



Gustav Meier
Music Director
60th Season
4th Subscription Concert
Klein Memorial Auditorium
Saturday, March 4, 2006
8:00 p.m.

Gustav Meier, Conductor
Alex Weill, Violin

MOZART Overture to Don Giovanni

MOZART Violin Concerto no. 5, K. 219
Allegro aperto
Andante cantabile
Rondo: Tempo di Menuetto
Alec Weill, Violin

INTERMISSION

MOZART Symphony no. 41, K.551 "Jupiter"
Allegro vivace
Andante cantabile
Menuetto: Allegretto
Finale : molto allegro

MOZART Overture to The Marriage of Figaro

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PROGRAM NOTES

Mozart as composer has been compared to Shakespeare as playwright, - that is as a creator whose achievements have resonated through the ages, transcending time and place, even though he, as well as Shakespeare existed in a time and place. Both were able to let characters speak for themselves in dramatic works, illuminating in the process how the world runs and the inner compulsions of its inhabitants. Even Mozart's instrumental works proceed like conversations between people and opera is his central form. How does a person of such capabilities handle the exigencies of daily life?

Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace, nestles along one or two miles of the Salzach, modest as rivers go, and is ringed at a distance by the stony cliffs of the Salzkammergut, also modest in size, but the whole scene adds up to one of the most beautiful small-city settings in the world. Nevertheless, it was only a provincial seat subject to the ecclesiastical and temporal power of its Prince-Archbishops and Mozart's violinist father, an employee of the Archbishop, saw to it that trips to all Europe's music centers advanced the boy's education (the internet was still over two centuries away!) and managed a pay-as-you-go pattern to finance these journeys through the performing prowess of Wolfgang and his sister Nannerl: astonished aristocrats made generous gifts.

After many vicissitudes (including a childhood bout with smallpox) Mozart, "sitting at table above the cooks, but below the valets," was also an employee of the Archbishop when he found himself in 1781 in Vienna, part of his employer's entourage for the coronation of the reform-minded Emperor Joseph. The archbishop wouldn't allow him to give any concerts, one of which would have been before the Emperor himself and earned him half his yearly Salzburg salary. Mozart balked and was literally kicked out, becoming by this act one of the first composers to try earning a living on his own through performances, writing and teaching. This went well in some years, but by 1789 Mozart was writing to his Masonic friend, Michael Puchberg for loans, "picture to yourself my condition, ill and consumed by worries and anxieties." Fortunately Puchberg always responded.

In his 1945 biography of Mozart, Alfred Einstein concluded that "the fact that all the reproductions of his death mask which would have shown him as he really was have crumbled to bits seems symbolic. It is as though the world-spirit wished to show that here is pure sound, conforming to a weightless cosmos, triumphant over all chaotic earthliness, spirit of the world spirit." Maynard Solomon ended in 1995 by observing "we are left with the unexceptional utopian affirmations - love, brotherhood, innocence, virtue, reconciliation - and a need to believe in the power of music. For awhile

Mozart succeeds in offsetting fears of separation, betrayal and silence. These affirmations may be defective, but they are all we have. We will have to make do." Robert Gutman signed off in 1999 with "he had the power to ransom the soul. Beloved of youth with its infinite longings and no less so of age with its failed aspirations, he confronted his time and he confronts posterity as a universal touchstone. Like all geniuses of his rank, he stands as a law unto himself: incommensurable, incalculable, sublime."

The world should not treat people about whom such statements can be made quite the way it often does.

OVERTURE TO DON GIOVANNI, K.527

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)

The Don is a symbol of the eternally masculine, first celebrated in an early seventeenth century play about an actual Spanish nobleman who preyed on the women of Seville in the fourteenth century, killing in a duel the father of one of his victims who was defending his daughter's honor. Mozart and his librettist, Lorenzo daPonte fashioned a *dramma-giocosco* (comedy-drama) on this subject in which issues of power, license, morality, respect, social order, egotism, self punishment, servitude and the like - in short many of the conditions nature subjects us to in this imperfect world - are taken up with a brilliance that puts it on the very short list of candidates for greatest of all operas.

More than a curtain raiser, the Overture immediately immerses the listener in this drama of good, evil and shades-in-between actions. The dark opening chords are followed by plaintive accents and strange scales which later will accompany the Don's descent into the fires of Hell. A bold, bouyant theme takes over, mirroring the boundless energy with which the Don pursues his pleasures. His lifestyle will be successfully challenged as the plot unfolds, but here it would seem to be unstoppable.

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO. 5, K 219 (Turkish)

Mozart

Mozart's five violin concertos were written in 1775, with the possible exception of the first. At the time he was 19, back in Salzburg, the childhood journeys (and glories) over, serving as concertmaster of the Archbishop's orchestra - a confining position for someone who knew what was going on artistically in Europe, but was bound to a secular/sacred court run like a feudal fiefdom. The last three concertos (the Fifth is played tonight) have been called the first of Mozart's works to enter the permanent repertory (Blom). Mozart was a good violinist (his father once wrote him, "you yourself do not know how well you play"), but kept up his skills for a lifetime on the piano, not the violin, which

is why there are 27 piano concertos against these five for the violin. Gradually geared more toward aristocratic salons and the emerging concert halls than the church, music in this period was becoming more refined, graceful and galant, with an ease of form, abundance of ideas, serenade-like ambience - "youthful music of yearning, but not of grief," as Solomon observed to characterize Mozart's violin concertos. "He becomes an individual in his music before he becomes one in reality."

The Concerto, K. 219 proceeds along these lines, but with considerable genius. For instance, the opening measures in the orchestra consist of rising, metrical repetitions of the basic chords (tonic and dominant) of the key (A major). These become the accompaniment to the bolder, but still genial, melody the soloist plays shortly after it enters. The entrance itself is an unexpected few slow measures, plaintive and quiet (some personal hurt transformed?). Thus are disparate elements held together when their is "great talent awaiting its day." The second movement is sweetly lyric. The third movement is a graceful minuet in rondo form. Contrasting sections between returns of the opening theme consist of (1) a darker, shadowy episode in the relative minor and (2) an extensive starkly different trio built from ballet music Mozart had used for an earlier opera, *Lucio Silla*. This melody is a cross between a Hungarian gypsy dance and Turkish military music, considered exotic at the time - which accounts for the nickname of this otherwise pastoral, hopeful, pleasant concerto which has touches of melancholy perhaps, but not "cynicism or disillusionment" (Solomon).

SYMPHONY NO. 41, K. 551

Mozart

In the summer of 1788, Mozart wrote his 3 last symphonies without apparently any immediate plans for performance, although concerts in Vienna were proposed, but didn't happen and a trip to London had a similar fate. If the Symphony no 40, K. 550 is the epitome of classic restlessness and pathos, No 41, K. 551, is that of classic up-beatness and nobility. Salomon who sponsored Haydn's trips to London in the 1790's is likely responsible for its nickname, "Jupiter." Classic style consists of an equilibrium of form and content achieved by combining often widely contrasting ideas through harmonic progression and modulation between keys. Monumentality in Bach's time came from the combining of related melodies in a continuous stream of sound. This about face had taken place between Bach's and Handel's deaths in 1750 and 1759 respectively and Haydn's and Mozart's births in 1732 and 1751. Many composers were working to effect this including 2 of Bach's sons who were direct or indirect teachers of both Haydn and Mozart. It is an artistic sea change to match that in politics between the heyday of absolute monarchs and the

rise of republican governments.

The opening of Symphony 41 reflects this immediately. For two measures it is strong, determined and sure of itself; the next two are tentative, plaintive and questioning - perfect structural and expressive balance which is then repeated on a related chord. Both elements are developed in the course of the movement and other melodies are gentler, but positive. Cadences are extended rhythmically and with back and forth chord repetition, keeping the movement on a high formal plane. The second movement uses muted strings; the mood is at once more inward and thoughtful. The following minuet is relatively quiet, but still quite majestic. The rapid Finale is energetic to say the least and makes extensive use of the polyphony Mozart learned from studying the works of Bach beginning in 1782. The movement is "one of the most splendid manifestations of classical style," as Michael Steinberg has written, and its coda "unfurls a dazzling glory of polyphony that is one of music's truly sublime pages."

OVERTURE TO THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, K. 492

Mozart

Motivation in relationships between people is the warp and woof of Mozart's music, both vocal and instrumental, albeit within the polite social mores of the 18th century. Far from immune to the temper of the times, however, he seized on the Frenchman Beaumarchais's play *Le Mariage de Figaro* as subject for an opera. "In this work", Napoleon once said, "the French Revolution had already begun." Servants successfully challenging their master, a countess plotting with her chambermaid to win back her husband's love, a count forced to apologize when caught in amorous philanderings, an adolescent boy making an awkward beginning of manhood and more gave the composer up-to-the-minute grist for his timely and timeless dramatic instincts. In fact, his librettist, daPonte, had to use his influence at court to get the proposed plot by the Austrian censors. Mozart ended in this work, as in many others, with an all-embracing sense of humanity far beyond that of apologist/supporter for the status quo that characterized much of the other music of the day, charming though a lot of it was.

The bustling string passage which opens the sprightly Overture predicts the happy ending, but not all the machinations through which it is developed. Brightness and verve infectiously dominate the curtain raiser to what, like *Don Giovanni*, is widely regarded as the greatest work in its comic-opera class.

-Burton Hatheway