

The Program

February 28, 2019

Overture to *L'isola disabitata* (1779) by Joseph Haydn

While Haydn has a towering reputation as a dominant, influential voice in the development of symphonic and chamber music in the 18th century, his numerous operas are often overlooked. As Kapellmeister for the Esterházy family, Haydn was required to write at least one opera every year between 1766 and 1780, resulting in more than 20 operas, few of which are still performed today. *L'isola disabitata* (*The Deserted Island*) was written for the name day of Prince Nicholas I and was premiered on December 6, 1779. The opera received a few performances in the years after its premiere, but is rarely revived today. The overture, however, was published soon after the premiere and has enjoyed a long life independent of the opera. The Overture to *L'isola disabitata* is a quintessential example of the *Sturm und Drang* style often found in Haydn's symphonies of this period, including his Symphony No. 45 in F-sharp Minor, "Farewell." A movement in German literature and music prevalent in the mid-18th century, *Sturm und Drang*—usually translated as "storm and stress"—emphasized emotional expression over the measured, rationalized responses of the Enlightenment. The aesthetics of *Sturm und Drang* can be heard in the dramatic shifts in tempo, key, dynamics, and mood throughout the *L'isola disabitata* Overture—especially in the opening half, which seems to describe the chaos and excitement of landing unexpectedly on a deserted island. Haydn balances the fear and anxiety that begin and end the overture with playfulness and excitement in anticipation of the adventures to come in the opera.

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19 (1788-1790; 1795)

In November 1792, Beethoven left his hometown of Bonn for Vienna, then the capital of Western European musical life. Nearly 600 miles away from Bonn, Vienna was the perfect place for Beethoven to escape the sadness and traumas of his childhood, and pursue his destiny as a composer and pianist. Beethoven moved to Vienna with the financial support of Archduke Maximilian Franz of Austria, Elector of Cologne, and the encouragement of none other than Joseph Haydn, who would become his teacher.

Upon arriving in Vienna, Beethoven began the arduous task of establishing himself as a composer and pianist amid a sea of talented young hopefuls. He spent his first three years there taking lessons from Haydn, performing in private concerts, and strengthening his connections within Vienna's influential aristocratic circles. Yet Beethoven did not make his public performance debut in Vienna until March 29, 1795, at the Burgtheater, presenting himself as both composer and pianist. The piece he chose to perform for his Viennese debut was his

own Piano Concerto No. 2. Beethoven composed the first two movements of his Piano Concerto No. 2 around 1788 while still living in Bonn. According to one of Beethoven's friends from Bonn, who was present for his debut concert,

Beethoven completed the third and final movement just before the performance. Beethoven continued to perform the concerto for several years after the premiere, composing a new finale in 1798. Years later, Beethoven would look back disparagingly on the youthful piano concerto that had introduced him to much of Viennese society, but the composer's bias should not diminish the value of the work. The concerto shows the young Beethoven's ability to absorb the influence of Haydn and Mozart and transform their styles into something fresh and new through his own flair for the dramatic.

The first movement opens with a burst of energy with the orchestra introducing the main theme, which is then developed throughout the movement. While the overall shapes of the themes are typical of Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven stamps his signature with flamboyant chromaticism in the piano solo and frequent, unexpected wanderings between major and minor. By contrast, the second movement calms and soothes with a smooth pastoral melody. The original 1795 version of the third and final Rondo movement is the one most frequently performed today. The first two sections are playful with dancelike rhythms and leaping syncopations, which Beethoven contrasts with an unconventional shift to a minor key. Here, Beethoven inserts a musical joke in the vein of Haydn by reintroducing the piano in the "wrong" key of G major before the orchestra corrects the error and concludes the concerto with a conventional return to the home key of B-flat major.

"Non temer, amato bene," K. 490 (1786)

Mozart composed *Idomeneo*—considered by many to be the greatest of his early operas—to fulfill a commission from the Intendant of Munich, Count Seeau. As was the custom at the time, Mozart composed the leading roles of *Idomeneo*, *Elettra*, *Ilia*, and *Idamante* for the singers who were available, tailoring the music to amplify their strengths and hide their weaknesses. The work received its premiere on January 29, 1781, at the Cuvilliés Theatre at the Residenz in Munich, with the composer on the podium for three performances. Mozart was eager to rework the opera to be closer to the dramatic style of Christoph Willibald Gluck, but there would be only one more production of *Idomeneo* in his lifetime.

The second production of *Idomeneo* came five years after the premiere with a concert performance at the private theater at the Palais Auersperg. Now known as the Vienna version, this performance was used by Mozart as an opportunity to rework the opera by rewriting several ensembles, making cuts to recitatives and arias, and simplifying one of *Idomeneo*'s arias, "Fuor del mar." As with the premiere performance, Mozart made these changes to suit the singers who were available. The most significant change was the rewriting of the soprano castrato role of *Idamante*, *Idomeneo*'s son, for tenor Baron Pulini. (Current performance practice for both versions of *Idomeneo* has the role sung by a soprano or mezzo-soprano.) Mozart composed the demanding Rondo aria "Non

temer, amato bene," K. 490, as a showpiece for Pulini, alternating long, legato lines with impassioned florid singing.

In "Non temer, amato bene," which is placed at the beginning of Act II in the Vienna version, Idamante reassures Ilia, the captive daughter of the defeated King Priam, that his affection for her will never waver. The aria is a touching declaration of love, beginning with a simple, reassuring melody that becomes more elaborate with each variation and grows in tension as Idamante rails against the hands of fate that thwart his happiness. The singer is joined in dialogue with a virtuosic violin obbligato that underscores Idamante's complicated feelings for Ilia, the daughter of his father's enemy, as well as his despair at being separated from her. Mozart composed another setting of the same text for Nancy Storace, the English soprano who created the role of Susanna in his *Le nozze di Figaro*, with the solo violin rewritten for piano. Mozart presented the aria, "Non temer, amato bene," K. 505, to Storace as a gift in December 1786. Today, both versions of the aria are frequently performed in concert by sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, and tenors, but are often replaced by the original music for the beginning of Act II in staged productions of the opera.

Haydn's Symphony No. 45 in F-sharp Minor, "Farewell" (1772)

In October 1772, the musicians of the Esterházy estate were eagerly anticipating the end of their long summer service so they could return to their wives and children. Prince Nicholas I, however, had other plans for the winter. The prince had recently renovated the residence and the grounds, and decided that he would remain in his summer residence for another two months, meaning the musicians would be expected to delay their well-earned vacation. The musicians appealed to Haydn to find a solution, threatening to refuse to work if they were not allowed to return home. Haydn's solution was to compose the Symphony No. 45 in F-sharp Minor. In the Adagio of the final movement, each musician stopped playing one by one, blew out his candle, and left the stage. At the end of the symphony, only Haydn and concertmaster Luigi Tomasini remained. Nicholas I understood, and shortly thereafter the musicians were allowed to return to their families until the following summer. The symphony's title, *Abschiedssinfonie*, or "Farewell" Symphony, was inspired by Haydn's pointed-but-lighthearted message to his supportive employer.

Beyond its amusing origin story, the "Farewell" Symphony is notable for being one of the few, if not the only, symphony written in the unusual key of F-sharp minor during the 18th century. At the time of its composition, Haydn was writing in the *Sturm und Drang* style, with its emphasis on drama and emotion rather than symmetry, logic, and unity. The first movement opens with a thunderbolt of sound that unleashes a deluge of tempestuous syncopations. By contrast, the second movement is muted and contemplative. Aching, doleful suspensions layer on top of one another, building emotional tension that is relieved only in the graceful, worry-free minuet of the third movement. The final movement begins with an opening Presto section in the home key of F-sharp minor. But this

anxious, pulsing first section slows down into an unexpected Adagio, with the tempo and the texture of the orchestra slowly diminishing until the symphony has been reduced to a violin duet. The final cadence is not in the expected F-sharp minor, but in a warm, congenial F-sharp major. – *Steven Jude Tietjen*