

Program Notes

Musical studies begin at different points in life, and in many cases, musicians choose their career paths at a very early age. Some young students are introduced to instruments and studies by teachers, and others are born into musical families. In 1756, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – given the name Johann Chrysotom Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart –



Mozart

was born into a musical family, led by his father Leopold, and had what one might consider an innate understanding of music from birth. Mozart is perhaps history's greatest musical prodigy, with his career as a composer beginning at the age of five, according to his sister's account of his life. Despite dying at the age of 35, his compositional output was nothing short of remarkable, totaling over 600 works across multiple genres.

Shortly after moving to Vienna in 1782, Mozart wrote a series of three piano concertos (Nos.

11, 12, and 13), for which he served as the soloist. During his time in Vienna, which was Europe's musical capital, Mozart wrote fifteen piano concertos, in addition to many other works, including *The Marriage of Figaro*. Moreover, scholars believe he composed all three simultaneously, as they were to be part of a Lenten concert series in 1783. The **Piano Concerto No. 12 in A major** is believed to be one of Mozart's favorites, as he played it frequently, taught it to many students, and even wrote out cadenzas. (Typically, skeletal structures are written for cadenzas, or they remain mostly unwritten, as it is established performance practice for soloists to invent their own. During Mozart's time, it would have been rare for the composer to transcribe a cadenza.)

The concerto is very lyrical overall, akin to Mozart's operatic works, with the piano soloist acting as a vocalist creating long legato lines that are supported by the orchestra. Additionally, the solo piano introduces new themes, seemingly ignoring many in the orchestral accompaniment, and has cadenzas in each of its movements, allowing for flourishes that further enhance traditional form structures. Aside from the use of cadenzas, all three movements illustrate the idea of expanding or modifying forms traditionally used in concertos – i.e., sonata allegro, or rondo. The work contains a flurry of themes, and they are not necessarily contiguous between orchestra and piano as one might expect. Instead, Mozart introduces new material when the piano enters in a way that resembles what might be expected, both aurally and structurally, from a

da capo aria in one of his operas.

The opening of the second movement is one of the most notable parts of the work. It begins by quoting a melody written by Johann Christian Bach, Mozart's friend and mentor. The two met in London when Mozart was a boy. The youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach died in early 1782, which is believed to be the impetus for this tribute.

While Mozart's musical career began early in his youth, Anton Bruckner did not find great success in his music until he was 60, with the premiere of his **Symphony No. 7 in E Major**. In fact, Bruckner did not completely begin his compositional career until he was nearly 40. Working in a time when tone poems and programmatic works were all the rage, if you will, Bruckner drew inspiration from his predecessors, most notably Beethoven, as well as his contemporary Richard Wagner, whom he referred to as the Master. Wagner's opera *Tannhauser* was the creative spark that inspired Bruckner to transcribe his own musical ideas and begin writing symphonies. Due to this influence, Bruckner is regarded as the composer who best translates Wagner's operas into instrumental music.



Bruckner

Bruckner and Wagner met several times, two of which were at the premieres of operas: *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*, at which Wagner chastised him for applauding too loudly. One occasion when the two did not meet at an opera can only be recounted sporadically, as Bruckner was so nervous that he drank too much beer and couldn't remember what was discussed. It was at their meeting for the premiere of *Parsifal* where Wagner stated he would conduct Bruckner's symphonies. Unfortunately, this was not to be, as the Master died in February of 1883. Bruckner somehow sensed this at that meeting, and when he heard the news of Wagner's passing, wrote a musical epitaph in Symphony No. 7's *Adagio*, which he called "the funeral music for the Master."

Although the treatment of form, as well as tonality, had greatly expanded by the time Wagner and Bruckner were composing operas and symphonies, respectively, the overarching structures remained mostly the same. This expansion resulted in works of greater length, utilization of larger orchestras, and creating sonoric environments that weren't possible during Mozart's time, nearly a century before.

Bruckner opens the symphony in what can be considered the most Bruckneresque way possible. Staying within his comfort zone, the initial soaring phrase, which he stated came to him in a dream, is played by

horn and cello. It is, in reality, reminiscent of the *Credo* from his D minor Mass, which he was revising at the time of the symphony's composition. The movement contains three major themes, each of which is lyrical and leads into larger and louder sections, all of which are recalled in the recapitulation that leads into an enormous coda. The second movement, the *Adagio*, opens with a chorale played by a quartet of Wagner tubas (or Wagnertuben), brass instruments akin to French horns that were created for Wagner's operatic cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The *Adagio* is regarded as containing the most eloquent music in Bruckner's entire canon of works. Although it is a funeral dirge, it is much more impassioned than not only the symphony's other movements, but also all of his previous compositions. This is appropriate, in a rather macabre way, and very typical of Bruckner, as he had a life-long obsession with death. After the lofty chorales that give the Master his final sendoff, we are snapped back to earth with the "cock's crow" that begins the scherzo. This section, which is nostalgic for a lost golden age, leads into the work's finale, which is a grand recapitulation of the symphony both musically and emotionally. This would be a model he used in the next two symphonies he composed.