

Program Notes – *Autumn Colors*, November 5, 2017

Concerto in d minor, K. 466

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

This work premiered on February 11, 1785 with the composer as soloist. The concerto is unusual in including trumpets and timpani in the orchestration.

It is one of few works Mozart wrote in a minor key. As such, it has a heightened sense of drama, at least in the outer movements. There is an interesting mention of the concerto in a letter from Leopold Mozart (the composer's father): "That same Friday," Leopold wrote several days later to his daughter Nannerl back in Salzburg, "we drove at six o'clock to his first subscription concert, where there was a vast concourse of people of rank...The concert was incomparable, the orchestra was excellent. Apart from the symphonies, there was a singer from the Italian theatre who sang two arias. Then came a new, superb piano concerto by Wolfgang, which the copyist was still writing out when we arrived, and your brother had not even found time to play through the Rondeau because he had to supervise the copying."

Joseph Haydn visited with the Mozarts and uttered the much-quoted pronouncement, "I tell you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know, either personally or by reputation; he has taste and moreover the greatest possible knowledge of the science of composing."

Adding to the dramatic sense in the opening movement is the accompanying syncopated pattern in the strings. This rhythm gives the introduction a nervous, agitato quality in keeping with the overall mood of the piece. The Romanze movement is lighter and quite tranquil, at least at the beginning. The solo piano plays the simple and charming melody alone; the melody is then played by the full orchestra. The second section in g minor combines instrumental forces in a dramatic way, with a much more active and intense activity in the solo part. The music returns to the initial theme and the home key of B-flat major and the movement works its way to a quiet close. The final Allegro assai movement returns to the high energy level of the first movement and the home key of d minor. The solo piano once again starts with a theme which races up the d minor chord in a rapid arpeggio, setting the tone for an exciting flourish which finishes the concerto in a dramatic style. Once the orchestra has taken over the musical continuity, the intensity builds to a elegantly vibrant conclusion.

The cadenza is not by Mozart, something of a rarity in Mozart's piano concerti. This is possibly because prior to the first performance the copyist was still preparing the orchestral parts as the audience was entering the hall – there was simply no time to write out a cadenza! Unusual for Mozart's concerti, following the cadenza the concerto moves to the key of D major and returns to a more festive tune; the ending based on this tune brings the concerto to a rousing close.

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 43

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Sibelius completed this symphony in 1902 and conducted the first performance on March 8 of that year in Helsinki. The composer's initial motivation to write this work comes from a visit to Italy in 1901. Some have credited the Italian sun with the lighter textures in this second symphony.

His mature years represented an unusual time for people like Sibelius, interested in writing symphonies; his contemporaries such as Strauss, Schönberg, Stravinsky and Bartok wrote symphonies, but their particular contribution to musical art lay in other areas. He cites a discussion he had in 1907 with Gustav Mahler, also a symphonist, about the nature and purpose of symphonic writing, as follows; "When our conversation touched on the essence of symphony, I said that I admired its severity and style and the profound logic that created an inner connection between all the motives. This was the experience I had come to in composing. Mahler's opinion was just the reverse. 'No, the symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.' "

The first movement in the home key of D major has a somewhat pastoral feeling, especially with the woodwinds. A significant difference can be noted as the string figure returns, like the beginning, but *pizzicato*, giving a very different impression. An alternate theme comes in and returns several times, at times in the solo clarinet; this is accompanied by a rapid figures in the strings. This development becomes contrapuntal, with ever increasing intensity. Eventually the brass come in loudly, with a new figure, declamatory and fanfare-like, followed by a quiet close.

After opening with a conversation between basses and cellos in the second movement, the bassoons enter with a melancholy tune in octaves. After a section with a variety of outbursts in all sections of the orchestra, the original bassoon melody appears again in the solo trumpet, after which there is yet another buildup in volume and intensity. The buildup in this instance is more than anything else rhythmic, ending in a very rapid passage in 32nd notes in strings, then woodwinds.

The third movement is in four brief sections; a lively scherzo, a chant-like melody in solo oboe, a startling explosion of brass announcing the return of the scherzo section, and a return of the slower, chant-like section.

A gentle transition to the fourth movement opens softly and builds to increasing majesty. Here we enjoy the grandeur of Sibelius' other works as the entire orchestra charges the air with mighty, mountainous majesty.