

Mahler Symphony No. 1, “Titan” – March 23, 2019

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
1756-1791

Mozart composed a total of 28 solo keyboard concertos, most of them for his own use in subscription concerts in Vienna. Consequently, the timing of their composition was influenced by the artistic climate and the economic wellbeing of the city. In the short period between 1782 and 1786, a booming economy created a heyday for musical life in Vienna. Aristocratic families vied with one another to underwrite and sponsor concerts of the latest in musical fashion. During those flush years, Mozart was in great demand both as a composer and a performer on the keyboard, composing 17 concertos, including this one in C major.

In the late 1780s Austria experienced a severe economic slump, the result of rebellions and the war with Turkey, which menaced the Eastern frontier of the Empire. To make matters worse, the revolutionary events in France terrified the Austrian Emperor, who rescinded his earlier liberal reforms and reintroduced various repressive measures. The resultant atmosphere led to a stifling of cultural life and a decline in patronage and public concerts. Consequently, Mozart composed only two piano concertos in the last five years of his life.

The Concerto in C major was composed in early 1785, finished – with typical Mozartean procrastination – on March 9, and premiered on March 10 in a subscription concert. The concert, as well as the Concerto, was an artistic and financial success; according to Mozart's father Leopold, the composer took in 559 Gulden – about \$2000 in today's currency. The Concerto's cheerful and outgoing character stands in stark contrast to its predecessor, composed only three weeks earlier, the Concerto No. 20 in D minor. No. 21 utilizes the full classical orchestra of strings with divided violas, a flute and two each oboes, bassoons, horns, trumpets and timpani. No cadenza by Mozart has survived.

The first movement is by far the longest, presenting a common opening theme for orchestra and piano, the two parts of which are also used as refrains. Piano and orchestra, however, have a series of different secondary themes. During the development section, the piano adds yet another theme to the pot.

After 1967, when the Swedish film *Elvira Madigan* used the second movement of this Concerto as the principal soundtrack, it has consistently ranked among classical music's greatest hits. The beauty of this theme resides in the manner in which Mozart spins it out to great length with poignant internal cadences.

Some listeners find the transition to the final movement analogous to being awakened from a dream. The mood and harmonic language of the Concerto change abruptly into a generally celebratory atmosphere. The movement is not the customary rondo, but rather a sonata form. As a parallel to the first movement, Mozart uses the piano to supply a darker coloring as it moves into the secondary theme, as well as within the development section.

Symphony No. 1 in D major

Gustav Mahler
1860-1911

In the late 1880s Gustav Mahler was building a reputation as a symphonic and operatic conductor. As he moved from one conducting post to another, usually as the assistant

conductor in opera houses, he had only limited time for composing. It took him from 1883 to 1888 to finish the First Symphony for its premiere and another 11 years to have it ready for publication.

During the interval, Mahler made major changes. At its premiere in Budapest in 1889, Mahler had called it a "Symphonic Poem in two parts" with an elaborate literary program that he later repudiated. The origin of the Symphony's subtitle "Titan" is uncertain; some scholars believe it derived from the title of a novel by Jean Paul, a popular literary figure during the heyday of the Romantic period. In its first version, the symphony had five movements, but Mahler immediately discarded the original second movement. He also expanded the size of the orchestra and revised the orchestration drastically. The discarded second movement, an *Andante* titled "*Blumine*," resurfaced only in 1967 and is now occasionally performed with the symphony.

At the time he began the symphony, Mahler was also composing a cycle of four songs with orchestra, titled *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer). The themes from two of these songs found their way into the symphony: The second song became the main theme of the first movement, while the fourth song became the middle section of the third movement.

In light of Mahler's later symphonies, the First is relatively tame. Nevertheless, it was received with hostility and ridicule at the first performance, bewildering the audience and annoying the critics. Its originality lies in the innovative orchestration and harmonies, as well as in the intensity of the emotions it conveys. In 1941 before the resurgence of Mahler's popularity, Aaron Copland perceived the value of the Mahler's music: "Of all romantics, this arch-romantic has most to give to the music of the future,"

The first movement begins with an eerie introduction, the first two notes of which later morph into a birdcall, as well as the first two notes of the main theme. It is punctuated by a distant fanfare and a wailing oboe cry. The Allegro section begins in the cellos with the second *Wayfarer* song, "*Ging heut morgen Übers Feld*," (I Walked this Morning over the Field); the theme is the heart and soul of the symphony serving not only as the main theme of this movement, but also as the basis of the themes of the second and final movements. The music of the introduction recurs in the middle of the movement. Mahler's genius was his ability to keep all his thematic balls in the air, a feat brilliantly achieved in the coda.

The second movement Scherzo has the rhythm of the *Ländler*, an Austrian folk dance. Although it conforms to the classic minuet and trio form, Mahler spins out the first section far beyond the standard repeat structure. Both the opening three notes of the Scherzo and the Trio recall the birdcall theme from the first movement.

A macabre timpani ostinato accompanies a lonely double bass introducing the main theme of the third movement, a funeral march based on none other than the nursery rhyme "*Frère Jacques*" in the minor mode. The spooky parody is said to have been inspired by a popular picture by the French painter Jacques Callot of a dead hunter accompanied to his grave by forest animals. The middle section of the movement is based on the melody from the fourth *Wayfarer* song, "*Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz*," (My Sweetheart's Two Blue Eyes) hypnotic and calming. In a third episode, Mahler transforms the theme into a dance with more than a hint of Jewish Klezmer music, an aspect of Mahler's heritage about which he manifested considerable ambivalence. Although a convert to Catholicism, he suffered

constant anti-Semitic slights, and after World War II, Leonard Bernstein had to bully the Vienna Philharmonic to revive Mahler's music.

The movement leads directly to the stormy Finale, which in the original program notes was titled *Dall' Inferno al Paradiso* (from hell to heaven). It opens with one of the most threatening passages in classical music and is subsequently taken up in the main body of the Allegro. In the Finale, Mahler ties together the themes from the earlier movements, even those from the discarded "*Blumine*" movement as a gentle, even comforting, second theme. The resolution occurs in a coda of heroic proportions, including a triumphant, full-voiced reprise of the distant fanfare from the opening of the Symphony.

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