

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Wed. January 24, The 114th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Thu. January 25, The 900th Suntory Subscription Concert

Sun. January 28, The 901st Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Mon. January 29, The 8th Weekday Afternoon Concert (for concert details, please refer p.29)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

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

Subscription
concerts only

Austrian born, Mozart is considered to be one of the most versatile composers of all time, especially considering his relatively short life span. Touring Europe widely as a child, he gave performances on piano, harpsichord and organ, and began to compose both instrumental and vocal music from a very young age. His exposure to a wide variety of music in large musical centers including Austria’s capital of Vienna; Munich and Mannheim in Germany; Paris, France; London, England; and throughout much of Italy, can be seen to have influenced his writings a great deal. In all, Mozart composed forty-one symphonies, the first when he was approximately eight years old and the last just three years before he died.

The *Jupiter Symphony* (No. 41) was to be his last symphony, part of a ‘symphonic triptych of 1788’ together with the ‘*Great G-minor Symphony* (No. 40) and the *E-flat Major Symphony* (No. 39). All three were composed in a creative flurry that summer, on June 26th, July 25th and August 10th. With cultural activities waning in light of the Austrian Empire’s war with Turkey, it was also a troubling time for Mozart, as it was becoming more difficult for him to find work. In addition to these professional and economic difficulties, Mozart’s six-month old daughter, Theresia had died during this same time period.

Having moved to more economical housing in the suburbs of Vienna, Mozart attempted to paint a positive light on the situation when he wrote in a letter: “I have greater leisure to work now since I am not troubled by so many visitors.” However, he also acknowledged the difficulties he faced as well: “...were I not visited so frequently by dark thoughts (which I must banish by force), I should still do better.”

Mozart was not one to give up easily, though. And in spite of the difficulties he faced finding work in Vienna, scholars believe he may have turned his sights towards London at this point in his career. Since there had been no evidence for a commission for these three symphonies, it seems plausible that he composed them with the thought of presenting them on tour there, as was customary. In a letter written to a fellow-Mason, Michael Puchberg, Mozart wrote of plans for a new concert series, so it’s possible the works were composed for this purpose as well.

Jan
24Jan
25Jan
28Jan
29

While the trip to London never came about, Mozart toured several German cities in the spring of 1789. It is believed he conducted performances of his works, and may have included at least one of these new symphonies. Two years later, in Vienna, Antonio Salieri is believed to have conducted at least one, if not two, of these works. So while it had been previously thought that these works were not performed in Mozart's lifetime, scholars now believe that the composer did have the opportunity to hear at least one, if not all three of these final symphonic works before he died.

The two outer works, both in major keys, have been characterized as representing Mozart's lighter and brighter sides. No. 39 seems to present the gentle and upbeat nature of the composer, possibly with a nod to the royal patronage for whom he was often composing. No. 41 seems to show the composer's persistent side in the face of adversity, looking forward with optimism. The central symphonic work, No. 40 provides great contrast to these with its minor-key focus and much more serious tone, perhaps a reflection of the difficulties he was facing.

Although Mozart was never able to present these works in person in London, a fitting tribute in the form of the subtitle "Jupiter" has been credited to have come from Johann Baptist Cramer, a renowned German pianist who had settled and founded a music publishing company in London. Another descriptor, given by his famous cataloguer Ludwig Ritter von Köchel is just as apt: "Symphonie mit der Schlussfuge – Symphony with the concluding fugue."

Whether one enjoys Mozart's culminating symphonic work for its Olympian magnitude or for its sheer masterful intertwining of baroque fugue with classical form as no other had done before, one cannot deny the extreme emotions evoked from the carefully contrasted themes in close succession that open the first movement through to the final fantastical five-motive fugal counterpoint in the closing coda of the last movement.

Work composed: 10th August, 1788 **World premiere:** unknown
Instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

Louis Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Symphonie Fantastique, op. 14

Inspired by his love for actress Harriet Smithson, after seeing her performance as Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Berlioz began composing this work in 1830. Within this work one can see the influence of the famous playwright that he had long admired, as well as the musical impact that Beethoven's symphonies had had on him. Berlioz also borrowed music from his own previous compositions and took the symphony to a new level with his *idée fixe* permeating throughout, a representation, and perhaps courting, of his true love.

Symphonie Fantastique was premiered in December of 1830, and it seems the effects of his courting did not go unnoticed, as Berlioz and Smithson were married in 1833. The symphony went through numerous revisions through 1855, with Berlioz himself writing programme notes for the various versions, indicating the text "must be considered as the spoken text of an opera, which serves to introduce musical movements and to motivate their character and expression" [from *Memoirs* by Hector Berlioz]:

I. Reveries -- Passions

A young musician sees the woman of his dreams and falls hopelessly in love. Each time her image comes into his mind, it evokes a musical thought [represented by an *idée fixe*] that is impassioned in character, but also noble and shy, as he imagines her to be.

II. A Ball

The artist finds himself in the swirl of a party, but the beloved image appears before him and troubles his soul.

III. Scene in the Country

In the distance, two shepherds play a "Ranz des vaches" in dialogue. The pastoral setting, the gentle evening breeze, the hopeful feelings he has begun to have--all conspire to bring to his spirit an unaccustomed calm, and his thoughts take on a more cheerful cast. He hopes not to be lonely much longer. But his happiness is disturbed by dark premonitions. What if she is deceiving him! One of the shepherds resumes his playing, but the other makes no response.... In the distance, one can hear thunder. Solitude. Silence.

IV. March to the Scaffold

Convinced that his love is unrequited, the artist takes an overdose of opium. It plunges him into a sleep accompanied by horrifying visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, has been condemned and led to the scaffold, and is witnessing his own execution. The procession advances to a march that is now somber and savage, now brilliant and solemn. At its conclusion the *idée fixe* returns, like a final thought of the beloved, cut off by the fatal blow.

Jan 24

Jan 25

Jan 28

Jan 29

V. Dream of a Witches' Sabbath

He sees himself in the midst of a frightful throng of ghosts, witches, monsters of every kind, who have assembled for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, bursts of laughter, distant cries. The beloved melody again reappears, but it has lost its modesty and nobility; it is no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque; it is she, coming to the Sabbath. A joyous roar greets her arrival.... She joins in the devilish orgy.... A funeral knell, a parody of the *Dies irae*. A Sabbath round-dance. The *Dies irae* and the round-dance are combined.

Work composed: 1830 **World premiere:** 5th December, 1830 in Paris

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (2nd doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling on English Horn), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling on Es clarinet), 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani (2 players), percussion (snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, chimes), 2 harps, strings

Banda: oboe

April L. Racana / Music Specialist at Nishimachi International School where she has taught since 1992. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana (BS/Piano Pedagogy) and her graduate studies at San Francisco State University (MA/Music), as well as a post-graduate fellowship at Northwestern University, and the Japan Studies Program at International Christian University.

Next Subscription Concerts in February

February 23, Fri 19:00 at Suntory Hall

The 902nd Suntory Subscription Concert

February 25, Sun 15:00 at Bunkamura Orchard Hall

The 903rd Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

February 26, Mon 19:00 at Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall

The 115th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Conductor: Mikhail Pletnev (Special Guest Conductor of the TPO)

Piano: **Tomoharu Ushida***

Sibelius: Finlandia

Grieg: Piano Concerto*

Sibelius: Pelléas et Mélisande

Sibelius: Symphony No.7



Mikhail Pletnev
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Tomoharu Ushida
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