

In Beethoven's Vienna, the Name-Day (corresponding to the feast day of the Saint whose name given name one shares) was far more significant than the birthdays we tend to celebrate.

Beethoven intended to write this overture for the 1814 Name-Day of Emperor Franz I (that is, St. Francis, October 4). Beginning with a grand, processional opening, in C major, he makes great heraldic use of the four horns (his works often have two) and two trumpets, before a lyrical string melody emerges. The Allegro is a cheerful and vivacious 6/8. At times it's cheeky - listen for off-beat dissonances in the bassoons, or an unusual modulation to A major necessitating a quick succession of keys to return to C major - or energetically muscular, especially as it ends, anticipating the 9th Symphony Finale's coda by eight years. When Beethoven finally completed it, he dedicated it to the Polish nobleman and musical benefactor Anton Radziwiłł, and it premiered on December 25, 1815.