

0. BEETHOVEN in PERSHING SQUARE - Story Preface

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Following the sound of music, not far from Beethoven's statue in Pershing Square, 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 a place to rest.

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.

Living on the streets of Los Angeles, 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? Nathaniel Anthony Ayers. 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 Beethoven is to Mr. Ayers. Not only does he feel connected to the man, who composed such beautiful music, 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 life on the streets 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 look at Beethoven [follow the link for his bio], I'll be alright.
(Steve Lopez, *The Soloist*, page 171 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.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/BEETHOVEN-in-PERSHING-SQUARE-The-Soloist)

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Beethoven Statue - Pershing Square

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Pershing Square in LA

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Homeless at Pershing Square

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The Soloist - Homeless in LA

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The Soloist - Skid Row in Los Angeles

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The Soloist - Sleeping on the Streets of Los Angeles

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The Soloist - Nathaniel Anthony Ayers

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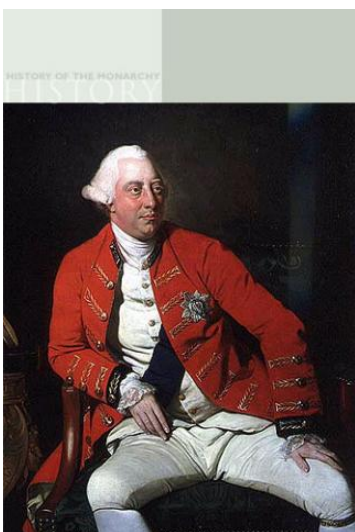


Beethoven in 1820

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Moonlight Sonata, by Beethoven

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