



Milwaukee Symphony Musical Journeys

WEEKLY STREAMING PROGRAMS
Episode 5 Notes

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born 27 January 1756; Salzburg, Austria

Died 5 December 1791; Vienna, Austria

Overture to *Die Zauberflöte*, K. 620

Composed: 1791

Premiere: 30 September 1791; Vienna, Austria

The summer of 1791, Mozart's last, was an especially productive time for the 35-year-old composer. In addition to *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), he was at work on the *Requiem in D minor*, K. 626, commissioned by the eccentric Count Salsegg, and an opera, *La clemenza di Tito*, K. 621, commissioned for the Prague coronation of Leopold II. And *Ave verum corpus*, K. 618, a 46-measure choral masterpiece, was penned on 17 June.

The Magic Flute is a tale of the triumph of good over evil, a lesson in the redeeming power of true love. George Bernard Shaw went so far as to call it "the music of my own church." The quality of its music and the power of its Enlightenment-era message assuredly distinguish it from the other Singspiels of its time.

Over the years, much has been written about Mozart's membership in the Freemasons and his use of masonic ritual and symbolism in *The Magic Flute*. (Emanuel Schikaneder, the librettist and first Papageno, was also a member.) For our purposes, suffice it to say that the number "three" has a special significance within Freemasonry. Thus, the overture is in the key of E-flat major (three flats) and opens with three full-orchestra chords; in the middle there is another statement, by woodwinds and brass, of three (times three) chords. (These will recur in Act 2, as symbols in the ritual of brotherhood.) In between, fugal writing and nimble passages depict unrestrained merriment, surely some of the most delightful music the Austrian master ever set down. ☺

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER

Born 29 January 1971; Marl, Germany

towards *Osiris*

Composed: 2005

First performance: 16 March 2006; Berlin, Germany

The German composer/conductor Matthias Pintscher is the music director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the world's leading contemporary music ensemble (founded by Pierre Boulez). In addition to their regular season in Paris, they tour extensively throughout Europe, the United States, and Asia. As a composer, Pintscher has penned operas, orchestral works, concertos, vocal and choral music, ensemble pieces, chamber music, and pieces for solo instruments.

towards Osiris was premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. The composer has provided the following program notes:

During the initial stages of conceiving an orchestral work which would eventually bear the title *towards Osiris*, I came across a work of Joseph Beuys from the 1970s that shows individual objects (sewing patterns on cardboard, originally created for his work *Felt Suit*) that were distributed in a free rhythmic sequence and mounted on a blank canvas on which nothing had been painted. This work, which made such an impression, was called by Beuys *Osiris*, and it inspired me to delve into the Osiris myth and its meaning through the centuries.

Osiris, the God of Fertility, was the son of Nut (the Goddess of the Sky) and Geb (the God of the Earth); the destiny that led to his death stood at the center of my investigations. After being murdered by his brother, Osiris remained in the Realm of the Dead, where he served as a judge in the afterlife. In Egyptian mythology, every person's death is closely bound up with the destiny of Osiris. I was especially touched by the figure of Isis, Osiris' loving sister and spouse, who, after her husband was dismembered by his raging brother (Set, the God of Combat), was able to reassemble him through the power of her love, and prevented further decay of his reconstructed body, resuscitating him with her wings. Prior to that, she had searched desperately and ceaselessly along the banks of the Nile for the remains of her beloved. This suggested to me a formal structure based upon various stages of fragmentation and reanimation: the initial state of completeness, the decomposition into separate pieces, and their reassembly and metamorphosis – a genuine musical process.

towards Osiris is to be understood as a self-standing orchestral study; it represents the first material composed of what would later be developed into a larger orchestral work (titled *Osiris*), which would be premiered in 2008 in Chicago (with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) under the direction of Pierre Boulez. The work played here therefore stands as a piece "on the way" – toward a stage of broader context, which *Osiris*, as one of the most complex figures in Egyptian mythology, allows us to grasp in musical form. ☺

CARL ORFF

Born 10 July 1895; Munich, Germany

Died 29 March 1982; Munich, Germany

Carmina burana

Composed: 1935-36

First performance: 8 June 1937; Frankfurt, Germany

The German composer Carl Orff is best remembered for his concepts of music education for children – a developmental approach called Orff Schulwerk that engages mind and body using a mixture of singing, dancing, acting, and playing percussion instruments – and for the "scenic cantata" on tonight's program.

In 1803, a manuscript was discovered at the abbey of Benediktbeuern, about 40 miles south of Munich. It contained c200 secular poems penned by the goliards, peripatetic monks and scholars active in the early medieval period. Set in Latin, old French, and old German, their topics range from personal tragedy to raucous drinking songs to orgiastic rites to mock piety.

Johann Schmeller published this codex in 1847, in a collection he titled *Carmina burana* ("Songs of Beuern"). Orff first encountered these libidinous lyrics in 1935. He was instantly captured by their dramatic possibilities. He chose 24 poems and cast them into three sections, with "O Fortuna" (the same text and music both times) serving as the supporting pillars at the very beginning and the very end. The structure of the piece looks like this:

- O Fortuna
- I. Prima vere (Springtime)/Uf dem anger (On the Green)
- II. In taberna (In the tavern)
- III. Cour d'amours (Court of Love)
- O Fortuna

Orff set these engaging texts using a musical language that is deliberately uncomplicated: the melodies and harmonies are diatonic; the choral textures are usually either single melodic lines or chordal harmonies, with little contrapuntal writing; there's a ritualistic repetition of rustic tunes and of rhythmic patterns; the musical forms are simple, harkening back to medieval song. At the same time, the orchestral scoring is quite colorful: strings and brass provide rhythmic and timbral effects, woodwind solos offer further tonal variety, and the enormous percussion section (eight players!) presides over it all.

Following the opening chorus – familiar from its use in film soundtracks and television commercials – the first section (“Spring”) describes nature and love rising from their winter sleep, depicting the spirited revelry of various social groups in “Uf dem anger,” a sequence of dances and roundelays interspersed with gentler, more melodious scenes. The second section (“In the Tavern”) ruminates on the deplorable state of the world and on the ever-present decadency within the Church. Of particular interest here is the tenor soloist’s “Olim lacus colueram,” the sad tale of a beautiful swan that now turns on the roasting spit. The third section (“The Court of Love”) portrays amorous games at court, then leads to the final scene: the apotheosis “Ave formosissima” and a restatement of the opening chorus.

With the reprise of “O Fortuna,” we are reminded once again that the wheel of fortune rotates unceasingly. One day may bring joy, but the next day may bring devastation. Thus has it ever been. Such is our lot as mortals. Orff’s music conveys that message powerfully. Since its 1937 premiere in Frankfurt, it has delighted audiences everywhere with its easy tunefulness – and with its electrifying brawn and vitality. ☺

Program notes by J. Mark Baker.