1784

M. Haydn

Symphony in G - *I. Adagio maestoso - Allegro con spirito*

MUSIC
Salieri
Il ricco d'un Giorno

ART
David
Oath of the Horatii

LITERATURE
Holcroft
Tales of the Castle

HISTORY
The Emerald Buddha is installed at the Wat Phra Kaew in Thailand

1786

Le nozze di Figaro

Piano Concerto No. 23, Symphony No. 38

MUSIC
Haydn
Symphony No. 82 in C ("Bear")

ART
Le Brun
Self-portrait with daughter

LITERATURE
Burns
Poems in the Scottish Dialect (First published collection)

HISTORY
Shays' Rebellion of taxpayers begins in U.S. Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

ALL MOZART!

What we today call the Czech Republic has long been a font of musical inspiration. Three of the composers performed by the RI Philharmonic this season - Smetana, Dvořák, and Suk – all hail from this small, central European hotbed of creativity. So, it is fitting that even the music on a program devoted (almost) entirely to Mozart finds its roots in the same soil, blossoming from the adoration of the Czech people, whose appetite for his genius knew no bounds.

When first confronted with *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Beaumarchais' irreverent comedy of manners, King Louis XIV proclaimed that it was "detestable and must never be produced." Such a proclamation, only served to make the forbidden fruit more enticing, and Mozart, hungry for a story that would be worthy of his first great opera buffa, was willing to take a bite. The overture on tonight's program condenses all the madcap goings-on of the opera into a concise musical whirlwind, and it was its premiere in Prague that marked the beginning of that city's enduring infatuation with Mozart.

The infatuation was mutual. When Mozart returned a year later for the premiere of *Don Giovanni*, he brought with him a symphonic thank you card. The aptly named "Prague Symphony" incorporates much of the same boisterous spirit found in *Figaro*.

Another nod of thanks and admiration can be found in Mozart's skillful deployment of wind instruments in both this Symphony and in his Piano Concerto No. 23, written in the same year. Famed throughout Europe for their skill, the wind players of Bohemia reveled in Mozart's increasingly wind-centric approach to orchestration, including the dark, mellow tone of a relative newcomer to the orchestra – the clarinet.

Though lesser-known today, Joseph Haydn's younger brother, Michael, enjoyed an enviable reputation during his lifetime, with 41 symphonies to his name, and wide renown as a musician and music director. Mozart, in an act of appreciation for his colleague's talent, added a slow introduction to Haydn's 25th Symphony for a performance in the court of an influential Austrian aristocrat.

The Marriage of Figaro: Overture
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART *(1756-1791)*

Last performed March 11, 1995 with Zuohuang Chen conducting. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

When Mozart conspired with his librettist Lorenzo da Ponte to make an opera out of Beaumarchais' racy and irreverent play *The Marriage of Figaro*, the two had to work furiously over a six-week period to have it ready for opening night on May 1, 1786. The overture, in fact, was completed only two days prior.

That same sense of urgency is reflected in the overture's opening notes. Frenetic (and famously difficult) melodic figures seem to scurry this way and that in the strings and bassoons until, somehow, they come together to create a playful and boisterous theme which romps happily throughout the overture. The original title to Beaumarchais' play, "La Folle Journée" ("the crazy day"), is a perfect description of the music here. Moods shift like quicksilver, a comedic helter-skelter atmosphere prevails, and there is no rest. At one point, Mozart had considered adding a contrasting slow tune for oboe but deleted the idea, preferring instead a seemingly unstructured outpouring of nervous energy. Listen for the prominence and independence of the winds, a particularly unusual compositional choice for the late 18th century, as the overture races to a rollicking finish.

Piano Concerto No.23 in A major, K.488
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Last performed February 26, 2005 with Larry Rachleff conducting and soloist Alon Goldstein. In addition to a solo piano, this piece is scored for flute, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns and strings.

Mozart's frivolous spending habits consistently placed him in financial difficulties, and he often found himself in desperate need of opportunities to concertize for wealthy patrons. Fortunately, he possessed a genius and a talent that allowed him to do so and, in the process, pen some of the most significant piano concertos in history.

All 27 of Mozart's piano concerti are justifiably deemed masterpieces, but Nos. 23 and 24 (which Mozart most likely imagined that no one but himself

would ever perform) are considered by many to be his best. It is our good luck that publishers recognized their worth after his untimely death and had the good sense to publish them for future generations to enjoy.

Mozart took full advantage of the relatively recent advent of the piano to catapult the form of the solo concerto to new heights of expressive possibilities. The sonority and tonal weight of the piano make for an equal partner to the orchestra, thus allowing Mozart (and others) to fully develop a sense of dramatic interplay between soloist and orchestra.

Dramatic interplay was, by now, second nature to Mozart. He had written quite a number of operas, the most recent of which – *The Marriage of Figaro* – enjoyed riotous success. Mozart's innovative decision to omit trumpets and timpani, and to replace oboes with clarinets, adds to this concerto's unique sense of drama. Despite the bright key choice of A major, the overall mood is both dark and intimate. But the key of A major has some singular acoustic properties as well, which Mozart well understood and exploited. After hearing the graceful lyricism of the concerto's opening themes played by the orchestra, listen for the subtle sympathetic vibrations drawn from the open strings as the soloist restates them.

The second movement, *Adagio*, is the only music Mozart ever wrote in the key of F#-minor, and it is some of the most poignant and pensive music Mozart would ever compose. Listen for the deeply expressive wind writing, pregnant pauses, an arching second theme that evokes a prolonged sigh, and a delicate interplay between the soloist and orchestra.

In the final movement Mozart decides that we've looked inward long enough, and it's time to enjoy a good romp. Here, all the musicians on stage engage in a game of harmonic "tag," taking the listener through unexpected key changes as themes race from one section to the other. Finally, an exciting bass drone fuels our anticipation for a satisfying ending, while the piano soars and plummets in exuberant cries of joy.

Symphony No.25 in G major, K. 183 (with an introduction by Mozart) - *I. Adagio maestoso - Allegro con spirito*

MICHAEL HAYDN *(1737-1806)*

This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. This piece is scored for flute, two oboes, two horns and strings.

While Johann Michael Haydn was cutting his teeth as a composer, the symphony, as a form, was developing from mere instrumental interludes for opera and theater to the grand form we know and love today. Five years younger than his brother Franz Joseph Haydn, Johann Michael was not only an eyewitness to this bit of genre bending, he contributed to it. A gifted young musician, he started contributing to the family coffers at the age of 12 as a substitute organist at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, where occasional performances of his original preludes and fantasies became the talk of the town. At the age of 23 he was named music director of the Großwardein Orchestra, and proceeded to compose prolifically - both sacred and secular music – producing a body of work that was largely regarded as every bit as good as that of his more famous brother. After a notable performance of his music at Mirabell Castle in Salzburg, he was quickly engaged as the music director at the Salzburg court, a position he occupied until his

death. It was there that he met, and impressed, Mozart.

Of Michael Haydn's almost 150 instrumental works (not to mention hundreds of other choral and liturgical works), 41 of them were symphonies. Haydn's 25th symphony was, for a time, mistakenly attributed to Mozart because the latter had (in a nod of respect) added an introduction to the symphony and included it in a concert of his own music in Linz in 1783. It was until 1907 that the mistake was discovered, and the work was reattributed to its rightful composer. But Mozart's introduction - an Adagio maestoso in triple time that ends on a lingering, unresolved chord - added such a compelling touch of grace and pathos to the work that it is rarely performed without it today.

Symphony No.38 in D major, K.504 (Prague)
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Last performed March 15, 2003 with Larry Rachleff conducting. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Looking to distance himself from the snobbishness and political intrigues of Vienna in 1786, Mozart decided to hit the road and take *The Marriage of Figaro* to Prague. The opera caught on like wildfire, and the people of this intensely musical city never looked back. Even today, nearly a quarter of the concerts that take place daily in the Czech capital include something written by Mozart. It's almost a law.

Even before he and his wife first entered the city gates, Mozart's reputation preceded him. The customs officer on duty, after looking at the composer's passport, asked if he was the genius behind *Figaro*.

The opera was such a success that the opera manager, Pasquale Bondini, commissioned a new opera from him, which was to become *Don Giovanni*. He returned to Prague less than a year later, with not one but two new scores under his arm: the nearly completed new opera, and a fully completed new symphony, nicknamed the "Prague." He took up lodgings in a residence where today a plaque proclaiming "V tomto domě bydlel Mozart v roce 1787" ("In this house lived Mozart in the year 1787") proudly hangs. He also spent fruitful time finishing up *Don Giovanni* as a guest in a charming villa known as Bertramka, where he would, in fact, spend many happy days in the coming years. Betramka is now a cherished museum dedicated to the composer's memory. *Don Giovanni* premiered to wild acclaim in October of that year, and went on to be such a success that he lived on income from its performances for the rest of his days (though it never quite solved all of his considerable financial woes).

Like the piano concerto, the "Prague" symphony is in three movements (rather than four, which had become the vogue for symphonies in that day). During his time there, Mozart had discovered that the people of Prague preferred them that way, and so he took pains to give the good people what they wanted. This symphony is also one of the few that feature a slow introduction to the first movement, a common practice for Haydn but rare for Mozart. From a stately and dignified Adagio that gives due deference to the city's leaders, Mozart moves to an *Allegro* that sparkles with all the fun that Czech audiences had come to expect from their idol.

In the *Andante* second movement, listen again for the masterful treatment

Mozart gives the woodwinds. In his hands (and ears) the winds no longer simply provide color to the orchestra, but are now a crucial part of its beating heart. Slipping deftly between moments of sweetness and melancholy, repose and urgency, Mozart achieves an almost incomprehensible balance between delicacy and depth.

Then, in a nod to the Bohemian craze for all things *Figaro*, Mozart opens the Finale of the symphony with a clever echo from one of its popular arias, and uses it as a springboard from which to launch the entire movement. Mozart keeps things delightfully off kilter with insistent syncopations and a relentless invention that foreshadows Beethoven. In the words of one contemporary concertgoer, "*the very soul is carried to sublime heights.*"