

PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K. 183

Mozart composed this symphony in 1773; it was first performed on October 5 of that year in Salzburg. The score calls for two oboes, two bassoons, four horns, and strings. Performance time is approximately twenty minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first subscription concert performances of Mozart's Twenty-fifth Symphony were given at Orchestra Hall on March 3 and 4, 1932, with Frederick Stock conducting. Our most recent subscription concert performances were given on May 11, 12, and 13, 2006, with Christoph von Dohnányi conducting. The Orchestra first performed this symphony at the Ravinia Festival on August 8, 1937, with Fritz Reiner conducting, and most recently on July 23, 1977, with James Levine conducting.

This is the earliest work by Mozart to have secured a place in the modern orchestral repertory. It is sometimes known as Mozart's "little" G minor symphony, in deference to the sublime later symphony in the same key, no. 40. In the nineteenth century it was little known and rarely performed. That changed in the following century, and, with the popularity of the movie *Amadeus*, which uses its dramatic first movement in ways that would surely surprise the composer, this symphony has achieved a familiarity nearly equal to that of its more famous counterpart.

The majority of symphonies written in the eighteenth century are in major keys, calling particular attention to those in the minor. Several of Haydn's, for example, are well known, including the *Mourning* and *Farewell* symphonies. This work was Mozart's first symphony in a minor key, and he would only write one other. G minor is a key that inspired some of Mozart's most moving music, including Pamina's poignant "Ach ich fühls" from *The Magic Flute* and a deeply expressive string quintet that is one of the landmarks of chamber music. Its choice for this symphony may well have been suggested by Haydn's thirty-ninth symphony, in G minor, with which it shares a number of other similarities, including the unusual scoring for four horns.

Mozart, who was not yet eighteen, wrote this symphony near the end of a busy year. He and his father had spent part of the summer of 1773 in Vienna, where Mozart dashed off many pages of relatively unimportant music and heard a number of Haydn's works. After he returned to Salzburg in September, Mozart began this G minor symphony and his first efforts in two forms which he would ultimately make entirely his own, the string quintet and the piano concerto. With this symphony in particular, Mozart made the first decisive step from wunderkind to great composer, from entertainer to artist.

Romantic myth always gets attached to works in minor keys, and much has been read into this symphony. Yet there is nothing in Mozart's life at the time to justify the exceptional nature of this music—other than his readiness to probe deeper into the human heart. With this piece, we can begin to chart the ways Mozart will move away from the strictly defined parameters of Haydn's art, even though these two great composers would continue to learn from each other and to influence the path the other would follow.

The opening of this symphony is probably the earliest music that sounds wholly Mozartean to our ears—not the charming, finely crafted, yet slightly anonymous music of the period, but something utterly individual, music that leaps from the page and lodges in our memories. The essence of the first measures—as in the later G minor symphony—is rhythm: urgent, repeated, syncopated notes. It is instantly effective, establishing both mood and momentum. A second theme, in B-flat major, provides contrast and a glimpse of the generic musical world Mozart was quickly leaving behind.

The Andante is the only movement in the symphony that does not begin with jagged octaves. Here we have a gracious dialogue between muted violins and bassoons. Mozart paints a picture of eighteenth-century gentility, yet there is boldness in the details. The stern and sober minuet which follows is decidedly not for dancing. Its mid-section trio, however, is friendly, out-of-doors music for winds alone—the sort Mozart often wrote for social functions. The finale restores the tension and turbulence of the first movement (the use of four horns also lends a special sound to this music) and stays in the minor mode to the bitter end.

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

© Chicago Symphony Orchestra. All rights reserved. Program notes may be reproduced only in their entirety and with express written permission from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

These notes appear in galley files and may contain typographical or other errors. Programs subject to change without notice.