

Program Notes

By April L. Racana

Thursday, January 21, The 98th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Suntory Hall

1/15

Orchard Hall

1/17

Opera City

1/21

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Symphony No. 33 in B-flat major K. 319

- I. **Allegro assai** (ca. 7 min)
- II. **Andante moderato** (ca. 5 min)
- III. **Menuetto** (ca. 3 min)
- IV. **Finale: Allegro assai** (ca. 5 min)

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. 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.

His *Symphony No. 33 in B-flat major* was composed in July of 1779. Mozart had written this work in Salzburg after returning from a European tour on which his mother had accompanied him (though sadly she had died after falling ill in Paris in the summer of 1778). The journey had taken the composer to Mannheim, Munich and Augsburg as well, where he was influenced by the music and musicians he encountered along the way.

Originally composed as a three-movement work, without the minuet section included, later revisions of *Symphony No. 33*, possibly around 1782, included the minuet that Mozart may have added for a performance in Vienna, and perhaps to reflect the Parisian four-movement style in fashion at the time.

The orchestration with pairs of oboes, bassoons and horns along with the strings (which included two parts for viola as well) followed the conventions found in Salzburg during that time. The work was published in Vienna in 1785 by Artaria, one of only a few symphonies to be published in the composer's lifetime.

The entire symphony is performed in a chamber music style with more intimate passages among the various sections of the ensemble. The opening movement *Allegro assai* is written in triple meter giving it a dance-like feeling from the start and presents a theme in the development section that would be featured later in the finale of the "Jupiter" symphony (1788).

The second movement, *Andante moderato*, is played in the key of E-flat major featuring the strings primarily, with only brief interjections from the winds. The recapitulation is presented in reverse with the second theme played first before returning to the first theme, and may have been a reflection of the Mannheim tradition he had heard by composers there on his recent tour. The inserted third movement, *Menuetto*, returns to the home key and to the triple meter as well, with a lilting Viennese dance feel, incorporating themes from the outer movements.

The final movement returns to the tempo of the opening movement, *Allegro assai*, however this time in a lively

duple meter. The first theme presents a melody that skips around over a quick-paced repeated-note pattern. This is followed by the second theme with a grace note figure that some scholars feel is similar to a comic opera style. The third theme features the oboes in this

sonata-form movement which highlights the composer's brilliant musicality and orchestrations, closing the symphony full of vitality.

Instrumentation: 2 oboes 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings

to foreshadow the finale, where the listener would travel from experience to the enlightened naïveté of a child. The second movement was originally described by Mahler as: "Death strikes up the dance for us; she scrapes her fiddle bizarrely and leads us up to heaven." Later, he commented that 'it wasn't meant so seriously after all,' however the shrill sounds of the violin, re-tuned so that each string is one whole tone higher, makes one wonder.

The *Adagio*, with its 'divinely gay and deeply sad' melody was described by Mahler in 1901:

'St. Ursula herself, the most serious of all the saints, presides with a smile, so gay in this higher sphere. Her smile resembles that on the prone statues of old knights or prelates one sees lying in churches, their hands joined on their bosoms and with the peaceful gentle expressions of men who have gained access to a higher bliss; solemn, blessed peace; serious, gentle gaiety, such is the character of this movement, which also has deeply sad moments, comparable, if you wish, to reminiscences of earthly life, and other moments when gaiety becomes vivacity.'

In the final movement, Mahler's instructions to the soloist are to adopt 'a joyful, childlike expression completely devoid of parody.' Although this childlike atmosphere may have been misunderstood by early listeners of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, it is clear that the composer's intention was to take the listener on a 'backwards' journey from an experienced adult's perspective to the more simplistic notions of a child: "When man, now full of wonder, asks what all this means, the child answers him with

the fourth movement: 'This is Heavenly Life'."

Excerpts from the opening and closing stanzas of the text from the lieder depict the images of this 'heavenly life':

So delightful are the joys of heaven
That we avoid earthly ones.
No worldly turmoil
do we hear in heaven!
There all live in deepest peace.
We lead the life of angels,
and yet we're quite merry nonetheless,
we dance and leap,
we skip and sing,
St. Peter in heaven looks on!

...

There's no music on earth
that can compare to ours.
Eleven thousand young maidens
devote themselves to dancing,
even St. Ursula smiles!
Cecilia and all her relations
are wonderful court musicians!
The angelic voices
refresh our spirits,
and joy wakens in all.

-from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Horn of Plenty)

Instrumentation: solo soprano, 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling on piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling on English horn), 3 clarinets (2nd doubling on E-flat clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling on contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, sleighbells, glockenspiel, triangle, cymbals, harp, strings

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Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) Symphony No. 4 in G major

- I. **Bedächtig, nicht eilen** (ca. 17 min)
- II. **In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast** (ca. 10 min)
- III. **Ruhevoll, poco adagio** (ca. 18 min)
- IV. **Wir genießen die Himmlischen Freuden. Sehr behaglich** (ca, 9 min)

The entire Fourth Symphony grew out of *Das himmlische Leben*, which was originally written in 1892 as part of the series of *Wunderhorn* songs, based on the texts from the German poetry collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Horn of Plenty).

Although Mahler had initially had the idea of using this song to conclude his Third Symphony, he eventually determined to use it as a basis for developing his next symphony, and included it as the final movement here, continuing his tradition of incorporating lieder into his symphonic works.

Mahler first began sketching ideas for his Fourth Symphony in the summer of 1899, where he spent a frustrating summer at Aussee, presumably unable to focus and develop any significant creative ideas until nearly the end of his holiday. These sketches were then put away until the following summer when he chose to spend time at a small village

on the northern edge of the Wörthersee in Carnthia, where he was having a villa built. He worked in the meantime in a small studio, at first having difficulty unwinding from an extremely hectic season at the Vienna Court Opera and conducting concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic at the World Exhibition in Paris. However, once he took out the sketches from the previous summer, the ideas developed in nearly record time for him, completing the symphony in just over three weeks time.

Abandoning his previous practice of writing programme notes for his audiences, Mahler included only the text for the poem of the final movement. The work was premiered by the composer in Munich, on November 25th, 1901, unsuccessfully. After previous symphonies of great immensity had nearly overwhelmed audiences, this symphony seemed too simplistic and many critics felt patronized. It was only later that the underlying complexities of polyphony came to be appreciated together with the pastoral Viennese melodies that at first belied listeners of the composer's time.

The childlike opening of sleigh bells with flutes in the first movement is the beginning of the journey Mahler intended