

By Noel Morris ©2020

From the Composer:

assacaglia' (pronounced "pahss-uh-CAH-lyuh") was my first foray into writing for brass instruments, written in 1990 while I was an undergraduate student at the Hartt School of Music. The piece was premiered the following year by the New England Conservatory Honors Brass Quintet, and I dedicated it to my friend Brian Diehl, who played trombone in the premiere. The piece has since been arranged for trombone choir and brass ensemble.

LAUREN BERNOFSKY: Passacaglia for Brass Ensemble

This is an ASO premiere.

Instrumentation: 2 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 1

hen Beethoven was born, the Mozart children were a recent memory. They had traveled to Bonn and astonished onlookers with their freakish abilities. No doubt, when young Beethoven began to show a gift for music, his father smelled opportunity.

There were three generations of musical Beethovens in Bonn. Ludwig the grandfather was Kapellmeister, the highest ranking musician; he was well respected and ran a prosperous wine business on the side. Ludwig's son, Johann, was the opposite—a so-so tenor, and far more accomplished at drinking wine than selling it. And then there was the grandson, little Ludwig.

Johann proved a harsh music teacher to his young son. Family friends reported seeing little Ludwig crying as he reached up to the piano.

Over the years, Johann van Beethoven squandered the elder Ludwig's estate. His wife, Maria Magdalena, was loving but depressive and neglectful of their three boys. At 13, their oldest son—the composer Beethoven—became the family's primary breadwinner.

In those years, he was handy, serving as church organist, a rehearsal pianist, and a string player and harpsichordist in the court orchestra. He grew in stature around town, entertaining and befriending members of the nobility.



In 1787, the Emperor's brother sponsored 16-yearold Beethoven on a trip to Vienna to study with Mozart. And there is a fond tale about the two geniuses coming together for an afternoon of mutual admiration—it might have happened that way, but the account is unverified. Tragically, news from Bonn soon followed: Beethoven's mother was on her deathbed; he hurried home.

In 1792, his friend Count Waldstein petitioned to again send him to Vienna. By that time, Mozart had died. Waldstein wrote to him: "You will receive the spirit of Mozart through the hands of Haydn."

The composer Franz Joseph Haydn was quite the international celebrity. His symphonies were especially popular in London. The 22-year-old Beethoven, the "unlicked bear cub," was less polished and extremely willful. The two didn't have much to say to one another, but Beethoven found his footing among the nobility.

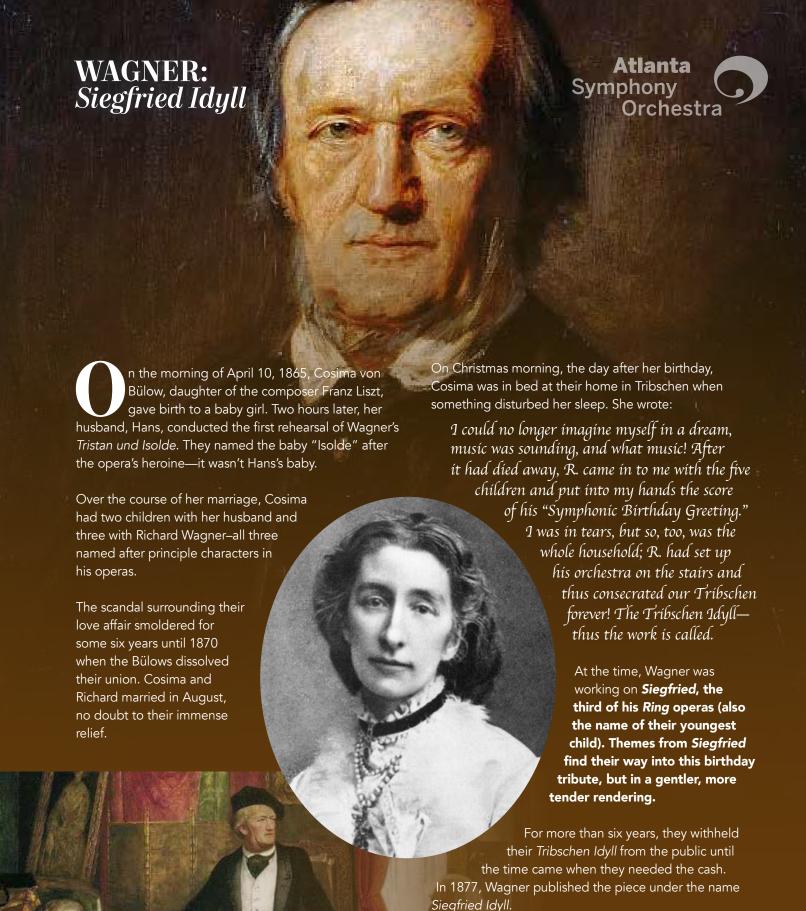
This brings up an important distinction: Haydn, the so-called "father of the symphony," had moved into the public sphere (by definition, symphonies require large performance spaces), whereas Beethoven dazzled people in their homes. Throughout the 1790s, he was enthusiastically welcomed into the palaces of Vienna where he gave lessons and private performances at the piano. Composing lots of music for this intimate arena, he made only one false start at writing a symphony around 1795, but didn't actually produce one until age 29.

In the spring of 1800, Beethoven acquired the use of a theater and presented a "grand concert for his benefit" that included works by Mozart and Haydn, and the premiere of his First Symphony.

A critic noted that the new piece "displayed great artistry, innovation, and a wealth of ideas; except that the winds were overused, so that it was music for band rather than for the whole orchestra."

This would not be Beethoven's last time challenging assumptions about music.

BEETHOVEN: Symphony No. 1



WAGNER: Siegfried Idyll

First ASO Performance: **JAN 13, 1954, Henry Sopkin, conductor**Most Recent ASO Performances: **MAR 5 – 7, 2020, Emmanuel Villaume, conductor**

Instrumentation: 1 flute 1 oboe, 2 clarinets, 1 bassoon, 2 horns, 1 trumpet, strings