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# Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Saturday, April 5th, 2008, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

- [Louis Spohr](#) (1784-1859). Symphony No. 4 in F, Op 86 “The Consecration of Sound” (1832). Budapest Symphony Orchestra, Alfred Walter. Marco Polo 8.223122. 38:49
- Spohr. Overture to Faust, Op. 60 (1813/23). Budapest Symphony Orchestra, Alfred Walter. Marco Polo 8.223122. 7:35

An experimental composer, the first conductor to use a baton, and the inventor of the violin chin-rest (someone had to invent it!) was Louis Spohr. His program music was considered avant-garde in the 1830s, and many considered him the most important German composer between Beethoven and Brahms. The New York Philharmonic, at its founding in 1843, stated that its mission was to be an American orchestra that could play the music of Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, *and Spohr*. He was the leading conductor of his day, an unparalleled orchestrator, and one of the top violin soloists on the continent. His legacy includes 15 violin concertos, 35 string quartets, 10 symphonies, four clarinet concertos, 90 lieder, dozens of operas, and a school of violin performance reaching well into the 20th century.

We don't hear his music today with nearly the same frequency that mid-19th-century audiences did, but it's worth considering what the attraction might have been. He titled his fourth symphony—the most popular of his symphonies during his lifetime—*Die Weihe der Töne* (“The Consecration of Sound”). It's a good example of what was then the novelty of having a symphony (usually an abstract piece) revolve around a story. He composed it just two years after Berlioz wrote perhaps the most famous programmatic piece, the *Symphonie fantastique* of 1830, a work Spohr probably did not know.

The poem on which Spohr based his work was written by the composer's good friend, Carl Pfeiffer, who had recently died at the age of 28. So it is a lament as well as a tone-painting of the creation and activity of sound. The first movement depicts silence (*the very idea!*—one literal-minded critic snorted), then the creation of nature and its many sounds. We hear birdcalls, and Spohr, always precise in his orchestrating, employs a tierce-flute (pitched higher than a flute but lower than a piccolo) for a specific texture. We know of only one other work (by Berlioz, of course) in the entire orchestral repertoire requiring tierce-flute—such is Spohr's uniqueness. The second movement includes a minefield of three tunes in three different meters *simultaneously*, striking fear into the hearts of not only conductors, but also the cellists who have to solo through it. Marching soldiers, an Ambrosian chant, and funeral music end the symphony in tears of consolation.

We imagine that audiences were taken with the audacity of the work and with its emotionalism, and yet Spohr never writes without proportion. He is always smart: he always sings well and with confidence. Always just under the surface, too, is a bit of theater. His *Overture to Faust* is from his successful early career as an opera composer, rounding off—as best we can in one hour—the remarkable work of this very 19th-century, yet highly individual composer, Louis Spohr.

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Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music in the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).