

Notes on the Program

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Romance in G major for Violin and Orchestra, Op.40 Romance in F major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 50

Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven's D-major Violin Concerto (Op. 61, from 1806) is the earliest of the monumental concertos in the repertoire of most virtuoso violinists, much larger in scale than the violin concertos of, say, Haydn and Mozart. The transition from those earlier violin concertos to Beethoven's was less sudden than it seems, but to appreciate that fact requires a working acquaintance with violin concertos by rarely performed composers whose style helped point the way, like Giovanni Battista Viotti, Pierre Rode, Pierre Baillot, and Rodolphe Kreutzer (immortalized by Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata).

Beethoven was aware of what was happening on the violin concerto front, and he knew some of these figures personally. He had studied violin as a youngster in Bonn and did a stint as an orchestral violist there before moving to Vienna in late 1792 to seek his fortune as a pianist and composer. He had already tried writing concerted music for violin. In the early 1790s he had started a Violin Concerto in C major (WoO 5), which he left incomplete. And then, probably around the turn of the century, he penned two charming, single-movement Romances for violin and orchestra.

The **Romance in F major**, which sports the heading "Adagio cantabile," was apparently the earlier of the two. Ignaz Schuppanzigh, who championed Beethoven's violin music more than anyone else did, is known to have given a concert in Vienna in November 1798 in which he played an "Adagio von Beethoven" — very possibly this Romance. That's the best clue to the early

performance history of this work. It is not known why Beethoven wrote this piece, or for whom, or whether it was in response to a commission.

Beethoven's manuscript, which resides in the Library of Congress, offers some clues,

IN SHORT

Born: probably December 16, 1770 (he was baptized on the 17th), in Bonn, then an independent electorate of Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Works composed and premiered: the F-major Romance, probably ca. 1798, the G-major, probably ca. 1800

World premieres: unknown, although the F-major Romance may have been played by Ignaz Schuppanzigh in Vienna in 1798

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances: Romance in G major, premiered November 18, 1903, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony (which merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928), Maurice Kaufman, soloist; most recent performance, May 30, 2002, Kurt Masur, conductor, Anne-Sophie Mutter, soloist. Romance in F major, premiered, March 2, 1901, with Frank Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony, David Mannes, soloist; most recently played June 4, 2011, Alan Gilbert, conductor, Anne-Sophie Mutter, soloist

Estimated durations: Romance in G major, ca. 6 minutes; Romance in F major, ca. 9 minutes

though not many. The physical characteristics of its paper and the details of the handwriting match those of the principal autograph manuscript of Beethoven's B-flat major Piano Concerto (Op. 19), which unquestionably dates from 1798. A screw in the works is that most of the music Beethoven composed at that time got worked out, at least in part, in an important sketchbook known to scholars as "Grasnick 1" — and nothing there has any connection to the F-major Romance.

Beethoven's **Romance in G major**, which lacks a tempo marking, seems not to have been composed until 1800 at the earliest, but even that is open to debate. It has been posited that the Romances may have been

written considerably earlier, and that one or the other may have been intended as the slow movement for the fragmentary C-major Violin Concerto. A slow movement in either key — F major or G major — would work in the context of a concerto in C major, but the theory would be more convincing if there were only one Romance rather than two. If one was to be the slow movement of the Concerto, what was the other one's destiny? Why would Beethoven have written unattached slow movements as concert pieces? Would such compositions be marketable? Could he have expected them to be programmed often? Perhaps not.

It is rarely mentioned that there exists a third single-movement "Romanze cantabile,"

The Road to Publication

The first firm date attached to Beethoven's Romances for Violin and Orchestra is October 1802; that's when the composer's brother Carl, who served as his business manager, wrote to the publishing firm of Breitkopf & Härtel to offer them "2 Adagios for Violin with a Full Instrumental Accompaniment." Apparently, Breitkopf & Härtel took a pass, and the two Romances ended up going to separate firms. The G-major made it to market first, appearing as Beethoven's Op. 40, on the imprint of the Hoffmeister firm in Leipzig in December 1803. The F-major wasn't available until May 1805, published by the Viennese company Bureau d'Arts et d'Industrie as Beethoven's Op. 50.

This provides a good example of how opus numbers in Beethoven's catalogue can be deceptive. It would be a mistake to try to make the F-major Romance jibe with such groundbreaking works in the "Op. 50s" as the *Waldstein* Piano Sonata [Op. 53] or the *Eroica* Symphony [Op. 55]. If one is to accept the composition dates of circa 1798 to 1800, the two Romances fall closer chronologically to Beethoven's three String Trios [Op. 9], three Piano Sonatas [Op. 10] and *Pathétique* Sonata [Op. 13], Clarinet Trio [Op. 11], three Violin Sonatas [Op. 12], and six String Quartets [Op. 18]. Even in this company, the Romances seem contentedly conservative.

Beethoven, ca. 1801



a fragmentary work in E minor for the unusual combination of piano, flute, bassoon, and orchestra (catalogued as Hess 13), which Beethoven composed around 1786 while still living in Bonn. This may have been intended as the middle movement of a concerto or sinfonia concertante that he never completed. An observation by the Beethoven scholar Lewis Lockwood may help sort things out:

What the Germans called “Romanze” was a type of slow movement in alla breve (the

second movement of Mozart’s *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* is the most notable), while its counterpart, the “Romance” for violin and orchestra, was a French subgenre used for slow movements by Viotti and his followers. Beethoven’s two Romances have all the smoothness and polish of the French models.

Instrumentation: both Romances call for flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

At the Time

In the years 1798 to 1800, when Beethoven is believed to have composed the Romances performed here, the following were taking place:



In Europe, Napoleon conquers Italy, declaring it the Roman Republic, and moves into an Egyptian campaign, winning the Battle of the Pyramids.

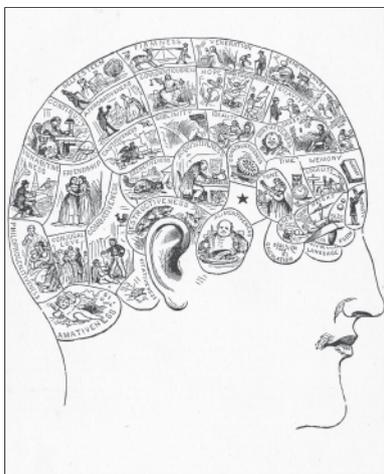
In Italy, adventurer, author, and seducer of multitudes Giovanni Casanova dies in 1798.

In Egypt, French Lieutenant Pierre-Francois Bouchard discovers a stone in the port city of Rosetta in

1799 that is inscribed with the same decree in three languages, helping to unlock the mystery of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

In Germany, physician Franz Joseph Gall promotes the practice of phrenology, in which an examination of the size and shape of the skull is used to determine character, thoughts, and disorders.

In the United States, Washington, D.C., becomes the nation’s capital in 1800 and John Adams becomes the first President to occupy the White House.



— The Editors

From top: Battle of the Pyramids, by Anton-Jean Gros; a 19th-century phrenology chart