

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

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Thursday, May 26, 2011, at 8:00

Friday, May 27, 2011, at 1:30

Saturday, May 28, 2011, at 8:00

Tuesday, May 31, 2011, at 7:30

Bernard Haitink Conductor
Emanuel Ax Piano

Schumann

Overture to *Manfred*, Op. 115

Mozart

Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major, K. 453

Allegro

Andante

Allegretto

EMANUEL AX

INTERMISSION

Brahms

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Allegro giocoso

Allegro energico e passionato

The appearance of Emanuel Ax is generously sponsored by Marian Edelstein.

The CSO's concert on Saturday evening, May 28, 2011, is dedicated to the memory of Ken M. Davee.

CSO Tuesday series concerts are sponsored by United Airlines.

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.



Robert Schumann

Born June 8, 1810, Zwickau, Saxony, Germany.

Died July 29, 1856, Eendenich, near Bonn, Germany.

Overture to *Manfred*, Op. 115

Robert Schumann's father August was a respected publisher who made a tidy sum printing pocket editions of works by Goethe, Schiller, and Byron, among others. Like his father, Robert was shy and bookish as a boy; he grew up reading the classics and showed great interest in becoming a writer himself. Although he occasionally worked for his father, Robert wanted to perform and compose music, and he was the only one of four brothers who eventually quit the family business.

Long after he had made a name for himself as a pianist, composer, and critic, Robert continued to read voraciously, often by dim, flickering candlelight at bedtime.

The powerful effects of literature may even have contributed to his frequent sleepless nights—a diary entry from 1829 reads “Bed-lecture: *Manfred* by Byron—terrible night.” Schumann always had a special affection for the British writer and, in 1840, he set one of Byron's poems to music as part of the song cycle *Myrthen*. Years later, Joseph von Wasielewski, Schumann's concertmaster in Düsseldorf, remembered that when the composer read aloud from Byron's *Manfred* “his voice suddenly failed him, tears started from his eyes, and he was so overcome that he could read no further.”

Two years before Robert and his wife Clara moved to Düsseldorf

COMPOSED

1848–49, incidental music

FIRST PERFORMANCE

March 14, 1852,
Leipzig, Germany. The
composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

January 1, 1892, Auditorium
Theatre. Theodore
Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

November 10, 2006,
Orchestra Hall. Ludovic
Morlot conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

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

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

12 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1977. Daniel Barenboim
conducting. Deutsche
Grammophon

A 1956 performance with
Bruno Walter conducting
is included on *Chicago
Symphony Orchestra in
the Twentieth Century:
Collector's Choice*.

in 1850, Schumann composed incidental music for a production of *Manfred*. He was thrilled and inspired by the challenge, commenting at the time that he had never before committed himself “with such love and outlay of force to any composition as to that of *Manfred*.” Throughout his life, Schumann identified with tragic literary figures, and he may have seen something of himself in Byron’s tormented hero, who wanders the Alps contemplating suicide and seeking oblivion. (Byron began his dramatic poem in 1816, shortly after visiting the Shelleys in the Swiss Alps, where eighteen-year-old Mary was hard at work on *Frankenstein*.) Schumann wrote an overture and incidental music for fifteen scenes; he began work on August 5, 1848, the day after he finished his only, ill-fated opera *Genoveva*.

Although it is often said that Schumann had no genuine theatrical talent and that he was inept at writing for orchestra, the powerful

overture he composed for *Manfred* proves otherwise. From its quick curtain-raiser beginning (three rushed, offbeat chords), Schumann’s overture is masterfully and economically scored, and an unerringly paced musical drama. It immediately casts a spell, setting the scene for the action to follow.

Schumann has composed a character sketch in dark, unsettled music that grows in passion and urgency, then slowly collapses in the final pages. This is a magnificent and satisfying piece of music on its own, though, like any effective overture, it makes us eager to hear more. ■



**Clara Schumann,
about 1853**



Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major, K. 453

According to Mozart's expense book, on May 27, 1784, he purchased, for 34 kreuzer, a pet starling that learned to whistle the first five measures of the finale of this concerto. Biographers sometimes confuse which came first, the bird or the tune, although since Mozart had already entered the concerto in his catalog on April 12, it seems clear that the music was finished by then and that it was Mozart who taught the tune to the starling and not the other way around.

Mozart's pet was a member of the *Sturnus vulgaris*, the European starling that now thrives in this country as well. The starling is a virtuoso mimic—the *American Scientist* journal reported a starling repeating verbatim, after hearing it said just once, "Does Hammacher Schlemmer have a toll-free number?"—and it has an

uncanny ear for musical patterns. Mozart and his starling agreed on the seventeen-note theme for this concerto finale except that the bird always sang one note sharp and held another too long.

Mozart's popularity with the Viennese concert public can be gauged from the number of piano concertos he wrote each year; 1784 was the peak year, with six new concertos. Those are the first works that Mozart entered in the catalog he started that February—a detailed listing, complete with date, instrumentation, and the opening bars of each new piece of music. Both the first entry, a piano concerto in E-flat (K. 449) and this G major concerto, the fifth item, were written not for Mozart's own use, but for one of his most gifted students, Barbara Ployer, often called Babette. Mozart said she paid him

COMPOSED

1784, entered in catalog
April 12

FIRST PERFORMANCE

June 13, 1784, Döbling, a
suburb of Vienna, Austria

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

March 4, 1937, Orchestra
Hall. Dalies Frantz,
piano, with Frederick
Stock conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE
March 20, 2010, Orchestra
Hall. Mitsuko Uchida con-
ducting from the keyboard

INSTRUMENTATION

solo piano, one flute, two
oboes, two bassoons, two
horns, strings

CADENZAS

by Mozart

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

32 minutes

handsomely for it, though its value to musicians through the years can't be rendered in common currency.

Barbara Ployer gave the first performance on June 13 at her family's summer home in the Viennese suburb of Döbling, accompanied by an orchestra her father hired for the occasion. Mozart brought along as his guest the celebrated Italian composer Giovanni Paisiello, whose newest hit, *The Barber of Seville*, had already made Figaro an operatic sensation before either Mozart or Rossini got the chance. Mozart himself took the keyboard part in his Quintet in E-flat for piano and winds—the work that directly precedes the concerto in his catalog—and, as an added attraction, joined Miss Ployer in his two-piano sonata, K. 448. The evening was an upscale entertainment heightened by great music. In the way that Mozart managed better than nearly any composer at any time, this music touches both connoisseur and dilettante alike—it's music of surpassing technical brilliance, but also, in Mozart's own words, "written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why."

The concerto is one of Mozart's finest, evidence that, even at the peak of his career as a virtuoso performer, he was as generous when writing for others as for himself. It was well received by the Ployers' guests, and its success quickly spread beyond the suburban enclave of Döbling. It's one of only six of Mozart's piano concertos which were published during his lifetime. Beethoven may well have

picked up the unusual idea of a second theme that travels rapidly through several keys from the first movement of this concerto, since he does the same in his own piano concerto in this key. The entire opening Allegro, a particularly graceful rendering of the military march, is delicate in detail and bold in outline, with surprising dips into E-flat at important junctures.

Harmonic drama plays an even more influential role in the C major slow movement, where several powerful modulations and extensive chromaticism give weight to music of great transparency. This is music infinitely more complicated, more troubled than it at first seems. Even the opening statement from the piano swerves from major to minor, and from simple declamation to passionate outburst.

The finale is a set of variations on the tune the starling sang. The variations grow in complexity and ingenuity until the fourth, which plunges headlong into the minor mode, laden with chromaticism. The final variation, almost a cadenza, leads straight to a comic-opera finale, the official coda. Surely Paisiello, whose talent seldom ventured beyond the opera house, marveled that Mozart could afford to waste on the piano concerto a ready-made opera finale more brilliant than anything yet written for the stage. Mozart, of course, realized that the forms weren't mutually exclusive—the merger of the symphonic and the operatic styles is one of his greatest achievements—and that his well was far from dry—he was merely

warming up for his own *Figaro* that, in just two years, would wipe Paisiello's from the stage.

A postscript about the starling. The bird lived with his master for three years (moving with the Mozarts first to the spacious apartment behind Saint Stephen's Cathedral where *The Marriage of Figaro* was composed and later to cheaper quarters in the Landstrasse); witnessing the birth of Carl Thomas, the couple's second son; Wolfgang's bout with a severe

kidney infection; the historic night Haydn came to listen to string quartets dedicated to him; the birth, and death just a month later, of a third son; and observing, day and night, the greatest composer of the time working at top form. The starling died on June 4, 1787, inspiring in Mozart an elegy that begins, "A little fool lies here / Whom I held dear . . ." Mozart then bought a canary that he kept in his room until a few hours before his own death. ■

Symphony Center Information



The use of still or video cameras and recording devices is prohibited in Orchestra Hall.



Latecomers will be seated during designated program pauses.



Please use perfume, cologne, and all other scented products sparingly, as many patrons are sensitive to fragrance.



Please turn off or silence all personal electronic devices (pagers, watches, telephones, digital assistants).

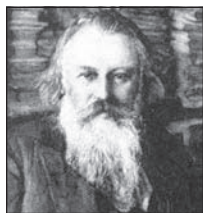


Please note that Symphony Center is a smoke-free environment.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Note: Fire exits are located on all levels and are for emergency use only. The lighted Exit sign nearest your seat is the shortest route outdoors. Please walk—do not run—to your exit and do not use elevators for emergency exit.

Volunteer ushers provided by The Saints—Volunteers for the Performing Arts (www.saintschicago.org)



Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany.

Died April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98

Brahms's good housekeeping has denied us an unfinished fifth symphony to set beside Mahler's Tenth and Bruckner's Ninth—two magnificent symphonies left incomplete at their composers' deaths. We know that Brahms was working on a fifth symphony as early as 1890, during a trip to Italy; apparently he soon gave up on it. During the last years of his life, Brahms conscientiously destroyed or recycled any musical scraps cluttering his desk. He admitted using the opening of his fifth symphony in the string quintet, op. 111, the work he intended to be his last. ("It is high time to stop," he wrote to his publisher in the note that accompanied the score.) Although he went on to write a handful of great chamber works, he didn't return to orchestral

music and destroyed all remaining evidence of a fifth symphony.

Brahms's Fourth Symphony is his final statement in a form he had completely mastered, although for a very long time he was paralyzed by the nine examples by Beethoven. Even Beethoven chose not to go beyond his own ninth, although he toyed with a new symphony two years before his death. It's difficult to imagine what Beethoven or Brahms might have done next, since their last symphonies seem to sum up all either knew of orchestral writing. The difference is that Beethoven's choral symphony opened up a vast new world for the rest of the nineteenth century to explore, while Brahms reached something of a dead end. But what a glorious end it is. Brahms was

COMPOSED

1885

FIRST PERFORMANCE

October 25, 1885,
Meiningen, Germany. The
composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

February 17,
1893, Auditorium
Theatre. Theodore
Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCE

March 21, 2009,
Orchestra Hall. Jaap van
Zweden conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two
oboes, two clarinets, two
bassoons and contrabas-
soon, four horns, two
trumpets, three trombones,
timpani, triangle, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

40 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1969. Carlo Maria Giulini
conducting. Angel
1976. James Levine conduct-
ing. RCA
1978. Sir Georg Solti
conducting. London
1993. Daniel Barenboim
conducting. Erato

never one to forge new paths—like Bach and Handel, he added little to the historical development of music—and yet he always seemed to prove that there was more to be said in the language at hand.

Brahms's Fourth Symphony begins almost in midthought, with urgent, sighing violins coming out of nowhere; it often disorients first-time listeners. (Brahms meant it to: he originally wrote two preparatory bars of wind chords and later crossed them out, letting the theme catch us by surprise.) The violins skip across the scale by thirds—falling thirds and their mirror image, rising sixths—a shorthand way of telling us that the interval of a third pervades the harmonic language of the entire symphony. (It also determines key relationships: the third movement, for example, is in C major, a third below the symphony's E minor key.)

Brahms has a wonderful time playing with the conventions of sonata form in the first movement. He seems to make the classical repeat of the exposition, but, only eight measures in, alters one chord and immediately plunges into the new harmonic fields of the development section. Listen for the great point of recognition—at *ppp*, the quietest moment in the symphony—with which Brahms marks the recapitulation. For twelve measures the music falters like an awkward conversation, the winds suggesting the first theme, the violins not seeming to understand. Suddenly they catch on and, picking up the theme where the winds left off, sweep into

a full recapitulation capped by a powerful coda.

In the *Andante moderato*, Brahms takes the little horn call of the first measure and tosses it throughout the orchestra, subtly altering its color, rhythm, and character as he proceeds. A forceful fanfare in the winds introduces a juicy new cello theme. (It turns out to be nothing more than the fanfare played slowly.) Near the end, shadows cross the music. The horns boldly play their theme again, but the accompaniment suggests that darkness has descended for good.

The lightning flash of the *Allegro giocoso* proves otherwise. This is music of enormous energy, lightened by an unabashed comic streak—unexpected from Brahms, normally the most sober of composers. Here he indulges in the repeated tinklings of the triangle, and he later boasted that “three kettledrums, triangle, and piccolo will, of course, make something of a show.” Midway through, when the first theme's thundering left foot is answered by the puny voice of the high winds, the effect is as funny as anything in Haydn.

Throughout his life, Brahms collected old scores and manuscripts—the autograph of Mozart's great G minor symphony was a prized possession—studying their pages to see what history might teach him. More than once he spoke of wanting to write a set of variations on a theme he remembered from a cantata by Bach. But no one before Brahms had seriously thought of writing a strict *passacaglia*—a continuous set of variations over

a repeated bass line—to wrap up a symphony. (Beethoven used a theme and variations in the finale of his *Eroica* Symphony [1803] and Brahms himself wrote a passacaglia to conclude the Variations on a Theme by Haydn.)

The finale to Brahms's Fourth Symphony isn't a musty, academic exercise, but a brilliant summation of all Brahms knew about symphonic writing set over thirty-two repetitions of the same eight notes. Trombones make their entrance in the symphony to announce the theme, loosely borrowed from Bach's Cantata no. 150, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (I long for you, O Lord) [the cantata is no longer thought to be by Bach]. To bring the ancient passacaglia form into the nineteenth century, Brahms superimposes over his variations the general outline of sonata form, with an unmistakable moment of recapitulation midway through. A look at the finale in its entirety reveals the sturdy four-movement structure of the classical symphony: Brahms begins with eight bold and forceful variations, followed by four slow variations of yearning and quiet eloquence, an increasingly hectic dancelike sequence, and an urgent

and dramatic final group that provides a triumphant conclusion.

One can follow Brahms's eight-note theme from the shining summit of the flute line, where it first appears over rich trombone harmonies, to the depths of the double bass, where it descends as early as the fourth variation, supporting a luscious new violin melody. Even in the twelfth variation, where the theme steps aside so the focus is on the poignant, solemn song of the flute, the spirit of those eight notes is still with us. And as Arnold Schoenberg loved to point out, the skeleton of the main theme from the first movement also appears in the penultimate variation, like the ghostly statue in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The finale is as magnificent and as satisfying as any movement in symphonic music; it's easy to assume that, having written this, Brahms had nothing left to say. We'll never know whether that was so, or if, in the end, he simply ran out of time. ■

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