THE NINTH SYMPHONY OF LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN AND OTHER LOST SONGS

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1

When a man's halfway to his death, he knows. The bones shift, the organs settle, the blood ticks out a quiet warning: time's half gone, look around, what've you done, what are you *going* to do? Every day we meet reminders of our mortality and dismiss them, uneasily ignore, turn our faces from the grave. But at that halfway mark, ignorance is impossible; a man thinks, My God, I'm thirty-five, I'm forty, and the years are relentless, I'll never be thirty or twenty or fifteen again—and was I ever? Did I ever look around, feel, really *know* eighteen or twenty-four or any of my ages? Did I make the most of them?

Charles Largens woke one morning and found himself there. He thought, I'm thirty-five years old and I won't live past seventy. My bones tell me in language I can't rebuff. Half my life is gone, and oh Lord, where?

The early years had gone into two sonatas, an unfinished symphony, a mass, an incomplete song cycle. Those were good years, good work. But since then his time had gone into research, criticism; it had been made solid, not in sounds but in vast stacks of paper, dreary essays and analyses.

He did not enjoy it, and often the stuff had no meaning for him, but it took his time nonetheless. It had taken half his life.

In his voicetyper was an unfinished essay on Buxtehude; he had abandoned it last night when the fugues and inventions piled up in a baroque tangle and he could make no more sense of them. Notes had swarmed past his eyes like flies on a five-staved racetrack, the precise ordered counterpoint a frightening miniature of his own boxed and formal life. He fell asleep with that image and woke to the sudden shock of being thirty-five. And he thought of Ludwig Van Beethoven, his avatar, the one constant source of solace in his life. He wanted to be Beethoven that morning, more than he ever had before.

Such a thing was not impossible. It was not easy to be Beethoven, of course. Like most of the Lincoln Center musicologists in the year 2016, he had been trying the greater part of his career for that distinction; and only now, after years of the lesser talents, the Couperins and Loeschorns and Bertinis, and atop that awful sense of waste and futility, did he feel ready to consider the Master.

But be honest: it was more than consideration; this morning he recognized it as an obsession. Bach and Chopin and Debussy and even old Buxtehude were fine in their places, but for him, Charles Largens, only one composer had all the balance, the power, the complete tightness that music ought to have; so as a pianist might dream of Carnegie (as he once had), or an artist of the Guggenheim, or a literary critic of *Finnegans Wake,* so Largens longed to base his lifework as musicologist on the works of Beethoven. More now; as Beethoven he might transcend the study of music, and attain the abstract itself. That was the dream that kept him going those years after his own music went dry, the dream that drove him to write essays on the preludes of Moskowski and bore himself to madness with Czerny just because he had been a student of the Master's; just because that particular essay might draw some attention, make someone cry, Hey! he's got it! and you could never tell what might attract the men with power, the men with the machines, so you did it all.

He wanted to be Beethoven, and these men could do that for him, with their machines.

The machines were windows into the past. Not doors, nor even a very clear sort of window; they more revealed the texture of the glass than the scene beyond, for what they did was transfer your consciousness into the mind of someone in the past.

After the historians found that subjective impressions of history were

not very much more valuable than textbooks and records, the psychologists and scholars took over the vast banks of transfer equipment; they roamed and delved the past like archaeologists in a newly unearthed Greek library. Essays appeared psychoanalyzing Freud. The real reasons for the Emancipation Proclamation were revealed. The Shakespeare/Bacon myth was finally debunked. George Washington's real name came out. And it was inevitable that the artists, the writers, the musicians, in their mutual despair of ever taking art further than it had already gone in the barren year 2016, came forward eager to learn the inspirations for *Macbeth, Also Sprach Zarathustra, Waiting for Godot,* the Beethoven Ninth. To find out if El Greco was really astigmatic; to catch Hemingway's last thoughts as he triggered the shotgun; to study firsthand the mad genius of Van Gogh; to see the world as the great minds of history saw it. To put together in the sad flat year 2016 a world, piecemeal, from remnants of the past

Time travel, of a sort; it was not real time travel, for that would have been magic, a kind of miracle, and there were no more miracles or magic in the world they had made. It was a world of norms and averages and no extremes, a world where everything had an explanation and a reason, where even this miraculous-seeming tune travel could be expressed in hard clear terms, if you had the math. There were no paradoxes; the mind occupied seemed to have no awareness of its passengers. The passengers could only observe, could not touch the past. One might even jump back into one's own life and affect it not at all (aside perhaps from some slight *d éja vu).* Of course, the government kept the tightest of reins on the process; so only now, after ten years with the very elite Lincoln Center Research Group, did Charles Largens feel qualified to ask for Beethoven, to accept that last resort.

It was his essay on the inspirations of Buxtehude that drew the attention of H. Grueder, chairman of the board deciding past inhabitations. Largens had been studying the lesser talents for those ten years; he had even inhabited a few. And now his patience had paid its reward: word was out that Charles Largens was a man to watch, a man on the edge of success. And the only thing dulling his sense of triumph was that ineluctable, tender realization that he had never meant to be a musicologist. He had joined the Lincoln Center group as a pianist and composer; but the tenor of the times was research over performance, study before passion; and call it weakness, expediency, what you will, he had found himself more in the archives than in the practice rooms. After

some years those quantitative changes became qualitative: he stopped even calling himself a composer; he was a musicologist (sharp Latin percussives), still a student of music, but now from the cold side: theory over practice, intellect over heart. As a boy he had dreamed of long polished grand pianos, warm and shining under bright spots, their keyboard mouths open and waiting, and beyond the stage's edge a blinding darkness filled with murmurs and the rustlings of programs, shirts, gowns. And ovations, storms of applause like all the warm summer showers that ever were, drenching him to a blissful numbness. But his life of composing was not that way; it was drab and hungry, and he wanted so desperately the color of a great composer's life. And what easier, director way than the transfers? At first he told himself that his own work would profit from the contacts with past greats; but he knew it was a lie—he found that the contacts withered his own impulses. He was glutted, stuffed with music not his own. Several times in those years he had wanted to quit, get out, go back to composing—but the money was good, he was sometimes acclaimed for his critical insights as he had not been for his music, and he had a fear that perhaps he could not compose any more. And too, as his own music faded, there was the growing dream of Beethoven.

The morning that dream seemed ready to come real, the morning Graeder sent for him, he was met by George Santesson outside the conference room. The rest of the board was inside, waiting for him; the separate and personal greeting from Santesson was a surprise. The big man smiled broadly and wrung his hand with real warmth. "Nervous?" he whispered. Largens nodded.

"Don't worry, you'll make it. I read your essay. You'll do fine."

Largens felt warm. He fumbled for a way to extend the moment. "I feel as nervous as I did at my conservatory tryout."

Santesson smiled in appreciation. "You majored in composition, didn't you?"

"Yes. I see you've been doing research on me."

"One likes to know about one's future colleagues." With that, Santesson pushed open the thick leather-covered door and they entered. Largens' heart surged: Santesson was head of Beethoven Studies. Such confidence was heady stuff.

He seated himself at the far end of an oval table. Grueder congratulated him on his essay, shuffled through some notes, and finally asked the long-awaited question: Who? Who would it be next? Offering him his

choice of composers for extended study, with full inhabitation rights. He had the strange feeling that Grueder already knew—Santesson certainly did—the feeling that this was all formality, that the decision was already made. He had for that second the feeling ola defendant watching the jury file back in.

He said Beethoven, and there was no surprise. Grueder nodded, made a notation on a schedule, a tiny precise scratching motion with his antique pen, and said he didn't see why not, and that Largens would be permitted a preliminary occupation during the composing of the first piano sonata, 1793, full rights pending approval of the results of that study. Was that acceptable?

Largens thanked everyone several times.

Santesson was on hand the next day, too, when Largens showed up at the transfer room with a head full of anticipations, and, stupidly, a notebook. He and Santesson laughed at that. Then the older man wished him luck and left him alone with the technicians.

They asked him a number of questions about his ancestry and mental health while they took an EEG and ran some machines of which he could see only the exposed backs, and finally they brought him a paper cup full of orange juice.

"What's this?" Largens asked.

"A hallucinogen. Very mild. It prepares you for the transfer."

"I never had to do this before."

"You were never trying to get into Beethoven's head before. He has a tremendous alpha potential. If you didn't drink this, it'd be like mismatching audio impedances; you'd never get across."

He was led into a thick-carpeted room more like a den than a laboratory: rich tapestry colors and subdued yellow lights instead of harsh fluorescents. Purposes of setting, he presumed. The only visible electronics were a stereo system and a tangle of multicolored wires that spilled from a wall socket into spaghetti patterns on the couch. The silence could be felt, like the pressure preceding a storm; behind the wall hangings there must have been acoustical tiles.

"Would you undress now, Mr. Largens?" someone said.

His clothes came off with more friction than usual, it seemed; his hearing seemed somehow bent, his vision slightly fragmented. They taped

electrodes to him: cold metal goosefleshed his neck and arms, his groin, the small of his back, behind his ears. He felt the coldness spreading to cover his skin with hallucinatory foil. He heard a thunk and a quiet hissing as someone set a phono needle down. A tickling began behind his ears and Beethoven's first piano sonata began to play in his head

swimming in sounds that spiraled up around him, came together in his head and canceled gravity, he could feel billions of tiny soft points of velvet grow and lift him through the liquid sky with the first piano notes rising, pulsing colors on the horizon, and each note had a texture, this C like rough dark wood, that F a silky coldness, an A like a trapped bumblebee in his hands, and the music was no longer coming into him through his ears but was bursting out from within like a spontaneous song breaking free and sailing into a clear summer sky, apart from its source, apart from time, it carried Largens and he had no sense of going forward or going back or anything other than motion itself, of shutting his eyes and feeling the gone world whirl beneath him, he was a child flat back on a grassy plain, eyes clenched tight at the sky and fingers dug into fistfuls of earth and the whole world spinning and spinning and nothing but spinning, the motion, the vertigo, circles and currents, layers of moire confusion, oceans and waves rolling and rolling, the perpetual roll and flat scream of things that change and never change, moving not moving, the seasons that spin down a spiral of time, the ocean that crawls and rolls under its map-flat surface, the planets that turn and spin, each its own clock, the moving and complete motions of the instantaneous universe. He was moving through the first movement of the first piano sonata of the beginning of a long and turbulent life full of its own movements and motions, songs wound into a soul and waiting for release, steps to be taken through meadows and woods and narrow cobbled streets, wines to be tasted .. . and it all shifted and was moving him somewhere, the motion and the music becoming one and leading him into a life whose goal was their perfect union.

There was a darkness, and a light, as Largens opened his new eyes onto Vienna of 1794.

2

Cries and the beat of hooves and the rumble and clatter of wagons through mudpuddled streets reached him as he lurched to consciousness.

The windows of the room leaned open to catch the afternoon rain-freshened air, and the sun struck rainbow brilliances off watery glass. The voices Largens heard could have been Beethoven's subconscious musings or the town's glad emergence after the storm. Beethoven went to the window and breathed deeply. Largens dizzied with the sights and sounds and smells of his dream come real, and he wept. He tried to put his hands to his face, and of course nothing happened. Foolish man, he fondly cursed himself, crying without eyes, expecting another man's body to express your joy. But if he was physically detached, the spiritual union was incredible. This was no fantasy; he was Beethoven, he could feel every ache and exultation of the composer's soul, and he had never before known what life could be like—! To have the world spread before you, to sense the forces of destiny shifting like banks of clouds or strata of earth—this was what it was to be great, to carry genius within you like a seed, a freight of potency. Very early in his own life Largens had felt the hints of this. In a way, his whole life had been an attempt to recapture that lost greatness. And here, Beethoven: with no doubt of his own importance, even so young. As young as Largens had been when he entered the Center. The drab improbable world of the future, his past.

Beethoven's mind was warm and sparkling. It idled and hummed with life like a brook in late spring; thoughts mixed and swirled in currents of warm and cool. Beethoven was content simply to be in his new lodgings and to peer out the large crystal windows overlooking the street where movers struggled in with his belongings. The sweet force of this content washed Largens.

Largens reviewed the history of the moment: it was late in the year; Beethoven had just moved to Count Carl Lichnowsky's house in Vienna, Alserstrasse 45. Here he would earn a substantial salary for composing and performing, and form a rare lasting friendship with the Count. *Dem Fursten Carl von Lichnowsky gewidmet.* He remembered the words from the top of a piano sonata he had played when young.

Beethoven paced the room, brooding. He thought rapidly, in fragments of dialect. Words, sounds, gave shape to music, which he visualized rather than heard. Once visualized, he immediately orchestrated the phrase. Only occasionally did he go to the piano to play out a bar. At last he began to play a full piece, the second movement of his first piano sonata.

Largens waited. This movement had been written piecemeal years before, but there were other things in the composer's mind, and Largens could sense syntheses occurring between what was played and what was imagined. He watched the young fingers triphammer up and down

arpeggios with a certain vicarious satisfaction, a remote pride. With two final flourished chords, the movement ended, and Largens' mind leaped to full attention.

Beethoven leaned over the keyboard, pondering. Then he lifted a quill, inked it, and began to write...

Hours later Largens awoke in Manhattan, screaming German curses. He blinked twice and settled foolishly back onto the couch as an attendant unwound wires, disconnected meters, and handed him his clothes. He stared at them as if they had changed color, or shrunk three sizes. He was acutely disoriented. A doctor standing near the door watched Largens and made notes on a flat glowing pad.

"I ... he was having a tantrum," Largens explained. "He lost his temper at a mover for interrupting him. He . . ." His thoughts fluttered. He shook his head. "Why am I so woozy?"

The doctor said, "Could be the drug."

"But I've taken them before; I never felt like this. Are you sure it's nothing serious?"

The doctor regarded him coldly. "We are not *sure* of anything, Mr. Largens."

"Did I say something wrong?"

"Nothing. Not a thing. It's a little idiosyncrasy of mine that I snap at people for no reason at all."

"For what reason are you snapping at me?"

The doctor thumbed off his light-pen. "It's a little matter of responsibility, Mr, Largens. Of all the ways you could be spending this money—and for that matter, your time, though I suppose that's your business— this strikes me as the most wasteful and dangerous. If I had my way, you people wouldn't be mucking around in the past at all. We just don't know enough about it. But you've got your government lobbies, and people must have their novelties, so you're allowed to go. Let's leave it at that. But don't expect me to get too concerned over your dizziness."

"If you feel that way, why do you work here?"

The doctor paused, and had a look Largens knew: the hard, bitter look of a man who knows just how much of himself he has sold, and how cheaply. "I intend to start a free clinic with my salary from here." He

clipped the pen in his pocket and walked out.

The attendant put away a handful of wires. "Don't mind him. Professional paranoia. Every week a different worry. This week it's something called a crosstalk effect."

"What's that?"

"Well, when you have a cable or a magnetic tape or a laser carrying more than one channel of information, there's always a certain amount of leakage between channels. If one channel's quiet you can hear the others coming through. That's crosstalk. The more channels, the worse it gets. So they're especially worried about guys like Beethoven; sometimes he has a dozen or more researchers in his head at once. They're worried about that."

"What, that Beethoven might overhear thoughts from the future?"

"Something like that."

"Oh, but that's absurd. Even if Beethoven heard anything, he'd never guess the source. He'd think it was ..." Largens slowed.

"Inspiration. Intuition. You begin to see?"

Largens stood silent. He thought of Da Vinci's notebooks, the visions of Blake. For a second in the murmur of the air conditioning, he thought he could hear a dozen researchers from *his* future whispering in one corner of his mind. "Oh, but after all..."

The attendant held up his hand. "I know, I know. I won't argue it. It's one of those damned paradoxes. Could be, couldn't be. That's why they're upset. Until they can *prove* any of it, there's nothing they can do. And how do you prove a paradox?" So there were paradoxes, after all.

In the first piano sonata of Ludwig Van Beethoven, the influence of his tutor Josef Haydn is clearly felt. Haydn seems to guide the young composer's pen from time to time. But

In this, his first sonata, the young Beethoven first breaks from his classical antecedents. The second movement seems to be saying a last farewell to the "galant" age. Breaking from the strict regimen of Haydn's instruction,

The first sonata might be called a tribute to Haydn. The composer moves with great surety through these familiar

Here the young Beethoven's craftsmanship still shows sign of immaturity, as when the splendid A-flat major cantilena is prevented from fully developing by a clumsy

The second movement is not in sonata form, but is rather a rhapsody, laid out

Beethoven's originality

Yes, yes, but where did he get his ideas?

At six Santesson came in to wish him good-night. All day Largens had been working on his essay and it had gone nowhere. The older man read the desk at a glance, took in the litter of half-written pages, abandoned beginnings, and all that they meant—and gave Largens a sympathetic nod. There must have been something near desperation in the young man's face, because Santesson paused as he was leaving, and motioned Largens to follow.

They went down the empty halls, the last ones in the building. They did not speak. They reached the transfer room and only then did Largens have an intimation of their purpose. Santesson fumbled a key from his pocket, slid the door open, and sealed it after them before turning on the lights.

The room stood empty and silent. Humming. "Do you know how to use the equipment, Charles?"

"No."

For half an hour Santesson detailed the use of the machinery, scrupulously, completely, until Largens could have started it alone, sent himself on a retrogressive voyage—and at the end of it Santesson pressed a key into his hand. "In case you ever need to," he whispered. And left Largens alone in the dark building.

A tight humming excitement was in him. He walked around the room, running his hand over smooth panels, knurled knobs. He listened to his breathing and felt his pulse. His hands moved over the controls almost independently of thought. He set them for Beethoven, 1794. He stepped into the carpeted tapestried room where the Kempff recording of the first sonata still rested on the turntable. If he could live it just once more ... His hands moved, attaching wires, taping electrodes, remembering. He lay on the couch for minutes. Then he got up, went back to the main room, returned all the switches to neutral, shut the lights off and went home.

3

Shortly after that he had an invitation from the Santessons. A cocktail party at their home in the West Eighties. He guessed it would be wearisome, but the night of the party he dressed anyway and took a cab crosstown. He had to go. In the past few years he had obligated himself. To tell the truth, Largens relied on these social functions to advance him where his talents alone might not. Seeing the uncompleted essay in his voicetyper, thinking of the rumors of personnel cutbacks, he knew he had to go. Any gesture of support from Santesson was welcome.

The apartment was elegant. The room was lit in soft blue. All the elder members of the Center were there, the aged coterie he had never before met informally. The elite. They had been born in the middle of the last century; some had studied with Stockhausen, Berio, Xenakis. The last legendary names of music.

Lia Santesson greeted him with a quick surprising press of her lips to his. Behind her was George Santesson, smiling warmly.

"Good of you to come, Charles."

He had the giddy, paranoiac feeling that they were all here for him, for his imminent prominence. The feeling increased as Lia led him through a gauntlet of introductions, her small electronic earrings making windchime noises as they walked, the old men's voices barely rising above the background of the party. They treated him with courtesy. He moved tentatively past their nods and smiles, a man exploring unsure ground.

The party's tempo was *adagio*. The guests all spoke softly, like low whispering strings; they moved like ancient clockwork. After a while Largens moved to a remote corner of the room. There was fatigue from the

closed world of the party, which, somewhere, he realized was the same closed world as his life. *Adagio molto e cantabile.*

"Is that *you,* Charlie?"

The wonder in the voice stopped him. He turned. "I'm sorry?"

"David Kanigher, remember? The New Music Ensemble, what, fifteen years ago?"

"David! Of course!" Kanigher now wore glasses and an ineffective mustache, but was otherwise unchanged.

"Charlie. What have you been doing?"

And time shifted for Largens then: it stuttered and stopped and he was no longer at the Santessons' party, but somewhere liquid in his own mind, where the events of his life swept past him like a wave pulling sand from under his bare feet. He was there only with Kanigher, wondering how he could possibly explain his life's turnings to this stranger from the past. He felt a sudden cold twist of remorse. It might have been the liquor or the plummet of memory, but all at once it sickened him to be standing there, just past thirty-five years old, talking with a man whose ambitions he had once shared.

Young Largens had been the Center's *enfant terrible* in the days before he switched over to musicology. One of the few real talents. Then a criticism from Santesson had unmanned him. Though Santesson had been only forty then, he carried unmistakable authority, and what he said had struck Largens to the core: You've no heritage. No sense of the past in your music. Modern, superficial, shallow. Clever, but ultimately disappointing.

Of course it was what Largens had always feared about himself. He had been orphaned at thirteen, already an excellent pianist; he had been sent to relatives, an ancient aunt and uncle who had no piano and refused to let him waste time on music. It took him a full year to muster the courage to sue them and win the right to live in a state Montessori home. He grew up there with a hundred other youngsters, all bright and creative: artists, actors, poets. From then on, everyone in his life had been adept, but, he realized with adolescent smugness, none brilliant. That was for him. He was sure he had that spark of true greatness. And he feared that, like his playmates, he was really a talented dilettante.

So Santesson's comment had struck him to the core: *You've no heritage.* No parents, true. *No sense of the past.* But the past was those two shriveled tyrants, the past was cracked porcelain, the smell of urine and rose water. *Even Beethoven,* yes, the god, *that great innovator, had*

deep respect for his forerunners. And Largens determined then to study music, to learn the history of music so well that no one could criticize him on that score, ever. Later he found it was a lifetime job.

"I'm in Beethoven Studies now," he said, the inside of his mouth like Chalk.

"Are you composing?"

The cruel question. "No." Glancing around, he saw Lia Santesson watching him from fifty feet away. She smiled as their eyes met. He turned away.

"That's too bad, Charlie. You had the makings of a fine composer."

"Perhaps I did." Yes. The makings. Kanigher had learned the difference.

Kanigher smiled. "Did you know I was jealous of you?"

"Yes, I knew that." Certainly. The Ensemble playing an evening of new music: works by Stockhausen, Cage, Riley, Shapiro, and Largens. Kanigher found it so hard to work, while for Largens the music simply flowed from his pen. For that reason he had switched to musicology, believing he would always have that easy facility.

"What are *you* doing?"

"Scrambling for money. Would you believe it—I had to sell my piano last month! I've been using those dreadful Baldwin uprights in the Center basement. I have to spend an hour tuning before I can play, it's so damp down there."

"I don't understand. What about your salary?"

Kanigher spread his hands. "No more. All the money is going into your research equipment. They can't afford to keep unproductive composers on the payroll."

Largens' remorse found a small, hard comfort in that. "Unproductive?"

"Well, yes. I suppose I've become rather avant-garde, and I don't have the carapace for it. I'm too sensitive to criticism. And my, have they been criticizing. So I'm suffering through a block." Kanigher finished his drink. "They offered me a job teaching music history, which I turned down, and suddenly I was without a salary. My contract had a rather clever termination clause that I never read. It states that if I turn down any Center job when my own position is in jeopardy, I void the contract."

"So what's wrong with teaching history."

"Well, there's an awful lot of it going on." Kanigher paused. " 'If we

carry our respect for the past too far, we are in danger of detaching ourselves from the present.' Andre Hodeir said that, a twentieth-century musicologist." He laughed. "You can tell I'm idle: I've been reading. But Christ, Charlie, I believe that. I'm terrified of losing the present. That's what music is all about, damn it! More than anything else, it's . . . a sense of what is necessary.

"You remember how clutched up I was with the Ensemble. Couldn't write anything. I had a girl then. She was so much better than anything I'd ever hoped for, it made everything a little unreal. I was sure I'd lose her, and I guess it was that sureness that finally drove her away. All right, I was just a young idiot. But Christ, when I lost her, I wrote music like I was born for it! Looking back, I can see that all I was doing was trying to hold those moments I had lost." Kanigher was quiet, and then he smiled. "I read through some of it the other day. It was a little embarrassing.

"But—now I feel I'm in danger of losing my composing. It makes me edgy and alert to little things, but totally useless in things that count. I'm afraid that's more serious than losing the girl, because then I knew I was young, I knew I could get over it, I knew I had my music and my friends. I'm a little older now, my only friends are acquaintances in the Center, and the music's all I have. It's too precious. I'm afraid to gamble it. I'm all too willing to take one of their jobs just to keep my muse safe and living in the style to which it's accustomed."

Largens looked at his drink. He shut his eyes. He looked up. "I wasn't afraid."

Kanigher stared at him a long time.

"I'm sorry, Charlie. Christ, I'm sorry. I thought you were happy."

"I'm all right."

"Santesson's been after me to study Beethoven."

"Why should he care what you do?"

"He seems to need these little conquests, displays of power. I'm sorry you're not happy, Charlie."

Santesson came over then. Liquor moved in Largens. He felt dead drained and set upon. Santesson smiled, a slow revelation of lion's teeth, and yet—with all his instincts burning in clear flame, Largens thought, *Why, he's afraid of Kanigher.* Why should a man intimate with Beethoven know such fear? And oddly, he had his answer: because Kanigher threatens him, Beethoven does not. Because Beethoven is dead. His music is fixed, pinned to the staves. Creation is a kind of magic that lives in men,

and when they die it passes from them. Only the works remain. Santesson fears the potential: the actual he can master, with notes and diagrams and rules. In that second, Largens knew Santesson's power, and consequently his weakness. He felt some small magic stir in himself with that perception.

But Kanigher did not sense control of the situation resting on him. He retreated.

"Hello, David," Santesson said. "How's the composing coming?"

"Not very well, I'm afraid."

"Well, you know there's a place for you upstairs."

"Yes. I know. I'm considering it."

And as if that were all Santesson wanted he said, "Come, Charles, I have someone you should meet," and turned from Kanigher.

But Largens was aggressive. He had his first real motivation in much time. Suddenly, strangely, there was music in him. He wanted to get home and write it down. "I don't think I'll stay," he said.

Santesson stopped and studied him. "Do what you like, of course. I thought you'd like to meet your competition for the Beethoven job."

And Largens' breath left him. He followed Santesson and met a man named John Hart, a man with a feral look, and they spoke for a short time, saying nothing about the Beethoven job. It occurred to him that Santesson might have lied.

He finally broke free and made for the door, but was deftly caught by Lia Santesson. She chided him for ignoring her all evening, and started speaking in a low, oiled, intimate voice that eventually drew him out of his resolution and into an empty room with her. Into a warm, silken purgatory.

The last cry of a man dying, mad and forgotten, in the midst of a summer storm. Layers and levels and years away, the lightning flickered and the thunder rolled out of the hills over Largens as he died; then he opened his eyes and thought no: that's not me.

He raised himself on one elbow and looked panic-stricken into darkness. Then a faint numeric glow brought him back. It was just past 2

A.M. and he had been lying half under Lia Santesson's naked body for almost an hour, dozing. She was still asleep. He felt bad—seduced and soured with irresolution. Furtively he bent to whisper her awake, when he heard a gentle breathing behind him. A thin slice of light cut across the floor, over the bed and his calf. He pivoted at the waist and saw the large dark silhouette of George Santesson in the doorway. Light and the late remnants of the party were faintly behind him. Largens' mouth half opened, and he froze in that twisted stiff posture, in an agony of silence, in a waiting and a wanting to cry out, to explain, to accept punishment for his adultery if punishment were needed. He was riven by the thought of having hurt someone unaware. And then he was hotly ashamed, for *he* had been seduced, *he* had been led to this, as much by Santesson as by his wife. The big man did not move or speak. They stared at each other for almost a minute; then Santesson let out a slightly heavier breath and passed into the hall.

When Largens finally left, silent and exhausted and with no good-byes, the walk home woke him. It was much too late to go to sleep anyway, so he sat up with a single light on, reading through his old notebooks. He started to play a couple of his compositions, but they were demanding and his fingers were stiff, and the sound of the piano in the silent apartment was loud and plangent. It sounded much more assertive than he felt. He had to admit he had put it off too long.

He saw Santesson once more before the thing happened. Late one evening they passed in the hall and Largens was immediately and pointiessly embarrassed enough to rush for the elevators. Santesson stopped him and drew him gently aside and said, "I wanted to thank you for giving my wife what I can't."

The blood pounding through his temples turned cold. "Oh," he said; then: "Oh! I—" Then he said nothing, but gripped Santesson's arms and was gripped back. He felt he had been used, manipulated into it, yes—but he felt Santesson's sincerity too, the man's great deep pain and weakness. He pitied him.

"It's terribly hard sometimes," Santesson said, "to have to live here, now, when your soul is somewhere else; when the only thing that ever felt like home . . . is something you can't even touch. I've given so much to my music, to Beethoven." He seemed to struggle briefly. "You know the opening of the Ninth's third movement ... the melodic theme?" Largens nodded. Santesson's mouth moved: "Mine."

"What?"

"I wonder what these transfers are, sometimes. What they've done to us. To the past. I sometimes think it's all one, there is no past or future, only that great timeless flow between. . . . *TVS* had so many transfers; I've left so much of myself back there, Charles. I feel I've left my soul there." He shook his head. "Do you know what I mean?"

Largens could only nod.

"I'll let you go." He dropped his arms. "I have to do something. You're a good man, Charles."

The next morning Largens was interrupted from work by the sounds of a hallway commotion, from the direction of the transfer rooms. He walked into the hall; a cold intuition gripped him; he started to run. The door was open; people clustered. He forced his way through and found Grueder and a dozen others surrounding the red velvet couch. As he entered the tiny room, a doctor straightened, stethoscope limp in his hand. Grueder looked at Largens and said, "It's Santesson. He's dead."

The doctor said, "At your earliest convenience, Mr. Grueder," and went stiffly out. The others followed, murmuring.

Largens stared in incomprehension.

Grueder's face was strictured, a hard and ancient landscape strained by simply being. He sighed. "An unauthorized transfer. Santesson set up the equipment late last night after everyone left. He gave himself triple the required trigger voltage. It killed him."

"How?"

"His brain just shut off. His mind was no longer here and it couldn't come back."

Largens trembled. Santesson's body was still, composed. His face was peaceful. "The controls . . . where—?"

Grueder just shook his head. "It doesn't matter, Charles, he's dead. Wherever—whenever—he is, he's dead. Come—"

"Where?"

Grueder looked at him strangely.

"Beethoven. 1823."

Largens reeled. "The Ninth..."

"Yes. The Ninth." Grueder looked around, to make sure they were alone. "This was no accident, Charles. There was a note on his desk—I haven't

told anyone this—he requested that you be appointed head of Beethoven Studies. I think we can arrange to honor that wish . . ."

"My God," Largens whispered, hardly hearing. He stared at the dead man's face, a poor snapshot exposure of a soul, a brief final connection of body and spirit. His heart, his brain, his body, were off, cold, stone; there was no way for Santesson to be alive. But Largens believed, he knew with fanatic irrationality, that some infinitesimal part of Santesson was living, almost two centuries in the past....

"Did you hear, Charles? You're head of Beethoven Studies now."

"I heard."

"Don't mention this to anyone, Charles. Lord, if the government found out this was unauthorized, they'd shut us down in a second. The doctor suspects, but he can't prove anything, I hope. They only need a small excuse to end the program, so for God's sake keep quiet about it, Charles!" Largens sensed a threat behind that. He just nodded.

Something in Largens' silence sparked to Grueder. The old man looked at Santesson and sighed. "He had a hard life, Charles."

"So have we all."

4

For some time I have been occupied with major works. Much of the music has already hatched, at least in my head. I must first get them off my neck; two important symphonies, each one different from my others ...

—Ludwig Van Beethoven, after completion of his Eighth Symphony.

The passage was circled in Santesson's notebook. The word *two* was underlined.

Largens walked out of the office with a confidence grown from a year of authority. "What is this stuff about a Tenth Symphony?"

Hart was there, serving as his assistant. He pushed the notebook back across the desk and snorted. "Nonsense. Santesson's pet theory. Some fragments of an unfinished symphony were found..."

"Yes, I *know* that, but a musicologist of Santesson's stature wouldn't

make all these notes simply on that basis."

"Well, there they are."

A fine antagonism had been honed between the men. True to his word, Grueder had given Largens the appointment. Hart was still resenting it. And he had learned that to cut Largens he had only to insult Santesson. He added, "Personally I think the old boy went a bit *soft* toward the end." Stressing the *double entendre*.

For an instant Largens wanted to whirl the little man around, slap him across the face, shut him up. But the feeling passed, and he simply sighed, and walked out, allowing Hart his small victory.

He was thirty-six. It was winter. He was bitterly unhappy. Was that all the years were good for, to add an extra sting to the remorse?

Santesson's death had affected him deeply. The poor impotent bastard—escaping not even into death, but into a life not his own. Largens had had a brief affair with Lia; three months ago he had talked Kanigher into taking a musicology job; he did not know how much further he might fill Santesson's role.

He watched the setting sun bleed New York. The day turned red, was drawn off into Jersey. Central Park stretched below, the lights just coming on, a few couples strolling. The city was livable for the first time in a century: two million people now. Buildings were coming down crosstown. But it seemed so empty to him. He had grown up here when it was five times as dense.

Hart left without saying good-night. Largens heard the elevator chime, close, suck away. He felt very alone. He stepped into the hall, looking up and down. Lights off, doors sealed for the night. He walked down the corridor, passing no one, hearing nothing. He walked faster.

A strange feeling took hold of him.

By the time he reached the transfer room he was running.

He fumbled with his key, pressed it home; the door opened. He went in, sealed it, snapped on the lights.

The machinery waited.

(In case you ever need to. The whisper, razoring back to him, from a year away.)

(Santesson's escape.)

Quickly then, the patch. It was not as if he were breaking regulations: he had permission for this transfer; what matter when he took it? He was

going back to the Ninth, he was going to consummate that lifelong obsession. His fingers twitched. His brain raced. At the last slider, marked *trigger voltage,* his fingers paused.

(Escape.)

1.5 he needed.

He slid it to 5.

A red light blinked, blinked, blinked.

(Escape!)

His hand trembled.

He brought it back to 1.5.

He had to rest for several minutes on the couch and let the sweat dry before he could take the drug. He taped electrodes to his skin, cold square steel invasions of his nakedness. He trembled there waiting for the colors to start, knowing he was wrong, knowing why he couldn't tamper with the past this way, but he was too far gone in his need, the colors were on him, he reached for the trigger switch and *like that:* immediately went to sleep

and the center went away and left him spinning in a silver void, down and across cold currents of time that moved with the vast slowness of glaciers. He moved in directions he could not name. His metabolism was high with nerves and it panicked him to think what difference that might make and all the colors and the great rumbling shapes moved about him and he was afraid, God what've I done, he was climbing a watt of paranoia until he dropped off the top straight into sleep

and he shrugged it off with heavy blankets and a fear of suffocation. Bright morning sunlight was in the room. Intimations of the coming winter whispered across the sill. Beethoven stretched, rolled his legs out of bed. He quickly crossed the room, pulled on some woolen socks, and plunged his arms into a basin of icy water. Largens' consciousness seemed to splash into bright fragments at the shock and reform quivering, clearer, sharper. Beethoven started bellowing up and down scales. He toweled himself, went to the window overlooking Baden and sang a few measures from the symphony's second movement. He sang some more, paused, and made a pencil notation on the shutter, alongside a dozen others and lists of figures, sums, conversions from florins to guilders.

Then another researcher blinked into being. Santesson. Vibrations of interest, perhaps irony, reached him. Of course. This was a younger

Santesson. And he suddenly realized, that was why Santesson had been so friendly and encouraging the first tune. Santesson *knew* Largens would end up here sometime later. A fragment of Largens' future had been part of Santesson's memory.

Meanwhile, Beethoven's whole train of thought went past unnoticed. Largens let it. To hell with analysis: he was here for magic. He didn't care why Beethoven was writing the symphony, only that he was a part of it. He wanted to be more a *part* of it. So when Beethoven sat at the pianoforte to start work, Largens in effect *dictated* a phrase to him.

To his utter and terrified amazement, the composer stopped. His pen wavered in midstroke; it trembled with just a hint of suspicion as Largens' phrase roiled in his mind; then he jotted it down. *Crosstalk.*

Beethoven had heard.

Some chemistry, some arcane connection of blood pressures, brainwaves, *something* had bridged the gap—and now Beethoven was developing a passage from his theme. *What had he done?*

This was not the Ninth Symphony; and yet the music spattered out from the pen, not entirely his, not all Beethoven's. His panic increased. What were the mechanics of music, time, the past?

Music was articulated time. Largens always thought of it as a river. If he were lucky, relaxed and easy in his craft, a man could tap the flow, turn the currents of time to something solid, a piece of music. And rarely, so rarely, he might actually direct the flow. Time might swirl and bend around him as space bends around a point of gravity. Beethoven had that force; that was his magic. But Beethoven was unique. What of himself and the critics that with machineries, with tinkerings and tampermgs dammed the flow? What were they doing to the past?

The next few hours were blurred and broken. Largens had no sense of returning to 2016. He remembered Santesson's voice, among all the other phantom voices filling Beethoven's head. The opening of the third movement—but not the way Largens remembered it. He lost all track of time then and came finally to consciousness in the dark transfer room, drained and sick with the irresponsibility of what he had done. He skirted Central Park on the way home, feeling vaguely threatened by it, watching the night sky glow faintly through layers of leaves that shifted as he walked under them. The way the layers crossed and moved stirred something in him. It reminded him of the surrealistic moments of transfer. It gave him unpleasant intimations, as if the trees were trying to tell him something; or, more accurately, his mind was searching for a way to reach him, and

the trees were handy. *Something is different.* He was too tired to think about it; He stopped in a bar on Sixty-eighth Street, had three drinks and went home. He had trouble with his door key—he had to search his ring for it, which seemed far too crowded—got inside, and dropped onto the bed.

The benefit of living in a closed world was that you were effectively shielded from attack from without. The failing was that your defenses weakened, and if the closed world started to come apart, you were helpless.

Charles Largens' world had showed the first weak seam. He lay drunk in his bed and cried as he hadn't since his parents died.

The afternoon before the official transfer he spent with Lia. In the same apartment on East Eighty-fourth, they traded thoughts and intimacies. He spoke as in a dream:

"Does it seem different to you?"

"What?"

"The way things are."

"What things?"

"Everything; I don't know. You and I and

The apartment on Seventy-eighth Street was unchanged since Santesson's death; Lia lived alone there and he visited frequently. This morning

He was so confused now, the world seemed only a welter of possibilities, nothing was certain. The sense of *change* that followed each of his returns had disjointed him so

A thin drizzle grayly painted the bedroom window as they

No, no; it was not real, it couldn't be. He was dreaming, the dreams

timeless monuments of time, clear and precise, their meanings faint and distant. These dreams had no more reality, no less importance, than all the music he had never written.

His dreams now, his nightdreams, were of Beethoven and the past, of music unraveling itself into spaghetti piles, and he woke frequently in sweat and fear, lying still but sliding madly into the past: time and the tide took him back, the great bulk of days he had lived weighed more heavily than days he would yet live, freighted him toward the past. It was only necessary to stand still in that awful darkness to be drawn vertiginously back.

And one morning, *that* morning he walked to the Center in a surreal mood, living, in a fantasy of the near-future which was a baroque counterpointed dream of the past since he was dreaming of where he would be in a half hour which would be two hundred years in the past, and concurrently he was remembering all .the tunes in his past he had daydreamed of this moment, each disparate present a window on the past through the future, and how different it all was from how he had frequently thought it would be. He had now a fear of alternate presents, vague suspicions of what was happening to him, to time, to music. He thought of how hectic his time with Beethoven would be with all the researchers from past and future history converging on that most covetable moment of inspiration.

(He had spent one afternoon with Bach during the Brandenburg months, during his assistantship to Santesson, and had been so drained by the babel of thoughts from the dozen others also there that he quite forgot why he had come. His own thoughts were washed from him in the greater cataract; there was only the sound of all the critics that would ever inhabit Bach during that period—a dozen trains converging on the same terminus from different moments in time, with a tumult and a clattering and collision, Bach, the terminus, all ignorant of the chaos within.)

(Or had all that furious racket somehow fueled the headlong counterpoint of the Brandenburg concert!? No, ridiculous, stop it.)

But he walked into the transfer room now with a growing apocalyptic sense, his every instinct so tightly wound that they had to give him a tranquilizer with the drug; and at the moment of triggering he still screamed, screamed his way into the place without time, the place of motion without destination, form without function, research without purpose, the floating fragments of tunes without order. Time without his

world, times without Beethoven, times where his own life was rich and glorious; and in an instant quickly past he heard his song cycle finished, he heard half a score symphonies that were his own; he clutched at them and they vanished, and only the flat spinning emptiness remained, as distant and unreachable as the bowl of the sky. . . . The moire patterns slowed, the layers peeled back to show greater complexities, more permutations, fork upon fork of time, and then a great rending—

(there was a time as a boy he had lain by midnight railroad tracks, waiting for a train to pass, the air hot, muggy, iron-smelling; he waited till a glow appeared, distant, and grew to a full glare; and then the train was upon him and rushing past like doom and time and the endless vacuum of space wrapped in a midnight earth blackness, the air shuddering and sucking all around him, the very fabric of space torn with its force. He felt his heart clutch up, stall, and he felt the end of the world passing in that endless second. Time suspended. He felt that now, in the moment of transfer, in the region between times.)

—as blocks of time were torn by their roots, knocked free and avalanched

: all past in an instant.

1823. Baden.

He was there; and the first thing was *not* a clear idyllic vision of the past, but a riot-blur of graygreen light and the assault of a thousand nightmare conversations of which he heard no words— but Beethoven was *deaf*— but the voices of a thousand and more men from Largens' time filled the void with their own sounds and laments, voices of pain and frustration and everything Largens saw coming to fruition in himself, voices of humanity enough to crush him— then strangely they all fell silent— a tense waiting hush, as before a curtainrise—

... and Beethoven thought clearly of the fourth movement of his Ninth Symphony, musing, brooding, on the proper introduction to Schiller's Ode...

and the voices surged out of silence:

O Freunde, nicht diese Töne! Sondern lasst uns ausgenehmere anstimmen und freudevoliere...

Beethoven staggered and gasped. He tore open his notebook.

The voices—!

Beethoven's tortured mind sensed them, it caught all the thunder and roar of a thousand voices, all gabbling humanity; they struck off his mind like a scream off piano strings, fragmenting into tones and harmonies:

Freude, schöner Gotterfunken, Tochter aus Elysium. . .

He scribbled frantically, desperately, and they urged him on, the minds pressed and sang and screamed, pleaded with him to say for them the things they couldn't, and Beethoven was filled with pity, understanding, a community of despair...

Seid umschlungen, Millionen, dieser Kuss der ganzen Welt...

and harder they pressed, each with his own personal demands and pains, each in search of his own special magic, a thousand variations of the Ninth, a thousand personal misinterpretations spilling their own lost songs into the chaos—

Deine Zauber binden wieder, was die Mode streng getheilt...

Largens caught the roar of an electronicized version, metal resonances echoing through Beethoven's deaf mind, a confusion of sounds, reverberating, building, starting to topple this immense structure, and in the chaos he recognized Santesson's voice, and then his own, all singing with the mad intensity they had never trusted their own lives to reach, a tottering sea of sound, climbing and accelerating, oh they knew what was coming, they *knew* it! madly racing, *screaming—*

Ja, wer ouch nur eine Seele, sein nennt auf dem Er-denrundl

Und wet's nie gekonnt der stehle, weinend sich cans diesem Bund...

until it was too much, too much pressure, and there was a rending and a piercing cry of anguish that was Beethoven's own as he *saw* what was inside him, and the turmoil raged on and on, past the end of the music—

(the last cry of a man dying, mad and forgotten, in the midst of a summer storm. The lightning flickered and the thunder rolled out of the hills over Largens as he died; then he opened his eyes and thought, Oh my God, it's me, it is, it's me and Santesson and all the rest, all the failed and weak and impotent. . . but it's not Beethoven.)

Silence...

Somewhere outside it was raining, fat drops hammering and spraying his face, and unheard thunder shaking the earth...

and inside the chaos raged on and rose over Largens as all the occupants wept and muttered about their own misspent lives (and the composer was silent, silent) and they at least rested in this dark world of

gray ash, this mind burnt and made their own—

(and Largens strained to hear Beethoven, but there was silence, silence, only silence—)

until the recall, and with great relief he heard the raining silence fall away, recede like foaming surf into sand, and he heard:

"You okay?"

The lights were soft and warm: inside lights. The sky's cold gray was gone. He was back.

"Uh." Speech was an effort. "Yeah, Are—are you the one who strapped me in?"

"Yeah. You're all right, you're sure?"

"Uh huh." Largens' voice was quite flat "You look different."

The attendant smiled. "They all say that after they've been through the breakdown."

"Breakdown?"

"Yeah. The 1823 breakdown you went to study, remember?" The attendant shook his head with old amusement. "Every time, you guys forget."

"I... I went to study the Ninth..."

"The what?"

"The Ninth, the Ninth Symphony! The Chorale on Schiller's'Ode to Joy!'"

"Hey, take it easy. Beethoven only wrote *eight* symphonies, remember? There were fragments for the Ninth, but no more."

"No!" Largens sat up suddenly, and the room tilted in his vertigo he felt thoughts rushing away and he tried to hold them.

"Poor guy," the attendant said, peeling tape from wires. "First he loses his hearing, then his sanity. Never wrote another note."

Largens was sick, soul-sick. The room spun without spinning.

They had killed the Ninth Symphony. All the frustrated pianists and composers and singers turned scholars had brought their frustration to the works they studied; and they had brought it to Beethoven himself. All their souls' cheapnesses summed; the faint crosstalk turned to a shout. They had brought their weakness and despair in such pent-up furious quantity that Beethoven had been swamped by it, and drowned.

Largens saw layers of reality peeling away, shifting, each one new with each new transfer, each time another subtle alteration: past present future so closely bound and interwoven there was no way *not* to change them.

This time they had killed the Ninth. This time Beethoven had gone mad in 1823. But next time—after the next transfer, what might happen? Would there be seven symphonies, or six, or four? As the thousands converged earlier and earlier in the master's life in coming realities, in search of unworked time, when would the breakdown occur? After a few more years of indiscriminate transfers, would the young Beethoven ever leave Bonn to study with Haydn? Or would he rebel against his tyrannical father and never touch the piano after the old man's death?

It was all so delicately balanced.

And he felt the reality of the Ninth leaving him, a great weight lifting; his memories slid and shifted and there was a great surge of loss. How, how did it go?

Freude…

He tried to hear, to remember, but there was only the silence, deafening and mute.

A terrible long night. Sleepless, he listened to faraway traffic and watched snow hit his window. He had dreams while he was awake. Dreams in which the building moved. In which the room filled with water, then emptied of air. The window vanished and he was left in complete blackness. He got up and walked around in the blackness. He walked at least a quarter of a mile straight into it. Then he was in bed again. He went to visit his aunt and uncle. They yelled at him. He forced open his uncle's dresser with a claw hammer and got out the pistol he kept there and shot both of them. There was a large grand piano in the living room when he tried to leave. He couldn't get past it. Later he was in a cemetery, knocking over stones. The ground was very dry and loose and they went over easily. When he saw the old composer walk stiffly around the room, lecturing, he went to sleep.

He woke at two in the afternoon and took a cold shower. Without thinking, he called the government agency. He then dressed and dictated two letters to his voicetyper. He mailed one and took the other with him. He walked directly to Grueder's office. The old man was hanging up the phone when he entered.

"Charles." He looked pale and shaken. "Something awful has happened.

The government's found out about our unauthorized transfers."

Largens slid his envelope across the table. Grueder only glanced at it.

"They're sending investigators. They're sure to close us down."

"So?"

"So? No more transfers!"

"I called them."

Grueder looked at him dumbly. "You. I didn't trust you at first. Then I did."

"I had a little talk with Beethoven last night. Or with myself, or with whatever remnants of Beethoven are in me. He said it might be too late, but I'd never know if I didn't try."

"This is incredible. You'll regret this, Largens!"

"I may."

"You idiot! What are you going to do now, compose?"

"I think so."

"You can't walk away from it that easily!"

"Yes I can," Largens said.

He went outside. He was shaking. If it had gone on, all Beethoven's music might have gone. What would the world—his world—be like without Beethoven?

Still, he was afraid he had made a terrible mistake.

The silence—a silence with specific dimensions, a silence in four movements—haunted him. Could he ever make up for that?

Despair rose in him as he stood there with no place to go. Then he remembered about inaction and time and the tide that wanted to draw him back. He took a step and then another and soon he was walking home, entering the second half of his life.

Why, I'm a young man, he thought. I'm two hundred years younger than I was yesterday. I can do something with that.

What was necessary was to begin.