

BERNHARD ROMBERG

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Bernhard Romberg was a German composer who lived from 1767 to 1841. He was born on 13 November 1767 at Dinlage and came from a family of musicians. His grandfather Balthasar Joachim was a military musician and his uncle Gerhard Heinrich and his own father Bernhard Anton (1742-1814) were in the service of the prince-bishop Maximilian Friedrich von Munster who also had a residence in Bonn. The father, Romberg senior, was a bassoonist and cellist.

With his cousin Andreas Romberg (1767-1821), young Bernhard who played the violin and cello respectively were very talented and caught the public eye. They made their debut in Munster in 1774 and undertook lengthy tours in Amsterdam, Leipzig, Frankfurt am Main and the Concerts Spirituel in Paris.

In Bonn they met the great Beethoven who was an organist there and a viola player until he left for Vienna at the end of 1792. Romberg turned down Beethoven's offer of his writing a cello concerto for him. The Rombergs knew Ferdinand Ries who gave Bernhard extra cello lessons and Anton Reicha who became the professor of music at the Paris Conservatory and the teacher of Berlioz.

Both Andreas and Bernhard became composers and during 1790 and 1791, Bernhard wrote three light operas which were performed in Bonn.

The French Revolutionary Army invaded and the Hofkapelle of the prince-bishop was dissolved. The Rombergs escaped to Hamburg finding work without difficulty but their stay there was short-lived. In the summer of 1795 they toured Austria and Italy and met up again with Beethoven. Bernhard played Beethoven's two cello sonatas, Op 5.

The Rombergs returned to Hamburg early in 1797 and went their separate ways. Bernhard became a travelling virtuoso and professor of cello at the Paris Conservatoire in 1801 but he could not stay in one place for long. In 1804, he was back in Berlin and for two years was in the Prussian Court Orchestra. In 1808, he joined the orchestra of Prince Kinsky in Vienna but soon afterwards set off for Russia, He seemed to be happy in Moscow and visited Sweden and the Baltic states.

By 1814 he was back in Berlin where he met Weber and both of them competed for the post of kappellmeister which Romberg won and Weber went to Dresden.

Romberg lengthened the fingerboard of the cello and wrote ten cello concertos, eleven string quartets, three symphonies and a toy symphony, among other works. The Symphony no 1 in C minor Op 23 was the Trauer symphony in memory of Queen Louise von Preussen premiered in Leipzig on 22 December, 1811, a fine work of high drama and poignancy. His symphonies deserve to be both played and heard. If you enjoy the symphonies of Haydn and Beethoven you will also enjoy these immensely.

The Symphony no 2 in E flat was a revelation to me. The first movement in particular is nothing short of magnificent, coherent in sonata form with some stunning orchestration and a vitality that is both uplifting and inspiring. The lyricism of the slow movement is quite wonderful.



Romberg went on several tours of Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands. In 1840, he made his final visit to Paris where his performances were highly criticised.

He died in Hamburg on 13 August 1841, three months before his 74th birthday.

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