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**BEETHOVEN**

Violin Concerto

**VIOTTI**

Violin Concerto No. 22

Arthur Grumiaux

Alceo Galliera · Edo de Waart

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

**Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61**

<b>1</b>	I	Allegro ma non troppo (cadenza: Fritz Kreisler)	24'07
<b>2</b>	II	Larghetto –	9'00
<b>3</b>	III	Rondo (Allegro)	8'59

**Arthur Grumiaux**, violin  
**New Philharmonia Orchestra**  
**Alceo Galliera**

GIOVANNI BATTISTA VIOTTI (1755-1824)

**Violin Concerto No. 22 in A minor**

<b>4</b>	I	Moderato	13'07
<b>5</b>	II	Adagio	6'30
<b>6</b>	III	Agitato assai	8'03

**Arthur Grumiaux**, violin  
**Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra**  
**Edo de Waart**

Total timing: 70'04

It is customary – although also somewhat arbitrary – to divide Beethoven's career into early, middle and late periods. Be that as it may, his only completed violin concerto comes from the middle period. (Beethoven had attempted a violin concerto in 1790, but only 259 bars of it survive.) He began writing it in late 1806, and it was premiered approximately one month later on December 23 of that year.

Beethoven's middle period is associated with heaven-storming, grabbing-Fate-by-the-throat masterpieces such as the Fifth Symphony and the 'Emperor' Piano Concerto. The Violin Concerto, however, is a far more relaxed work – more Elysian Fields than Battle of Waterloo. (Donald Francis Tovey called it 'one of the most spacious concertos ever written'.) The similarly serene and radiant Fourth Symphony and Fourth Piano Concerto were composed just a few months earlier. What was the source of all this serenity? Earlier in the decade, as his encroaching deafness became impossible to deny, Beethoven despaired and he gave voice to that despair in the so-called Heiligenstadt Testament of 1802. In the intervening years, however, Beethoven's music had been acclaimed both at home and abroad, he was writing great music in several different genres,

and he had come to realise that deafness would not stand in the way of accomplishing his goals as a composer.

Beethoven's skill as a pianist had allowed him to premiere all of his piano concertos except for the 'Emperor' – by that time, he was too deaf to be an effective soloist. The Violin Concerto was composed with another performer in mind. This was Franz Clement, who was Beethoven's friend, and also director and concertmaster of the Theater an der Wien, where Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* had been unsuccessfully premiered the year before, and repeated (with revisions, but still unsuccessfully) early in 1806. (Also, Clement had been the conductor at the 1805 premiere of the 'Eroica' Symphony.)

Clement's violin-playing was renowned for its expressiveness and for its beauty of tone, and not so much for its overt virtuosity, and so the match of repertoire with performer seems to have been an excellent one. Musicologist Barry Cooper surmises that the Violin Concerto was perhaps Beethoven's way of thanking Clement for his assistance during the opera's difficult birth. The violinist was 26

years old at the time of the concerto's premiere – ten years Beethoven's junior.

According to his erstwhile pupil and fellow composer Carl Czerny, Beethoven did not complete the concerto until two days before the premiere. It is said that Clement did not have the opportunity to rehearse the new work with the orchestra. It also is said the Clement practically sight-read his part at the premiere. This seems less likely, however, as there is no reason why he and the composer could not have conferred during the work's composition. Even so, if Clement had been obliged to play his solo part directly from Beethoven's notoriously messy manuscript, it must have presented the violinist with a formidable challenge!

An additional anecdote concerns performance customs of the time. Apparently Clement performed a work of his own – a Fantasy and Sonata – in between the first and second movements of Beethoven's concerto, which were, in any case, separated by an intermission. Furthermore, Clement is said to have played this work of his on one string, and with the violin held upside down. Such antics seem unbelievable today, at least in a concert

hall, but they were not unusual during Beethoven's time, when going to public concerts was a more casual experience, in many ways. Other works on the program that evening were overtures by Méhul and Cherubini, and an aria by Mozart.

For whatever reason, the concerto's premiere was not a critical success. One factor might have been the concerto's length. Mozart's violin concertos, for example, generally require no more than 20 or 25 minutes to play; Beethoven's concerto is some 20 minutes longer. The Viennese *Zeitung für Theater, Musik, und Poesie* complained that the concerto, although beautiful, lacked continuity and was repetitious. Beethoven must have taken at least some of these criticisms to heart, because the work was revised in 1807. (It would be interesting to hear and judge the original version by today's standards.) It wasn't until after Beethoven's death, however, that most listeners began to accept his Violin Concerto as a work of almost seraphic perfection. Violinist Joseph Joachim saw the concerto for what it was, and it is in no small part thanks to his efforts that the work is so familiar today.

Beethoven dedicated the concerto not to Clement, as one might have expected, but to his boyhood friend Stephan von Breuning – and then, not until 1808. It was in that year that Breuning married Julie Vering, and when Beethoven transcribed the concerto into a version for piano and orchestra – a task probably motivated more by financial considerations than by artistic ones – Vering was the dedicatee of the transcription.

Compared to Beethoven, Giovanni Battista Viotti (fifteen years Beethoven's senior) was a marginal figure in music history, and yet he was an important bridge between Tartini, the last of the great Baroque violinists, and Paganini, who revolutionised violin-playing at the dawn of the Romantic era. His appearance at the Parisian *Concert Spirituel* in 1782 was a sensation, and two years later he was employed by none other than Marie Antoinette.

During the French Revolution, Viotti fled to London where he quickly found success and new patronage. However, he was accused of Jacobin sympathies, and he fled back to the European mainland. For much of the remainder of his life, he lived in either Paris or London, slowly slinking into financial distress

and disgrace as he devoted himself to activities other than those to which he was best suited. (There was, for example, a stint as a wine merchant, and later as director of the Paris Opera.)

Viotti wrote 29 violin concertos – an unusual number in the late Classical/early Romantic era. The first 19 were written in Paris, and the last ten in London. His Concerto No. 22, composed sometime during the 1790s, is the one which has proven to be the most durable. Joseph Joachim had a hand in this as well: he revived it in the 1870s. Since then, it has been an occasional (but welcome) visitor on concert programs. Although it often is performed by conservatory students, its galant charm attracts mature violinists and their audiences as well.

**Raymond Tuttle**

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