

Flammenschrift (2012)

Commissioned by Radio France.

*Premiered on November 8, 2012 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris (France),
by the Orchestre National de France, conducted by Daniele Gatti.*

Dedicated to Alice.

Flammenschrift or 'letters of fire' is an expression that Goethe used in his Marienbad Elegy. I wanted to compose an air with a fierceness that would draw a psychological portrait of Beethoven and, more generally, pay homage to the music of Germany. My portrait of Beethoven is that of a man of great anger, seething and impetuous, whose inner violence transpires in numerous works of music. Beethoven continually celebrated fraternity in his works, even though he always behaved brutally with servants and those close to him. From that paradox was born this desire to draw his portrait in music. This Beethoven, the untidy misanthropist in a shapeless hat whom people saw marching down the street, is a solitary figure cursed by fate yet sanctified by genius, a man who has always fascinated me : he constructed a very pregnant image of the artist in our imaginations from the 19th century up until the present.

To pay homage to him I use the same instrumental nomenclature as his Fifth Symphony, but also make use of opposing factions (woodwinds versus strings), and above all rhythmical writing with numerous allusions to his works. But more generally, it is to German music in its entirety that I wanted to pay tribute with the veiled references to the compositions of Brahms and Richard Strauss at the end of the piece. *Flammenschrift* appears as a double sonata form with no restatement. Two themes with a furious character are stated first, while a third, with less tension at the beginning. After a great development the four themes are transmuted, recalling the sudden emergence of the major mode in the Fifth's finale : drama is then followed by a dance of joy.

Guillaume Connesson