

For Immediate Release

7 April 2005

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THE SOUNDS OF A BRITISH BEETHOVEN – CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER RARE MANUSCRIPT

**Musical Manuscripts, Christie's King Street
30 November 2005**

King Street – Christie's sale of Musical Manuscripts on 30 November is to offer the most



complete autograph Beethoven manuscript to be seen on the open market for 15 years. The work also signifies the closest link between one of the world's greatest composers and British culture. The 22-page manuscript includes 5 separate arrangements for Scottish and Irish folk songs, including arrangements for famous works by Robbie Burns and Thomas Moore. With an estimate of £350,000-450,000, the manuscript is in an unusually original state, the pages still bound by the original twine.

Beethoven never travelled to Britain, and this example of his work offers the closest possible link between the great composer and his perception of British culture.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was born in Bonn, Germany, and is widely regarded as one of the finest composers ever to have lived. He had his music published at the age of 12, before moving to Vienna in 1792, where he spent the rest of his life. It was here that Beethoven studied under Haydn and Salieri, before finding favour as a composer and musician with the Austrian aristocracy. Beethoven suffered from a hearing condition for most of his life and by 1802, he realized that this condition was both incurable and set to worsen. By 1812, his hearing had deteriorated so much that he could no longer perform. Incredibly, he continued to write and arrange music until his death in 1827.

The autograph manuscript to be offered at Christie's dates from 1815, and is the result of the collaboration between Beethoven and the Scottish publisher George Thomson. Thomson was the Secretary to the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Arts and Manufacturers in Scotland, and he was a notable ambassador for Scottish culture. His aim was to make folk songs popular in 19th century drawing rooms, and he achieved this by commissioning the best known composers of the day to write arrangements for popular Scottish and Irish folk songs. Thus he

managed to commission arrangements by Beethoven of songs written by Robbie Burns and Thomas Moore – a fantastic cross-pollination of European cultures. Unfortunately, Thomson found it difficult to continue commissioning Beethoven as the arrangements that he produced were too complicated for the drawing room performer. Correspondence in the British Library suggests that Beethoven and Thomson had rather heated exchanges on this matter, with the great composer refusing to simplify his arrangements, as well as continually haggling on his price.

Beethoven wrote 126 settings for Thomson between 1803 and 1820. Thomson would send Beethoven a selection of tunes that he wanted to be arranged, and Beethoven would write out his settings before sending them to his copyist. The example being offered at Christie's is one of these original composing manuscripts. The copyist would then write a fair copy of the arrangement and send it back to Beethoven, who would forward it to Thomson if he was satisfied. Sending these copies during the Napoleonic Wars was often a difficult process, and examples would be sent via both Germany and Malta to ensure that at least one copy survived the journey.

The manuscript to be offered at Christie's is part of a group of fifteen songs that were commissioned to Beethoven in August 1814. Beethoven completed his settings in May 1815, and a fair copy was sent to Thomson in June and received by him in August. The autograph manuscript for the 15 songs was divided; one set of 5 songs is in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, one set of 5 was separated with 3 in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and the whereabouts of the other 2 unknown, while the remaining 5 examples will be offered at Christie's on 30 November. Only two autograph manuscripts of Beethoven's folk settings still exist in private hands, and this example is considerably bigger than the other. The appearance of this manuscript is expected to be of great excitement to music scholars and historians around the world.

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Images available on request

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Notes to editors:

The folk songs included in the manuscript are as follows:

- 'Tis the last rose of summer, by Thomas Moore
- O Mary ye's be clad in Silk
- The Parting Kiss
- Highland Harry, by Robbie Burns
- Again my Lyre

- **Covered:** Beauty and Art in Contemporary Bookbinding, an exhibition being staged at the Flow Gallery, from 15-23 April 2005, which will offer a rare opportunity to discover the work of Designer Bookbinders - an internationally known and respected society devoted to the maintenance and improvement of standards of design and craft in hand bookbinding. The exhibition will bring this exciting and relatively little known medium of contemporary bookbinding to a wider audience of collectors.