

Mozart, Haydn & Cello

Thursday, January 23 – 7:30 pm

Alexander Shelley, conductor

Oliver Herbert, cello

BEETHOVEN

Coriolanus Overture, Op.62

(8')*

HAYDN

Cello Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Hob VIIb/1

(24')*

Moderato

Adagio

Allegro molto

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

MOZART

Le nozze di Figaro, K.492: Overture

(4')*

MOZART

Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K.551 "Jupiter"

(35')*

Allegro vivace

Andante cantabile

Menuetto: Allegretto

Molto allegro

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Coriolanus Overture, Op.62

Ludwig van Beethoven

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performed: March 1807 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: Symphony Under the Sky 2018

The play which inspired Beethoven to write the overture *Coriolan* was not the play by Shakespeare, but an original German play based on the same story of the Roman patrician by a German playwright. Heinrich Joseph von Collin's take on the tragic story was first staged in 1804, but it was for an 1807 revival that Beethoven's overture was composed. It was premiered at a private concert at which both the *Fourth Symphony* and *Fourth Piano Concerto* also premiered.

Coriolanus is a successful and respected Roman military leader, whose disdain for the common folk lands him in political trouble, leading to his expulsion. Proud to a fault, Coriolanus seeks revenge on Rome by joining the enemy Volsicans and leading them on Rome. Ultimately, his own wife and mother plead with him not to carry out his invasion, and losing his will to carry it through, Coriolanus instead takes his own life.

Beethoven's work, one of his most frequently performed overtures, begins with an orchestral depiction of the title character's character: tortured, conflicted, proud. The middle section is one of restraint and even considerable beauty. The work is based in C minor, the relative minor of Beethoven's favourite "heroic" key signature, E-flat Major. The conclusion, which switches to F minor, seems at first to recall the idea of the beginning, but ebbs away into an ominous and uneasily quiet ending.

Cello Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Hob.VIIb: 1

Franz Josef Haydn

(b. Rohrau, Lower Austria, 1732 / d. Vienna, 1809)

Believed composed between 1761-65; manuscript lost until 1961

Last ESO performance: March 2014

Before Josef Haydn enjoyed a life of a celebrated elder statesman of music (see *Covent Garden* program note below), he was for most of his career the head of music for the court of the Esterházy family, near what is now Fertőd, Hungary. Under his direction, the palace at Esterháza became renowned for its incredible performances. It was for the fine musicians there that Haydn composed most of his concertos. The cello concerto we will hear tonight was likely written for Josef Franz Weigl, first cellist of the Esterháza orchestra.

It was thought for many years that another Haydn cello concerto (what is now called No. 2) was the only one to have survived to modern times, until the *C Major Concerto* was discovered in Prague's National Museum, only 53 years ago. This is an exuberant and lighthearted work, yet full of challenges for the player, with an emphasis on the cello's upper register. The opening movement unfolds as a stately moderato in its orchestral introduction, matched by graceful runs in the solo instrument upon its entrance. The regulated 4/4 time is countered by frequent use of dotted notes, which lends a syncopated forward momentum. While the cello is certainly pushed to the fore throughout, Haydn also cleverly blends the cello in with the string complement at times, giving an almost chamber music feel to some ensemble sections. There is a brief cadenza before a tender Adagio, in F Major, begins.

Orchestral violins present the main theme of the slow movement first, delicately in a measured 2/4, from which the cello emerges, in a lovely to and fro with the other strings. The movement unfolds as a series of cello variations on the main theme, with a slightly darker, more impassioned but brief central episode.

Haydn eschews his usual loping 3/8 final movement tempo in this concerto for an Allegro molto in common time – an energetic, dashing whirlwind of high spirits and even higher cello notes. The soloist is given many taxing runs testing both bow speed and clarity of notes. When given their say, the orchestral strings match the cello's bravado, but the soloist is clearly on full display here, with little chance to pause from one daunting virtuoso challenge to the next.

Le nozze di Figaro, K.492: Overture

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

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

Opera first performed: May 1, 1786 in Vienna

Last ESO performance of the overture: May 2012

We begin with a beloved overture by Mozart. *Le nozze di Figaro* ("The Marriage of Figaro") was a major hit for Mozart. The story is based on the play by Beaumarchais (1732-1799), which caused a stir at its early performances (Louis XVI banned it after he read it), as it aims its barbs squarely at the aristocracy. It is a sequel to the Figaro story told in *The Barber of Seville*. The opera was the first of three collaborations between Mozart and the masterful librettist Lorenzo da Ponte. It played in Prague following its 1786 Vienna premiere, and Mozart happily wrote home that the whole town seemed to be whistling the opera's tunes. The brisk overture is full of the mischief that features so much in the story of the opera itself, while never actually quoting any of its themes.

Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K.551 "Jupiter"

Mozart

(see above)

Composition completed August 10, 1788. It is not known if the work was ever performed during Mozart's lifetime.

Last ESO performance: November 2017

Mozart wrote his last symphony more than three years before he died, and it is highly likely he felt that he would write more. But the fact remains that other projects occupied him until his death seven weeks shy of his 36th birthday, and while it was not Mozart who chose the epithet "Jupiter" for his last symphony, this Olympian work is a worthy final effort.

Mozart both looks back to the past, and anticipates the future in his *41st Symphony*. His use of counterpoint in the opening and final movements is certainly a tribute to composers such as Bach, while his ability to create towering musical structures from minimal musical building blocks is something Beethoven and others picked up on years later.

There are no less than three separate musical ideas in the very opening of the work – quite uncharacteristic of “proper” sonata-allegro form. Similarly, there are three thematic ideas in the Andante cantabile second movement – two serene ones separated by a tense, dramatic emotional one.

A slightly more conventional third movement balances a lyrical Minuet with two starkly contrasting trio subjects. The final movement, rather than a jovial trot to the finish line, is instead a towering musical structure, “...where contrasting themes are lined up, harnessed, and sent galloping down the final stretch in one of the most glorious, tingling, and overwhelming passages in music,” wrote longtime *New York Times* critic Harold C. Schoenberg.

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