

Overture to "Don Giovanni," K. 527
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Written: 1786

Movements: One

Style: Classical

Duration: Seven minutes

For opera composers, oftentimes the last thing they write is the overture. What could be easier than dashing off a short little piece based upon the catchier tunes you've just written? George Nissen, the man who married Mozart's widow, recounted how Mozart went about writing the overture to his newest opera: The evening before the production of *Don Giovanni* at Prague, the dress rehearsal having already taken place, he said to his wife that he would write the overture during the night if she would sit with him and make him some punch to keep his spirits up. This she did, and told him tales about Aladdin's lamp, Cinderella, etc., which made him laugh until the tears came. But the punch made him sleepy, so that he dozed when she left off, and only worked as long as she told tales. At last the excitement, the sleepiness, and his frequent efforts not to doze off were too much for him, and his wife persuaded him to go to sleep on the sofa promising to wake him in an hour. But he slept so soundly that she could not find it in her heart to wake him until two hours had passed. It was then five o'clock. At seven o'clock the overture was finished and in the hands of the copyist."

Mozart's biographer Ernest Newman insists that the story is true. Composition for Mozart "meant developing the work in his head; he found the business of writing it out rather tiresome, and he would often postpone it as long as he could. . . . the *Overture to Don Giovanni* had been worked out in his head long before . . . all he had to do on that historic night was to put the notes on paper."

The opera tells the tale of the famous seducer Don Juan who, in the first act, kills the Commendatore, the father of Donna Anna. The Commendatore returns in the final act of the opera in the form of a statue to drag an unrepentant Don Juan to his awful fate. The overture begins with the same imposing music that Mozart used to introduce the statue in the last act. It then proceeds to a faster section that may describe the Don himself or perhaps as "justice pursuing the mercurial seducer."

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Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68, "Pastoral"
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Written: 1803-08

Movements: Five

Style: Romantic

Duration: 40 minutes

"When you wander through the silent pine woods, remember that I have often made poetry, or, as they say, composed there," Ludwig van Beethoven wrote to a friend. Anticipating arriving in the country, he wrote to another, "How delighted I shall be to ramble for a while through bushes, woods, under trees, through grass and

around rocks. No one can love the country as much as I do. For surely woods, trees, and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear." Beethoven spent his summers in the country and it was there he did his most productive work. Beethoven composed most of his *Symphony No. 6*, what he himself called his *Pastoral* symphony, in the "delicious wooded environs of Heiligenstadt."

Beethoven avoided giving a blow-by-blow description of his *Pastoral Symphony*. Early on he wrote, "The hearer should be permitted to discover the situations for himself. He who has ever conceived an idea of country life ought to be able, without many indications, to think of the author's meaning." At the first performance, he wrote "More an expression of feeling than of painting," on the printed program.

Beethoven's *Sixth Symphony* is just *happy* music. The first movement ("Cheerful impressions awakened by arrival in the country") is void of the drama and tension that we so often hear in Beethoven. The second ("Scene by the brook") – complete with orchestral birdcalls – is about as lazy and serene as orchestral music gets. The third movement ("Merry gathering of country folk") is a joyous folk dance that is suddenly interrupted by a fierce thunderstorm – the fourth movement. This is the only place in the entire symphony that reflects Beethoven's tempestuous personality. What a storm it is! Like all thunderstorms, it dies away. The country folk of the third movement rejoice with a return to happy music in the last movement ("Shepherd's Song; glad and grateful feelings after the storm). After an entire symphony of such unmitigated joy, we have to agree with a friend of Beethoven who said that he had "never met anyone who so delighted in Nature, or so thoroughly enjoyed flowers or clouds or other natural objects. Nature was almost meat and drink to him; he seemed positively to exist upon it."

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