

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Bank of America 
Global Sponsor of the CSO

Thursday, March 31, 2011, at 8:00

Saturday, April 2, 2011, at 8:00

Kurt Masur Conductor

Louis Lortie Piano

Mozart

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro assai

LOUIS LORTIE

INTERMISSION

Bruckner

Symphony No. 4 in E-flat Major (*Romantic*)

Moving, not too fast

Andante quasi allegretto

Scherzo: Moving

Finale: Moving, but not too fast

The Thursday performance, in memory of Roy I. Warshawsky, is sponsored by his family.

Steinway is the official piano of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

This program is partially supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488

From 1782, the year after he moved to Vienna, until 1786, Mozart wrote fifteen piano concertos. That's an incredible outpouring of important music, and it corresponds precisely to Mozart's heyday as a performer. These concertos were his main performing vehicles—as well as his primary source of income—and time has placed them among the crowning glories of all music. There's little else in all Mozart's output, aside from the great operas, to compare with the magnificence, subtlety, and consistent brilliance of these scores, and in no other works did Mozart so ingeniously merge the symphonic, operatic, and chamber music styles into a uniquely personal language of expression.

In the winter of 1785–86, Mozart wrote three piano concertos while he also worked on *The Marriage of Figaro*. This was the most productive period of his life, and the only reasonable way to explain the enormous and varied output of these six months is to assume that the intense work on the complicated musical and dramatic structures of *Figaro* set his mind racing with more ideas than a single four-act opera could contain. It has been suggested that the purely mechanical task of writing it all down would produce only six full pages per day. Neither that challenge, nor the infinitely greater one of conceiving so much glorious music, appears to have inconvenienced Mozart in the least.

COMPOSED

entered in Mozart's catalog
March 2, 1786

FIRST PERFORMANCE

spring 1786, Vienna

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

December 10, 1920,
Orchestra Hall. Harold
Bauer, piano, Frederick
Stock conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

February 19, 2008, Orchestra
Hall. Mitsuko Uchida con-
ducting from the keyboard
July 23, 2010, Ravinia
Festival. Christoph
Eschenbach, piano, John
Axelrod conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

one flute, two clarinets, two
bassoons, two horns, strings

CADENZAS

by Mozart

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

26 minutes

Throughout the winter, he kept to his regular routine of teaching and performing, while also maintaining a full social calendar. The only activity that seems to have suffered was his correspondence, so we have only a sketchy account of his daily life at the time.

Mozart entered the A major piano concerto (K. 488) in his catalog on March 2, 1786, only a month after the one-act comic opera, *The Impresario*; just three weeks before the famous C minor concerto (K. 491); and less than two months before *The Marriage of Figaro*. Although it's not documented, Mozart probably performed the A major concerto at one of the Vienna Lenten concerts a few days after finishing it.

This and the other two concertos of the *Figaro* winter are the first in Mozart's output to call for clarinets. (Sketches show that Mozart started writing this A major concerto as early as 1784 with oboes instead.) Mozart begins as if he were following the conventional recipe for a classical concerto (which is totally unlike him), but then, after a few pages, he proceeds to ignore nearly every subsequent instruction. The

result is the kind of risky—though not reckless—creation known only to the very greatest chefs and composers. The tone of the entire movement is generous and warmly lyrical, although, as in the duet in the same key between the count and Susanna in act 3 of *Figaro*, there's still room for mischief, doubt, and the thrill of imminent danger.

Mozart marks the slow movement adagio instead of the more common andante—what he has to say can't be rushed. This magnificent and justly famous music stands alone among all Mozart concerto movements, not only because of its tempo or key (it's his only work in F-sharp minor), but also because it unlocks a tragic power that won't surface in music again until Beethoven. The wind writing is particularly expressive, and the piano solo is as simple and haunting as any slow aria. Even in *Figaro*, with its celebrated mixture of laughter and tears, there's scarcely a moment that plunges so deeply into the heart. The finale, a buoyant and delightful rondo, brings us back to A major, and, after the Adagio's revelations, it sounds like the happiest key on earth. ■



Anton Bruckner

Born September 4, 1824, Ansfelden, Upper Austria.

Died October 11, 1896, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 4 in E-flat Major (*Romantic*)

Anton Bruckner was forty when he wrote his first significant large-scale work—a mass in D minor—and forty-two before he wrote the first symphony he was willing to claim. After years as a diligent student, Bruckner had finally found his own voice, but he wasn't confident enough to trust it. The third and fourth symphonies were the toughest for him, and, in both cases, he needed three separate attempts before he was satisfied. He began the Fourth Symphony in 1874. Four years later, he wrote a new scherzo and finale. In 1880, he made further changes, reaching what was, for the time being, his final score. But in the late 1880s, he picked up his pencil and returned to the E-flat symphony.

Bruckner was responding not just to his own second thoughts,

but also to the trivial—though deeply wounding—criticism of others. Well-meaning friends suggested pruning (Bruckner has always seemed long-winded to the unsympathetic listener) and recommended other changes, which Bruckner dutifully considered and often accepted. Franz Schalk and Carl Löwe—two favorite, though unfaithful disciples—thought the scherzo of the Fourth Symphony ought to end pianissimo the first time around, rather than in a blaze of brass as Bruckner conceived it. And so it does, in the first printed edition that they prepared in 1890. (However, when it came time to authorize that edition, Bruckner refused to sign the printer's copy; it was published anyway. The 1880 version is performed at these concerts.)

COMPOSED

1874, revised 1878–80,
late 1880s

FIRST PERFORMANCE

February 20, 1881, Vienna.
Hans Richter conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

January 22, 1897, Auditorium
Theatre. Theodore
Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

November 4, 1007, Orchestra
Hall. Christoph von
Dohnányi conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes, two oboes, two
clarinets, two bassoons,
four horns, three trumpets,
three trombones and tuba,
timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

66 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1972. Daniel Barenboim
conducting. Deutsche
Grammophon

1981. Sir Georg Solti
conducting. London

Bruckner was certainly not the first composer to suffer at the hands of insensitive friends and colleagues. A tall, awkward man with a severely cropped Prussian haircut and a wardrobe of seriously misshapen suits, his very appearance seemed to invite doubt and scorn, if not ridicule. (Beethoven, once arrested as a vagrant, had already proved that fashion plays no role in musical greatness.) But Bruckner's problem lay deeper. From his earliest days, he fought a devastating insecurity that frequently damaged his dealings with people, made his life one of perpetual misery, and almost denied him a career as a composer.

Yet, despite his doubts, the failure of several important performances, the hostility of musicians (the Vienna Philharmonic rejected his first three symphonies as unplayable), and the disloyalty of his students, Bruckner managed to get something down on paper that pleased himself, if no one else. In time, his unorthodox style, with its leisurely pace, slowly unfolding harmony, obstinate repetition of simple motives and chords, and apparent resistance to wrap things up, found other receptive listeners.

Six of Bruckner's symphonies start with a vague rumble that Bruckner picked up from the opening of Beethoven's Ninth and then focus on an important theme as it breaks through. Sometimes the effect is almost improvisational, as if Bruckner sat at the piano—or in the organ loft, for that was his instrument—one hand waiting to see what the other would do.

In the Fourth Symphony, it takes us a surprisingly long time to figure out how quickly the music is moving. A calm, clear horn call beckons over string tremolos. But as the theme emerges, it brings with it faster countermelodies and increasing activity.

From Beethoven's Ninth, Bruckner also found his model for a large-scale structure: a big first movement, a spacious adagio, a scherzo in sonata form, and a wide-ranging finale that gathers many threads together in a new light. It is useless (though accurate) to note that the first movement of Bruckner's Fourth is twice as long as any opening symphonic movement in Mozart or Haydn, and comparable only to those of Beethoven's *Eroica* and Ninth symphonies, among its predecessors. For Bruckner is not Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven—not in the way he handles themes, plans his harmonic structure, or conceives form—even if he is working with many of the same tools.

It has taken music lovers some time to understand him. Robert Simpson, who wrote one of the first comprehensive studies of the symphonies, describes Bruckner's technique as a manifestation of patience. It is patience, certainly, which many listeners today do not bring to Bruckner, and he will not divulge his greatness without it. Bruckner has never been known to make a long story short, but he is a masterful storyteller. The slow movement of this symphony moves at a deliberate and relentless gait, but it's shrewdly paced

and lovingly told, and there are moments of almost unimaginable beauty. The grand climax is truly impressive only if one has made the slow ascent.

The scherzo, with its combination of hunting calls and brass fanfares, is lively, exciting stuff. But the pace is still leisurely, and the trio (marked “Not too quickly”) is delicately scored and even more relaxed. When the scherzo returns, it’s particularly noticeable how Bruckner relies not on speed, but on sheer sonority—here the full brass band—to create excitement.

A Bruckner finale is always large and complicated, and this one gave him an especially hard time. As Donald Tovey rightly points out, “the first thing to realize is that, whatever Bruckner chooses to call it, it is really a slow movement, with all the positive qualities thereof.” It opens, like the symphony, with a serene horn call over low rumblings that leads to increased commotion.

Bruckner takes time for any number of detours to distant harmonic regions, enriching the itinerary immeasurably. The shadow of the scherzo hovers. Near the end, after a barrage from the full orchestra, there is a great, unexpected pause, and then the last full paragraph. As Bruckner told the conductor Arthur Nikisch—in explanation of one of his most common idiosyncrasies—he liked to catch his breath before saying something significant. And the ending is important, for it brings us back to the opening of the symphony, with its simple horn call. There is both a sense of wrapping things up and the satisfaction of reunion, as Bruckner gathers together familiar themes, like tourists who have gone their separate ways and meet at the day’s end. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.