

Program Notes

By April L. Racana

Thursday, February 25, The 99th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert

Friday, February 26, The 874th Suntory Hall Subscription Concert

Sunday, February 28, The 875th Bunkamura Orchard Hall Subscription Concert

Opera City

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Suntory Hall

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Orchard Hall

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major K. 488

- I. Allegro (ca. 11 min)
- II. Adagio (ca. 7 min)
- III. Allegro assai (ca. 8 min)

By the time Mozart had left the service of the Archbishop in Salzburg to pursue his musical career in Vienna in 1781, he had already composed six piano concertos. But it was during his years in Vienna that he not only relied on additional compositions in this genre to establish himself both as a composer and as a pianist, but also depended on them for financial support. Scholars point to his development as a composer through his various concerti, the first of which was composed when he was still a child at the age of eleven. The last was composed in 1791, the same year of his death. The first concerti were more along the lines of arrangements of other composers' sonatas, with the addition of orchestral interludes and accompaniments. But it wasn't long before he created his own thematic material on his way to composing 27 piano concertos, more than any other composer.

The *Piano Concerto in A major, No. 23* was completed on March 2, 1786 and is believed to have been premiered by the composer himself at one of his subscription concerts later in the spring. Mozart began to explore, to a much

greater extent, the use of winds in his later concertos, especially highlighting the two clarinets as a more mellow alternative to the sharper timbre of the oboe. Contrasting with the two concerti composed on either side of this one, with their more heavily dramatic orchestrations and themes, the 23rd Piano Concerto is set in a more chamber-like setting (without trumpets and timpani), providing a more intimate association between the soloist and the various ensembles within the orchestra.

The opening movement (*Allegro*) in A major is gentle and graceful in tone, with hints of the melancholy to come, and a closing cadenza written out by the composer. The second movement is one of only two *Adagios* found in all of Mozart's piano concerti and the only in the key of F sharp minor. The scene change is immediate here with the soloist's opening melancholy melody in 6/8 meter, the orchestra drawn in to the emotion, before the soloist expands further. The winds enter midway with a lighter tune in a major key, as if to try to lift spirits. However, the soloist soon returns to the original melancholic mood, with the winds' interspersed accompaniment as if offering comfort, and the strings eventually tip-toeing on offbeats as the movement comes to a close. Another change of scenery as the final movement

suddenly stirs the performers, and in particular the soloist, into a *rondo* full of playful energy and high-spirited dancing before the proverbial curtain comes down.

It seemed Mozart did not allow this work to be published in his lifetime, allowing only a very few trusted friends to retain scores, preferring to keep it for himself, even when finances became

difficult. In a letter to his father he wrote that this was one of “the compositions that I keep for myself or for a small circle of music-lovers and connoisseurs, who promise not to let them out of their hands.” Not surprisingly, it has become one of his most well loved piano concertos.

Instrumentation: flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings, solo piano

circumstances or whether he was simply maturing as a composer, is left up to much debate. However, one can easily discern a distinct departure from the previous symphonic works whose focus was the infusion of song with symphony. Although there are still passing references to lieder he was composing at the time, the focus was away from programmatic music. Instead, the development of intricate instrumental themes can be heard, especially reflecting the study of Bach’s counterpoint techniques as Mahler masterfully weaves those throughout the work.

Although the Fifth Symphony is divided into five separate movements, these movements have been delineated into three over-arching parts. Part I includes the opening *Funeral March* as well as the second movement, *Allegro*. The former acting as an opening prelude of sorts to the latter, and the two presented in reverse of the traditional symphonic format, with the faster movement delayed. The *Scherzo* is the centerpiece of the work and makes up the whole of Part II. It is said to give a nod to Strauss, and in all its complexities it juxtaposes the *ländler* and the *waltz*. Referring to his move away from the integration of song with symphony, Mahler stated: “The human voice would be absolutely out of place here. There is no need for words, everything is purely musically expressed.” Part III is made up of the final two movements of the symphony.

The *Adagietto* utilizes only strings and also acts as a prelude to final movement, *Rondo-Finale*. It is here where his use of counterpoint is perhaps developed to the greatest extent.

The work was premiered in October of 1904, in Cologne, after numerous revisions. Following this first performance Mahler is quoted as saying: “Nobody understood it. I wish I could conduct the first performance fifty years after my death.” Perhaps as a consequence of this perception he continued to revise the work for many years afterward, with a final revision in 1911 just prior to his death. After this last revision, Mahler again acknowledged his move into a new period of his creative life when he commented:

“I have finished the Fifth. I had in fact to re-instrumentate the whole of it. I simply cannot understand how I could have fallen back into such beginner’s errors at that time. Evidently the routine I had developed in the first four symphonies let me down completely on this occasion – when a completely new style required a new technique.”

Instrumentation: 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling on piccolos), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on Es[E-flat] clarinet and bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling on contrabassoon), 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drums, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, whip, glockenspiel, harp, strings

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Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor

Part I

I. Trauermarsch - In gemessenem Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt.
(ca. 12 min)

II. Stürmisch bewegt, mit größter Vehemenz (ca. 15 min)

Part II

III. Scherzo. Kräftig, nicht zu schnell
(ca. 17 min)

Part III

IV. Adagietto, Sehr langsam
(ca. 9 min)

V. Rondo-Finale. Allegro giocoso
(ca. 15 min)

Mahler’s Fifth Symphony marks, at least in hindsight, the beginning of what is termed his middle period, together with his Sixth and Seventh Symphonies. Not only had the composer begun his fourth decade, but he also had a nearly fatal health scare when he experienced a major hemorrhage in February of 1901. In spite of this incident he was on the top of his game professionally as the principal director of the Vienna Philharmonic and as director of the Vienna Court Opera.

He was established well enough that he was even able to retreat to his own villa in the south of Austria, where he began sketching out the first movements of this work during the summer of 1901.

It was later that same year he met Alma Schindler, whom he married shortly thereafter. The following summer found the composer completing the final movements of this work with his new wife at his side and a baby on the way. Apparently, Alma was a great support for Mahler, on a personal as well as professional level, being a musician and composer herself. Not only did she provide inspiration for his creative juices, (the *Adagietto* has been said to be a love song written for her), but she also acted as copyist for him. And when copying parts of the Fifth Symphony she even provided critique for her husband, pointing out a passage where the percussion seemed a bit on the heavy side. Mahler agreed and made the necessary changes.

There is a marked shift in his symphonic writing during this middle period, whether due to his personal