

Letter to the Editor

In Defense of Lafayette

I disagree strongly with the criticism of Lafayette, in Pierre Beaudry's article on Bailly and the French Revolution ["Jean Sylvain Bailly: The French Revolution's Benjamin Franklin," *EIR*, Jan. 26, 2001]. Clearly, Lafayette was right to try to leave France, whose revolution had gone to the dogs. Had he made it to America, he might have done much more for France than Bailly accomplished by stubbornly remaining in France. Had Bailly the benefit of revolutionary expe-

rience, as Lafayette did, it might have been more clear to him, that the right thing to do was to flee Robespierre, and continue the fight from the United States. I think Schiller would agree.

Dave Paulson
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The Author Replies

The point you are touching on, concerning Lafayette's desertion of the French Revolu-

tion, is an important one. The point is that there exists a crucial difference between the royalism of Lafayette and the royalism of Bailly, when both were confronted with the overriding commitment to the nation. The issue is the *sublime*, as it was understood by Schiller.

Indeed, on the one hand, Lafayette chose to abandon the revolution, based on a principle that he defended bitterly all his life, and about which he was tragically divided. In the circumstance where Paris had come under the control of the British-led terrorists, Lafayette's refusal to swear to the oath of the Jacobins was quite reasonable, and his decision was the right one. However, the flaw appeared in what was not there. Lafayette was not happy with himself. This division in him is what is most telling. As he wrote to his wife, Adrienne, on Aug. 21, 1792: "You know that my heart would have been republican, if my reason had not given me a nuance of royalism, and if my fidelity to my oaths, and to the nation's will, had not made me the defender of the King's constitutional rights; but the less others swear to resist, the louder I spoke, and I became the object of all their attacks. The mathematical demonstration that I could no longer usefully resist crime, has forced me to remove myself from a struggle in which it was obvious that I would perish fruitlessly." True, Lafayette estimated that his death would be worthless, and would in no way serve the cause of the revolution.

As for Bailly, on the other hand, he did refuse to exile himself and leave for America, as was proposed to him by Charles Marquis de Cassaux. Bailly's decision to refuse Cassaux's proposition was based on a different principle, and his reaction was quite different from that of Lafayette: "From the day that I became a public official, my fate had become irrevocably united with that of France; never will I quit my post in the moment of danger. Under any circumstances my country may depend on my devotion. Whatever may happen, I shall stay." He was found guilty, and was executed on Nov. 12, 1793. After his condemnation, Bailly gave a final insight into the nature of his principles, when he said: "I die for the sitting of the Tennis Court [the founding of the National Assembly], and not for the fatal day of the Champs de Mars."

As you can see, one principle leads to tragedy, the other elevates to the sublime of heroism.

Pierre Beaudry

Correction

FIGURE 1

Opening of fourth movement of Brahms' Symphony No. 4

Allegro energico e passionato

We reprint here the graphic used in last week's issue with David Shavin's article, "The Learned Academic Meets the Scientific Musician," which was a review of *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*, by Christoph Wolff. The graphic was garbled, due to a printer's error. As Wolff points out, the theme of the Finale of Brahms's Fourth Symphony was based on Bach's passacaglia "Meine Tage," from BWV 150.