

Flashmob in Sabadell, Spain, 2012

Church bells toll under a cloudless sky. In the middle of Placa de Sant Roc, a string bass player wearing a tuxedo prepares his instrument. A young girl drops coins into the black hat he has placed in front of him, retreats a few steps, and waits. The bass player pulls his bow across the strings and strikes the first familiar chords of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

Passersby gather. Musicians stream in with violins and violas, cellos and bass, brass, woodwind, and percussion. The conductor emerges from the crowd and joins the entire orchestra. The young girl girl (encircled in the photo at right)

stands absolutely still. Beethoven’s familiar notes capture the spectators. A man sways from side to side. A misty-eyed woman pauses and taps her cane. On cue, a chorus bursts into “Ode to Joy.” A man gasps. A smile brightens a woman’s face. She blends her voice with the choir. Others follow. The young girl remains. A spirited boy shimmies up a streetlamp. Securing himself with one arm around the pole, he sweeps the other arm in time with the conductor. Beyond the dancing bows, children play. Scooters stop. Couples hold hands. (For a You Tube video of this performance, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBaHPND2QJg) Thus does Beethoven’s music send a message of hope to all people.



—Robin A. Zimmerman