

Orlando Philharmonic 2005-06 “Focus Series” – Mozart & Beethoven:

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791) – Concerto for Flute and Harp in C Major, K. 299:

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Andantino*
- III. *Rondo: Allegro*

“O Mozart, immortal Mozart, how many, how infinitely many inspiring suggestions of a finer, better life have you left in our souls.”

- Franz Schubert

“We cannot despair about mankind knowing that Mozart was a man.”

- Albert Einstein

This month, we begin celebrating the 250th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s birth. Probably the most prodigious musician ever born, the Austrian composer was born in Salzburg on January 27th, 1756 and died in Vienna on December 5th, 1791. Unique in musical history for his accomplishment in all forms and genres and blessed with an astonishing compositional fluency, he is one of the most beloved of all *classical* composers.

Mozart was the first important composer to attempt to establish a “freelance” musical career. His extraordinary musical gifts were evident from an early age, so much so that his father, Leopold, gave up his own successful musical career to promote his son’s talents before the astounded royalty and cognoscenti of Europe. Notwithstanding continual and extensive tours, Mozart composed and studied regularly; but, by 1772, too old to be considered a child-prodigy, he had to settle for the reality of searching for some sort of court appointment. His hometown of Salzburg recognized his remarkable talents, but could not satisfy the young composer’s desire for greater achievements and challenges. Mozart eventually ended up in Vienna, but along the way he attempted to obtain elsewhere in Europe positions more in keeping with his gifts.

One journey with that objective in mind was a trip to Paris in 1778. Accompanied by his mother, Mozart hoped to build on the favorable impression he had made in that city from his first trip there as a Wunderkind of seven in 1763. With the help of Baron Friedrich Grimm, whom Mozart had met as a child-prodigy, Mozart was introduced to a number of the aristocracy. However, he did not get the reception he had anticipated. His letters home to his father often complained of being dropped in drafty anterooms and being asked to perform on rickety harpsichords. He bristled, “What annoys me most of all here is that these stupid Frenchmen seem to think that I am still seven years old, because that was my age when they first saw me.” His chief desire was to be asked to compose an opera – the musical genre he cherished most throughout his life – but despite calling on numerous potential patrons, no one would give him an opportunity. His performance exhibitions for the wealthy yielded little money and led to no desirable appointments, so Mozart by necessity had to take on students to meet expenses.

One especially promising client introduced to him in April 1778 by Baron Grimm was the Duc de Guines, a music-loving diplomat who had most recently been the French ambassador to England. Mozart reported to his father that the Duke was a talented flutist and his daughter, arranged to be his pupil in composition, played the harp “*magnifique*.” Soon after meeting the Guines, *pere* and *fille*, Mozart thought it a good idea to compose for them a Concerto for Flute and Harp with hopes of winning their favor in his plan to gain a desirable post.

Although some theorize that Mozart disdained both instruments, especially the harp, the result was a charmer. The work even prompted the musicologist Alfred Einstein to dub it “an example of the finest French salon music” and one of his most delightful pieces. Mozart set the Concerto in the most congenial of harp keys, C major, and stuffed it full of immensely attractive melodies shared by both soloists. Straightforward and meant to immediately please, the sunny opening *Allegro* follows the easily digestible sonata-concerto structure and the score for the most part avoids the counterpoint and wide range of emotional expression that would come to mark Mozart’s later efforts in the concerto form. The second movement *Andantino*, was praised by Einstein as resembling “a Francois Boucher painting, decorative and sensuous but not lacking in deeper emotions.” The concluding *Rondo* is so drenched in beautiful melody that the Viennese composer Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf was prompted to remark, “I have never yet met a

composer who had such an amazing wealth of ideas: I could almost wish he were not so lavish in using them. He leaves his hearer out of breath; for hardly has he grasped one beautiful thought when one of greater fascination dispels the first, and this goes on throughout.”

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) – Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 36:

- I.** *Adagio molto-Allegro con brio*
- II.** *Larghetto*
- III.** *Scherzo: Allegro*
- IV.** *Allegro molto*

Squaring the overall buoyant and cheerful thrust of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 2 with the emotional travails he wrestled with at the time makes for fascinating analysis. Exuberant, graceful, sunny, and witty, nothing in the Second belies the agony and painful soul-searching Beethoven dealt with when the work was written.

Beethoven was inescapably aware of his advancing deafness. The symptoms had begun several years earlier when he experienced a buzzing and ringing in his ears, but not until the summer of 1802 did he really have to face the harsh reality that he was on the path to losing his hearing altogether. Losing one’s hearing is devastating enough for anyone to bear, but for a musician of Beethoven’s magnitude to lose his most precious faculty, deafness provided plenty of reason for abject despair and depression.

Advised by his doctor to protect his ears from the hustle and bustle of Vienna, Beethoven took up residence in Heiligenstadt, a favorite haunt north of the city which at the time was a quiet and pastoral village nestled in beautiful countryside and with views of the Danube. The hope was that leaving the noisy city for such peaceful environs would be beneficial for his hearing and his general health.

With a lifelong love of nature, Beethoven loved to take long walks into the woods around Heiligenstadt. “On one of these wanderings,” says his pupil, Ferdinand Ries, “I called his attention to a shepherd who was piping very prettily in the woods on a flute made of elder wood. For half an hour Beethoven could hear nothing, and though I repeatedly assured him that I no longer heard him either (which was not true), he became extremely quiet and morose. And when he occasionally appeared to be merry, it was mostly exaggerated to the point of boisterousness; but even that seldom happened.”

Although moving to Heiligenstadt was well-intentioned, it must have accentuated Beethoven’s agonizing face-to-face encounter with oncoming deafness. Incidents like the one described by Ries, coupled with his ill-fated love affair and thwarted marriage to Giulietta Guicciardi, and deteriorating relations with his own family, led to the penning of the heart wrenching “Heiligenstadt Testament.” Intended as a will written to his brothers (although never sent and only found in his papers after death), it is a cry of despair over his fate.

You men who think or declare that I am hostile, stubborn, or misanthropic, how greatly to you wrong me, you do not know the secret causes of my seeming so...I was compelled early to keep apart, to live in loneliness; when at times I tried to surmount all this, O how harshly was I defeated by the double tragic experience of my bad hearing, and yet I could not bring myself to say to people, “Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf.” Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which should have been more acute in me than in others...What a humiliation when someone stood beside me and heard a flute in the distance, and I heard nothing, such incidents brought me to the verge of despair, I was near to putting an end to my life – only art, only that held me back, ah, it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt called upon to produce, and I endured this wretched existence....

Lesser men would have withered at such a challenge, but Beethoven accepted it and refused defeat. This is the miracle of the man: he would allow nothing to stand in the way of his destiny. “I shall grapple with fate; it shall never pull me down.” Although he said he couldn’t describe it in exact terms, he knew that his mission on this earth was to produce great art. Rather than succumbing to self-pity, Beethoven actually felt energized and a sense of urgency. To a friend he wrote: “I live only in my notes, and with one work barely finished, the other is already started; the way I write now I often find myself working on three, four things at the same time.” Between 1802 when the “Heiligenstadt” was written and 1806, just look at what Beethoven produced in only four years! Symphonies 2-5, a dozen piano sonatas, the Fourth

Piano Concerto and the Triple Concerto, *Fidelio*, and many songs, chamber works and keyboard compositions. And of all these works, it is the Second Symphony which goes the farthest in belying the difficult and painful year of its birth.

Forward-looking and full of beauty, fun, life, and optimism, the Symphony No. 2 is a convincing affirmation of Beethoven's commitment to bringing music forth and forward. Although seeming very *classical* in spirit and technique, the Second is almost as significant a step ahead from the First Symphony as was the *Eroica* from this one. The *Eroica* was Beethoven's great breakthrough symphonic statement, but the Second forged a new path and was a significant advance over the reserved language of the First Symphony.

The forceful and lively first movement – *Adagio molto--Allegro con brio* - is preceded by the longest and grandest slow introduction composed up until that time. Spacious and varied, the material is full of an amazing richness and range of bold harmonic excursions and musical characters. After this mounting suspense, the introduction spills into a bustling theme of high spirits and verve. Brought along by the woodwinds, a more songful subordinate theme follows. Beethoven takes these themes and playfully divides them up into little rhythmic fragments, from which he constructs the entire middle section of the movement. We are then presented with a traditional recapitulation of the opening themes, followed by a harmonically active and fiery coda. The coda makes for fun listening, as in a wonderful passage where the bass rises through chromatic steps over more than an octave. This provides effective momentum for the final affirmation of D major. Along the way, Beethoven whips up excitement through the use of vigorous off-beat accents.

The *Larghetto* second movement introduces us to a new quality of sweetness in Beethoven's music. Songful with a broadly flowing melody for strings followed by an echoing in the woodwinds, the whole movement overflows with melodies unfolding in a more leisurely manner than is typically found in the tighter *classical* style. One surmises that Schubert must have been paying attention.

In the First Symphony, Beethoven still called his quicksilver third movement a minuet; here, in the Second, he admits up front that he is writing a *scherzo*, actually choosing the word for his tempo designation. This delicate but zippy *Scherzo* is full of sudden dynamic and rhythmic twists. The middle section, or trio, gets going along established and well-behaved eighteenth-century lines, but quickly unleashes in sudden and unpredictable blasts from the orchestra, fading unexpectedly along the way into sudden silences.

The boisterous *Allegro molto* finale is cast in rondo-sonata form, beginning with an impudent and startling back-flip. The first two notes and the last two notes of this somersault serve as fun and effective thematic fragments to toss back and forth among the instruments of the orchestra. A long coda intensifies the irresistible exuberance of the music, and carries it along to the final bar.

German musicologist Paul Bekker offers good perspective on Beethoven's Second: "In this symphony, with its wealth and power of emotion, its dazzling beauties of instrumental tone, combined with the free treatment of a form, bent and distended by the burden of ideas, the Viennese type of symphony comes to ripe perfection, perhaps even to over-ripeness. It contains the germ of all the symphonic work of future generations."