

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, November 11, 2010, at 8:00

Saturday, November 13, 2010, at 8:00

Antonio Pappano Conductor

Jonathan Biss Piano

Mozart

Symphony No. 23 in D Major, K. 181

Allegro spiritoso—

Andantino grazioso—

Presto assai

First Chicago Symphony subscription concert performances

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19

Allegro con brio

Adagio

Rondo: Molto allegro

JONATHAN BISS

INTERMISSION

Mendelssohn

Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Op. 90 (*Italian*)

Allegro vivace

Andante con moto

Con moto moderato

Saltarello: Presto

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.



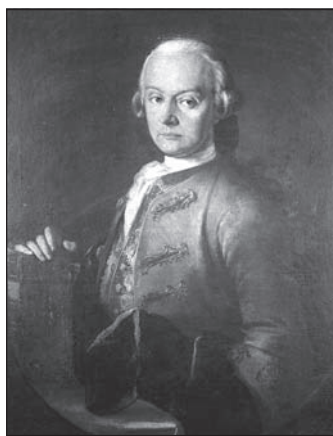
Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 23 in D Major, K. 181

The numbers are misleading. Although this *is* Mozart's twenty-third symphony, if we take into account all the pieces he wrote as an ambitious child and teenage overachiever, it is still early Mozart,



Mozart's father, Leopold.
Anonymous oil portrait, ca. 1765

and it predates by a good decade the half-dozen works on which his reputation as a symphony composer rests. Aside from a single set of

subscription concert performances of his Symphony no. 1, this is the

earliest Mozart symphony the Chicago Symphony has ever played.

Mozart's very first symphonies make little advance over the conventional works of the day, in particular the wonderful symphonies by J.C. Bach, Johann Sebastian's youngest son, who moved to London, where the Mozarts heard his music during their visit in 1764–65 (the eight-year-old Wolfgang and he played duets together). Mozart's Symphony no. 1, in fact, was written during that London trip. More symphonies quickly followed, confirming that Mozart's father was introducing him to all the important music centers and that the young Wolfgang was taking in everything he heard. But with the symphonies he composed in and around a trip to Vienna in 1773—where he heard Haydn's music, among other things—Mozart began to move from prodigiously talented youth to

COMPOSED

date unknown

FIRST PERFORMED

May 19, 1773, Salzburg

ONLY PREVIOUS CSO PERFORMANCE

July 1, 1961, Ravinia Festival, André Kostelanetz conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two oboes, two horns, two trumpets, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

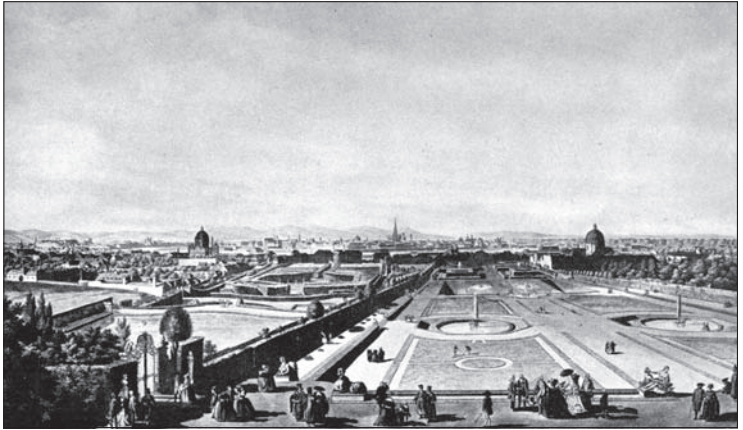
9 minutes

great composer. And he was beginning to discover his own voice—the distinctive sound that, for the first time in his young career, makes it impossible to confuse his music with that of anyone else.

Mozart wrote several symphonies in 1773, either to be performed at home in Salzburg or written

for his upcoming trip to Vienna that July—the D major work played tonight is one of the hometown pieces. It was called an overture in the first Köchel catalog, probably because it is a single paragraph of music with three linked sections, like the popular Italian overtures of the day—several of

Mozart’s symphonies borrow this format—but it is labeled “Sinfonia” on the autograph and it was clearly intended as a symphony. The



A sketch of Vienna in the eighteenth century

opening section, with the unusual tempo marking *Allegro spiritoso*—quickly, with spirit; animated—is a study in changing textures and dynamics. The slow middle section disposes with the trumpets and showcases a lovely oboe solo. The finale, which follows without pause, is a jaunty march. ■



Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany.

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19

Although it is known as no. 2, the B-flat piano concerto is the earliest of Beethoven's five well-known works in the great classical form. In fact, it's not even the composer's first attempt at writing a concerto for himself. When he was only fourteen, Beethoven composed a piano concerto in E-flat, and, although only the solo part has survived, it clearly reveals that the teenage Beethoven thought himself a great virtuoso. (The concerto was reconstructed and performed for the first time in 1943.) But, sometime over the next six years, Beethoven wisely shelved that score and began a new piano concerto in B-flat, over which he struggled on and off for several more years until he felt it was ready for the public. The teenage show-off had become a perfectionist.

In 1792, the year Beethoven left Bonn and settled in Vienna, he wrote out a fresh copy of this concerto, perhaps to show his new teacher, Joseph Haydn, whom he would soon dismiss, leaving neither man with kind words for the other. At the first chance to play the work in public, Beethoven evidently dropped the original finale (discovered among his papers after his death and now known as the Rondo, WoO 6) and wrote a new one. He also revised the slow movement. This is probably the concerto he played at the charity concert on March 29, 1795—his first official public appearance in this great music capital—although by then he had written another one, in C major—the one we know as no. 1. (Beethoven's old friend Franz Gerhard Wegeler recalls that the

COMPOSED

1790–95, revised 1801

FIRST PERFORMANCE

March 29, 1795, the composer as soloist

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

March 12, 1926; Harold Samuel, pianist; Orchestra Hall; Frederick Stock conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

October 20, 2005; Orchestra Hall; Evgeny Kissin, pianist; Sir Andrew Davis conducting

July 15, 2010; Ravinia Festival; Jorge Federico Osorio, pianist; James Conlon conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, strings

CADENZAS

by Beethoven

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

28 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1972, Vladimir Ashkenazy, pianist; Sir Georg Solti conducting, for London

1983, Alfred Brendel, pianist; James Levine conducting, for Philips

composer finished the finale at the very last moment, while suffering from a bad stomachache, but the evidence suggests that he was remembering a different performance and a different concerto.)

Beethoven continued to work on the B-flat score. He sketched, and then discarded, a new slow movement in D major. For a performance in Prague in 1798, he brushed up both the outer movements and added a coda to the Adagio. Still, he was dissatisfied. In fact, when he wrote to the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel in 1801, Beethoven hadn't a good thing to say about *either* of his piano concertos:

I wish to add that one of my first concertos, and therefore not one of the best of my compositions, is to be published by Hofmeister, and that Mollo is to publish a concerto which, indeed, was written later, but which also does not rank among the best of my works in this form.

In truth, both of these concertos reflect Mozart's influence—in their design, in the balance of piano and orchestra, and in the piano writing itself—but, from the day he arrived in Vienna, Beethoven was impatient to establish himself as a new force to be reckoned with, not as the next Mozart. Moreover, by 1801 he had already completed another concerto—the Third—that decisively broke away from the classical model and pointed in a completely new direction. *That* was the composer Beethoven wanted the power brokers at Breitkopf to notice.

Nonetheless, he thought both of his first concertos fit to print, and they were published that year, in the “wrong” order—the C major concerto in March, and the earlier one in B-flat major in December.

For all its classical decorum, there's something explosive and rebellious about Beethoven's earliest piano concerto. In the very opening orchestral tutti, for example, Beethoven swerves unexpectedly into D-flat major, at the same time pulling back from fortissimo to pianissimo to emphasize the jolt, in a way that is quite un-Mozartean. Once the piano enters, we are in the presence of a new personality. By all accounts, the young Beethoven was a thrilling performer of a very different sort than Mozart—the newspaper reports praise his power, “unheard-of bravura and facility,” and sheer intensity of feeling—and his concertos reflect these musical sensibilities, as well as his new style of piano playing.

Mozart's shadow still falls across the elegantly designed first movement, despite evidence of the subversive young Beethoven in the details. The bold and lovely slow movement (revised for the 1795 premiere) is one of his earliest attempts to display both his true originality and the range of his emotional compass. The finale is light and witty, with a wonderful syncopated theme that the pianist finally “corrects,” putting the off-beat material on the beat shortly before the ending. The boisterous spirit of Vienna's new self-appointed musical king is apparent in every measure. ■



Felix Mendelssohn

Born February 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany.

Died November 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany.

Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Op. 90 (*Italian*)

We owe this music to Goethe. At his recommendation, Mendelssohn went to Italy, and there, struck by the landscape and a brilliance of sunlight, and the disposition of a people previously unknown to him, he began his A major symphony—a product of the northern mind intoxicated by the Mediterranean spirit. It’s the same journey, though with a different itinerary, that gave us Goethe’s own *Faust*, Berlioz’s *Harold in Italy*, and E.M. Forster’s *A Room with a View*. “The true Italy,” says Forster’s Miss Bartlett, discarding Baedeker, “is only to be found by patient observation.” Mendelssohn’s grand tour, lasting two years and undertaken with no guide other than Goethe’s comments, allowed him, like Forster’s characters, to see the whole of life in a new

perspective. When Mendelssohn wrote home to his sister Fanny, he noted, with obvious surprise, that his new A major symphony was the “most cheerful piece I have yet composed.”

But first, back to Goethe. In 1821, when they met, Goethe and Mendelssohn made an unlikely pair—the great poet was seventy-two and famous, the composer a precocious twelve-year-old. Nonetheless, they found mutual interests and formed a lasting friendship. Mendelssohn continued to visit Goethe in Weimar throughout the 1820s, as his fame grew nearly equal to his friend’s, the result of his astonishing early success—he wrote the lovely Octet at sixteen and his masterpiece, the Overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, at seventeen. Still, like all

COMPOSED

1830–March 13, 1833

FIRST PERFORMANCE

May 13, 1833, London, the composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

March 24, 1893; Auditorium Theater; Theodore Thomas conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

March 28, 2009; Orchestra Hall; Daniele Gatti conducting

July 10, 2009; Ravinia Festival; James Conlon conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons,

two horns, two trumpets, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

26 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1976, 1985, Sir Georg Solti conducting, for London

the composers of his generation, Mendelssohn failed to win the poet's appreciation. (In the end, and despite a number of qualified applicants including Berlioz, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn himself, Goethe admitted that Mozart was the only one who could have set *Faust* to music.) More than once, Mendelssohn tried to convert Goethe to Beethoven's cause, without success. Music, it appeared, was not their common ground.

Mendelssohn stopped off to visit his colleague in May 1830, just before he began his Italian journey. He played the piano for Goethe every day, sometimes choosing his own music, or works by Bach and Weber; he even tried, with utter failure, to interest the eighty-year-old master in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. They parted, not knowing it was the last time they would see each other. After stopping briefly in Munich, Salzburg, Linz, and Vienna, Mendelssohn landed in Venice on October 9. For months, he wandered the Italian countryside, lingering in Florence and Rome. There he met Berlioz for the first time, finding more to like in the man than in his music. Berlioz, knowing this, still wrote glowingly of Mendelssohn, "He has an enormous talent, extraordinary,



First page of the manuscript of the *Italian Symphony*

prodigious, superb. And I can't be suspected of comradely partiality in speaking like this, since he has frankly told me that he understood nothing of my music."

In the meantime, music was beginning to take shape. On December 20, Mendelssohn wrote home, "After the new year I intend to resume instrumental music and to write several things for the piano, and probably a symphony of some kind, for two have been haunting my brain." By February he reported to Fanny that "the Italian symphony makes rapid progress." (The other, a Scottish symphony, went less well, perhaps

because it was so far from home.) Mendelssohn stayed in Rome through Easter in order to hear the music at Saint Peter's, and then left for Naples, where he expected to write the only remaining movement, the Adagio. "If I continue in my present mood," he wrote shortly after arriving, "I shall finish my Italian symphony . . . in Italy."

When Mendelssohn returned home, however, the A major symphony wasn't done. Even after the score was completed, in chilly Berlin on March 13, 1833, Mendelssohn wasn't satisfied. In May, he conducted the *Italian Symphony* in London, but afterwards he put it back on the shelf, like a disappointing souvenir of his great journey. From time to time he would take it down and tinker with it, but he never thought highly enough of the music to send it to his publisher. After Mendelssohn's premature death in 1847, a number of his scores, including the *Italian Symphony*, were finally published, widely performed, and welcomed into the repertoire.

It's hard to imagine what Mendelssohn found to fault in this nearly perfect symphony. Perhaps, as Donald Tovey suggests, "an instinct deeper than his conscious self-criticism may have prevented him from altering it." The opening is one of but a handful in all music that is instantly recognizable simply by its sonority—rapid-fire, repeated wind chords set in motion by one giant pizzicato plucking of the strings—even before Mendelssohn's famous, bustling melody gets going. The melody itself is one of

the composer's most natural and unforced, racing unstopped over the hills and valleys of the movement, slowing only to make way for a lovely clarinet solo.

Mendelssohn waited until he got to Naples to write the Adagio, a movement of particular grace and nobility. The composer and pianist Ignaz Moscheles said that Mendelssohn took his theme from Czech pilgrims; Donald Tovey heard a religious procession passing through Naples. Mendelssohn himself didn't comment, no doubt assuming that music of such obvious beauty didn't require a setting. The third movement—really more minuet than scherzo—is colored with the composer's characteristic light touch, though the sober trio in particular proves that one can still say serious things lightly. Mendelssohn called his finale a saltarello (the fast and jumpy Italian folk dance); some claim it's more like the tarantella, once prescribed as a cure for the bite of the tarantula. Unlike either, and going against the grain of virtually all symphonic finales known to Mendelssohn, this dance begins in the minor mode and stays there to the last chord. Despite its bitter cast, it makes a brilliant and decisive ending. ■

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