

**Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra
Program Notes for Concert May 2, 2015**

by Geoffrey Decker

Symphony No. 31 in D Major, K. 297/300a ("Paris")

by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

When the young Austrian composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and his mother set out on their six-month journey to Paris, hoping to secure a prestigious post for him, little did they know that he would return to Salzburg a year and three months later with neither a job nor his mother. The wanderlust that pulled the nearly 22-year-old composer from the city of his birth, and his home, in search of greener grass and better work than that available to him in Salzburg, was very strong indeed. In fact, it was a wanderlust that would affect him his entire life, just as it had Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frideric Handel, and many other composers of the time.

Leaving Salzburg in September 1777 on their way to Paris, Mozart and his mother stopped and spent several weeks in each of Munich and Augsburg and a full five months in Mannheim. After what must have been a grueling 10-day carriage ride, the two arrived in Paris on March 24, 1778. Flying from Chicago to Paris in a mere eight and a half hours today, one can only imagine how the two travelers suffered in a carriage with wooden wheels and no shock absorbers over treacherous and unpaved "highways," with no bathroom facilities and no real sleeping accommodations.

At first glance, the journey seems all for naught and even tragic, for his lonely and, for that period, elderly mother died in Paris on July 3, 1778. He also struggled with his father's unrelenting correspondence threatening his son with dejection if he did not find success and, especially, income to support the entire family. In his 1995 biography of Mozart, Maynard Solomon writes, "It is my view that Mozart's quest for employment failed not because he was unemployable, unproductive, or untalented, but because his father pursued a private agenda that Mozart ultimately could not live with." In other words, all the time that Mozart was on the road, his father's machinations behind the scenes sadly foiled what were probably very good opportunities for the young composer.

There were indeed moments of joy, though. The very fickle Mozart met and fell in love with two young ladies along the way. The first was his cousin,

Maria Anna Thekla Mozart, in Augsburg, and the second, Aloysia Weber, the daughter of a famous singer, in Mannheim.

Somehow Mozart found time to compose several significant musical works, one of which is the *Symphony No. 31 in D major, K. 297/300a*, subtitled "Paris." It was premiered in a private performance on June 12, 1778, in the home of Count Karl Heinrich Joseph von Sickingen, the ambassador to Paris of the Electorate of the Palatinate; and the public first heard the symphony just six days later in a performance by an ensemble known as the Concert Spirituel.

From the very beginning, the public loved the symphony. Proof of this lies in the fact that on June 26, 1778, a London periodical, the *Courier de l'Europe*, wrote, "The Concert Spirituel . . . began with a symphony by Mr. Mozart. This artist, who from the tenderest age made a name for himself among harpsichord players, may today be ranked among the most able composers."

There were further performances of the work in Paris throughout the following decade, due mostly to the Paris publishing house, Sieber, which announced the printed work for sale on February 20, 1779 and promoted it in its catalog through the year 1788. The symphony's Vienna premiere took place at the Burgtheater, March 11, 1783, during a benefit concert for Mozart's former love interest (and now his sister-in-law!), the singer Aloysia Weber.

In an unusual gesture, Mozart omitted the traditional minuet third movement and adopted the general form of fast-slow-fast. Strangely, there are also two extant versions of the second movement; the first is an *Andantino* in G major in 6/8 time and the other is an *Andante* in G major but in 3/4 time.

Because Paris provided him the instrumental resources, he scored the work for a rather large orchestra of 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in A, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings. It was also Mozart's first symphony to use clarinets! Another interesting aspect of the work is its use of a technique he obviously picked up during his time in Mannheim. Known as the *Mannheim Rocket*, the first movement opens with a rising and accelerating D-major scale. Repeated several times throughout the movement, it has a thrilling and very uplifting effect.

Recommended Recordings of Mozart's *Symphony No. 31*: Although there are myriad recordings of Mozart's final six symphonies, recordings of the 31st are scarce in comparison; they are often only included in complete sets of Mozart's symphonies. Those that can be found come in two flavors:

period instrument and modern instrument. A favorite that combines the best of period-instrument performance style played on modern instruments is Sir Charles Mackerras' second recording of the work with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, made not long before his death for England's Linn Label (CKD350). The performance is one of the most excitingly and rhythmically vital ever recorded. The recording is spectacular and, because it's what is known as a hybrid Super Audio CD (SACD), it can be played on both a SACD or traditional CD player. By the way, if you really want to treat yourself, there are two 2-CD sets in this series containing Mozart's Symphonies Nos. 29, 31, 32, 35 and 36 in the first volume and Nos. 38-41 in the second. For a more traditional recording, you can find Karl Böhm's excellent and recently remastered 1966 recording with the Berlin Philharmonic included in their "complete" set of the Mozart symphonies on Deutsche Grammophon (28947761341). Note that, if you buy this set on Amazon, you can immediately download the mp3 version for free while awaiting the arrival of your CD set!

Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen (Songs of a Wayfarer)

by Gustav Mahler
(1860-1911)

Although Bohemian composer Gustav Mahler is mostly known as a symphonist of gigantic proportions today, he was a genuine celebrity performer in his day. In fact, when considering musicians of that time, only the fame of Italian tenor Enrico Caruso and that of Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini ever came close to or eclipsed Mahler's fame as a conductor. His work across Europe, and especially that which he did in New York, made his a household name.

Mahler today is firmly entrenched as a popular composer because of his ten gigantic finished symphonies. And yes, there are ten if we count *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth) as a symphony, which it pretty much is. We often forget his fame as a conductor and even sometimes forget how adept he was both at writing songs for voice and orchestra and at "rearranging" other composers' music for what he referred to as "modern" performance; modern for his time, that is.

Of the many songs Mahler wrote, there are three song cycles for voice and orchestra which are pretty much standard repertoire. They are *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer) of about 1884-85, his so-called *Rückert-Lieder* after poems by Friedrich Rückert of 1901-02, and his *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children) of 1901-04, also based on poems by Rückert. The earlier set, *Songs of a Wayfarer*, are more

popular and more frequently performed than the others, partly because he incorporated some of the same melodies into his *Symphony No. 1 in D*, subtitled "Titan." Another reason for their more frequent performance is that their subject matter is a lot less tragic than the later two cycles.

Composed for low voice and set to his own text, Mahler wrote the work in the wake of an unhappy love for Johanna Richter, a soprano he met while conducting at the opera in Kassel, Germany. It is difficult to trace the song cycle's compositional history, but we do know that it was originally written for voice with piano accompaniment. As with most of his works, Mahler continued developing and revising his *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* throughout the remainder of his life. The biggest revision, and the orchestration of the songs, came in the 1890s. Although the piano accompaniment version may very well have been premiered at some point before, the orchestrated version's premiere was given in Berlin on March 16, 1896. The Dutch baritone Anton Sijmsemans was soloist, with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by the composer.

As noted above, the text Mahler set to music was his own, although there is a strong relationship between the first song's text to a poem found in one of Mahler's favorite collections of German folk poetry, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* ("The Boy's Magic Horn," a work from which Mahler derived a lesser-known cycle of songs of the same title).

Even if one cannot understand German, young forlorn love's tug on the heartstrings can certainly be felt in the orchestral music and especially in the vocal part if done with the proper amount of expression. The four songs of the cycle are "Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht" ("When My Sweetheart Is Married"), "Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld" ("I Crossed the Field This Morning"), "Ich hab' ein glühend Messer" ("I Have a Glowing Knife"), and "Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz" ("My Beloved's Two Blue Eyes").

Note that, although it has stuck, the translation of the German word "Gesellen" to "wayfarer" in English is not quite accurate. According to Langenscheidt's *New College German Dictionary* and Austrian music journalist Fritz Spiegl (1926-2003), the German word "der Geselle" more accurately refers to a "journeyman," or apprentice, who travels from town to town learning his trade from various masters before becoming one himself. This is further evidence that *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* was probably autobiographical for Mahler. Spiegl put forth a more accurate translation of the song cycle's title: "Songs of a Traveling Journeyman."

Recommended Recordings of Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden*

Gesellen: Recordings of this Mahler song cycle are many. There are recordings with both men and women singing solo. One of my favorite recordings is with the American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Andrew Davis, on Sony (SBK 46535). Even though a female voice, von Stade does a fine job in sounding like a very young man. (She was a great Octavian, the so-called "trouser role" in Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*.) And as a supreme added bonus on this budget-priced CD, von Stade's recording is coupled with one of the finest recordings that can be had of Mahler's *Symphony No. 4 in G* with soprano Judith Raskin and the Cleveland Orchestra conducted by George Szell. Other highly regarded recordings are of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's 1952 EMI studio recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler and of an even better live performance he gave at the Salzburg Festival in August 1951 with Furtwängler conducting the Vienna Philharmonic, now available on the Orfeo label in an 8-CD set (C409048L).

Le sacre du printemps (The Rite of Spring)

by Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

Considering his precocious interests in music as a child and early adult, the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky was lucky enough to spend a lot of time with great musicians who were often guests in his parents' home. His father, a principal bass singer at the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg, worked closely with composers Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, and Modest Mussorgsky, and he frequently invited them to dine with his family. Later, while studying law at the University of St. Petersburg, Stravinsky even sought Rimsky-Korsakov's guidance in some of his early compositions.

In another stroke of luck, the impresario Sergei Diaghilev happened to be in the audience at the 1909 premiere of one of the early works guided by Rimsky-Korsakov, *Feu d'artifice* (Fireworks). Recognizing Stravinsky's talent, he invited the young composer to prepare music for several upcoming productions for his newly-formed ballet troupe, the Ballets Russes, in Paris. Diaghilev soon commissioned Stravinsky to write music for a new ballet, *L'oiseau de feu* (The Firebird) for the Ballets Russes' 1910 season. Finding Diaghilev "the very essence of a great personality," the inspired Stravinsky wrote a powerful and very different work that met with great success at its Paris premiere in June 1910. The same inspiration infused his

second commission from Diaghilev, the ballet *Petroushka* which also premiered in Paris but in 1911.

As original as Stravinsky's music for the ballets *Firebird* and *Petroushka* was, the third commission shook the musical world to its core, a tremor that we still feel today and that influenced almost every composer since. Subject matter for each of the two prior ballets was Diaghilev's, but the original idea for *Le sacre du printemps* ("The Rite of Spring") was entirely Stravinsky's. In fact, he had to almost talk the impresario into supporting the commission! As Stravinsky himself wrote, "The idea of *Le sacre du printemps* came to me while I was still composing *The Firebird*. I had dreamed a scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin dances herself to death." Stravinsky tried to interest Diaghilev in the subject of "pagan rites," but his mind was focused, as he thought Stravinsky's should also be, on *Firebird* and *Petroushka*.

In describing his work on *The Rite of Spring*, Stravinsky wrote, "The entire [work] was written in a tiny room . . . an eight-by-eight-foot closet, rather, whose furniture was a small upright piano which I kept muted, a table, and two chairs." His work progressed rather quickly until he reached the final movement, the *Danse sacrale*, which he says he "could play . . . but did not know how to write." He finished the work by the beginning of 1912 and spent the next four months completing the orchestration.

With choreography by the famous dancer Vaslav Nijinsky, stage designs and costumes by Nicholas Roerich, and the Ballets Russes Orchestra conducted by Pierre Monteux, *Le sacre du printemps* premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris on May 29, 1913. It is best to let Stravinsky himself describe that night. He wrote, "That the first performance . . . was attended by a scandal must be known to everybody. I was unprepared for the explosion myself. The reactions of the musicians who came to the orchestra rehearsals betrayed no intimation of it. Nor did the stage spectacle seem likely to precipitate a riot. The dancers had been rehearsing for months; they knew what they were doing at least, even though what they were doing often had nothing to do with the music." In describing the audience reaction, he writes, "At the performance mild protests against the music could be heard from the beginning. Then, when the curtain opened, a group of knock-kneed and long-braided lolitas jumping up and down, the storm broke. Cries of 'ta geule' ['shut up'] came from behind me. I left the hall in a rage . . . I could not understand why people who had not yet heard it wanted to protest in advance . . . I arrived backstage in a fury. There I saw Diaghilev switching the house lights on and off in the hope that this might quiet the hall." As the riot continued in the hall, the music could

hardly be heard by the dancers and Nijinsky stood on a chair shouting numbers in Russian to the dancers so that they would not get lost.

It can be said that, much like the day on which the world heard the premiere of Beethoven's Third Symphony, the "Eroica," on that May night in Paris in 1913, music changed forever. Everything that has come since has been influenced in some way by Stravinsky's masterpiece. Because of its unbelievably revolutionary musical character and still – even today – sort of ultra-modern style, Russian composer Igor Stravinsky's music for the ballet *The Rite of Spring* continues to stir up emotions even now, nearly 102 years after its premiere! Ask a group of classical music listeners what they think of Stravinsky and they will quickly and almost completely divide into two groups: those who like his music and those who do not. A lot of this like or dislike comes from linking his name with only one of his many works: *The Rite of Spring*. It is indeed hard to listen to, and it is hard to comprehend. Speaking from much experience, one might be better served to approach the work with less scrutiny and more with the mindset of just "going with the flow." Well-mannered-ness and the so-called high culture inherent in music by Johann Sebastian Bach and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – and perhaps even that of Stravinsky's Russian contemporary, Dmitri Shostakovich – will not be found in *The Rite of Spring*. As stated above, sit back and let yourself "go with the flow." The flow will be a mighty raging river. The extremely wide-ranging orchestral colors and untamed rhythm that Stravinsky used – his color palette is bigger than any other composer's before or since – to evoke the world of early raw primitive culture will definitely be enough to make it all worth your time.

Recommended Recordings of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*:

Stravinsky himself recorded the work three times commercially; the first was in 1928, the second in 1940 with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York (aka New York Philharmonic), and the third in 1960 with a studio orchestra called the Columbia Symphony Orchestra. Although these recordings have their merits – the most important being the fact that the composer himself is conducting – they fail to excite like they should. Of the remaining seemingly hundreds of recordings available, a few stand out above all of the others. A personal favorite is Igor Markevich's second recording made in 1959 with the Philharmonia Orchestra. Both it and his groundbreaking 1951 recording with the same orchestra are available on a single CD on the Testament label (SBT 1076). Supposedly, a recording session with conductor Otto Klemperer was cancelled due to illness and Markevich was called in as a substitute. He and the now-unknown producer decided instead to re-record his interpretation. The spontaneity is infectious to say the least, and the 1959 Kingsway Hall, London recording does not sound its age. To quickly sample this recording, simply listen to the end of

the first part, *The Adoration of the Earth*. It will knock your socks off. Leonard Bernstein made three commercial recordings of the work, but his 1958 New York Philharmonic recording for Columbia Records (now Sony) stands head and shoulders above the others. Upon hearing it, Stravinsky exclaimed, "Wow!" It was recently remastered for Sony Masterworks (MS 6010) and is available on vinyl too! Stay away from his London Symphony and Israel Philharmonic recordings. Another recommended recording from the 50s was recently rediscovered and remastered by Andrew Rose and his very excellent online download label Pristine Classical. It is the 1957 recording made by Jascha Horenstein and the Southwest Radio Symphony Orchestra of Baden-Baden and Freiburg. It can be purchased and downloaded at www.pristineclassical.com. Of the many remaining and more recent recordings, several stand out as exceptional. One is the Decca demonstration-class recording made in Chicago's Medinah Temple with Sir Georg Solti conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. It is difficult to find as a single CD but is one of many treasures to be found in a recently-released and highly-recommended 51-CD set titled Decca Sound – The Analogue Years (Decca 478 5437). A little earlier in the same year, 1974, Lorin Maazel, the Vienna Philharmonic, and the Decca recording team set up shop in Vienna's famed "studio," the Sofiensaal (where Solti's famous *Ring* was recorded). From that session came a surprisingly blistering recording of *The Rite of Spring*. Once again, the recording is of demonstration quality and, although it may not have been much in their blood in 1974, the Vienna Philharmonic plays the work with the utmost precision and power heard in any American recording of the piece. Although Maazel might introduce some interpretive quirks, it is a *Rite* with which to reckon. Finally, this reviewer's favorite recording is – and always has been – the second recording made with the Berlin Philharmonic and conducted by Herbert von Karajan. There are some clinkers in the horns but one can tell that Karajan recorded in long takes and was willing to accept the clinkers if the mood was right. Perhaps because Karajan's earlier recording of the work prompted Stravinsky to describe it as "tempo di hoochie-koochie," Karajan worked particularly hard to achieve perfection in his second run of the piece. Some even say that the first recording was so good that Stravinsky was jealous that he himself could not achieve such precision. The second recording is available on the Deutsche Grammophon label (415 979-2).