

PROGRAM NOTES

Overture to The Marriage Of Figaro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born on January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria to Leopold and Anna Marie Mozart. At the time of Mozart's birth, Leopold was employed by the Archbishop of Salzburg as the vice-Kapellmeister of his orchestra. When Leopold realized that his son was a child prodigy, he decided to showcase Mozart's talents all over Europe. However, this did not help Mozart in securing a decent employment in the Viennese court later on in his life. In fact, at the time of his death, he was so deep in debt that he had to borrow money from his close friends to pay his bills. Mozart died on December 5, 1791; the cause of his death is unknown. During his lifetime, Mozart wrote over 600 compositions including 27 piano concerti, 5 violin concerti, numerous operas such as *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così fan Tutte*, *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, 41 symphonies, several sonatas for piano and violin, and his final work, *The Requiem*.

The Marriage of Figaro is probably one of Mozart's most beloved and performed operas along with *The Magic Flute*, *Così fan Tutte* and *Don Giovanni*. It is a four acts comic opera (opera buffa) composed by Mozart in 1786 and with Italian libretto written by Lorenzo Da Ponte. It was premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna on May 1, 1786. The opera took place on the wedding day of the two main characters, Figaro and Suzanna and the basic plot, in short, is about how they succeeded in getting married under the watchful eye of Count Almaviva. This overture has become so popular that the entire work was played in the opening credits of the award winning movie "*Trading Places*".

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn, Germany in 1770 to a family of seven children and died in Vienna in 1827. Over 20,000 Viennese attended Beethoven's funeral; one of the torchbearers was Franz Schubert, who was buried beside him a year later in 1828. Beethoven's father was his first teacher and he made his first public performance at age seven in 1778 in Cologne. He later studied with Gottlob Neefe, Haydn, Albrechtsberger, Salieri, among others, and quickly gained a reputation as a virtuoso pianist. Knowing how Leopold Mozart exploited Mozart, Beethoven's father, Johann, also attempted to do the same but without success. Beethoven was never married but there is no doubt that he had had a few romantic relationships during his life time. During the late 1790's, Beethoven noticed that there was a problem with his hearing but was unsuccessful in finding a cure. Although no one knew for certain his actual cause of death, some of the medicine that he had taken contained so much lead that there was common belief that he died of lead-poisoning.

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 was composed between 1805 - 1806 and was dedicated to his friend, student and patron, Archduke Rudolph. It was premiered at the private home of Prince Franz Joseph von Lebkowitz. in March, 1807. However, the first public performance did not take place until December 22, 1808 at Vienna's Theatre an der Wien with Beethoven at the keyboard. Also premiered at this concert included his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, and Choral Fantasy, Op. 80. But according to composer J. F. Reichardt, the premiere was not a success because the concert was too long and the audience were forced to sit inside an unheated theatre in the middle of winter. This concerto was never performed again until Felix Mendelssohn revived it in the 1836.

To many scholars, this work represents the birth of the modern piano concerto because of new developments in its construction. One example is that additional keys were added to the keyboard which gave composers more freedom in expressing their ideas.

Instead of writing a long orchestral exposition, Beethoven decided to have the solo piano introducing the main theme of the movement at the beginning first five bars. However, this took the audience of the day by surprise. Felix Salzer, an Austrian-American music theorist, says the following about this opening, "It is one of the most fascinating substitutions of the entire literature...The whole passage appears as a most imaginative prolongation of interruption, the post-interruption phrase starting with a B-Major chord boldly substituting for the tonic. In addition, this post-interruption phrase introduces a very interesting melodic parallelism in form of an augmentation of the end of the pre-interruption phrase one step higher."

Reichardt also noted how Beethoven had played this concerto. He said, a "new pianoforte concerto of immense difficulty, which Beethoven executed astonishingly well in the most rapid tempos."

The second movement, Andante, only has 72 bars and it is a romantic dialogue between the solo piano and strings. Adolph Bernhard Marx, a German music theorist, compared this movement to 'Orpheus taming the wild beasts with his music'.

The final movement, Rondo, is energetic and rhythmic. The main theme is presented by the strings at the very beginning of the movement and returns three times before the piece comes to a dramatic finish.

Unfortunately, the public premiere of this concerto also marked the end of Beethoven's solo career; his debilitating hear loss became so severe that it prevented him from performing in public ever again.

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809 - 1847)

Without Felix Mendelssohn, one might wonder if J.S. Bach's music will forever be forgotten. It was because of Mendelssohn's effort that Bach's music was once again performed in 1820 when he programmed his St. Matthew's Passion in one of his concerts that sparked the revival of public interest in the music of Bach.

Felix Mendelssohn was the son of Abraham and Lea Mendelssohn, and he has three other siblings including the famous woman composer, Fanny. He was brought up in Berlin and was surrounded by a cultured circle of family friends. His family organized concerts regularly at their home which gave Mendelssohn the opportunity to write music for various ensembles. It is widely believed that he wrote his string symphonies at this time between the ages of 12 - 14.

Even though Mendelssohn was a child prodigy, he did study with some prominent musicians of his time such as composition and counterpoint with Carl Friedrich Zelter (a person who had a tremendous influence on his development as a composer); and piano with Ludwig Berger. Although Mendelssohn was considered a composer in the Romantic period, his

musical style is rather conservative because he favoured musical forms of the Classical period.

As for his musical employment, Mendelssohn received his first paid position as the music director in Düsseldorf in 1833. In 1835, he was named conductor and director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, a post which Johannes Brahms also held in later years. He also founded the famed Leipzig Conservatory.

Felix Mendelssohn has written two virtuosic violin concertos: one in D Minor, which he composed when he was only thirteen years old; and the famous E minor concerto which he finished just a year before he died. Violin Concerto in E minor was dedicated to the famous French composer Ferdinand David and he premiered this wonderful work in Leipzig in 1845. It is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, two clarinets, two trumpets, two French horns, timpani and strings.

In a letter to David in 1838, Mendelssohn said, "*I should like to write a violin concerto for you next winter. One in E minor runs through my head, the beginning of which gives me no peace.*" It has three technically challenging movements (fast–slow–fast) and is considered a major work in the violin repertoire together with the concertos of Brahms, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky.

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