

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2016-2017 Mellon Grand Classics Season

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MANFRED MARIA HONECK, CONDUCTOR
TILL FELLNER, PIANO

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART Overture to *La clemenza di Tito*, K. 621

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

Intermission

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550
I. Molto allegro
II. Andante
III. Menuetto: Allegretto
IV. Allegro assai

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Overture to *La clemenza di Tito* (“*The Clemency of Titus*”), K. 621 (1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791. He composed his opera *La clemenza di Tito* in a hurried period of productivity in 1791, and it was premiered in Prague on September 6, 1791, with the composer conducting, having just finished the overture the night before. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the overture on December 17, 1971, with William Steinberg conducting, and it was most recently performed in Heinz Hall on December 20, 1981, with Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos conducting. The score calls for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings.

Performance time: approximately 5 minutes

It was during the summer of 1791 that Mozart's health broke for good. His last five years in Vienna, when he was in his early thirties, were marred by frequent bouts of illness (the year 1790 was one of the least productive of his life because of his poor health), and by his last summer, he was seriously in debt, Constanze's health had been nearly destroyed by her almost constant pregnancies following their marriage in 1782 (their fourth son — Franz Xaver Wolfgang — was born on July 26th), and Wolfgang was subjecting himself to a series of questionable folk remedies in an attempt to relieve his own suffering. In the spring of 1791, Emanuel Schikaneder, an old Salzburg pal of the composer whose financial ambition was matched only by the disreputability of his character, presented Mozart with a proposition to join him in producing a fantasy opera based on one of the Oriental themes then popular in Vienna. Mozart threw in with Schikaneder, a Freemason brother of his, and began composing *The Magic Flute*. Mozart had done considerable work on the new opera by July when two additional commissions came his way. The first was an anonymous but lucrative request to compose a Requiem for one Count Walsegg, who (odiously) intended to pass the work off as his own creation. No sooner had the Requiem appeared on his work desk (next to the unfinished score for *The Magic Flute*) than Mozart was presented with yet another commission. Leopold II, the most recent incarnation of the ancient Habsburg line, was to be crowned King of Bohemia in Prague on September 6th, and it had been decreed by a clique of wealthy Bohemian land-owners that Mozart should supply an opera for the occasion. The nearly impoverished composer could hardly refuse such an imperial offer, since it offered some ready cash and also fanned his still-not-abandoned hopes of securing a position at the Viennese court. For his subject, Mozart was given the 50-year-old libretto *La clemenza di Tito* by the venerable poet Metastasio, which had earlier been set by at least a dozen composers, not the least of whom was Christoph Willibald von Gluck. Caterino Mazzolà, Court Poet at Dresden, did what he could to modernize the libretto, but a composition in the hoary form of the *opera seria* did not allow for the peerless dramatic powers that Mozart had so magnificently displayed in *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, and the project was, in too many significant ways, stillborn.

Though Constanze had delivered her baby only three weeks before, Mozart talked her into making the trip to Prague with him for the premiere of *Tito*; his student Franz Süssmayr joined them to cobble the *secco* recitatives and serve as copyist. The little group left for Prague on August 25th or 26th. Mozart worked furiously in the carriage, and stayed up half the night in their inns along the way to finish the commission. He pressed on with his labor after arriving in Prague, though he felt poorly and was especially upset because his tightly packed work schedule allowed him no time for parties or visits to old friends. As was his custom, Mozart left the composition of the overture until last, and the night before the premiere the piece was still unwritten. With a copyist waiting at the door, he sat down at the clavier, pounded away on the instrument throughout the night, and finished the overture by dawn. He gingerly handed the copyist the full orchestral score in the morning with special instructions not to smear the still-wet ink. Though *Tito*, written in great haste in an antiquated operatic style that Mozart found uncongenial, had only a modest success at its first hearing, during the three decades after its composer's death, it became the second most popular of his operas (after *Don Giovanni*), and was the first of his operas to be performed in London. As soon as his duties in Prague were finished, Mozart returned directly to Vienna, where he completed *The Magic Flute* and oversaw its production at the end of September. (He also composed the wondrous Clarinet Concerto during that month.) Illness sapped his strength after the premiere of *The Magic Flute*, and thoughts of the unfinished Requiem plagued him. (Süssmayr

completed the work after Mozart's death.) Exactly three months after his difficult and hasty trip to Prague, Mozart was dead. He was 35.

The plot of the opera concerns Vitellia, proud daughter of the deposed Roman Emperor Vitellius, who loves the new Emperor, Titus (Tito), but is furious that he has chosen Berenice, daughter of the King of Judaea, as his consort instead of her. She tries to persuade her admirer Sextus to join her in an assassination plot on Titus' life. Sextus, a close friend of the new Emperor, is at first loath to participate in such a monstrous undertaking, but his love for Vitellia proves irresistible, and he agrees to initiate her plan. The murderous adventure goes forward, but proves unsuccessful. Sextus is implicated by a fellow-conspirator, and brought before Titus. Fearful of revealing Vitellia's guilt, he refuses to answer the Emperor's question, and instead offers only his heartfelt contrition. Incensed by this apparent arrogance, Titus signs Sextus' death warrant. To save her lover, Vitellia comes forward to confess that it was she who instigated the assassination attempt, and Titus grants the conspirators clemency in the final scene.

The brief Overture to *La clemenza di Tito* opens with a solemn intonation reminiscent of the stately chords prefacing *The Magic Flute*. The vigorous main subject is followed by a delicate duet melody for the flute and oboe, which serves as the second theme. The development section has many proto-Romantic harmonic shadings coloring its contrapuntal passages. The recapitulation begins not with the main theme, but with the more delicate second theme, which serves as a foil to the surprisingly stormy nature of much of the development. The music proceeds through repetitions of the opening intonation and the main theme before drawing to its abrupt conclusion.

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, Schikaneder 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 Schikaneder 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. 40 in G minor, K. 550 (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. 40 during a two month period of productivity in 1788 that also produced his Symphonies Nos. 39 & 41. The premiere of the symphony is uncertain, but was most likely performed on a concert he presented in Leipzig in May 1789. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered Symphony No. 40 at Carnegie Music Hall on March 5, 1896, with Frederic Archer conducting. Most recently, Michael Francis conducted the Symphony in Heinz Hall on January 27, 2013. The score calls for flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns and strings.

Performance time: approximately 24 minutes

At no time was the separation between Mozart's personal life and his transcendent music more apparent than in the summer of 1788, when, at the age of 32, he had only three years to live. His wife was ill and his own health was beginning to fail; his six-month-old daughter died on July 29th; *Don Giovanni* received a disappointing reception at its Viennese premiere on May 7th; he had small prospect of participating in any important concerts; and he was so impoverished and indebted that he would not answer a knock on the door for fear of finding a creditor there. Yet, amid all these difficulties, he produced, in less than two months, the three crowning jewels of his orchestral output, the Symphonies Nos. 39, 40 and 41. The G minor alone of the last three symphonies may reflect the composer's distressed emotional state at the time. It is among those great works of Mozart that look forward to the passionately charged music of the 19th century while epitomizing the structural elegance of the waning Classical era.

The Symphony's pervading mood of tragic restlessness is established immediately at the outset by a simple, arpeggiated figure in the violas above which the violins play the agitated main theme. This melody is repeated with added woodwind chords to lead through a stormy transition to the second theme. After a moment of silence, a contrasting, lyrical melody is shared by strings and winds. The respite from the movement's driving energy provided by the dulcet second theme is brief, however, and tension soon mounts again. The wondrous development section gives prominence to the fragmented main theme. The recapitulation returns the earlier themes in heightened settings. The *Andante*, in sonata form, uses rich chromatic harmonies and melodic half-steps to create a mood of brooding intensity and portentous asceticism. Because of its somber minor-key harmonies, powerful irregular phrasing and dense texture,

the *Minuet* was judged by Arturo Toscanini to be one of the most darkly tragic pieces ever written. The character of the *Minuet* is emphasized by its contrast with the central trio, the only untroubled portion of the entire work. The finale opens with a rocket theme that revives the insistent rhythmic energy of the first movement. The gentler second theme, with a full share of piquant chromatic inflections, slows the hurtling motion only briefly. The development section exhibits a contrapuntal ingenuity that few late-18th-century composers could match in technique and none surpass in musicianship. The recapitulation maintains the Symphony's tragic mood to the close.

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