



September 25, 2019

## Princeton Symphony Orchestra Recaptures 18th-century Sibling Rivalry Through Mozart Double Piano Concerto

By Nancy Plum

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed more than 20 piano concerti which grace the repertoires of symphony orchestras worldwide, but less than a handful of pieces for two pianos. To celebrate Rossen Milanov's 10th anniversary as music director of the ensemble, Princeton Symphony Orchestra presented Mozart's *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra in E-flat Major*, featuring a 21st-century pair of virtuosic sisters in pianists Christina and Michelle Naughton. Bracketed by one of Mozart's more popular operatic overtures and one of his more joyful symphonies, this *Concerto* proved to be the perfect vehicle to commemorate Milanov's tenure as conductor of the Orchestra and welcome the audience to a new season.

Saturday night's performance at Richardson Auditorium (the concert was repeated Sunday afternoon) also paid homage to former Princeton Professor Edward T. Cone's role as pianist and mentor — the last time the Mozart double piano *Concerto* was performed by Princeton Symphony was with Cone himself and his student Robert Taub (who had his own extended history with the Orchestra) at the keyboards. Milanov and the Orchestra warmed up the audience with Mozart's "Overture" to *The Marriage of Figaro*, an operatic standard since its premiere in 1786. Musically launched with lithe bassoon swirls, Mozart's "Overture" was full of well-tapered lines and well-defined accents. Inner instrumental parts were heard well and the Orchestra effectively closed the work in a blaze of glory.

Music for more than one piano and orchestra was rare in Mozart's day, although the form would seem to be natural for a composer whose youthful career featured his own keyboard virtuosity combined with that of his sister. At the time Mozart composed his *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra*, not only was the piano still

evolving as an instrument, but finding two of them in one space in Austria was also a challenge. Mozart was fortunate to find two keyboards in Vienna at the home of future wife, Constanze, and likely conceived his *Double Concerto* for his own renowned brother-sister act. For this performance, Princeton Symphony brought to Richardson another renowned sibling performing phenomenon in Michelle and Christina Naughton. Born in Princeton, the identical twins have been captivating audiences worldwide through their technical virtuosity and innate musical communication that perhaps only twins can have. Throughout Saturday night's performance of Mozart's *Concerto*, Michelle and Christina easily recreated a friendly musical sibling rivalry and "one-upmanship" Mozart may well have experienced performing with his sister Nannerl.

In the first movement "Allegro," both pianists began together, with Michelle asking the first lyrical question, answered with a bit of musical sauciness by Christina. The sisters played with consistent clarity in a dialogue between two pianos subtly accompanied by the Orchestra, often finishing each other's melodic sentences. Roles were occasionally reversed between the two keyboards, and a dual cadenza was especially marked by musical drama from Christina.

A pair of oboes played by Arthur Sato and Erin Banholzer added courtly elegance to the second movement while Michelle and Christina played in a stylistic detached style, both using pedal for dramatic effect. The closing movement required extremely fluid playing and floating octaves from Michelle, while Christina added expressiveness and a bit of humor. There was a great deal of musical punctuation from both pianos and Orchestra, as Milanov maintained a sprightly and spirited Viennese feel. The unison playing from the pianos was precise in the closing cadenza, and the work ended in a similar operatic drama found in Mozart's operas of the same time period. The pianists returned to the stage to great audience appreciation to play the "Malagueña" movement of Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona's 1933 *Suite Andaluía*. A popular flamenco dance arranged by Lecuona for a variety of instruments, this piece exhibited a whirling dervish style expertly handled by Michelle and Christina in an animated dialogue between the two keyboards.

The Orchestra closed this homage to Mozart, Cone, and Milanov with Mozart's 1788 Symphony No. 41 in C Major, known as the "Jupiter" Symphony. Composed only three years before Mozart's death, this work shows the composer at his creative height, with a martial yet regal opening movement, elegant and lilting inner movements and fugal finale. Throughout the work, Princeton Symphony effectively found the shifts in drama reminiscent of the composer's *Don Giovanni*, which had premiered the year before, as well as the dark pathos foreshadowing Mozart's final *Requiem*. Lean strings and a precise trio of two oboes (Sato and Banholzer) and bassoon (Seth Baer) kept the performance light and decisive, as Princeton Symphony Orchestra brought a joyous musical celebration to a close.

*Princeton Symphony Orchestra will present its next performances in its Classical series on Saturday, October 5 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, October 6 at 4 p.m. in Richardson Auditorium. Conducted by Bernhard Gueller and featuring pianist Natasha Paremski, this concert will include music of Glinka, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky. For ticket information, call (609) 497-0020 or visit [www.princetonsymphony.org](http://www.princetonsymphony.org).*

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