

Overture to *The Impresario*, K. 486.....Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Born in Salzburg, 27 January 1756; Died in Vienna, 5 December 1791

The early Classical period saw the development of the *Opera buffa*, the Italian comic opera which was to have an impact on operatic composition for more than two hundred years. Another form emerged at this time in the German-speaking lands which has an even closer influence on our daily lives here in the United States. We are speaking of course of the *Singspiel*, or Songplay, the forerunner of Viennese Operetta and, in turn, the Broadway musical. The concept is quite simple; instead of a structure of recitatives and arias, as found in *opera seria* and *opera buffa*, the *Singspiel* consists of arias, ensembles, and choruses within the framework of a spoken play. This is highly reminiscent of the semi-operas composed by the Englishman Henry Purcell in the late 1600's, but in those works the musical activity was relegated to minor characters, and did not advance the dramatic action or plot.

Mozart wrote three *Singspielen*; two full-length works, *The Magic Flute*, K. 620, and *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, K. 384. The third of these pieces, *The Impresario*, K.486, was written at the suggestion of Emperor Joseph II. That august monarch took a lively interest in the Imperial Theaters, including the rivalries, quarrels, and intrigues which they fostered. The play is by Gottlieb Stephanie (1741-1800), who also provided Mozart with the libretto for *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. The one-act comedy describes the efforts of an

impresario to assemble a new company of players for his theater. Most of the humor is provided by the two female singers, each of whom is convinced that *she* should receive the title (and salary) of *Prima donna assoluta*.

Mozart composed a sparkling Overture for the production and four vocal numbers. *The Impresario*, K. 486 was first performed at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna on 7 February 1786. This was a private performance for the Emperor and his guests, the Governor of the Imperial Netherlands and his wife. The comedy was quickly offered to the public, who enjoyed it on the 18th and 25th of that same month. Mozart scored the Overture for pairs of woodwinds, horns, and trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Concerto Antico for Guitar and Small Orchestra.....Richard Harvey

Born in London, 25 September 1953

Richard Harvey began his musical education at age four when he started playing recorder. He flirted briefly with percussion, then returned to the woodwind fold as a clarinetist, earning a spot on that instrument with the British Youth Symphony Orchestra. He graduated from the prestigious Royal College of Music in 1972 and eschewing opportunities in the traditional world of "classical" music, joined *Musica Reservata*, an early music ensemble. Harvey also founded the progressive rock band *Gryphon*, which was active in the mid-1970s.

An opportunity to work with the legendary film composer Maurice Jarre (1924-2009) led Harvey to his present career path. He has scored or assisted on over 80 films and television series, primarily in the United Kingdom. Along the way, Harvey became good friends with the guitarist John Williams, resulting in the composer's most widely known concert piece, the *Concerto Antico*. Richard Harvey has written the following commentary about this work:

"Concerto Antico is a suite of tunes based on old dance and song forms from different parts of Europe. I use the word 'concerto,' though, in its original sense to mean a concerted, collaborative effort, with the guitar often involved in interplay with or accompanying a variety of other instruments.

"The concerto was written to celebrate the ability of my good friend John Williams in a way that would compliment and contrast with the more usual staples of the guitar repertoire. My other aim was to write a piece that would stretch John's technique by being impossible to play, yet interesting enough to be a worth-while challenge.

"*Alborada*: The name *Alborada* implies a morning song, and the music begins by evoking the atmosphere as dawn breaks over fields and houses. As the day and the music gather pace, working up towards the bustle and energy of a small-town market day, the woodwind theme that emerges is redolent of the ancient meaning of *Alborada*, a rhythmic traditional folk piece for oboe and drums.

" *Contredanse*: This rustic, full-blooded dance should be in 4/4 but can't always make up its mind. There may be martial overtones, but these off-duty dancers would definitely be irregular militia rather than a regiment of the line.

" *Cantilena*: This is a lyrical, dreamlike sequence, like a ballet acted out behind a veil of gauze. The flowing, singing qualities of the solo woodwinds and strings are what give this longer movement the character of a Cantilena.

" *Forlana*: This slow dance features the guitar with a capo on the fifth fret, to produce a smaller sound, more like a lute. Technically, the piece is not quite a Forlana, which ought to be a Northern Italian dance in 6/8 time. This oscillates between 7/8 and 4/4 and was written in Surrey. But the name somehow suits the piece, so it has stuck.

" *Lavolta*: The original Lavolta was an innocent but startlingly indelicate Tudor dance, after the Italian model, in which the female partner was levitated in a highly unusual manner. I hope that the same spirit of unshockable vitality comes through here, especially in the *con fuoco* finale, which spans the complete range of the guitar fretboard, from bottom E to top B, in a flurry of explosive activity in the last four bars."

John Williams performed the premiere of the Concerto Antico in 1994 while on tour with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta.

Ma Mère l'Oye: Suite from the Ballet.....Maurice Ravel

Born at Ciboure, 7 March 1875; Died in Paris, 28 December 1937

Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)* is one of his most endearing compositions, as well as one in which he reveals a great deal of himself. In addition to the craftsmanship and masterful orchestration one takes for granted in Ravel's music, this piece also shows us the child within the man. Ravel loved children, and easily slipped into their world of fantasy and make-believe, sharing their games and amusements.

The original *Mother Goose* was a set of five pieces for piano duet written in 1909-10 as a gift to Mimi and Jean Godebski, the children of Ravel's best friends. The two budding pianists were victims of stage fright and the pieces were premiered on 20 April 1910 by another pair of young artists, Jeanne Lelou and Geneviève Durony. The following year the composer devised a scenario, orchestrated the piano pieces, added two more short movements, and presented *Mother Goose* as a ballet. The Suite drawn from the ballet uses the original five movements contained in the piano version.

1. *Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant (Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty)* is based on the fairy tale of the same title by Charles Perrault. Disarmingly simple in structure, this is one of the earliest examples of the economy which characterized Ravel's later works.

2. *Petit Poucet (Tom Thumb)* is another tale by Perrault. Children are walking through the woods, leaving a trail of crumbs behind

them to ensure their safe return. After napping, they discover that birds have eaten the “map” home, and that they are lost.

3. *Laideronette, Impératrice des Pagodas (Laideronette, Empress of the Pagodas)*. The music describes a tiny Oriental empress, bathing to the accompaniment of nutshell violas and lutes played by her diminutive subjects. The idea comes from the tale “*Serpentin Vert*” (*Green Serpent*) by Mme. d’Aulnoy. The green snake itself is suggested by the clarinet playing in its lowest register.

4. *Les Entretiens de la Belle et la Bête (Conversations between Beauty and the Beast)*. Erik Satie’s influence is quite evident in this piece based on the story by Mme. LaPrince de Beaumont. An ugly Beast (the contrabassoon) declares his love to the Beauty (the clarinet). Time and time again he pleads his case, only to be refused. After bestowing a token kiss on the Beast’s cheek, the Beauty is amazed when the creature is turned into a handsome Prince.

5. *Le Jardin Féerique (The Fairy Garden)* describes Prince Charming’s awakening of the Sleeping Beauty.

In the *Mother Goose Suite* Ravel kept his orchestration as clean and economical as his writing. His orchestra calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and trumpets, timpani, percussion, harp, celeste, and strings. The second flautist, oboist, and bassoonist are called upon for their respective doubling instruments, i. e., piccolo, English horn, and contrabassoon.

Symphony No. 35 in D major, K.385 “*Haffner*”W.A. Mozart

This delightful symphony is an example of “music made to order,” a commission for a festive occasion. The event in question was elevation of Sigmund Haffner the Younger to the nobility in 1782. The Haffner family had long been influential in Salzburg; Sigmund the Elder was mayor for several years, as well as being a wealthy merchant. The relationship between themselves and the Mozarts had always been one of friendship, so it was only natural that they would turn to Wolfgang for music to mark events of importance to their family. He had done so once already in 1776, providing the “Haffner” Serenade for the wedding of Maria Elisabeth Haffner. Mozart was now living in Vienna and was busy with preparations for his wedding to Constanze Weber, as well as arranging selections from his latest opera (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*) for wind ensemble. Despite these demands on his time he was able to write the new piece and send it off on schedule.

The work is cast in the standard four-movement form, but the music itself seems to burst out of any formal restrictions. The first movement is based on a single theme that is varied by dynamics, tonal center, and orchestration when it appears instead of the expected new material. The Andante is peaceful and relaxed, not displaying any of the emotional tension which characterizes many of Mozart’s slow movements from this time. The Minuet is somewhat military in nature, employing the trumpets and timpani to great effect, while the Trio portion is reminiscent of a *Ländler*, a popular folk-dance. The finale is marked

Presto and contrasts its two themes dynamically, as well as by actual melodic material.

In addition to the ceremony in Salzburg, the "Haffner" Symphony received many performances throughout Europe during Mozart's lifetime. He scored the work for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Program Notes by Bruce Gbur

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