

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2016-2017 Mellon Grand Classics Season

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MANFRED MARIA HONECK, CONDUCTOR
TILL FELLNER, PIANO

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN Overture to *Armida*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra
in C minor, Opus 37
I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo: Allegro
 Mr. Fellner

Intermission

WOLFGANG AMADEUS Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543
MOZART
I. Adagio — Allegro
II. Andante con moto
III. Menuetto: Allegretto
IV. Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN Overture to *Armida* (1783)

Franz Joseph Haydn was born in Rohrau, Lower Austria on March 31, 1732, and died in Vienna on May 31, 1809. He composed the opera *Armida* in 1783, and it was premiered at Esterháza Palace in Hungary on February 26, 1784, with the composer conducting. These performances mark the Pittsburgh Symphony premiere of *Armida*. The score calls for flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns and strings.
Performance time: approximately 8 minutes

The story of *Armida* and Rinaldo derives from Torquato Tasso's epic dramatic poem about the First Crusade, *Jerusalem Liberated* (completed 1575). *Armida*, the Saracen sorceress, has entranced Rinaldo, the greatest of the Frankish heroes, with her sensual charms. For love of *Armida*, he abandons his Christian comrades, who seek to rescue him from her spell. They restore his sense of duty, and win him back from the sorceress, but he determines to destroy the source of her magic, a myrtle tree at the center of her enchanted forest. He finds the tree, and just as he prepares to rend it with his sword, the trunk splits open to reveal *Armida* in her most alluring form. Nearly lost once again, Rinaldo summons his greatest courage and strikes the tree and *Armida*. Her spell is broken, and the Christians emerge victorious.

This story, usually fleshed out with a love interest between Rinaldo and *Armida*, provided the subject for a large number of operas in the 17th and 18th centuries, beginning with Monteverdi's dramatic madrigal of 1624 (*Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*), and continuing in later decades with stage works by Handel, Salieri, Lully, Gluck, Traetta, Jomelli, Anfossi, Sacchini, Gazzaniga and Righini; Rossini and Dvořák carried the subject into the Romantic era. Haydn settled on the old theme of *Armida* for the *opera seria* written in 1783 for the Esterháza Palace season of the following year — it proved to be the last opera he composed for the Esterházy. After its premiere on February 26, 1784, *Armida* was performed more frequently than any other opera at Esterháza (at least 54 times before Prince Nicolaus' death in 1790), and came to be a favorite at the court in Vienna (21 performances in 1784 and 17 in 1785; the work remained in the repertory for several more seasons). The composer and his contemporaries regarded it as his finest creation for the musical stage.

In his study of Haydn, Karl Geiringer described the Overture to *Armida* as "a sort of tone poem covering the whole plot of Rinaldo's sinful passion for the lovely sorceress *Armida*, and his eventual return to duty." The Overture is unusual in 18th-century practice in that it is based on excerpts from the opera. The opening theme depicts the conflict between Rinaldo's sense of duty and his longing for love; the subsidiary subject is a reminder of the hero's military activities. The development section describes Rinaldo's turbulent scenes with *Armida* and his guilty conscience. The seductive music of the enchanted wood provides a beguiling contrast, but Rinaldo tears himself away, and the Overture ends with the victory of duty over love.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra in C minor, Opus 37 (1797-1803)

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn on December 16, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. He composed his Third Piano Concerto (one of five concertos for the instrument) between 1797 and 1803. The concerto was premiered in Vienna on April 4, 1803, with Ignaz von Seyfried conducting and Beethoven as soloist. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the concerto at Syria Mosque on October 25, 1946, with Fritz Reiner conducting and Claudio Arrau as soloist. The concerto was last heard in Heinz Hall on April 17, 2010, with Juraj Valcuha conducting and Yefim Bronfman as soloist. The score calls for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings.

Performance time: approximately 34 minutes

By 1803, Emanuel Schikaneder, the colorful character who figured so prominently in the closing pages of Mozart's life as the librettist and producer of *The Magic Flute*, had taken over the management of Vienna's Theater-an-der-Wien. His house was locked in a fierce competition with the court-subsidized

Kärntnertheater, run by Baron Peter von Braun. When von Braun hired the distinguished Luigi Cherubini as resident composer, Schickaneder felt obliged to counter with his own music master, and he approached Beethoven with an offer. Beethoven, who had felt the need to write for the stage for some time, accepted gladly — especially since the job carried free lodgings in the theater as part of the compensation. He and Schickaneder dutifully plowed through a small library of possibilities for an operatic subject, but none inspired Beethoven until he took up work on *Fidelio* late in 1803.

In the meantime, Beethoven took advantage of his theatrical connection to put some of his instrumental works on display. Since opera was forbidden in Catholic countries during Lent at that time, the Theater-an-der-Wien was available for concerts in the early spring, and Beethoven scheduled such an event during April 1803. It had been fully three years since he last presented a concert entirely of his own music, and he had several scores that were awaiting their first presentations, including the Second Symphony, the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and this Third Piano Concerto. He programmed all of these, and, for good measure, tossed in the First Symphony, which had first been heard at his concert three years earlier.

Beethoven proceeded enthusiastically with plans for the concert, working right up to the last minute putting finishing touches on the new compositions. (His pupil Ferdinand Ries found him in bed writing trombone parts for the oratorio only three hours before the rehearsal began.) He had only a single rehearsal on the concert day for this wealth of unfamiliar music, and, with his less-than-adept players, it is little wonder that it went poorly. The public and critical response to the concert was lukewarm, undoubtedly due in large part to the inadequate performance. Beethoven, however, was delighted to have played his music for the Viennese public, and he was well on his way to becoming recognized more for his ability as a composer than as a pianist.

The Third Concerto's first movement opens with the longest introductory orchestral *tutti* in Beethoven's concertos, virtually a full symphonic exposition in itself. The strings in unison present immediately the main theme, "a group of pregnant figures," assessed the eminent British musicologist Sir Donald Tovey, "which nobody but Beethoven could have invented." The lyrical second theme is sung by violins and clarinet in a contrasting major mode. The closely reasoned development section grows inexorably from thematic fragments heard in the exposition. The recapitulation begins with a forceful restatement of the main theme by the full orchestra. The second theme and other melodic materials follow, always given a heightened emotional weight over their initial appearances, and lead to a cadenza written by Beethoven that takes on the character of a development section for the soloist. The orchestra re-enters, at first accompanied by quiet, ethereal chords in the piano but soon rising to a stern climax that draws the movement to a close.

The second movement is a nocturne of tender sentiments and quiet moods. Though analysis reveals its form to be a three-part structure (A–B–A), it is in spirit simply an extended song — a marvelous juxtaposition of hymnal tranquility and sensuous operatic love scene.

The traditional, Classical rondo was a form of simple, high spirits meant to send the audience away in a bubbling mood. Mozart, in his incomparable late concertos, had begun to explore the emotional depth possible with the rondo, and in this Third Concerto Beethoven continued that search. (Mozart's Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491 was an important model for Beethoven's work.) Beethoven incorporated elements of sonata design into the finale to lend it additional weight, even inserting a fugal passage in the second episode. Only in the closing pages is the dark world of C minor abandoned for a vivacious romp through C major to close this wonderful work.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543 (1788)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791. He composed his Symphony No. 39 during a two month period of productivity in 1788 that also produced his Symphonies Nos. 40 & 41. The premiere of Symphony No. 39 is uncertain, though it was most likely performed at one of the following concerts he presented: April 14, 1789 (Dresden), May 12, 1789 (Leipzig), October 15, 1790 (Frankfurt) or April 16, 1791 (Vienna). The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the work at Carnegie Music Hall on December 9, 1897, with Frederic Archer, and most recently performed the work in Heinz Hall on October 3, 2010, with music director Manfred Honeck. The score calls for flute, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Performance time: approximately 30 minutes

The city of Prague fell in love with Mozart in January 1787. *The Marriage of Figaro* met with a resounding success when he conducted it there on January 17th, and so great was the acclaim that was awarded to his Symphony in D major (K. 504) when it was heard only two days later that it has since borne the name of the Bohemian capital. He returned to Vienna in early February with a signed contract to provide Prague with a new opera for its next season. The opera was *Don Giovanni*, and Mozart returned to Prague on October 1st to oversee its production. Again, he triumphed. He was invited to take up residence in the city, and he was tempted to abandon Vienna, where his career seemed stymied and the bill-collectors harassed him incessantly, but, after six weeks away, he returned home for pressing reasons both personal and professional. Personally, his wife, Constanze, was due to deliver their fourth child in December, and she wished to be close to her family for the birth. (A girl, Theresa, was born on December 27th.) Professionally, the venerable Christoph Willibald Gluck was reported near death, and Mozart, who had been lobbying to obtain a position at the Habsburg court such as Gluck held, wanted to be at hand when the job, as seemed imminent, came open.

Mozart arrived back in Vienna on November 15th, one day after Gluck died. Three weeks later he was named Court Chamber Music Composer by Emperor Joseph II, though he was disappointed with both the salary and the duties. He was to receive only 800 florins a year, less than half the 2,000 florins Gluck had been paid, and rather than requiring him to compose operas, a form in which he had proven his eminence and to which he longed to fully devote himself, the contract specified he would write only dances for the imperial balls. Still, the income from the court position, the generous amount he had been paid for *Don Giovanni* and his fees for various free-lance jobs should have been enough to adequately support his family. However, his desire to put up a good front with elegant clothes, expensive entertaining, and even loans to needy (or conniving) musicians drained his resources.

Despite the disappointments inflicted upon him, his precarious pecuniary position, and an alarming decline in his health and that of his wife, Mozart was still working miracles in his music. On June 26th, he finished the E-flat Symphony (K. 543), the first of the incomparable trilogy that he produced within two months during that unsettling summer of 1788. The reason that he wrote the E-flat, G minor and C major ("Jupiter") Symphonies has never come to light. It has been speculated that they might have been composed for a series of concerts he planned originally for June, but which was several times postponed for lack of subscribers and eventually cancelled completely. A second possibility is that the symphonies were written on speculation to be published as a set. A third consideration might have been a trip that Mozart was trying to arrange to London. Should the tour materialize, he reasoned, these symphonies would make a fine introduction to the British public. None of these three situations came about, however, and the genesis of Mozart's last three symphonies will probably always remain a mystery.

The E-flat Symphony opens with a large introduction of surprising emotional weight. The remainder of the movement, however, uses its sonata form as the basis of a lovely extended song rather than as an intense drama. The halcyon mood carries into the *Andante*, a sonatina in form (sonata without development section) and a sunbeam in spirit. The *Minuet*, with its sweet trio, is a vivacious dance of grace, elegance and prescient Romantic vigor. The finale combines wit and verve with suavity of style and harmonic felicity.