* (The Creatures of Prometheus) was created in collaboration with choreographer Salvatore Viganò. Commissioned in 1800, the ballet was the composer's first major work for the stage. Premiered in Vienna's *Burgtheater* on March 28, 1801, *Prometheus* was initially a great success, and within a few years it had been performed dozens of times. Still, it was criticized by a contemporary as "fragmentary" and "too learned for a ballet," and the score, save for the overture, has since been generally neglected as little more than an historical curiosity. Aside from a few interesting aspects of its orchestration, the most important part of the ballet, musically speaking, is the 16th and final number. This section shares its key, main theme, and bass line with the seventh of the *Twelve Contredanses*, WoO 14, composed at intervals between 1791 and 1802. This workhorse of a theme came to even greater prominence through its use in Beethoven's 15 *Variations and Fugue* for piano, Op. 35, and in the finale of his epochal *Symphony No. 3* ("Eroica") Op. 55.

The *Prometheus Creatures Overture* is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, and timpani, along with orchestral strings. It is approximately 5 minutes long.