

Program Notes _____



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart with his sister Maria Anna (detail),
painted by Johann Nepomuk della Croce, c. 1780.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's premature death in 1791 at the age of 35 was a tragic loss to music. Remarkably, in his brief life he produced a vast and impressive collection of masterpieces, transforming the music of his day and exerting an ongoing influence on musical composition today. His finest music combines the qualities of exceptional compositional craft, mastery of formal balance, boisterous playfulness, ingenuity, drama, and a profound and honest expression of the human experience. Composers from Tchaikovsky to Schoenberg have treasured and learned from his music. As pianist and comedian Victor Borge put it, *"In my dreams of heaven, I always see the great Masters gathered in a huge hall in which they all reside. Only Mozart has his own suite."*

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Today's journey into Mozart's compositional world includes *The Marriage of Figaro* Overture, the Concerto for Two Pianos, and the great "Jupiter" Symphony—examples from three of the defining genres of Mozart's work: opera, the piano concerto, and the symphony. Composed within a decade of each other, these works take us from the period of the composer's youth in Salzburg to his full maturity in Vienna.

Mozart's extraordinary musical gifts were cultivated early by his father, violinist and composer Leopold Mozart. Wolfgang began touring as a young child, performing together with his sister Maria Anna "Nannerl" in the great courts and capitals of Europe. In his travels, Mozart was exposed to a tremendous variety of regional musical styles and genres, including Italian and French opera and chamber, symphonic, dance, and church music. Part of the genius and variety of his music lies in his ability to combine these diverse stylistic influences, also incorporating the techniques of baroque counterpoint that he learned from studying the music of his predecessors Bach and Handel.

Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* **Composed 1786**

The Overture to Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* had its triumphant premiere in Vienna in 1786. The original title of the Beaumarchais play on which the libretto was based was "La Folle Journée." From the start, Mozart skillfully captures the celebratory, madcap spirit of the "crazy day" as it unfolds, reflecting the joyful spirit of the wedding day and accentuating the contrasting characters of the nobility and the servant classes who feature so prominently in the opera. The overture

Premiere

May 1, 1786, Burgtheater, Vienna

Instrumentation

two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

Duration

4 minutes

begins with a famously difficult unison passage in the strings and bassoons that scurries along, crackling with mischievous energy. The orchestral writing features complex dialogue between the instruments and a prominence and independence of the winds parts that was unusual for the time.

Mozart creates an element of surprise in his compositions through sudden outbursts and frequent and unexpected changes in the musical character and expression. His music contains a seemingly inexhaustible outpouring of varied melodic material, with each new element ultimately contributing to the logic and integrity of the work as a whole. The complexity of Mozart's music created challenges for him professionally. His music was confronting for late 18th century audiences, as indicated by the famous complaint attributed to Emperor Joseph II that his music contained "*too many notes.*" While Mozart was acclaimed for his work and successful enough to receive important commissions, he never attained a secure, permanent position allowing him to work without the stress of financial insecurity.

Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra in E-flat Major, K. 365 **Composed 1779-80**

Mozart composed his Concerto for Two Pianos in Salzburg in 1779-80, around the same period he composed the Sinfonia Concertante for violin

and viola. It was probably written as a performance vehicle for Mozart and his sister, and the two solo parts are of similar difficulty and prominence.

The piano mechanism was still evolving in 1779, and in this concerto Mozart explored new possibilities for virtuosic passagework on the instrument. As with all of Mozart's

Premiere

Date unknown

Expanded Instrumentation

two pianos, two clarinets, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

Duration

26 minutes

music, the influence of opera is ubiquitous, and you can hear the same contrast of characters and conversational exchange that was present in the *Figaro* overture. The two soloists sometimes act in opposition to the orchestra, but they also work as a team, playing in tandem, trading off or finishing each other's phrases, overlapping and complementing each other. The piece is in three movements: a noble Allegro in sonata form, an intimately lyrical Andante, and an exuberant Rondo, which features a lengthy dual cadenza for the soloists.

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Program Notes _____CONTINUED

Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K. 551 “Jupiter”

Composed 1788

“I tell you before God and as an honest man that your son is the greatest composer known to me; he has taste and in addition the most complete

First Recording

1913 – by Victor Concert Orchestra,
Walter B. Rogers, conductor

Instrumentation

flute, two oboes, two bassoons,
two horns in C, two trumpets in C,
timpani, and strings

Duration

31 minutes

knowledge of composition.” So said Franz Joseph Haydn, the “father of the symphony,” praising his student Mozart. Haydn and Mozart built on one another’s compositional innovations, expanding the formal complexity and expressive range of symphonic form. Composed in 1788, the Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K. 551, is Mozart’s last symphony, and

it is one of the great masterpieces of the genre. From the heroic opening flourishes of the Allegro vivace to the triumphant five-part fugato near the end of the fourth movement Molto Allegro, the piece bubbles over with Mozart’s high spirits and compositional genius. Here is “late” Mozart at the height of his powers. Listen for the operatic dialogue and drama that are such hallmarks of Mozart’s musical voice. In the words of Robert Schumann, *“does it not seem as if Mozart’s works become fresher and fresher the more often we hear them?”*

~By Nell Flanders, Assistant Conductor
Princeton Symphony Orchestra