



Seeking to enhance its flow and continuity, he directed that the four movements be played as a continuous whole. It opens with a quiet, plaintive, darkly coloured introduction based upon the "Holyrood Castle" theme. This leads to a highly active and dramatic first movement proper.

Mendelssohn offered only token relaxation through a sad, sighing second theme. The second movement is a jaunty, featherweight scherzo in which the influence of Scottish folk music is felt strongly.

The third movement is a slow, almost mournful procession which grows increasingly forceful. The warlike finale is highly rhythmic, with materials passed about rapidly between the sections of the orchestra. As in the first movement, the tumult dies down to a whisper. This time the music rises up in glory through a majestic, hymn-like transformation of the "Holyrood Castle" theme. It spreads rapidly throughout the orchestra, setting upon the symphony an uplifting seal of triumph.

(From Program Notes by Don Anderson for a performance by the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, 2018)

We hear the fourth movement performed by the Gewandhaus Symphony Orchestra of Leipzig conducted by Kurt Masur at a concert given in the Gewandhaus in 2016. (Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory of Music and became its director and the chief conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835. In so doing, he put Leipzig on the map as the musical centre of Germany).



The YouTube link (for the whole symphony) is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-zoNEO55yU&t=1956s>

The fourth (final) movement begins 29 minutes and 38 seconds into the recording,

Celebrating the 250th in Germany

Around 1,000 concerts, opera performances, festivals and exhibitions are expected throughout Germany to underline the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven

The city of Bonn, where the composer was born and lived until he moved to Vienna at the age of 22, will play a central role in the anniversary year's programme.

The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra is planning a 24-hour Beethoven marathon on April 25.

The German-French cultural channel Arte will be broadcasting live the performance of all nine Beethoven symphonies from different cities.

Daniel Barenboim will be closing the event on December 17, 2020 with a performance of the Ninth Symphony with his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in Bonn.

The German federal government is funding the anniversary to the tune of €27 million (\$33 million), the City of Bonn is contributing €5 million and the Rhein-Sieg-Kreis rural district is adding another €1.5 million.

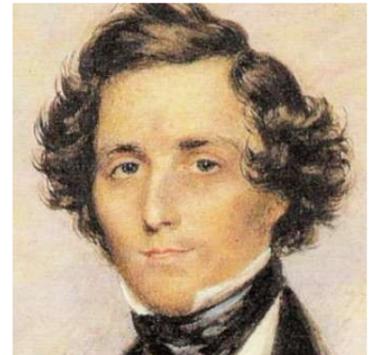


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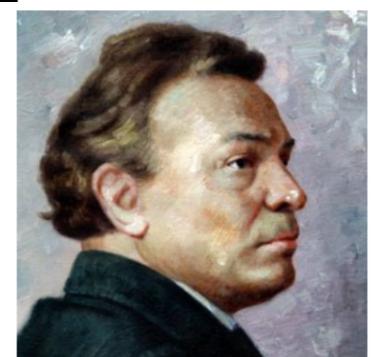
Dvořák



Mendelssohn



Respighi



Khachaturian

Programme Notes

28th February, 2020

Antonin Dvořák – Carnival Overture Ous 92



A couple of years ago a presenter on New York's classical music radio station WXQR introduced Dvořák's *Carnival Overture* in these words:

"To me, there's something reliable about Antonín Dvořák's music. It's like a good spaghetti, a new candle, a long night's sleep. Even an old book! In fact, I often have to stop myself from writing about Dvořák again and again. But while I've waxed lyrical on his *Symphony No. 9, From The New World*, his *Slavonic Dances*, his *Cello Concerto in B Minor*, there's another piece I've never given its due credit: *Carnival Overture*. On its

own, *Carnival Overture* is a gulp of fresh air, a ray of sunshine on a winter day

Composed in 1891, more or less on the eve of Dvořák's move to New York City, the *Carnival Overture* is the second entry in his "Nature, Life and Love" overture trilogy (the first being "*In Nature's Realm*", the last, "*Othello*"). Is "Nature, Life and Love" the original "Live, Laugh, Love"? Should I have it etched onto a wooden rectangle and display it proudly on my mantle? You tell me.

Regardless, *Carnival Overture* was composed in an attempt to capture the broad spectrum of experiences the human soul goes through. It sounds vague, perhaps, but isn't that life? (No, it's just vague.)

Of the piece, Dvořák wrote:

"A wanderer reaches the city at nightfall, where a carnival of pleasure reigns supreme. On every side is heard the clangour of instruments, mingled with shouts of joy and the unrestrained hilarity of people giving vent to their feelings in the songs and dance tunes."



The piece bursts into existence with all of your favourite percussion: timpani, triangle, cymbals, tambourine ... and more tambourine! It feels overwhelming, and it should. Have you ever been to a carnival? There are people moving around you in every single direction: pushing, yelling, screaming, hollering. It's rousing as all heck.

Melodies that begin in the strings get picked up by the oboe. There's a repetition, an overlapping chaos that continues throughout. There are no true silences or pauses for breath — but that wouldn't happen at a real carnival, either, the cloying songs playing from the rides intermingle with one another as you walk around the grounds. Every now and then it's possible to be seduced by something, say the harp at the 3:24 mark or the strings and woodwinds (and yes, the tambourine) at 4:52.

Felix Mendelssohn – Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 56 "Scottish"

A young, early nineteenth-century man of means could expect a "grand tour" of Europe as part of his education. Mendelssohn had already visited several countries when his father, a wealthy banker, sent him off on a further three-year expedition in April 1829. The composer had earlier begun the practice, common to many artists of the day, of creating impressions of his travels. He used Swiss melodies, for example in one of his early, unnumbered symphonies after a trip there in 1822. All he needed to inspire further travel-related music was the right stimulus.



He stopped first in England before he and his traveling companion Karl Klingemann headed north to Scotland. A visit to the ruined chapel of Holyrood Castle near Edinburgh sparked Mendelssohn's imagination. "This evening in the deep twilight," he wrote home on July 30, "we went to the palace where Queen Mary lived and loved; there is a small room with a winding staircase leading up to it..."

The adjacent chapel has lost its roof; grass and ivy grow thickly within; and on the broken altar Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything there is in ruins and ramshackle, open to the blue sky. I think I have today found the opening of my *Scottish Symphony*."

The tour continued to Italy in May 1830. Mendelssohn kept working on the new symphony, but gradually the sunny Mediterranean climate dissipated the call of his Celtic muse. "The loveliest time of the year in Italy is the period from April 15 to May 15," he wrote home from Rome in 1831. "Who then can blame me for not being able to return to the mists of Scotland? I have therefore laid aside the symphony for the present."

"The present" turned out to be 10 years, resulting in the *Scottish Symphony* being a more polished and mature work than it would have been had he brought it to term all at once. During that interim he completed the "*Italian*" *Symphony*. He finished the "*Scottish*" in Berlin on January 20, 1842 and conducted the first performance in Leipzig six weeks later.

The success of a performance in London led to his receiving permission to dedicate it to one of his deepest admirers, England's Queen Victoria. During a royal command visit to Buckingham Palace in 1842, Mendelssohn entertained the Queen and her husband, Prince Albert, by performing some of his own piano pieces, improvising simultaneously on *Rule, Britannia* and the Austrian national anthem, and accompanying the monarchs as they sang his songs.

No authentic Scottish folk tunes have been identified in Mendelssohn's *Symphony*. It seems likely that he intended it more as an atmospheric portrait of the country than a direct tribute founded on homegrown culture.

It is believed that Beethoven never bought a piano, although he owned or borrowed over a dozen at various times. Rather, manufacturers offered him gifts or loans of their latest models for the prestige of association with the great pianist-composer.



Beethoven's English Broadwood piano

As recounted by William S. Newman, Beethoven "needed an instrument capable of withstanding his animal energies" and was never satisfied with any piano. He claimed to prefer Viennese models with their relatively light action and clear tones, although he later gravitated toward the English Broadwood with its heavier construction and wider dynamic range, which he was given in 1818 and which he may have had in mind for his final four sonatas.

Shortly before writing the *Appassionata*, he had accepted the gift of an Erard piano from its Parisian manufacturer, but although he kept it until 1825 he wrote in 1810 that it was "quite useless."

Newman asserts that Beethoven was frustrated by the five-octave range of his instruments and had to make some thematic compromises to fit his conceptions within their span. With the *Appassionata*, Beethoven clearly hit the bottom of the keyboard of the time, and his many repeated FF notes suggests that he might have delved even lower had that been feasible. Indeed, it is possible that the key of f minor was chosen in order to exploit the lowest fundamental note possible on Beethoven's piano.



Beethoven's Erard piano

The Work itself

Following 3-movement form - *Allegro Assai*, *Andante con moto*, and *Allegro ma non troppo*, *Appassionata* advances with fast-slow-fast pacing, first emerging with synchronous ominous heaviness and delicacy.

Allegro Assai

Opening with trills and arpeggios in F Minor, sequences of notes then progress with urgent definition, traversing from the keyboard's deep underbelly to the light, flighty upper-register. Accompanying the foreboding, almost harsh first motif, Beethoven built a second, similar lyrical path that soothes built intensity from the prior trajectory with warmth. This warmth conserves sanity, as sudden switches from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* seem unexceptional in *Allegro Assai*'s latter half.

Andante

A calm, easy return to tradition, *Andante* liberates itself from agitation present in the *Allegro*. Although seeming a smidgen underwhelming at times, this movement provides an essential break to absorb a tempestuous third movement: *Allegro ma non troppo* which succeeds in crushing tonality at one moment, calling upon another motif at another, and at last reasserting tonality with powerful certainty.

Allegro ma non troppo's where Beethoven conquered his mounting troubles.

(Music description: <https://www.sputnikmusic.com/review/69365/Ludwig-van-Beethoven-%22Appassionata%22-Piano-Sonata-No.-23-in-F-minor-Op.-57/>)

The pianist we are to hear is Murray Perahia. The YouTube link to his performance is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACB2a7dOHmU>

What's so magical about the *Carnival Overture* is that it relentlessly demands your attention — it commands your ear for a full nine minutes. It can feel dizzying at times, but the joy is contagious. Remember, this is Dvořák's overture celebrating "Life." And the protagonist, the speaker, maybe even Dvořák himself, moves through the carnival, feeling the inevitable pull of life all around them.

(Fran Hoepfner - WQXR, Dec 20, 2018).

Dvořák's popular "*Carnival*" dates from the period when honours began falling on his shoulders, and just as he was weighing up an offer he eventually couldn't refuse to become the very first director of the New York Conservatory of Music.

The piece was the second of a triptych of concert overtures intended to portray impressions of what a human soul might experience, in both positive and negative aspects. *Nature, Life, and Love* was Dvořák's original name for the set, and that's the way the work presented at its premiere.

But Dvořák soon decided to publish them as three separate pieces: *In Nature's Realm* (with the opus number 91, (composed from March 31 to July 8, 1891), *Carnival* as Opus 92, (written from July 28 to September 12), and *Othello* as Opus 93, (begun that November and completed on January 18, 1892).

THE MUSIC



As indicated above, "*Carnival*" depicts a lonely, contemplative wanderer reaching a city at twilight where a festival is in full swing. On every side is heard the clangour of instruments, mingled with shouts of joy and the unrestrained hilarity of people giving vent to their feelings in songs and dances. The ebullient opening section with its rapid tempos and 'clangourous' percussion leads to a slower *Andantino* section, featuring a solo *ostinato* by

English horn. The English horn is soon joined by flute to represent, as Dvořák wrote, "a pair of straying lovers." The festive motifs return and the overture ends with a breathless and noisy coda.

Our recording is by the University of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra conducted by Richard Davis.

The YouTube link to it is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4a55F10As>

Ottorino Respighi – Pines of Rome

Self-restraint was evidently not at the top of Respighi's list of priorities when he composed *Pines of Rome* in 1924.

The orchestral forces enlisted for this 20-minute symphonic poem include a large organ — ideally with a 32-foot pedal stop — six bucinas (Roman trumpets), a vast percussion section and even a gramophone player. It isn't just about creating a big noise, however, and over the four movements the composer beguiles us with vivid depictions of various pine tree-adorned scenes in Italy's capital city— The Pine Trees of the Villa Borghese; Pine Trees near a catacomb; The Pine Trees of the Janiculum; The Pine Trees of the Appian Way.

Respighi begins *The Pines of Rome at the Villa Borghese*, a 17th century palace with elegant pleasure gardens. Today the building houses masterpieces of Italian painting and sculpture, and the Villa's expansive grounds are one of Rome's most popular public parks.



Pines inside the Villa Borghese gardens.

The movement opens with children playing in the pine groves of Villa Borghese. They dance round in circles, they play at soldiers, marching and fighting, running this way and that, singing children's ditties. (Respighi asked his wife Elsa, who was fifteen years his junior, to sing him the nursery songs she had grown up with; he incorporated some of these Italian tunes into the movement). Suddenly the scene changes to

Pine Trees near a Catacomb.

We see the shades of the pine trees fringing the entrance to a catacomb. From the depth rises the sound of mournful psalm-singing, floating through the air like a solemn hymn, gradually and mysteriously dispersing. It evokes the sombre atmosphere of underground Christian burial chambers from the 2nd and 3rd-centuries. It is a brilliant dramatic stroke: total contrast after the exuberant young life depicted in the first movement.

Respighi's music proceeds in a long, slow crescendo, sedate, serious, march-like, as if we were auditing the prayers of those early Christians.

From this sober section, Respighi moves to the serenity of the great outdoors.



"Sunset on the Janiculum"
An 1857 painting by David Roberts

The *Janiculum* is one of Rome's seven hills. A quiver runs through the air: the pine trees of the Janiculum stand distinctly outlined in the clear light of a full moon.

A nightingale is singing. A piano introduction and a clarinet theme establish the scene, far from the hubbub of the central city on a moonlit night.

At the end of the movement, we hear the song of a nightingale. In Respighi's day, this interpolation of birdsong was wildly controversial. (Respighi specified a gramophone recording of a nightingale).



An alley in the catacombs of St.. Callisto



Carl Czerny 1791 - 1857

This is the more understandable if you note that it dates from around 1804-1806 - the time when, in his mid-thirties, Beethoven was going deaf and the anger and the consequent despair he felt was reflected in his music.

Who better to give an insight into Beethoven's inner state at the time that his pupil Carl Czerny who is on record writing that "There is no doubt that in many of his most beautiful

works Beethoven was inspired by visions or pictures from his reading or from his own lively imagination. It is equally certain that if it were always possible to know the idea behind the composition, we would have the key to the music and its performance".

Czerny also has a convenient visual for those struggling with the crashing chords, unexpected pauses and shockingly violent outbursts (of this sonata). "If Beethoven, who was so fond of portraying scenes from nature, was perhaps thinking of ocean waves on a stormy night when from the distance a cry for help is heard, then such a picture will give the pianist a guide to the correct playing of this great tonal painting".

(quote published by Jane Jones: classicfm.com).

But perhaps it wasn't all to do with the onset of deafness and the frustration and outbursts of anger he came to be noted for. Beethoven was a passionately romantic man. "Always in love, but never married" is how a biographer recently described him :- "A virtuoso pianist attracting female pupils keen to learn from a genius. He promptly fell in love with them, but they were always aristocratically unattainable and were whisked away from the pockmarked commoner by their rich and titled parents".

("Beethoven Variations: Poems on a Life" - Ruth Padel: published 2020).

So, all in all, like its composer, this sonata is a work of contrasts and contradictions. One music critic has written: "listening to the 'Appassionata', it's possible to reconcile the expressive silences with the furious urgency of the finale, without necessarily knowing which is the 'cry for help' described by Czerny. But Beethoven does reveal himself in the piano pieces he wrote with the sole purpose of performing them himself. It means that centuries later, through these intensely personal works, and the 'Appassionata' in particular, we get a glimpse of that troubled heart.

(ibid Jane Jones).

Performance Issues

Beethoven may have loved the piano as the means to express his most personal musical thoughts, but he had far lesser feelings toward the instruments themselves.

The reason is apparent from the mere appearance of the spindly piano on which he wrote the *Appassionata*, as it could not possibly have produced the impassioned expression that pervades that work. Indeed, as early as 1796, Beethoven disparaged the pianos of his time as so undeveloped that "often one thinks that one is merely listening to a harp."

Khachaturian composed *Spartacus* in 1954, and was awarded a Lenin Prize for the composition that same year. The four-act ballet was produced in Leningrad in 1956 and tells a story of slaves rebelling against oppressive rulers in the third of the three “Servile Wars” during the 1st century BC. (the Servile Wars were a series of revolts by slaves in the latter years of the Roman Republic, i.e just before the advent of the Roman Empire).

In spite of its historical setting, this composition was music to the ears of the Soviet proletariat of the time who were looking to promote in their art an allegory of their struggles against their bourgeois overlords.

The ballet follows the trials and tribulations of the Thracian warrior, Spartacus, who led the slave revolt against Rome, beginning in 73 B.C.

After the seizure of Mount Vesuvius, set up as their fortress, they were defeated in bloody battle by Licinius Crassus and Pompey in 71 B.C. and taken into captivity. Spartacus and his wife Phrygia were among those captured with Phrygia being added to the harem of Crassus.

Another revolt, led by Spartacus saw the captives freed and in the “Adagio” Spartacus and Phrygia celebrate their reunion and freedom. It was to be short lived, as six thousand recaptured slaves were subsequently crucified on the Appian Way, including, finally, Spartacus.



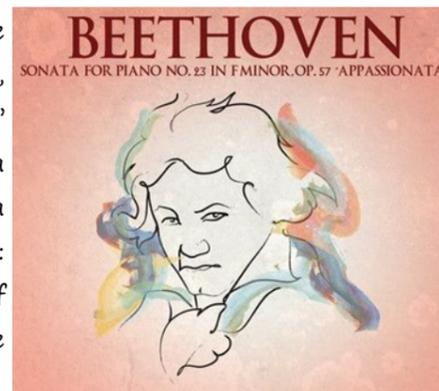
We watch the Adagio as performed by Carlos Acosta & Nina Kaptsova from a production by the Corps de Ballet of The Bolshoi Theatre of Russia. The Orchestre Colonne is conducted by Pavel Klinichev.

The YouTube link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPxVNOVMWqI>

Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, op.57 (Appassionata)

While Beethoven wrote more than 30 sonatas, he considered this the greatest of them. Why the name, though? Well. let's say straight off that ‘Appassionata’ wasn't given to this sonata by Beethoven. It was a marketing tool some 30 years after its composition by a publisher trying to move some excess copies quickly: ‘Appassionata’ possibly encapsulating the spirit of Beethoven – an insight, maybe, into the very heart of the passion of the composer.



Along the Appian Way

The steady build of “Pines of the Appian Way” is one of music’s great crescendos, suggesting the approach of Roman legions that tramped those stones two millennia earlier. Misty dawn on the Appian Way; solitary pine trees guarding the magic landscape; the muffled, ceaseless rhythm of unending footsteps. The poet has a fantastic vision of bygone glories. Trumpets sound and, in the brilliance of the newly risen sun, a consular army bursts forth toward the Sacred Way, mounting in triumph to the Capitol.

Respighi’s triumphant closing chords, dominated by brass, affirm the might of the Roman empire.

A Momentous Premiere

Elsa Respighi, the composer’s widow, attended the premiere on 14 December 1924 at Rome’s Teatro Augusteo, with Bernardo Molinari on the podium. In her biography of her husband, she recalled:

“The hall was packed, the atmosphere electric. At the end of the first part there were protests in the form of booing and hissing which subsided with the sudden pianissimo of the second section. The audience was gripped by the second and third parts, while frantic applause such as had never before been heard in the Augusteo drowned the last bars of the poem.

According to Elsa Respighi, *The Pines of Rome* was one of the compositions in which her husband was most emotionally involved. His success in immersing us in the beauty of his beloved city is compelling testimony to that involvement.”

(from Programme notes –The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra).

The recording we listen to is by the Slovenian Youth Orchestra conducted by Nejc Bečan.

The YouTube link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvgyfzLCOA&t=545s>

Beethoven: Andante con Variazioni in D Major, WoO 44 No. 2

When Beethoven was a young man in Vienna, the mandolin was enjoying a period of popularity among the cultured nobility as a delightful instrument both to play and listen to. Italian mandolin virtuosos had migrated north to Paris, Vienna, and other European capitals, employing themselves with teaching, composing, and presenting salon concerts for the aristocratic public. Beethoven, as many young composers of his day, was looking to make a name for himself in the right circles, to gain patronage and a good reputation.



Beethoven composed at least six works for mandolin, four of which survive - Sonatina in C minor, WoO 43, No. 1; Adagio in E-flat, WoO 43, No. 2; Sonatina in C, WoO 44, No. 1; and Andante and Variations in D, WoO 44, No. 2.

None were published during his lifetime. Though known better as a pianist, Beethoven possessed a Milanese mandolin, which was hung beside his piano. He was friends with two prominent mandolinists - Wenzel Krumpholtz and Countess Josephine of Clary-Aldringen - both of whom were linked to his surviving mandolin music.

An 18th century Milanese mandolin with six pairs of strings.

Beethoven wrote his mandolin works near the beginning of his career. The works are numbered in the WoO system of 'works without opus number', which designates the pre-opus numbered compositions. He was not known for his mandolin works, and ultimately focused elsewhere. However, Joseph Braunstein said of these pieces that, although "not great music ... they are valuable miniatures that fit well, biographically and stylistically, into the period of Beethoven's Opus 1, his first sonatas, the String Trio in E-flat, the song "Adelaide", and the Piano Concerto in B-flat".

ABOUT THIS WORK

An easy-going set of variations on a charming tune in which both instruments participate as equals. There are several changes of mood and tempo along the way to keep things interesting. Both instruments share the spotlight. In the first variation, running triplets belong to the mandolin, in the second, to the piano. The sixteenth-note figuration of the third variation is produced by both instruments. The piano leads in the fourth and the mandolin in the sentimental, even passionate fifth (in the minor). A merry dance in polka rhythm appears in the concluding variation which, however, closes in a serious vein.

(Acknowledgement: archive.org)



The liuqin

The instrument our recording is played on is a liuqin, a four-stringed Chinese mandolin with a pear-shaped body. A high pitch-plucking instrument. The name "Liuqin" comes from the fact that the instrument is made of willow wood and shaped like a willow leaf ("Liu" in Chinese means willow). Small in size, it is almost a miniature copy of another Chinese plucked musical instrument, the pipa.



The pipa

The range of the voice of the liuqin is much higher than the pipa, and it has its own special place in Chinese music, whether in orchestral music or in solo pieces.

This has been the result of a modernization in its usage in recent years, leading to a gradual elevation in status of the liuqin from an accompaniment instrument in folk Chinese opera, to an instrument well-appreciated for its unique tonal and acoustic qualities. The position of the instrument is lower than the pipa, being held diagonally like the Chinese ruan and yueqin. Like the ruan and unlike the pipa its strings are elevated by a bridge and the soundboard has two prominent soundholes. Finally, the instrument is played with a pick, whereas the pipa is played with the fingers.

Pictured are the members of this family of instruments: the ruan (pictured below left) and the yueqin (below right).



The ruan is a traditional Chinese plucked string instrument. It is a lute with a fretted neck, a circular body, and four strings. Its four strings were formerly made of silk but since the 20th century they have been made of steel.

The yueqin. A traditional Chinese string instrument. It is a lute with a round, hollow wooden body which gives it the nickname moon guitar.



The artists in our recording are Zihan Chen, playing the liuqin and Yunchang Dong, Piano performing at a 2006 recital in the National Recital Hall, Taipei.

The link to the YouTube video is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2en5vkHgH0>

Khachaturian (1903-78) - Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia



Born and raised in Tbilisi, the multicultural capital of Georgia, Khachaturian originally intended to become a biologist. He moved to Moscow in 1921 following the Sovietization of the Caucasus.

At the same time as studying biology, he also studied the cello at the Gnesin Musical Institute, even though he had no prior music training. Subsequently studying at the Moscow Conservatory, Khachaturian wrote about 25 film scores, mainly very patriotic. He is known principally for his Piano Concerto and the ballets Gayaneh and Spartacus. His style is "characterized by colourful harmonies, captivating rhythms, virtuosity, improvisations, and sensuous melodies". Virtually all his music celebrates Armenian national culture although it's not to everyone's taste in the Western musical world.