

KNECHT
Le Portrait musical de la Nature
PHILIDOR
Overtures

Orchestra Filarmonica di Torino
Prague Sinfonia Orchestra
Christian Benda



Justin Heinrich
KNECHT
(1752-1817)

Le Portrait musical de la Nature – Grande Simphonie (1785) **28:09**

- 1

I. Allegretto – Andante pastorale – Allegretto – Villanella grazioso – Allegretto:
Une belle contrée où le soleil luit, les doux zéphirs voltigent, les ruisseaux traversent le vallon, les oiseaux gazouillent, un torrent tombe du haut en murmurant, le berger siffle, les moutons sautent et la bergère fait entendre sa douce voix –

9:38
- 2

II. Tempo medesimo:
Le ciel commence à devenir soudain sombre, tout le voisinage a de la peine à respirer et s’effraye, les nuages noirs montent, les vents se mettent à faire un bruit, le tonnerre gronde de loin et l’orage approche à pas lents –

2:58
- 3

III. Allegro molto:
L’orage accompagné des vents murmurants et des pluies battantes gronde avec toute sa force, les sommets des arbres font un murmure, et le torrent roule ses eaux avec un bruit épouvantable –

6:03
- 4

IV. Tempo medesimo:
L’orage s’appaise peu à peu, les nuages se dissipent et le ciel devient clair –

2:25
- 5

V. L’Inno con variazioni: Andantino – Coro: Allegro con brio – Andantino – Coro: Allegro con brio:
La Nature transportée de joie élève sa voix vers le ciel et rend au créateur les plus vives grâces par des chants doux et agréables.

7:05

François-André Danican
PHILIDOR
(1726-1795)

Le Jardinier et Son Seigneur – Ouverture (1761) **11:40**

- 6

I. Allegro

4:24
- 7

II. Andante

4:13
- 8

III. Allegro

3:03

Le Sorcier – Ouverture (1764) **8:14**

- 9

Allegro

Tom Jones – Ouverture (1765) **7:19**

- 10

Allegro assai

Le Maréchal-Ferrant – Ouverture (1761) **12:05**

- 11

I. Allegro

5:28
- 12

II. Andante con spirito

3:34
- 13

III. Presto

3:03

Justin Heinrich Knecht (1752-1817): Le Portrait musical de la Nature – Grande Simphonie

Born in Biberach in 1752, the son of a Kantor, Justin Heinrich Knecht was first taught by his father and continued his education in his home town, with lessons in organ, keyboard, violin and singing. He received early encouragement from Christoph Martin Wieland, born near Biberach and intermittently resident there until settling in Weimar, where Goethe was coming to prominence. Like Wieland, Knecht was influenced by the artistic tastes of Graf Stadion zu Warthausen-Biberach, at whose court he broadened his musical knowledge, getting to know the work of leading contemporary composers. At Esslingen, where Knecht continued his studies, he met Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, whose literary and musical tastes had a strong influence on him, introducing him, in part, to the work of Klopstock and the cultural interests of the court in Württemberg, where Schubart was to be imprisoned for ten years. Knecht subsequently returned to Biberach, taking up duties as a teacher at the Lutheran School there and in the church. He was able to organize concerts in Biberach and to write and compose for the theatre, and contribute to educational literature with books on music theory. In 1792 he resigned in order to devote himself to work as an organist and director of music at the shared Church of St Martin. In 1806 he left Biberach, hoping to find a position at the court in Stuttgart as Court Composer or Court Kapellmeister. His efforts, however, eventually brought him the post of director of the orchestra, which he abandoned after eighteen months, returning to his employment as organist at Biberach, and remaining there, active in the musical life of the city, until his death in 1817.

Knecht's activities as teacher, church musician and man of the theatre are reflected in his compositions and writings. For the theatre, principally in Biberach, he wrote operas, Singspiel and incidental music, for the church settings of psalms and canticles, music and pedagogical

works for the organ, chamber music and works for keyboard. His orchestral compositions include *Le Portrait musical de la Nature ou Grande Simphonie*. This last was written in 1784-1785, a pastoral symphony that, in the events it depicts, anticipates Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6*, written 24 years later. Knecht dedicated the work to the Abbé Vogler.

The five movements of the *Grande Simphonie* run without a break, with each movement preceded by a description of the events depicted. The first movement is described as showing a beautiful country, where the sun shines, the gentle Zephyrs swirl, streams cross the valley, birds sing, a waterfall descends from on high, murmuring, the shepherd pipes, sheep leap and the shepherdess sings sweetly. These images are faithfully depicted, with trills for the birds, flowing semiquaver figuration for the murmur of the water and a villanelle for the shepherd. The sky suddenly grows dark, the whole region can hardly breathe for fear, the black clouds mount, the winds begin to make a noise, and there is distant thunder, as the storm gradually draws near. In the third movement the storm breaks in its full force, the wind sounding through the treetops and the torrent making a terrifying noise. The tempest rages, with an occasional lull in the storm, which resumes in full strength as the movement nears its end. In the fourth movement the storm gradually draws to a close, the clouds scatter, the sky grows bright, and the music of the opening of the symphony returns. Finally nature rejoices and offers thanks to the Creator in sweet and pleasing songs. A hymn of thanksgiving is raised, its theme followed by variations from a solo violin. The jubilant final chorus is interrupted by the return of the hymn and the solo violin, after which the chorus comes back in the full vigour of a classical finale, to bring the work to a close.

François-André Danican Philidor (1726-1795): Overtures

Born at Dreux in 1726, into a fourth generation of musicians distinguished at the French court, François-André Danican served, as a boy, as a chorister in the Chapelle Royale at Versailles, where he was taught by Campra, the *maître de chapelle*. After his voice broke he left the choir, earning a living, now his father was dead, by teaching and serving as a copyist. During this period of his life Philidor began to pay more attention to the game of chess, a pastime among older musicians at Versailles. At this he acquired considerable ability, instructed by M. de Kermur, Sire de Légal, a leading player of the time in France, whom he was eventually able to defeat. His chess opponents included Voltaire and Rousseau, and he came to know other leading figures of the French intellectual establishment, with frequent meetings at the Café de la Régence. A concert tour to The Netherlands in 1745 with Geminiani and Lanza was interrupted by the death of the latter's young daughter, a harpsichordist, leaving Philidor stranded there for a time, keeping himself as best he could by playing and teaching chess. This was followed by a visit to England, arranged through English officers of his acquaintance. In 1747 he began to play at Slaughter's coffee-house in London, defeating some of England's principal players. The following year he was back again in The Netherlands, and while staying at Aachen wrote his *L'analyse des échecs*, later revised as *L'analyse du jeu des échecs*. An English version was published in London in 1749, with a distinguished list of subscribers, including the Duke of Cumberland. Philidor was now established as the leading chess-player of his time.

Urged by his friend Diderot, in 1754 Philidor returned to France and to music, although a motet proved unacceptable to the court. This failure induced him, on the advice of Rameau, to turn his attention to the theatre, winning his first significant success with the comic opera *Blaise le savetier* (Blaise the Cobbler) in 1759. This was the start of a career that for many years brought considerable success, while he was, at the same time, able to continue his parallel career as a chess virtuoso, known not least for his skill in simultaneous blindfold

games. It was chess that took him on occasions to London, where he found himself in 1792. Although he had initially been a supporter of the Revolution, his name was included among those proscribed as émigrés, while his wife, the singer Angélique Richer, and his children remained in Paris. He died in London in 1795.

Philidor's *Le Jardinier et Son Seigneur* (The Gardener and His Lord), has a libretto by Michel-Jean Sedaine, based on the fable by La Fontaine, and was first staged at the Foire St Germain in February 1761. The gardener, plagued by the depredation made by a hare, seeks the help of the local lord, who creates far more trouble and expense with his servants and huntsmen than a hundred hares. The *Overture* is in the form of a three-movement Italian *Sinfonia*, its central slow movement in the tonic minor key.

The two-act *Le Sorcier* (The Sorcerer) was first mounted at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in January 1764, its libretto by Antoine Alexandre Henri Poinsinet, Philidor's most frequent associate. The piece won immediate success. Julien, betrothed to Agathe, has left to become a soldier, and in his absence Agathe's mother, Simone, plans to marry her off to the vine-grower Blaise. Julien returns and, disguised as a sorcerer, succeeds in achieving his ends, winning his bride Agathe and securing a match between Justine, Julien's sister, and his friend Bastien, leaving Simone to marry Blaise. The work is introduced by a cheerful sonata-form *Overture*, its exposition and second section both repeated.

Poinsinet and Bertin Davesne derived their libretto for *Tom Jones* from the picaresque novel by Henry Fielding. It was first performed by the Comédie-Italienne at the Hôtel de Bourgogne in February 1765, but failed to please, leading to a revision of the libretto by Sedaine and a new staging in January 1766, when the piece won a success that led to stagings throughout Europe. Tom, a foundling, has been adopted by Squire Allworthy and is in love with Sophia, daughter of Squire Western. Allworthy had intended Sophia as a match for his nephew Blifil, whom she detests. The love between Tom and Sophia is discovered, and Tom dismissed from Allworthy's house, to be joined

later by Sophia. Eventually it is revealed that Tom is also a nephew of Allworthy, evidence of his true identity cunningly concealed by the villainous Blifil. Tom is reconciled with his newly discovered uncle, Allworthy, and Sophia with her father, so that all ends well. The *Overture*, with its repeated sections, provides an apt introduction to the piece.

The comic opera *Le Maréchal-Ferrant* (The Blacksmith) was first staged at the Foire Saint-Laurent in Paris in 1761. Based on an episode in the *Decameron* and with a libretto by Antoine François Quétant, it won considerable success. Marcel is a village blacksmith and surgeon. His daughter Jeannette is secretly engaged to

Colin, the object of Claudine's affections, while the castle coachman, La Bride, is largely indifferent in love. Colin drinks a soporific potion concocted by Marcel, and is apparently dead, his supposed corpse hidden in the cellar. La Bride, excited by his own vivid praise of his trade, embraces Claudine, who transfers her affections to him, while Colin revives, to be united with his Jeannette. The overture is in the form of a three-movement Italian *Sinfonia*, a further reflection of the influence on Philidor of Naples and Pergolesi.

Keith Anderson

Orchestra Filarmonica di Torino



The Turin Philharmonic Orchestra was established in April 1992, after ten years of activity as the Filarmonici di Torino, when important co-productions were undertaken for the RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana) symphonic seasons, with the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Turin, and the San Paolo Company. The Turin Philharmonic holds its regular concert series at the Giuseppe Verdi Hall. The orchestra has collaborated with prestigious conductors including Sergiu Celibidache, Carlo Maria Giulini, James Levine, Giuseppe Patané, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Thomas Sanderling, Marcello Viotti, Aldo Ceccato, Christian Benda, their first guest conductor, and world-famous soloists such as Boris Belkin, Andrea Bocelli, Maurice Bourgue, Bruno Canino, Eugene Istomin, Alexander Lonquich, Shlomo Mintz, Ruggero Raimondi, Jean-Pierre Rampal, Mstislav Rostropovich, and Maxim Vengerov. A key person for the ensemble's team work is the distinguished concertmaster Sergio Lamberto, highly appreciated for his musical and human qualities by both orchestra musicians and conductors. In November 1995, the orchestra received special recognition and financial support from the Piedmont regional government. The orchestra is also supported by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the municipality of Turin, the city of Turin, the San Paolo Company, the CRT Foundation, and sponsors Lavazza, Dayco Europe, Studio Torta, Turin, and Pragmata, Reggio Emilia, among others.

Prague Sinfonia Orchestra of the Velvet Revolution



During the celebrations of the Czech National Day, the former President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel became Honorary President of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra of the Velvet Revolution in a gala concert under Christian Benda at the Czech National House in New York City. After having collaborated with conductors such as Václav Neumann, Gerd Albrecht, Charles Mackerras, Trevor Pinnock and, for over ten years with Christian Benda, its chief conductor and artistic director, the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra of the Velvet Revolution was established for the symphonic repertoire during Prague Chamber Orchestra's

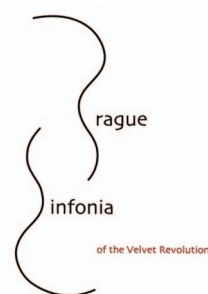
sixteenth tour of North America. The orchestra has toured widely throughout the world, and is a regular participant of Czech musical life, with concert series in Prague and participation in festivals such as Salzburg, Bregenz, Berlin, Dresden, Lucerne, Montreux, Cheltenham, Besançon, and Biarritz. Solo artists performing with the orchestra have included Maxim Vengerov, Arturo Benedetti-Michelangeli, Friedrich Gulda, Emil Gilels, Henryk Szeryng, Mischa Maisky, and Christoph Eschenbach. Recordings for companies including RCA, EMI, Decca, Sony Classics, Naxos, Polydor, Nippon Columbia, Denon, BMG, Telarc, Ariola, Eurodisc, and Supraphon have won a number of prestigious prizes, including the Wiener Flötenuhr, the Grand Prix du Disque Académie Charles Cros twice, and, after having sold one million records, the Golden Disc Award.

Christian Benda



Christian Benda is descended from a long line of musicians. First guest conductor of the Turin Philharmonic, he appears worldwide with orchestras including the Prague Symphony, Shanghai Philharmonic, Orchestra della Toscana, I Pomeriggi Musicali, Polish National Opera, Budapest Concert Orchestra MÁV, Slovenian Philharmonic, Cyprus State, Moscow Virtuosi, Sinfonieorchester Münster, Stuttgarter Kammerorchester, Ulster Orchestra, Teatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, and the Suisse Romande Orchestra, and is invited by festivals such as Schwetzingen, Echternach/Luxembourg, Cité de la musique Paris, Prague Spring, George Enescu Bucharest, Hong Kong Arts, Klangbogen Wien, and the Menuhin Festival in Switzerland. Christian Benda is chief conductor and artistic director of the Prague Sinfonia Orchestra of the Velvet Revolution with which he has recorded numerous standard classical works, as well as the complete overtures of Schubert [Naxos 8.570328-29] and Rossini [8.570933, 8.570934, 8.570935, 8.572735]. Singers such as Renée Fleming,

Barbara Hendricks, Cheryl Studer, and Simon Estes have appeared under his baton. As a composer, his micro-operas have been created at the Vienna Konzerthaus and the Prague Smetana Hall. In collaboration with the Vienna State Opera he has devised a new introduction to opera for the general public and young people, *High-Lights and Micro-Opera*, based on Goethe's colour theory, with the participation of narrator and dancers.



Though he wrote a great deal of church music, and also composed for the theatre, Justin Heinrich Knecht is best remembered for his *Grande Symphonie 'Le Portrait musical de la Nature'*. Elegantly scored and completed in 1785, this eventful five-movement symphonic work of nature-depiction predates Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* by almost a quarter of a century. Knecht's older French contemporary Philidor was the leading chess player of his time in addition to being a popular stage composer, whose overtures reveal the influence of the Italian school in their sparkling drama.



Justin Heinrich
KNECHT
(1752-1817)

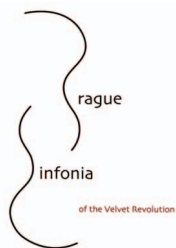


**1-5 Le Portrait musical de la Nature –
Grande Symphonie (1785)**

28:09

François-André Danican
PHILIDOR
(1726-1795)

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Orchestra Filarmonica di Torino 1-5
Sergio Lamberto, Solo Violin 5
Prague Sinfonia Orchestra 6-13
Christian Benda

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded at the Sala Concerti del Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi, Torino, Italy, on 15th January, 2013 (tracks 1-5), and at Studio Domovina, Prague, Czech Republic, on 17th March, 2012 (tracks 6-13)

Producers: Silvio Germano Ricci (tracks 1-5), Kateřina Chobotová (tracks 6-13)

Engineers: Silvio Germano Ricci (tracks 1-5), Michael Rast (tracks 6-13)

Booklet notes: Keith Anderson • Cover: *Biberach* by Wolfgang Fischer (iStockphoto.com)