

Beethoven & Saint-Georges

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Overture to *L'amante anonyme*

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, was a biracial violinist, composer and expert fencer (!) who enjoyed considerable success in France during the mid- and late 18th century. *L'amant anonyme* (*The Anonymous Lover*) was his most successful opera, produced in Paris in 1780. Its instrumental prelude is in the style of an Italian *opera sinfonia*, an important precursor to the multi-movement symphony. It consists of three sections arranged fast-slow-fast, but played without pause. The concluding segment is in a lively dance rhythm.

Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Violin Concerto in A Major, Op. 5 No. 2

Contemporary reports confirm that the Chevalier was a highly accomplished violinist who led important orchestras in pre-Revolutionary Paris. Like most composers of the day, he wrote virtuoso pieces for personal use. They reveal his impressive capacity as a violinist. This A-major concerto is representative, favoring high registers, difficult string crossings and extensive use of double stopping. He places the cadenza in the slow movement rather than the opening Allegro, suggesting that he felt more at home improvising in a lyrical vein. Nevertheless, the dazzling passage work and arpeggiation in the finale remind us that the Chevalier was a virtuoso.

Beethoven: Romance for Violin and Orchestra No. 2 in F Major

Beethoven's two Romances both date from 1798 and are believed to be abandoned slow movements from early attempts at a violin concerto. In the late 18th century, both the German term *Romanze* and the French *romance* meant a ballad-like song. Beethoven's choice of title is no accident. His tempo indication for Op. 50, Adagio cantabile, confirms that he was thinking along vocal lines for this movement. The musical emphasis is on the soloist's upper register. The violinist requires great beauty of sound and the most tender expression for the very melodic themes of this Romance.

Beethoven: Symphony No. 2

Beethoven's sunny Second Symphony was the first in which he opted for a scherzo instead of the more sedate minuet which had become standard in the late 18th century. All four movements boast joy, good cheer and glorious themes. The first movement opens with a slow introduction. But Beethoven liked to take his audience by surprise. Listen for sudden changes from soft to loud, and unexpected accents. Dance rhythms will have your foot tapping!

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Overture to *L'amante anonyme* (Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 11)

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges

Born: *ca.* 1745 near Basse Terre, Guadeloupe

Died: June 10, 1799, in Paris, France

Composed: 1779

World Premiere: The first documented performance took place on March 8, 1780, in Paris.

NJSO Premiere: These performances are the NJSO premiere.

Duration: 10 minutes

The Black Mozart. Thus was Joseph Bologne dubbed by early music historians. But that does injustice to this swashbuckling character, who was one of the most colorful and versatile figures of the high Classic era.

He was born in the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe to a white planter and his African slave Nanon. The father took Nanon and their son with him to France in 1747 for two years, to avoid false charges of murder in Guadeloupe. After the elder Saint-Georges obtained a royal pardon, the three returned to Guadeloupe for a couple of years, but moved permanently to France in 1753.

The boy demonstrated unusual athletic talent. He took up fencing at age 13 and rapidly developed formidable skills that earned him a position as a member of the King's guard in 1764, at age 19. That appointment also carried the title of Chevalier. His personality, legendary swordsmanship and exotic good looks made him popular with the Parisian nobility, and many contemporary reports refer to his success with the ladies.

Little information survives about Saint-Georges' early musical training, but some dedications to him of works by the composer François-Joseph Gossec and the Italian violinist and composer Antonio Lolli indicate he likely studied with both of them. We do know that he joined Gossec's orchestra in 1769 and was soon promoted to be its concertmaster. He began performing as a soloist in the 1770s, including performances of his own concertos. Those works attest to his superior technique, and to the advantage he found in the newly developed Tourte bow. By the mid-1770s, Saint-Georges was directing the Concert des Amateurs, which was soon acknowledged to be one of Europe's finest orchestras.

For much of the last 25 years of his life, Saint-Georges earned a living as a musician, both performing and composing. His two sets of string quartets were some of the first to be published in Paris. From 1776 on, he focused more on composing operas, enjoying the patronage of Mme. de Montesson and the Duke of Orléans. Saint-Georges was a founder of the Concert de la Loge Olympique. He was directing that orchestra when it commissioned Haydn's "Paris" Symphonies.

The overture that opens this program was published in 1779 as Symphony Op. 11, No. 2. Saint-Georges repurposed it the following year as an opera overture. *L'amante anonyme* (*The Anonymous Lover*) was a *comédie-ballet* in two acts, first performed at the Paris Opera in 1780. As the original title *symphonie* implies, the overture is really an *opera sinfonia*, an important precursor to the Classical symphony that was popular in 18th-century Italian opera. It comprises three discrete movements arranged fast-slow-fast and played without pause; the concluding segment was usually in a dance rhythm.

Saint-Georges' overture begins with a resolute, ceremonial movement in D major, replete with oboes and horns to reinforce its dramatic opening. Saint-Georges shows a secure command of sonata form, with delicate dialogue between violins and oboes for the contrasting second theme, and a well-thought-out development section with some surprising harmonic turns.

The Andante switches to D minor and is limited to strings. A miniature three-part form, it provides respite between the livelier outer segments. The overture concludes with a zesty Presto in tarantella style. A brief interlude in D minor relates it to the Andante, before a reprise of the Presto music. It is easy to imagine this attractive overture as a curtain raiser for a comic opera.

Instrumentation: two oboes, two horns, strings and continuo.

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges: Violin Concerto in A Major, Op. 5, No. 2

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges

Composed: Probably in 1774 or 1775; the score was published in 1775.

World Premiere: undocumented, but likely with the Concert des Amateurs in the mid-1770s.

NJSO Premiere: These performances are the NJSO premiere.

Duration: 24 minutes

Most of Bologne's published works were issued in Paris between 1772 and 1779. They consist of three types: string quartets, symphonies concertantes (featuring more than one soloist) and violin concertos. This concerto in A major appeared in 1775, with another concerto in C major, as Saint-Georges' Op. 5. The publisher was Antoine Bailleux, who published works by Italian and Austrian masters as well as other French composers in the emerging classical style.

By 1775, Bologne's mentor François-Joseph Gossec had left the Concert des Amateurs—one of the finest orchestras in France—to assume the directorship of the Concert Spirituel. The Chevalier assumed the leadership of the Concert des Amateurs and almost certainly performed both of his Op. 5 concertos with that ensemble. (His debut with them as a soloist in 1772 is documented.)

To 21st-century listeners, this music will sound a great deal like Mozart, but it is far more likely that Mozart was influenced by the Chevalier than the reverse. The prodigiously gifted Austrian was more than a decade younger and was conversant with musical trends in Italy and France as well as his native Austria. We know that Mozart met Saint-Georges in Paris in 1778, during the fateful trip when Mozart's mother died.

The A-major concerto is a substantial, large-scale work; its opening Allegro moderato alone takes about 12 minutes in performance. The work is in concerto-sonata form, with a full orchestral exposition preceding the soloist's entrance. Phrases are well-balanced, and the string writing is deftly handled. The soloist introduces a new theme, supported only by the orchestral violins. That lighter texture—a holdover from the concerto grosso idea—holds for solo passages throughout the concerto.

Saint-Georges reserves his cadenza for the lyrical slow movement, a Largo in D major. Once again, an extensive string introduction precedes the solo entrance. Steady triplets give the movement the lilting feel of

12/8 time. Placement of the cadenza in this Largo suggests that Saint-Georges felt more at home improvising in a lyrical vein.

That stated, he leaves no doubt about his virtuoso credentials. Almost all of the concerto favors high register, with abundant string crossings and double-stopped passages. In the finale, a Rondeau, the soloist and orchestral violins present the catchy, dance-like theme before full orchestra echoes it. Of the three episodes interpolated between rondeau statements, the middle one in A minor is the most interesting, with irregular six-bar phrases, a musette-like drone and a brief sideways excursion into C major. The final episode boasts dazzling arpeggiation and other eye-popping bravura passages that seem to presage the era of Niccolò Paganini.

Soloist Augustin Hadelich performs his own cadenza in the slow movement, as well as his own *Eingänge* (short cadenza-like passages leading to a solo section) in the finale.

Instrumentation: solo violin and strings.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Romance for Violin and Orchestra No. 2 in F Major, Op. 50

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: *ca.* 1798

World Premiere: undocumented, but possibly in the private salon of one of Beethoven's patrons in the late 1790s

NJSO Premiere: 1973–74 season. Berl Senofsky was the soloist; Henry Lewis conducted.

Duration: 9 minutes

Beethoven composed two Romances for solo violin and orchestra. Despite the difference in their opus numbers (the other, in G major, is Op. 40) and later publication dates, they were probably written about the same time, in 1798. We are not certain why Beethoven composed these Romances. Possibly he intended one of them to be the slow movement of an earlier, unfinished violin concerto.

In the late 18th century, both the German word *Romanze* and the French term *romance* meant a ballad-like song. Beethoven's choice of title is no accident. His tempo indication for Op. 50, *Adagio cantabile*, confirms that he was thinking along vocal lines for this movement. The musical emphasis is on the soloist's upper register. The violinist requires great beauty of sound and the most tender expression for the very melodic themes of this Romance.

Instrumentation: flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, solo violin and strings.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1801–02

World Premiere: April 5, 1803, in Vienna. The composer conducted.

NJSO Premiere: 1927–28 season. Philip James conducted.

Duration: 32 minutes

Each of Beethoven's nine symphonies is a towering masterpiece that broke new musical ground in some way. He excelled in all areas of music, but he wrote particularly well for instruments (as opposed to the human voice). His symphonies give every member of the symphony orchestra a chance to participate at the most essential level. Symphonies are the ultimate teamwork, but not in a competitive sense. A large group of musicians, including the conductor, share a common goal: to bring the composer's music to life. We might think of symphonies as novels, or perhaps four-act dramas. At the end, we have experienced a musical narrative that reaches each of us in a different way, because symphonic music communicates without words.

How does Beethoven's music continue to do this, more than two centuries after he composed it? His foundation is the musical characteristics we know from the great classicists Mozart and Haydn, but Beethoven pushes the envelope, demanding our undivided attention through his use of surprising accents, changes of mood and unexpected harmonic diversions. Always, he writes with a wonderful give-and-take among the various orchestral instruments.

About the music

A lengthy slow introduction opens the Second Symphony, larger in scope than any of Haydn's or Mozart's slow introductions. Beethoven takes his time—almost three minutes. Many writers have perceived foreshadowing of the great “Choral” Symphony in this opening. Once the Allegro con brio (fast, with vigor and spirit) arrives, we are off and running. Strong dance rhythms propel this music forward. Beethoven does not skimp on energy.

The slow-movement Larghetto shows him at his most tender and intimate. Next is a Scherzo: Allegro, Trio, arguably the Second Symphony's most noteworthy movement. This was the first time that Beethoven used the label Scherzo (Italian for “joke”), instead of the 18th-century Menuetto (a sedate, courtly dance). He thereby altered the shape and character of the four-movement symphony for the entire century to follow. The finale, starting with an orchestral exclamation point, is equally remarkable, with Haydnesque wit and Beethovenian daring. Its extended coda presages the monumental coda of his Third Symphony, “Eroica,” which would follow in 1803.

BEETHOVEN'S INNER STRENGTH: OVERCOMING A DISABILITY

We all know that Beethoven suffered from deafness. The first signs that his hearing was deteriorating occurred in the late 1790s, when he was in his 20s. In 1802, the year of the Second Symphony, he finally acknowledged his affliction openly to friends and family. Not being able to hear was—and is—the most terrible blow that can befall a musician. In Beethoven's case it meant that he would be forced to curtail public performances at the piano, as well as limit his conducting activities.

Beethoven had a complex, forceful personality. Despite a stubborn streak, a hot temper and some eccentric habits, he had many friends. He liked to eat and drink and socialize with his friends, who enjoyed his sense of humor and admired his devotion to his art. Nevertheless, Beethoven became deeply depressed by his increasing deafness, even contemplating suicide in 1802.

That summer, his physicians sent him to Heiligenstadt, then a bucolic village outside Vienna. They instructed him to rest his ears as much as possible. Tormented by the realization that he was losing his hearing altogether, Beethoven took long walks, pondered his fate, continued to compose and, in October, penned the passionate letter to his brothers that has become known as the Heiligenstadt Testament. In

this powerful document he recorded his despair at the cruel blow fate had dealt him, declaring that only his love for his art had prevented him from taking his own life.

Ultimately he demonstrated great courage and determination, deciding that he still had so much music to give the world that he must carry on and continue composing. Eventually he began a series of handwritten pads and notebooks that have become known as “conversation books.” Through these, he was able to continue communication with friends, family, students, patrons and admirers.

These were the circumstances in which Beethoven completed his joyous Second Symphony. Instead of the anguish one might expect, the D-major symphony is, for the most part, a positive and sunny work. Beethoven still manages to cover many moods: pompous grandeur, relaxed contemplation, exuberant youthful energy and unexpected humorous outbursts. His grasp of the many facets of the human condition is aptly reflected in this lovely symphony. Little sign of his own personal tragedy invades the work.

Instrumentation: woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs; timpani and strings.