

# JAN JOSEF HOREMANS THE YOUNGER

(Antwerp 1714 - Antwerp 1790)

## *The Concert*

oil on canvas  
69 x 59 cm (27¼ x 23½ in)

**T**HE CONCERT SPLENDIDLY DEPICTS AN ANIMATED gathering of revellers outside a village inn. Taking centre stage is a dancing couple. The elegant lady gathers up her full, ivory skirt, from under which a dainty toe peeks out, and her partner, more vigorous in his approach to the dance, gestures enthusiastically.

Two musicians accompany the dancers; one, seated with his back to the viewer, plays the double bass, while the other stands and plays the fiddle. At a table, an attractive young lady in a blue silk dress with white trim is seated. Her fine outfit is accessorised with kid gloves, pearl earrings and a pearl necklace. She observes the dancing with interest as do her companions: a gentleman in brown, and a lady with pink rosettes in her hair and at her chest. Behind them, another lady inclines her head, deep in conversation with a young man wearing a jaunty hat with ostrich plumes.

Although in a rural setting, the gathering is not the raucous mix of carousing villagers and peasants that one associates with Jan Josef Horemans the Younger's Flemish artistic forbears. Horemans instead presents an elegant image of restrained gaiety. Perhaps this was partly influenced by the popularity of 'conversation pieces' in the eighteenth century, which were a form of group portrait set within an informal surrounding, often showing its members deep in conversation. The painting may even be a take on the popular *fête champêtre* of the Rococo period.

A perfect complement to the present painting, which is concerned with dancing, is one in the Hermitage devoted to singing (fig. 1). Here, a group of men and women are clustered around a table in a darkened interior. One plays a 'cello, while his companions sing, the two ladies dutifully holding their song books. They are a more serious group than in *The Concert*, and the table is set for tea rather than crowded with wine glasses. The setting for the gathering is a large and sombre room, indicating that the household is one of considerable means and respectability.

The presence of the seated lady in the centre of the singing lesson is striking as she is identical in face, dress and pose to one of the ladies at the table in *The Concert*. Such an obvious repetition makes it interesting to speculate as to the lady's identity; perhaps she was a relative or a favoured model of the artist. In the Hermitage picture, she wears an enigmatic smile and her gaze is turned away from her companions and songbook, towards the window. Perhaps she is distracted by a more lively party such as that depicted in *The Concert* outside.

Horemans was the son of Jan Josef Horemans the Elder (1682-1759). Like his father, he specialised in capturing the essence of the age in which he lived, depicting social gatherings with spirited detail. His nickname, 'le Clair', was used to distinguish him from his father and referred to his preference for an overall lighter palette. Although his speciality was in painting genre scenes for private patrons, often borrowing elements from the seventeenth-century experts David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690) (cat. no. 49) and Hieronymus Janssens (1624-1693) (cat. no. 60), Horemans also painted interior decorations and accepted a number of official commissions.



Jan Josef Horemans the Younger, *Lesson of Singing*, 1750s, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg; Purchasing Commission of the Experts of the State Hermitage Museum, 1940 (Figure 1)

