

Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Augustin Hadelich

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Daniel Bernard Roumain: *i am a white person who _____ Black people*

Resident Artistic Catalyst Daniel Bernard Roumain (who goes by his monogram, DBR), composed *i am a white person who _____ Black people* for the opening of the New Jersey Symphony's 2020–21 virtual season.

Because of pandemic restrictions, the original score was limited to strings and percussion. For this weekend's performances, DBR has expanded the work to include wind and brass instruments. His concept was for the conductor, the musicians and the audience to consider how they feel about and respond to Black people.

"They can determine for themselves how to answer, how to fill in the blank," DBR has said. He adds that he wanted the piece to be mournful, a memorial for the plight, trauma and times of Black people in America. His thoughtful musical canvas delivers a full spectrum of emotional experience, opening with reverent solemnity and moving through agitated, turbulent passages that evoke America's impassioned, sometimes violent history. The journey will be individual and personalized for each listener.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61

Ludwig van Beethoven's Violin Concerto, Op. 61, is arguably the greatest concerto written for violin.

Monumental in scope, it is heavenly in its beauty—and joyous. Surprisingly, the violin has very little thematic material. Beethoven assigns the singing role to the orchestra, but what the violin plays is sublime. Soloist Augustin Hadelich recently told *The Strad* magazine, "Beethoven composed much of it in a high register that makes the sound shine with an incredible purity and transparency. . . . [Its] length creates one of its greatest challenges: to sustain the long arc of the musical story, so it does not sound like an endless collection of 'nice moments.' You need to know when to move it along, and when to have moments of rest, so that you can take your listeners with you on this journey.

Modest Mussorgsky/Maurice Ravel: *Pictures at an Exhibition*

The trumpet solo that opens Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is one of the most recognizable

melodies in all classical music. It is also one of the most personal: a self-portrait of the composer, who casts himself in the principal role of the visitor wandering through the exhibition of the title. The other principal character, who appears vicariously through his paintings, is Victor Hartmann, a prominent Russian artist and close friend of the composer who died in 1873. Mussorgsky's original Pictures, for solo piano, illustrated some of Hartmann's paintings in music. His impressions are as fresh and vivid as the colors in Hartmann's art. The Russian-born conductor Serge Koussevitzky commissioned Maurice Ravel to orchestrate Pictures in 1922. That version, which we hear in these performances, has become a staple of symphonic literature. Culminating in the splendid finale, "The Great Gate of Kiev," it is also an audience favorite.

Daniel Bernard Roumain: *i am a white person who ____ Black people*

Daniel Bernard Roumain

Born: December 11, 1971, in Margate, Florida

Composed: 2020

World Premiere: November 19, 2020 at NJPAC in a virtual concert; Xian Zhang conducted.

Duration: 5 minutes

Instrumentation: flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, percussion and strings

The New Jersey Symphony's Resident Artistic Catalyst Daniel Bernard Roumain – who goes by his monogram DBR – is busier than ever. He is expanding his role as a composer for cinema; recent film scores include *Ailey* (2021), a documentary about the visionary choreographer who found salvation through dance; *Lynching Postcards* (2021), a documentary short film directed by Christine Turner; and *The Holly* (2022), about five bullets, one gun, and the struggle to save a gentrifying neighborhood in Denver.

Roumain continues to serve on the faculty at Arizona State University and the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, a position he describes as a dream come true. "From my first days on campus, there's a freedom of imagination that allows me to be vulnerable, take risks, and ask the deep, probing questions required of any artist," he has written. "I design classes that I feel are needed to be taught; I collaborate with students and faculty on an array of programs, special projects, and concert experiences; I create and compose new works for artists and ensembles, worldwide, from creative spaces that are vital to my creative practice; and I've created DBR Lab which allows students to plan, design, and present their own work as they start or deepen their careers."

He has also developed *EN MASSE*, an immersive musical experience designed to work in both large public spaces (squares, stadiums, parks) as well as contained spaces (theaters, warehouses). According to his web site, it can last anywhere between 30 minutes to an entire day. *EN MASSE* was commissioned by the Mitchell Center for the University of Houston "Spirit of Houston" Marching Band. It was conceived as a "deconstructed

parade” with music direction by Roumain. The band members took over Houston’s public park Discovery Green, creating a cross between a flash mob and a pep rally, a processional and pop-up recital.

Amid these geographically far-flung and time-consuming projects, Roumain remains active as a performing violinist – and he is also fulfilling a busy schedule of commissions. *i am a white person who _____ Black people* is a relatively recent example. Roumain’s composer’s note explains its genesis, title and subtext.

This work was commissioned by the New Jersey Symphony, Xian Zhang, Music Director, for the opening of the 2020–21 virtual New Jersey Symphony season. It was composed during a series of overlapping crises in our lives: a pandemic; a global fight for social justice; the effects and awareness of climate change; an array of economic collapses; and the tyranny of an electoral process under siege by a president and his party. As a Black, Haitian-American composer, every commission offers a choice. The titles of my work often speak to my feelings and (political) position.

With *i am a white person who _____ Black people*, I am extending what has traditionally been my choice given to any white person: how do you see me and other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) people, and what choice of word or phrase best reflects your opinion of Black people? Your choice, in part, reflects who you are.

The music reflects a kind of deliberate dance among all these brilliant musicians, safely and physically distanced on stage for the premiere, in a time when making music might mean ending a life. Every note and every breath, then, becomes urgent, passing, and precious. We all need to be cautious about the choices we have made and will make, and in this, yes, Black Lives Matter, and always have and will. Alive and here,

Daniel Bernard Romain (DBR)

In an interview at the time of the premiere, Roumain acknowledged that he struggled with the title. Ultimately, he said, the title comes from where he is as a Black human at this moment. “A title can speak to the moment. I started to ask myself, can a title allow for participation?” The concept was for the conductor, the musicians, and the audience to consider how they feel about and respond to Black people. “They can determine for themselves how to answer, how to fill in the blank.” He adds that he wanted the piece to be mournful, a memorial for the plight, trauma, and times of Black people in America. His thoughtful musical canvas delivers a full spectrum of emotional experience, opening with reverent solemnity and moving through agitated, turbulent passages that evoke America’s impassioned, sometimes violent history. The journey will be individual and personalized for each listener.

Because of Covid protocols, the original version of *i am a white person who _____ Black people* was limited to strings and percussion. For these performances, Roumain has re-orchestrated the piece to incorporate wind instruments that match those of the Beethoven Violin Concerto. These are the first performances of the newly orchestrated version.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: July–December 1806

World Premiere: December 23, 1806 at the Theater an der Wien, Vienna; Franz Clement was the soloist.

Duration: 42 minutes

Instrumentation: flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, solo violin and strings

Beethoven wrote his only Violin Concerto for Franz Clement (1780–1842), an Austrian violinist, conductor and composer who led the violin section at the Vienna Opera. Clement is said to have sightread the piece at the premiere, because Beethoven finished writing it only at the last minute. If that apocryphal story is true, it may account in part for the fact that this concerto took a long time to win friends before it became a staple on concert programs.

After its premiere in 1806, the Violin Concerto received only one additional documented performance during Beethoven's lifetime, and that in Berlin rather than Vienna, Beethoven's adopted city. The 19th century favored flashy showpieces for its soloists, and this concerto does not focus on the violinist's brilliant technique. Beethoven studied repertoire of his contemporaries Giovanni Battista Viotti, Rodolphe Kreutzer, and Jacques-Pierre Rode to become more conversant with the technical possibilities of the violin.

But display for its own sake never overtakes the broader musical architecture of this mighty work. Among Beethoven's own compositions, the Violin Concerto's closest spiritual sibling is the Fourth Piano Concerto, Op. 58, with which it shares serenity, absolute conviction in its own inherent balance, and a lack of need for overt display.

A timpani pattern of five gentle taps opens the concerto and become its recurring motif. From this pattern springs the entire first movement: its leisurely, unhurried pace, its emphasis on internal examination rather than external show, and the motivic cells from which Beethoven develops his ideas. These five beats are a stable foil to the woodwind theme, marked *dolce*, that answers them and eventually emerges as the principal melody of the movement. The same five strokes, understated yet inexorable, firmly anchor the first movement in the tonic key of D. They are a welcome homing point in light of the disorienting and unexpected D-sharps (significantly, repeating the same rhythm of the opening timpani strokes) that the first violins interject as early as the tenth measure.

Beethoven takes subtle liberties with form in this expansive first movement. For example, he reserves the *cantabile* second theme for the orchestra until the coda, when his soloist finally has its turn at that lovely melody.

Built on variation principles, the Larghetto is sheer embroidery. It is lovingly scored: only muted strings and pairs of clarinets, bassoons and horns accompany the soloist. The mood is comfortable, intimate, friendly. Beethoven's geniality carries through to the Rondo finale, a foray into near-irresistible foot-tapping that wields its power even on those who have heard the music dozens of times. The double-stopped episodes are the only such occurrence in the concerto. Taking unusual and beguiling advantage of the violin's upper register, the finale provides wonderful opportunities for a soloist to display discerning taste and polished execution.

For these performances, Mr. Hadelich has chosen the cadenza by Fritz Kreisler.

Modest Mussorgsky/Maurice Ravel: *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Modest Mussorgsky (composer)

Born: March 21, 1839, in Karevo, Pskov District, Russia

Died: March 28, 1881, in St. Petersburg, Russia

Maurice Ravel (orchestrator)

Born: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France

Died: December 28, 1937, in Paris, France

Composed: In the 1870s for piano; published posthumously in 1887. Ravel's orchestration is from 1922.

World Premiere: October 19, 1922 in Boston; Serge Koussevitzky conducted the Boston Symphony.

Duration: 35 minutes

Instrumentation: three flutes (second and third doubling piccolo), three oboes (third doubling English horn), two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, chimes, glockenspiel, ratchet, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tamtam, triangle whip, xylophone), two harps, celesta and strings

The trumpet solo that opens *Pictures at an Exhibition* is one of the most recognizable melodies in all classical music. It is also one of the most personal: a self-portrait of the composer who casts himself in the principal role of the visitor wandering through the exhibition of the title. The other principal character, who appears vicariously through his paintings, is Victor Hartmann, a prominent Russian artist and close friend of the composer's. When Hartmann died in 1873 at age 39, Mussorgsky was shattered, for the two young men had shared artistic ideals and ambitions.

The following year, an exhibition of Hartmann's paintings, watercolors and architectural drawings was organized in St. Petersburg by Vladimir Stassov, who was at the time Director of Fine Arts at the Imperial Library. In an attempt to illustrate some of the paintings in music and pay tribute to his friend, Mussorgsky commenced work on a set of piano pieces. The resulting composition, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, remains one of the cornerstones of the virtuoso keyboard repertoire. The cycle was published posthumously in 1887. The celebrated Russian-born conductor Serge Koussevitzky commissioned Maurice Ravel's orchestration of *Pictures* in 1922.

The succeeding generation of Russian composers busied itself not only by composing new works, but also with completing those left behind by composers who had died young, including Borodin and Mussorgsky. Mikhail Tushmalov and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov were among the first of many composers to arrange *Pictures* for large ensemble; however, not until Maurice Ravel put his magical hand to the score of *Pictures* in 1922 did it find a permanent place in concert programs.

Pictures is ingenious in both its piano and orchestral incarnations. Structurally it is a suite of ten miniatures connected by a recurring interlude that is slightly varied each time it returns. Mussorgsky's musical precedent for such an idea is the large programmatic solo piano works of Robert Schumann, particularly *Papillons*, *Carnaval*, and *Kreisleriana*. Other striking parallels between Mussorgsky and Schumann come to mind in a consideration of *Pictures*. Like his German predecessor, Mussorgsky composed best in the first flush of inspiration; the refinement of ideas often presented problems. Writing to Vladimir Stassov (the eventual dedicatee of the piano pieces) in June 1874, Mussorgsky exclaimed:

Hartmann is bubbling over, just as *Boris* did. Ideas, melodies come to me of their own accord, like the roast pigeons in the story — I gorge and gorge and overeat myself. I can hardly manage to put it all down on paper fast enough.

The immediacy of Mussorgsky's impressions keeps them as fresh and vivid as the colors of Hartmann's paintings. His incisive portraits of human nature are some of the finest in all music: women haggling over market prices at Limoges in search of a daily bargain; and children squabbling at play in the gardens of the Tuileries; Mussorgsky himself was especially fond of the several Promenades, and they remain the closest we have to a musical self-portrait of this elusive Russian composer.

Ravel orchestrated Mussorgsky's *Pictures* in 1922. He was commissioned to do so by the celebrated Russian-born conductor Serge Koussevitzky, who was based in Paris from 1920 to 1924. Koussevitzky owned the exclusive rights to the orchestral version for many years.

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