

Great Arias

Wednesday, February 28 – 7:30 pm

Jayce Ogren, conductor

Claire de Sévigné, soprano

MOZART

“Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!” K.418 (7’)*

SCHUBERT

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, D 485 (30’)*

Allegro

Andante con moto

Menuetto: Allegro molto

Allegro vivace

J. STRAUSS II

Frühlingstimmen, Op.410 (“Voices of Spring”) (8’)*

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

VERDI

“Caro nome” (from *Rigoletto*) (6’)*

WAGNER

Siegfried Idyll (18’)*

OFFENBACH

“Les oiseaux dans la charmille” (Doll’s Song from *Les contes d’Hoffmann*) (6’)*

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

“Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!” K.418

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(b. Salzburg, 1756 / d. Vienna, 1791)

First performed: June 30, 1783 in Vienna
This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Aloysia Lange (née Weber) was not only a world-class soprano, she was Mozart's sister-in-law. He knew her voice well, and wrote many pieces specifically suited to her. Often, these would be single arias, written either as concert pieces, or as substitute arias for use in previously composed operas – and not necessarily operas Mozart had written.

“Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio,” for example, was written in 1783, and inserted into the opera *Il curioso indiscreto* by Pasquale Anfossi (1727-1797). First staged in Rome in 1777, the opera is based on a section of Cervantes' famous *Don Quixote*, in which a nobleman tests his intended's fidelity by asking another man to woo her (a plot which Mozart would revisit in his own opera, *Così fan tutte*). In the aria, the woman being tested confesses that her feelings are in fact wavering, but she is consumed by the guilt she feels.

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, D 485

Franz Schubert

(b. Vienna, 1797 / d. Vienna, 1828)

First performed: August 1816 at a private performance in Vienna
Last ESO performance: May 2008

The debt owed to Mozart in Schubert's *Fifth Symphony* is both patently obvious, and perfectly understandable. Schubert was 19 when he wrote the work, still a student and besotted with a composer who, two and a half decades after his death, was at last being acknowledged for the genius he was.

"O Mozart, immortal Mozart," wrote the budding composer, "how many, oh how endlessly many such comforting perceptions of a brighter and better life has thou brought into our souls!" Written the same year as his *Fourth Symphony*, Schubert did a nearly complete about-face with his *Fifth*. It is scored for what amounts to a chamber orchestra (strings are joined by only a single flute, with pairs of oboes, bassoons, and horns), and is everywhere lean, graceful, and amiable.

The opening movement dispenses with a slow introduction, with an elfin welcome to a sunny landscape built from a simple, two-bar phrase. The Andante con moto second movement is more ambitious melodically, with a detailed but still charming main theme (which switches phrasing from major to minor - a typical Schubert technique), and a contrasting section that moves to surprisingly distant keys, over the same kind of pulsing accompaniments as found in many of his lieder; aside from the two symphonies, 1816 saw him write some 150-odd songs!

The third movement looks both forward and back. Many have compared the Scherzo's main theme to any of several works by Mozart, including the third movement of the Mozart *40th Symphony*. But cast as

it is in a Scherzo form, it is in step with the newer symphonic models of Beethoven, which were becoming the yardstick by which to measure works of this kind. The finale is a merry dash to the end, a playful and high-spirited work of a young man coming into his own compositional voice.

Frühlingstimmen, Op.410

Johann Strauss II

(b. Vienna, 1825 / d. Vienna, 1899)

First performed: 1882 in Leipzig

Last ESO performance: April 1993

For much of the second half of the 19th century, the city of Vienna was set to music by the Strauss family. On any given night, up to four grand parties were dancing to the waltzes, quadrilles, polkas, and other dances composed and led by Johann Strauss senior or a number of his talented sons. The gowns, the chandeliers, the orchestras – the entire scene could not be more cosmopolitan and polished.

And yet, it was not uncommon for depictions of nature – the countryside – to provide inspiration for the dances that kept the genteel Viennese entertained. The blue Danube, the Vienna woods, mountain songs, forest lads – all these provided wellsprings for some of the hundreds of waltzes composed by Johann Strauss II – the “waltz king.” So it is with *Frühlingstimmen* (“Voices of Spring”), composed in 1882. While often performed by orchestra alone, it was composed with an optional part for soprano voice – the way it will be presented this evening. The words, written by Richard Genée, evoke a bird-filled forest scene.

Rigoletto: “Caro nome”

Giuseppe Verdi

(b. Roncole, 1813 / d. Milan, 1901)

Opera first performed: March 11, 1851 in Venice

Last ESO performance of the aria: 1981

Giuseppe Verdi’s 1851 tragic opera *Rigoletto* is the story of the bitter hunchback jester to the corrupt and lascivious Duke of Mantua. Rigoletto’s secret is his chaste and innocent daughter, Gilda. When the Duke first encounters her, he does not know she is Rigoletto’s daughter, and he conceals his own true identity from her as well.

He woos her under an assumed name, and she is entranced by him. He takes his leave, and left alone, she contemplates the feelings he has aroused in her in the aria “Caro nome” (“Dearest name”), one of Verdi’s most famous soprano arias.

Siegfried Idyll

Richard Wagner

(b. Leipzig, 1813 / d. Venice, 1883)

First performed: December 25, 1870 at Tribschen

Last ESO performance: October 1998

In the history of romantic Christmas gifts, it is probably wise to cede first prize to Richard Wagner. Topping it would take some doing. Following the 1869 birth of Siegfried, his son with his second wife Cosima, Wagner conceived the idea of composing a piece of music inspired by the happy event. He kept it secret from Cosima, and when the family spent the Christmas of 1870 at Tribschen, on the shores of Lake Lucerne in Switzerland, he rehearsed the musicians away from their villa – even to the extent of rehearsing on a boat on the lake. Wagner scored the work for 13 instruments, including a brief solo trumpet part played at its premiere by conductor Hans Richter.

And what a premiere! Cosima awoke Christmas morning to the sounds of the music, played by the musicians who lined the stairs of the villa. The work became known as the *Siegfried Idyll*, and while Wagner intended the piece to be kept private, he did eventually publish the work in 1878. Today, it is typically performed by a larger orchestra. This afternoon's version features pairs of clarinets and horns, along with single flute, oboe, bassoon, and trumpet, with strings.

Les contes d'Hoffmann: "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" (Doll's Song)

Jacques Offenbach

(b. Cologne, 1819 / d. Paris, 1880)

Incomplete version of the opera first publicly performed: February 10, 1881 in Paris

Complete version first performed: December 7, 1881 in Paris

Last ESO performance of the aria: April 1993

Jacques Offenbach's final work, the "opéra fantastique" *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* ("The Tales of Hoffmann") is unusually constructed. It is based on three stories by the writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, a real person who is also a character in the opera. Offenbach died a few months before the opera (in an incomplete version) was first performed in February 1881. Today, it is his most often-performed work.

It is not unusual for many of the principal roles to be performed by a single singer. The three main female characters, for example (one in each of the three tales), are often performed by a single soprano. The first tale of the opera is the story of a mechanical doll, Olympia, who sings "Les oiseaux dans la charmille" ("The birds in the arbour"), known popularly as the Doll's Song, during which her inner works run down, and she needs to be wound up in order to continue.

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