

# **BEETHOVEN in PERSHING SQUARE**

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Pershing Square, in Los Angeles, is known (among other things) for its statue of the composer, Ludwig von Beethoven. Photo by LA Wad, online courtesy Flickr. LICENSE: This image is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5 License. In short: You are free to distribute and modify the image as long as you attribute its author(s) or licensor(s). Click on the image for a better view.

Following the sound of music, not far from <u>Beethoven's statue</u> in <u>Pershing Square</u>, Steve Lopez saw a man playing a violin. On closer inspection, he saw the violin was battered and missing two of its four strings. Even so, the music ... by Beethoven ... was pretty good.

The man, playing the music, appeared to be homeless. Lopez was reasonably sure about that, since he saw a shopping cart filled with someone's possessions. Besides, Pershing Square is often used by people, without homes, as <u>a place to rest</u>.

Lopez told the man, whose clothes were tattered, that he liked his music. Taken aback, the violinist acknowledged the compliment, then apologized for his current condition. He'd had a few setbacks, he explained. Lopez would later learn that schizophrenia was one of those setbacks.

<u>Living</u> on <u>the streets</u> of <u>Los Angeles</u>, a person gets suspicious of someone else's motives. He could wonder: Why are you talking to me? I'm playing this music for myself ... what do you want? Lopez knew he should proceed carefully.

Eventually, he learned that the musician - an African-American, about fifty years old - was originally from Cleveland. His name? <u>Nathaniel Anthony Ayers</u>. That's Mr. Ayers, if you don't mind, since he grew-up in a home where people were respectful. And, since respect is a mutual thing, it would be Mr. Lopez, not Steve.

Needing to return to his office, Lopez had no time to learn more in this first meeting. Intrigued, though, he asked whether the violinist often performed at the same place. Of course, he was told. Beethoven is here.

Gradually, Mr. Lopez would come to understand just how important <u>Beethoven</u> is to Mr. Ayers. Not only does he feel connected to the *man*, who composed such <u>beautiful music</u>, he studies the Pershing-Square *statue* for inspiration:

I've never seen anything in my life that great. I'm flabbergasted by that statue because I can't imagine how he's here. I don't know how God is operating.

Acknowledging that <u>life on the streets</u> of Los Angeles is more than difficult, Nathaniel nevertheless draws comfort from his composer-friend:

*It's rough out there, but as long as I can <u>look at Beethoven</u> [follow the link for his bio], <i>I'll be alright.* (Steve Lopez, *The Soloist*, <u>page 171</u> of the hardcover edition.)

In the 21st century, why would anyone be so dedicated to a composer who's been dead for more than 180 years? To answer that question, we need to investigate Nathaniel Ayer's background.

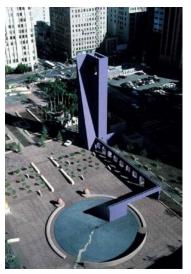
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## Media Stream











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## The Soloist - Homeless in LA

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The Soloist - Sleeping on the Streets of Los Angeles

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