

An autograph manuscript of Beethoven's Romance for Violin and Orchestra

Ludwig van Beethoven, Opus 50, Romance for Violin and Orchestra in F Major. 1805. 9 1/2 inches x 13 1/4 inches (241 x 337 mm), 26 pages.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) is perhaps the most compelling figure in all of classical music. He occupies the central position in the transition of Western composition and performance from its liturgical and courtly origins to the complex individuality of the modern period; he was at once the last of the classical composers and the first in the romantic genre. His music is marked by continuous development and maturation. He elevated classical music forms, most especially the sonata, into compositions that displayed daring experimentations with harmony, a contextual use of the form, and as a means of expressing his extraordinary creativity.

The composer's eccentric, irascible temperament — exacerbated by the gradual progression of the incurable deafness that began to afflict him at the age of 26 — is reflected in the crabbed, impetuous hand of his autograph scores. Printed scores, however faithful to the original, are devoid of a composer's personality and the immediacy that especially characterize Beethoven's autographs. Throughout his career Beethoven made a practice of sketching out even the most fragmentary of his ideas and plans for his music, providing an invaluable record of his genius. His autograph scores are enormously important as a record of his creative process and intentions; Beethoven characteristically wrote his first drafts in ink and wrote over or eliminated reconsidered passages in pencil.

Possibly performed as early as 1798, this light, airy piece for violin and orchestra is the second romance composed by Beethoven. Scored for solo violin, flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns and strings, the Romance ranges through several keys, including several variations in minor keys. The solo violin part to this three-movement sonata expresses a wide range of intensity and emotion.

This manuscript belongs to the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Collection in the Music Division, Library of Congress. Gertrude Clarke Whittall (1867–1963) is renowned for her generosity to the Library of Congress, beginning with a gift in 1935 of five Stradivari instruments — three violins, one cello, one viola — known as the Cremonese Collection, which are still played in concerts at the Library. The Whittall Collection also contains a large number of music autographs by major European composers and includes the 4,389-piece Mendelssohn collection composed of music manuscripts and letters, libretti, programs, iconography, and miscellaneous papers. This Beethoven manuscript is part of a remarkable group of autograph music manuscripts that Whittall helped the Library acquire from a Viennese family in 1941.

Octavo code: **btv50f**