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KISHWAUKEE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PROGRAM NOTES

by Geoffrey Decker

Overture to *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* was completed in 1787, and the first performance was given by the Prague Italian opera company at the Royal National Court Theater in Prague on October 29 of that year.

Having almost completed most of the music for his opera *Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni* (The Rake Punished, namely Don Giovanni), more commonly known as simply *Don Giovanni*, Mozart and his wife, Konstanze, boarded a coach in Vienna on probably September 28 or 29, 1787, and headed north to Prague where they arrived on October 4, 1787. His success with his opera *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro) in Prague earlier in the year inspired him greatly and, in the face of a waning popularity in Vienna, the chance to shine again was very tempting. Besides, he was in desperate financial straits, as usual.

The Italian librettist Lorenzo da Ponte (1749-1838) is probably best known for his collaboration with Mozart on *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* (So Do They All), all three considered Mozart's finest operatic work. Da Ponte adapted the libretto for *Don Giovanni* from the legend of Don Juan; but, although he would not admit it in his own memoirs, it very closely resembles a libretto by Giovanni Bertati.

The dissonant heavy chords that open the opera's overture leave no doubt as to how truly serious and darkly dramatic the opera will be in spite of the fact that it is officially labeled an *opera buffa*, or comic opera. That it is not. In the opera's grim plot, the rake, Don Giovanni, murders the father of one of his female conquests. Later, the father returns to life in the form of a statue who eventually drags the Don into hell for his punishment.

When he arrived in Prague, Mozart had to direct the parts to be copied for the orchestra, singers, and chorus. Finally, in one of his huge bursts of creativity, Mozart wrote the overture. Some believe it was written on the day of the performance itself, but Mozart himself indicated the completion of the opera – and probably the overture, too – on the day before. Regardless, it is hard to believe how fast Mozart worked, under pressure and not.

Recommended Recordings

There are some very highly recommendable recordings of the entire opera *Don Giovanni*, namely those recorded in Berlin in 1958 on Deutsche Grammophon with the late Hungarian conductor Ferenc Fricsay and in London in 1959 on EMI (now Warner) with the late Italian conductor Carlo Maria Giulini. A recommended period-instrument performance would be that recorded by Sir John Eliot Gardiner for Archiv in the early 1990s. A personal favorite recording of the full opera is one captured live from the stage of the Salzburg Festival on July 27, 1953, with Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Vienna Philharmonic. It's a bit hard to find – and you have to join the Society to buy anything – but it can be purchased online from the Société Wilhelm Furtwängler at www.furtwangler.org. It's worth it, too. Of recordings of just the overture, Sir Neville Marriner's on Warner is quite good but features an added concert ending instead of ending rather quietly just before the curtain rises in a staged performance.

Concerto No. 2 in D major for Cello and Orchestra, Hob. VIIb:2 by Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

The Haydn Concerto No. 2 for cello was completed in 1783. The date of the first performance is unknown although it is thought to have been premiered by cellist Antonin Kraft.

Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn spent many happy years working for the Esterházy family at their palace, Schloss Esterházy, south of Vienna in Eisenstadt. Sometime in 1778, a young virtuoso cellist from what is now Pilsen in the Czech Republic, Antonin Kraft, secured an appointment to Prince Nikolaus Esterházy's orchestra. This orchestra was, in effect, Haydn's personal band of musicians. Besides playing in the orchestra, Kraft studied composition with Haydn.

Haydn was so taken with Kraft's cello technique that he asked Kraft's advice in writing for the cello. The product of their collaboration was Haydn's Cello Concerto in D major. But that is where the trouble started. At some point, an encyclopedia entry mis-accredited the concerto to Kraft and that was that until the American musicologist H. C. Robbins Landon started digging into things.

Robbins Landon did much in bringing Haydn's music to the forefront. He worked hard to determine the provenance of many of Haydn's works, but not without some comical episodes. As his obituary in London's *Independent* states, “. . . Robbins Landon could himself be cavalier with the facts. In his early days in Vienna he was fond of calling press conferences, in one of which he presented his discovery that the Haydn Cello Concerto in C [*sic*] was in fact by Antonin (also referred to as

Anton) Kraft; six months later he called another conference to announce that he had discovered Haydn's manuscript [of the Cello Concerto in D major] after all."

So, it was through Robbins Landon's work that we now know that tonight's concerto is really that of Joseph Haydn. But, Dutch cellist Anner Bylsma firmly believes that Kraft exerted a huge influence over the composition of the concerto and, because of this, he believes that they both wrote it! He states that "the masterful orchestration can hardly be by anyone else [than Haydn]; but what about the wonderfully effective technical passages? Could Haydn have done that?" And, at the end of his essay, Bylsma puts forth the question, "Do we have here [in the Concerto in D major] . . . a work by the masterful Haydn in collaboration with the young Kraft?" Kraft was, after all, a composition student of Haydn's and, when he was working in Vienna later in his life, more famous composers and musicians highly respected his work. As Bylsma asks, we will have to decide for ourselves.

The concerto is in the typical Classical three movements, and it is scored for two oboes, two horns in D and strings.

Recommended Recordings

Anner Bylsma's own recording with the Tafelmusik Orchestra and conductor Jean Lamon on the Deutsche Harmonia Mundi label is an excellent period-instrument performance and includes both Haydn Concertos and Anton Kraft's Cello Concerto in C major, Op. 4. Another excellent period performance is that by Christophe Coin with Christopher Hogwood conducting the Academy of Ancient Music on L'Oiseau-Lyre.

Although Mstislav Rostropovich recorded a fine modern-instrument performance of the Haydn Cello Concertos with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields for EMI (now Warner), it is Rostropovich's conducting the same orchestra "from the cello" on a Euroarts DVD that wins a Rosette – the highest recommendation – in the *2010 Penguin Guide to Recorded Classical Music*. It can be sought out on YouTube and is special indeed.

Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944 ("The Great") by Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Austrian composer Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 9 in C Major, D. 944 ("The Great") was completed in 1828, and the first public performance was given by the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn on March 21, 1839.

Schubert never saw his “Great” C major Symphony published and may not have even been present at the performance given by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society of the Friends of Music) in Vienna sometime during the latter half of 1827. Although they took the time to copy out the symphony’s parts and paid Schubert a small fee, the somewhat private performance was the one and only time it was played during the composer’s short life. The work was considered too long and too difficult, especially for the Society’s conservatory orchestra.

The symphony was forgotten for ten years until Robert Schumann visited Vienna and was given a copy of the work kept in the library of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. Schumann took the copy back to Leipzig where it was given its first public performance. In writing about the work after the concert, Schumann famously proclaimed the Symphony as having a “heavenly length.” Simply stated in other words, we are finally given the opportunity to hear Schubert’s wealth of invention in a performance of the work.

Franz Schubert suffered complications from syphilis and died two months short of his 32nd birthday. His disease and bouts of melancholy and depression made his last few years especially difficult. But, his illness notwithstanding, he found a degree of happiness and respite – and inspiration – among the mountains of Austria’s Central Alps. On the northern end of the mountain lake known as the Traunsee lies the resort town of Gmunden. The belief is that it was during a somewhat lengthy stay here in the summer of 1825 that Schubert composed most of his “Great” C major Symphony.

It was during my years as an undergraduate in music history at the University of Kansas that I had the chance to attend an unforgettable lecture by Dr. Brian Newbould, Professor of Music at the University of Hull, England. Newbould is a noted Schubert expert and has done extensive research about Schubert’s symphonies. He has “completed” the Symphony No. 8 in B minor (“The Unfinished”) and other sketches of symphonies Schubert left behind. Newbould’s infectious enthusiasm is amply apparent in describing Schubert’s “Great” C major Symphony in his 1997 book, *Schubert – The Music and the Man*.

He writes, "Schubert's 'Great' C major Symphony inhabits a quite different world from that of the one we now call the 'Unfinished' Symphony. It is a glorious last re-affirmation of the Classical principles of symphonic design, imbued with a Romantic spirit and impelled by an unflagging rhythmic verve which seems almost calculated to dispel any doubts that Schubert would never be able to finish a symphony again. It could be seen as evidence of Schubert having found in his Gmunden-Gastein summer a new life, disease-free, or the strength to face out the residual threat and attain a new, exalted creative plane. In its life-enhancing combination of richness and élan, it stands as a symbol of renewal, a beacon lit by

the burning force of creativity and casting its light in turn over Schubert's last years as a referential backdrop to all the varied masterpieces yet to come."

Further, Professor Neubold compares Franz Schubert and Ludwig van Beethoven: "Some may find an irony in the fact that Beethoven, no noted composer of Lieder, had recourse to the unsymphonic ingredients of voices and verbal text in his Ninth, while Schubert the prolific song-writer retained the instrumental purity of the symphonic strain to the last. He had reached the position – by virtue of commitment, practice and maturation – at which he was wholly at ease with the symphonic medium, its long-term architecture and its orchestral sound-world: he had used solo and choral voices often in conjunction with an orchestra (in his church music and operas), but even with a model by his idolized Beethoven to build from he resisted any inclination to let poetry, drama or the voice infiltrate the symphonic domain. He did, however, implicitly pay homage at a distance to the influence of the spoken word by allowing a clear reminiscence of the vocal 'joy' theme of the 'Choral' Symphony to lead him into the development of the finale of his own Ninth.

"The two symphonies by Beethoven and Schubert are almost contemporaneous, in the middle of the nineteenth century's third decade. At the end of the same decade came another notable symphony, the 'Fantastique' of Berlioz. Schubert's looks conservative alongside the other two. Berlioz's two harps, swollen woodwind palette, extra percussion and cornets reflect a French tradition and programmatic purpose. Even Beethoven requires, in addition to his singers, four horns, a contrabassoon, piccolo and exotic percussion. Schubert's orchestra merely adds the three trombones to the Classical contingent of four woodwind pairs, two each of horns and trumpets, and two drums. Yes as his symphony unfolds, there is no lack of energy, no shortage of colour, nor any sense of a tired tradition. The last Classical symphony it may be, but its message is new-minted, its scope visionary, its momentum tireless."

Leaving behind almost 1000 compositions – including over 600 Lieder, or art songs, for voice and piano, Schubert is among the most prolific of all composers. We can only imagine his output had he lived into his 50s like Beethoven or, like Joseph Haydn, into his late 70s. Sadly, Schubert is not as popular or as performed in the United States as that other very prolific composer, Mozart, who died just short of his 36th birthday. Why? Well, there are lots of reasons – some based in more fact than others. A big part of it is probably because Mozart had the 1984 film *Amadeus* to solidify his place in our culture; poor Schubert did not. Perhaps his time will come someday, though.

Schubert was the only authentically Viennese composer among figures like Brahms, Bruckner, Beethoven, and Mozart. Vienna ran in his blood and this trait can be felt throughout tonight's symphony. It is hard to explain what this

authenticity is, but it is definitely present. Of all the beautiful moments in the work, listen especially for the middle section, or trio, of the third movement, the Scherzo. Like Beethoven's Sixth Symphony ("Pastoral"), it comes up out of the countryside surrounding Vienna, that of the Vienna Woods, the vineyards and Heurigers* dotting the hills.

The "Great" C major Symphony is in the Classical symphony form of four movements, scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, two alto trombones and one bass trombone, timpani, and strings.

Recommended Recordings

It isn't easy to choose a favorite recording of the work, but that by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment on period instruments and conducted by the late Sir Charles Mackerras can hardly be bettered. It was originally recorded for the Virgin Label but is now available on the Erato Label coupled with other symphonies by Schubert. (Do not confuse it with Mackerras' later recording on Telarc, which is quite good but not as good.) A famous 1951 studio recording by Wilhelm Furtwängler and the Berlin Philharmonic on Deutsche Grammophon's "The Originals" expresses the work in its most Romantic form. Another great recording is that on Decca with Sir Georg Solti conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. The Viennese horns and acoustics of Vienna's Sofiensaal recording "studio" add much to the enjoyment of Solti's only recording of the work. Other favorites are those on RCA (now Sony) by Günter Wand and his North German Radio Symphony, recorded live in concert in April 1991 and with a rhythmic vitality like few other recordings of the work. And last but not least – and difficult to find on CD – is the Philips (now Decca) 1975 recording by Bernard Haitink and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Although Haitink could be quite bland during the era of the recording, he hits the ball out of the park with this one.

*A Heuriger is a small tavern still found in the Vienna woods, hills, and vineyards surrounding the city where the new wines are served alongside sausages, bread, and other Viennese foods.

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