

Overture to *L'Italiana in Algeri* (“The Italian Girl in Algiers”)

Work composed: 1813

World premiere: May 22, 1813 in Venice, Rossini conducting

GIOACCHINO ROSSINI

(1792-1868)

In the years following the French Revolution, many composers (most famously Beethoven in his *Fidelio*) drew inspiration from widespread clarion calls for political freedom. The result was a number of so-called “rescue operas,” of which Rossini’s *L’Italiana in Algeri*—his first comic opera—is a zany version of the genre. (He composed his serious opera, *Tancredi*, at the same time.)

The storyline of *L’Italiana* centers on a noble Italian woman, Isabella, who sails to Algeria to liberate her captive lover. The opera’s brief and vivacious overture begins with a slow introduction where softly plucked strings provide a delicate backdrop for a regal melody intoned by a solo oboe. The ensuing main theme is given to the high woodwinds and is closely echoed by the strings. A short stormy episode leads to yet another songlike oboe-featured episode that is answered by a fluttery flute, which in turn sets up one of the composer’s signature crescendos. A short return to the opening themes leads to an even more strenuous crescendo.

Composed for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Duration: 9 minutes

Piano Concerto No. 11 in F major, K.413

Work composed: 1782-83

World premiere: March 1783 in Vienna, Mozart as soloist

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756-1791)

Mozart wrote more than two-dozen piano concertos spanning the breadth of his all-too-brief life. The earliest ones, dating from his precocious pre-adolescent years, derived both inspiration and material from the pen of J.C. Bach, the so-called “London Bach,” and practical assistance from Leopold Mozart—father, mentor and exploiter of his prodigiously gifted son. Several trips to Italy honed the young Mozart’s skills early on. The lessons learned stayed with him throughout his life, imparting to his musical thinking an essentially vocal—and specifically Italian—orientation. The vocal quality of his melodies and his sense of human drama informs his compositional style. Haydn, by way of contrast, was a composer who thought instrumentally; his themes, like those of his erstwhile student Beethoven, are thusly conceived.

This gives a clue as to the “singability” of Mozart’s themes, no more so than in his F-major concerto, K.413, dating from his first years in Vienna. Success came quickly when the composer first

arrived in the Austrian capital, and the set of three concertos, K.413-415, are all bright, festive and optimistic. The least known of this set is K.413, since it is the most unassuming of the lot, and makes no attempt to plummet emotional depths. It is music of grace and natural simplicity, unforced and engagingly lyrical.

The opening movement is one of only three of his 27 piano concertos set in 3/4time. Two themes balance the movement, a primary motif consisting of a repeated note figure followed by a rapidly descending scale, and a dance-like secondary rising tune with a trill.

The songlike two-part *Larghetto*, with its delightful bassoons, oboes and horns “subplot,” calms the soul with its beguiling serenity. The effervescent finale epitomizes Mozart’s ability to satisfy the general public’s need for immediacy and the sophisticate’s appreciation of the contrary-motion polyphony of its main theme.

Composed for two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, strings and solo piano.

Duration: 23 minutes

Symphony No. 4 in B-flat major, Op. 60

Work composed: 1806

World premiere: March 1807 in Vienna

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

The year 1806 was an eventful one in Beethoven’s tumultuous life, filled with intense love affairs (which, as virtually always, came to naught), frustrating rehearsals of his opera *Fidelio*, emotionally wrenching misunderstandings with one of his major patrons, Count Lichnowsky, and the on-again, off-again occupation of Vienna by Napoleonic armies of liberation. Despite, or perhaps because, of these upheavals, the composer seems to have been catapulted to heights of creative outpouring. As if to parallel the multiple issues confronting him, he worked on many masterpieces simultaneously: the *Appassionata* piano sonata, the three Op. 59 *Razumovsky* string quartets, Fourth Piano Concerto, Violin Concerto and Fourth and Fifth symphonies.

Robert Schumann, an astute commentator on the state of music in the generation after Beethoven’s death, described his predecessor’s Fourth Symphony “as a slender Greek maiden between two Norse giants,” aptly characterizing the lighter mood and comparative restraint of the B-flat symphony when compared to the revolutionary and epic Third (“Eroica”) and fiercely dramatic Fifth. The Fourth Symphony breathes a gentler, more bucolic air than its weightier brethren, and looks forward to both the “Pastoral” and Eighth symphonies.

Yet in the far more recent past, composer Robert Simpson has astutely noted that “its grace is neither maidenly nor Greek; it is that of a giant who performs relaxed athletic movements with gigantic ease and fluency. There are muscles of steel beneath the skin of Beethoven’s creature; some-

times they are tense and flex with sudden force, though there is rarely more than a hint of sudden irascibility.”

One might not divine as much from the expectant *Adagio* that serves to introduce the buoyant *Allegro vivace* that completes the first movement. This is music of mystery and inwardness, and serves to heighten the outburst of good spirits that infuses the remainder of the symphony. Throughout the engaging first movement, Beethoven weaves delightful conversations among the winds, the evolution of part-writing learned from the scores of his one-time teacher, Haydn. The lovely second movement recalls the nocturne-like sensibilities of the *Larghetto* of the Second Symphony, with a stress on lyricism rather than dark passion, though a series of slowly descending scales adds a sense of portent to the proceedings.

Though labeled *Menuetto*, the third movement is a true *Scherzo* both in the literal meaning of the word—“joke”—and in its boisterous syncopated energy. The Trio brings the winds back to center stage, adding to the music’s rustic feel. Good humor abounds in the whirlwind finale, as bumptious and comic a movement as Beethoven ever penned.

Composed for one flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Duration: 34 minutes

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BEETHOVEN REVEALED

Facts, anecdotes and other enlightening trivia collected by C. Chagnard which will help you understand Beethoven, the man behind the music.

PART I: A rough start

Musical Heritage

Beethoven came from a long lineage of court musicians employed at the electorate court of Cologne, one of the seats of the Holy Roman Empire.

Grand Parents: His Grand father, Kapellmeister Ludwig van Beethoven was a bass singer born in Belgium who moved to Cologne where he held the highest post as a musician and became its most powerful musical force. In 1741 he and his wife Maria Josepha, a chronic alcoholic, settled in Bonn with their children. He had a very strong and willful personality and was clearly the patriarchal head of the Beethoven clan. Young Beethoven worshiped his grand father and saw him as a constant model throughout his life.

Parents: Beethoven’s father Johann was a tenor and music teacher of limited abilities and a disastrous penchant for night caps at the local taverns. (By 1784, Johann’s alcoholism is forcing Beethoven to take on the leadership of his family,) Johann married Maria Magdalena Leym in 1767 (her 2nd marriage. She had been widowed at 19 and lost an infant child.) The marriage is disapproved of by both families.

Siblings: The first child Ludwig Maria was baptized on April 2, 1769 and lived for 6 days. The second son, Ludwig was baptized on December 17, 1770. 5 more children followed of whom 2 survived: Caspar and Nikolaus.

Education: Beethoven learns very little in school. He is a loner who looks neglected and isolates himself in silence and his muse. His father Johann teaches him music in a brutal and willful manner. Beethoven is a great improviser which his father disapproves of, forcing him into a rigid and most often inefficient regiment. Soon, Johann's limitations in inspiring his son's extraordinary gifts are evident. He finds a new teacher in the name of Tobias Pfeiffer who becomes Johann's "beer buddy" and teaches Beethoven little. When Beethoven reaches 10, he at last, is provided with an education worthy of his genius. Christian Gottlieb Neefe not only helps Beethoven become an established composer, he also inspires the highest moral code to his star pupil. Neefe is a strong proponent of the ideals of the "Age of Enlightenment" and the philosophy of Kant which will become the philosophical compass of Beethoven's ideals. Neefe teaches Beethoven until 1792, the year of the composer's departure for Vienna. From his mother whom he always feels close to, Beethoven learns self-reliance and resiliency in the face of great adversity. Her advice to him: "Remain single"!

Denial: Beethoven was convinced that he was born in 1772, making him 2 years younger than his actual age. He also let a rumor that he was the illegitimate son of a King of Prussia circulate to the point of having this myth published as fact in encyclopedias as early as 1810!

Epilogue: What is most remarkable from this very inauspicious start is Beethoven's ability to shape and nurture his distinct musical identity in spite of the initial mediocrity that surrounds him. That extraordinary force of personality is on every page of his music giving it its unprecedented emotional range.