



Kahane Plays and Conducts

The music of three Austrian composers, all active in Vienna, comprises this weekend's concerts. Each half opens with a concerto by Mozart and concludes with a work by a native son: Schubert's tuneful "Unfinished" Symphony" and Johann Strauss II's frothy overture to *Die Fledermaus*.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born 27 January 1756; Salzburg, Austria

Died 5 December 1791; Vienna, Austria

Concerto No. 14 in E-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 449

Composed: 1782-84

First performance: 17 March 1784; Vienna, Austria

Last MSO performance: MSO Premiere

Instrumentation: 2 oboes, 2 horns, strings

Approximate duration: 20 minutes

At the time he wrote his E-flat major concerto, the 28-year-old Mozart was the most idolized pianist in Vienna. He had composed three piano concertos the previous season (1782-83), to draw attention to his own talents as a performer. These did him proud, so that in 1784 audience demand was high enough to warrant an additional six concertos. The first of these, K. 449, was his initial entry in a new catalog of his works he had begun keeping. From this, we know the concerto was completed on 9 February 1784, during "what were the busiest, the most successful, and probably the happiest months of his life." (Stanley Sadie)

The opening Allegro vivace's 3/4 time signature is an unusual choice for an opening movement, something Mozart rarely did. There's harmonic ambiguity at the start, including a fiery passage in C minor and an extended one in B-flat major before a martial-like rhythm settles us into the home key of E-flat major. Listen, in this appealing movement, to the delectable dialogue between soloist and orchestra.

The gently swaying Andantino is set in B-flat major. Muted and elegant, the keyboard filigree becomes progressively elaborate as the movement continues. The Finale is a rondo, saturated with delightful polyphonic writing; the composer had recently embarked on an intensive study of counterpoint. Following the premiere in the private auditorium of the Trattnerhof, Mozart reported to his father Leopold: "The hall was full to overflowing, and the new concerto I played won extraordinary praise. Everywhere I go, I hear praises of that concert."

Recommended recording: Murray Perahia, English Chamber Orchestra (Sony) 

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born 31 January 1797; Vienna, Austria

Died 19 November 1828; Vienna

Symphony No. 7 in B minor, D. 759 "Unfinished"

Composed: 1822

First performance: 17 December 1865; Vienna

Last MSO performance: November 2015; Lawrence Renes, conductor

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns,
2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings

Approximate duration: 25 minutes

Franz Schubert was only 25 when he composed the two movements of the Symphony in B minor. To this day, musicologists disagree as to why he failed to complete the symphony. Some have speculated that he stopped work in the middle of the scherzo in the fall of 1822 because he associated it with his initial outbreak of syphilis — or that he was distracted by the inspiration for his *Wanderer Fantasy* for solo piano, which occupied his time and energy immediately afterward. Others have theorized that Schubert may have sketched a finale that instead became the big B minor entr'acte for his incidental music to *Rosamunde*, but all evidence for this is circumstantial. Then again, says another, Schubert may have left the symphony incomplete because of the predominance of triple meter. The first movement is in 3/4, the second in 3/8, and the incomplete scherzo is also in 3/4. Rarely, if ever, does one find three consecutive movements in basically the same meter in symphonies, sonatas, or chamber works of the Viennese composers.

Many believe Schubert regarded the work as complete. "I am convinced," said conductor Nicolas Harnoncourt in a 2015 interview, "that Schubert found it impossible to continue after the second movement. Which is not to say he didn't try. There are sketches for a few bars of a scherzo. But after Schubert finished the first two movements, and wrote out a neat copy, there came a time where he thought this cannot be continued. The form is perfect; there is simply nothing else to say."

Nearly 120 years ago, the great Austrian conductor Felix Weingartner (1863–1942) stated the case for this view in his monograph *The Symphony Since Beethoven* (1898): "I feel it is fortunate that it remained unfinished. The first movement is of a tragic dimension such as was attained by no symphonist except Beethoven and by Schubert himself only in his songs. The second theme, played by the cellos, contains one of the noblest inspirations a musician was ever given to utter. That which moved us deeply as an emotional struggle in the first movement dies away transfigured in the second. This conclusion is so satisfying that a desire for additional movement can hardly arise."

Likewise, the fate of the manuscript has been plagued by theories based on flimsy facts. A few decades ago, the disclosure of documents from the Hüttenbrenner family archives shows that Schubert gave the manuscript of the Unfinished Symphony to Josef Hüttenbrenner in 1823, to pass on to his brother Anselm as a private gift. This may have been in payment for a debt or an obligation. In any case, Anselm had a perfect right to retain the score. In 1865, it was given to the conductor of the orchestra of the Vienna Musikverein and performed for the first time in December of that year, 37 years after Schubert's death.

Allegro moderato

The first movement, cast in sonata form, opens softly in the strings, followed by a theme shared by oboe and clarinet. Then the Unfinished brings us one of the most famous tunes in all of classical music, stated first by the cellos and then by the violins, to a gently syncopated accompaniment. No less remarkable than the tune itself is that it, too, is unfinished — broken off in extraordinary gestures of pathos and drama. It is also a rare moment of sweet lyricism in a movement otherwise dark and troubled.

Andante con moto

The second movement, set in the somewhat unexpected key of E major, is calmer in spirit but not without moments of drama. It alternates two contrasting themes in sonatina form. In this lovely movement, a few eloquent details stand out: the first theme's lyrical dialogue between low strings/brass/winds and high strings; the serene woodwind solos that soar over shifting chords; the plaintively still passage for violins, outlining a minor chord, which introduces the second theme. It is upon this inspired moment, though with strange keys and chromatic harmonies, that Schubert later builds his gently lingering coda.

Recommended recording: George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra (Sony) ↩

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto in A major for Clarinet and Orchestra, K. 622

Composed: 1791

First performance: 16 October 1791; Prague, Bohemia

Last MSO performance: October 2013; Asher Fisch, conductor;
Todd Levy, clarinet

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings

Approximate duration: 25 minutes

Mozart penned the graceful A-major clarinet concerto, the last major work he completed, in the final months of his life. Designed for virtuoso Anton Stadler (1753-1812), it was premiered in Prague in October 1791. Mozart and Stadler were brother Masons and good friends and, despite Stadler's failure to repay money Mozart — who could ill afford it himself — had loaned him, they remained close. For Stadler, Mozart had earlier written the *Kegelstatt* Trio, K. 498 (1786), the Clarinet Quintet, K. 581 (1789), and the obbligato parts to arias in *La clemenza di Tito*, K. 621 (1791).

Like Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, composed a few months prior, the concerto possesses a profundity in its seeming simplicity. The gentle instrumental writing (strings, flutes, bassoons, and horns — but no oboes) must surely reflect the master's desire to create tone colors that offset the clarinet's distinctly beautiful timbre.

The work is cast in the three traditional movements of the late 18th century. The first is a graceful Allegro in sonata form, brimming with elegant, sinuous themes, supple coloratura passages, and exciting timbral contrasts between the clarinet's highest and lowest notes. The achingly lyrical Adagio, set in D major and elegiac in tone, is some of the most sublime music the composer ever set down. The sprightly Rondo: Allegro (in 6/8) has a cheerful ritornello, with the soloist in conversation with the orchestra; its three episodes reflect this mood, but also venture into darker minor-key territory.

Reviewing a performance of *Don Giovanni* in Berlin the same month as K. 622's premiere, the pianist and composer Bernhard Weber offered an opinion equally applicable to this concerto: "If any fault had to be found with Mozart, it could surely be only this: that such abundance of beauty almost tires the soul, and the effect of the whole is sometimes obscured thereby. But happy the artist whose only fault lies in an all-too-great perfection."

Recommended recording: Robert Marcellus; George Szell, Cleveland Orchestra (Sony) ↩

JOHANN STRAUSS, JR.

Born 25 October 1825; Vienna, Austria

Died 3 June 1899; Vienna

Overture to *Die Fledermaus*

Composed: 1873

First performance: 5 April 1874; Vienna, Austria

Last MSO performance: March 2003; Andreas Delfs, conductor

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (chimes, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, bass drum), strings

Approximate duration: 9 minutes

Johann Strauss, Jr. — “The Waltz King” — was the scion of a musical family. His father Johann senior penned 251 opuses, including 152 waltzes; the *Radetsky March* is his best-known work. His younger brother Josef set down 283 pieces before collapsing on the conductor’s podium — probably from a brain tumor — at the young age of 43.

For a long time, the music of Strauss was considered “light” music and relegated to classical pops concerts, but in its own day was widely admired by such musical heavyweights as Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and Richard Strauss. Brahms, Johann Jr.’s close personal friend, was also his greatest admirer, opining “He is one of the few colleagues I can hold in limitless respect.”

Die Fledermaus [The Bat], Johann Jr.’s third operetta, is the most popular work in the genre. Its plot — with a libretto by Richard Genée, based on an earlier French vaudeville — is one of farcically confused identities at a Viennese masked ball. The Overture is essentially a pot-pourri of melodies that will be heard in the operetta — not unlike the type of opening music that later became familiar on Broadway. The first three tunes are from the prison scene in Act 3. Then comes the grand waltz with its songful refrain, followed by a forlorn interlude from the oboe, with a contrasting section of tunes associated with Eisenstein’s mock-serious valediction before going to prison. The material is repeated, with the waltz monopolizing the proceedings.

Recommended recording: Willi Boskovsky, Vienna Symphony (EMI) 