

Ludwig van Beethoven composed his Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 61, in 1806. Its first performance by Franz Clement was unsuccessful and for some decades the work languished in obscurity, until revived in 1844 by Joseph Joachim. Since then it has become one of the best-known violin concertos.

Beethoven had previously written a number of pieces for violin and orchestra. At some point in 1790–2, before his musical maturity, he began a Violin Concerto in C, of which only a fragment of the first movement survives. Whether the work, or even the first movement, had ever been completed is not known. In any event, it was neither performed nor published. Later in the 1790s, Beethoven had completed two Romances for violin – first the Romance in F and later the Romance in G.

These works show a strong influence from the French school of violin playing, exemplified by violinists such as Giovanni Battista Viotti, Pierre Rode and Rodolphe Kreutzer. The two Romances, for instance, are in a similar style to slow movements of concerti by Viotti. This influence can also be seen in the D major Concerto; the 'martial' opening with the beat of the timpani follows the style of French music at the time, while the prevalence of figures in broken sixths and broken octaves closely resembles elements of compositions by Kreutzer and Viotti.

The premiere was not a success, and the concerto was little performed in the following decades.

The work was revived in 1844, well after Beethoven's death, with a performance by the then 12-year-old violinist Joseph Joachim with the orchestra of the London Philharmonic Society conducted by Felix Mendelssohn. Ever since, it has been one of the most important works of the violin concerto repertoire, and is frequently performed and recorded today.



Beethoven

Violin Concerto In D Major, Op. 61

Menuhin

Vienna
Philharmonic
Orchestra

Conductor
Constantin Silvestri



The legendary violinist Yehudi Menuhin was the eldest child of Russian-born Hebrew scholars who met in Palestine, emigrated to New York City, and moved to San Francisco soon after their son's birth. After just three years of violin study, Yehudi made a legendary debut at age seven with the local symphony. His Carnegie Hall debut three years later, in the Beethoven Violin Concerto, garnered praise that likened him to Mozart as a prodigy, whereupon the family (which now included sisters Hephzibah and Yaltah) lived gypsy-like in hotels wherever Yehudi was engaged at enormous fees. But the child's talent was instinctive. As Fritz Kreisler was to remark later on, "Because the young Menuhin had anticipated so early and so much of what nature had given him, I foresaw that he would have great difficulties." And he did.

When an eminent elder colleague requested a scale after the boy had played Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* flawlessly, Menuhin wrote in his autobiography, *Unfinished Journey*, "I groped all over the fingerboard like a blind mouse.... I played the violin without being prepared for violin playing." He began recording early on (playing among other works Elgar's *Violin Concerto* at 16, with the composer conducting) and continued to concertize, making a world tour of 73 cities during his 19th year. At the end, however, he felt "tired, indifferent, and sad," and in 1936 began an 18-month sabbatical. Menuhin resumed playing in 1938, but never after with the sublime confidence of his preadolescent years.

During World War II he gave more than 500 concerts for Allied and American troops, but stirred a hornet's nest of controversy as the first major Jewish artist to perform in postwar Germany. Likewise, after the Six Day War in the Middle East, he was vilified for performing charity concerts in Arab countries. Increasingly he devoted himself to the training of young artists, both near London (which became his home in 1952) and at Gstaad, Switzerland. Also in 1952 he went to India, became a disciple of yoga, and a colleague of sitarist Ravi Shankar. He recorded with Shankar, as he did subsequently with jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli. In the middle 1950s Menuhin took up conducting, but was no better schooled than he had been as a child violinist -- and he was conspicuously less successful despite having made a steady stream of recordings beginning in 1958. At age 82 he was guest conducting the Warsaw Symphony on tour when he suffered a fatal heart attack in Berlin.

Menuhin was named Chevalier of the *Légion d'honneur* in 1948, to the British knighthood in 1965, and to a Lordship in 1993. For his work on behalf of peace worldwide, he was named ambassador of goodwill to UNESCO in 1992. His dedication to the "minds and hearts" of young musicians well may be remembered after his pre-adult celebrity has faded to black. Menuhin married twice, fathered four children, and played frequent recitals with sisters Hephzibah (1920-1981), starting in 1930, and years later with Yaltah (1922-2001), notably at the Bath Festival he founded and directed in the 1960s.

Beethoven

Violin Concerto In D Major, Op. 61

Yehudi Menuhin, violin

Constantin Silvestri
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

- 1. Allegro ma non troppo 23:28**
 - 2. Larghetto 10:28**
 - 3. Rondo: Allegro 10:49**
- Total Time: 44:49**

Recorded by EMI records 1960



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