

MOZART, BACH & GLASS PROGRAM

WOLFGANG MOZART (1756-1791) **Symphony No. 40 in G minor**

Mozart is largely remembered today as a child prodigy who composed almost effortlessly. He wrote his first symphony at the age of eight, and over the next quarter of a century, added 40 more, all of them superb and mature works.

Symphony No. 40 is classical in structure and technique. Both outer movements adhere to the sonata principle, the second movement is a lyrical andante, and the third, labeled minuet, follows a traditional A-B-A outline. Many aspects of this work exemplify Mozart's perfection of symmetry. Themes often divide into small units that are equal in length, and some of them are balanced by melodic direction and/or dynamics. An especially notable example occurs in the opening of movement one, where the first part of the melody leaps upward and is immediately answered by a descending stepwise line.

But Symphony No. 40 is not simply a culmination of classicism. Mozart dispenses with the usual slow introduction, beginning instead with a distinctive rhythmic motive (short-short-long) that constitutes the opening theme. This motive not only serves as the sole means of development, appearing in various guises, but also returns at the end, thus unifying the opening movement. Such reiteration is particularly remarkable, since it had seldom (if ever) been achieved before, and it was still 20 years before the intense motivic development of Beethoven's Fifth. In the first movement Mozart also uses relatively remote keys, such as F# minor in the development, and teases the audience with a premature entry of the main theme before the actual recapitulation. Other features that further lead away from classicism occur in the minuet, which contains dissonance and phrases in three measures instead of the usual four.

The score for Symphony No. 40 calls for a rather small orchestra. There are no trumpets or timpani, and although the clarinets are used today, they were not originally included. Even so, Mozart does not need a massive orchestra to unleash powerful energy. The work begins in feverish excitement as the violins, doubled in octaves, present the main theme (derived from the three-note motive) over a throbbing viola accompaniment. Although the expressive second movement is more relaxed, there is still a pulsating accompaniment that propels the music forward. The middle section of the minuet is lovely, containing pastoral woodwind interludes. However, the A section of this movement, which is loud, serious, and full of syncopations, does not sound at all like a typical aristocratic dance. Suspense is particularly enhanced through dramatic pauses found in both the opening movement and the finale, creating an emotional intensity that not only helps to make this work popular but also serves as a harbinger of the future, leading directly into romanticism.

Mozart composed No. 40, along with two other symphonies, within six weeks during the summer of 1788—truly an astonishing feat! His sudden, untimely death three years later is one of the greatest tragedies in music history. Imagine what he would have written if he had lived to be a senior citizen!

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH **(1685-1750)** **Keyboard Concerto in G minor**

J. S. Bach, who was born in Eisenach in Thuringia (now Germany), belonged to the most extraordinary family in music history. His lineage, which dates back to his great-great-grandfather in the mid-16th century, included more than 50 professional musicians, and he passed this legacy on to four of his sons. Throughout the 17th century the name "Bach" became synonymous with music. Any Thuringian mother who

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wished a musical career for her son would simply remark, "I hope he becomes a Bach!" and everyone understood what she meant.

Except for opera, Bach wrote for all the genres of his day, producing only works on the highest artistic level. He also composed a prodigious number of compositions, but he was not averse to recycling some of them. Although intended for harpsichord, the Seven Concertos for Keyboard were probably transcriptions of earlier concertos for violin and/or wind instruments. Bach often exercised considerable freedom with his original works, and these concertos thus offer a unique opportunity to observe his incomparable art as a transcriber and arranger. The Seven Keyboard Concertos were composed for convivial music making by the Leipzig Collegium Musicum, a musical society consisting mostly of university students, and the one in G minor is the last composition in this group.

Bach's Concerto is typical for its time. It comprises three separate movements in a fast-slow-fast scheme, and the overall harmonic plan moves from G minor in the opening movement to B-flat major for the second, returning to the home key for the finale. The orchestra consists of two violins, viola, continue (cello), and keyboard—quite small by today's standard, though not unusual for the Baroque period.

The outer movements consist of alternating tutti and solo sections; however, like most of Bach's keyboard concertos, these two groups are not always clearly delineated. Everyone performs together in the tutti, with the violins often doubling the treble part of the keyboard and the cello doubling the bass. For the solo sections the keyboard is much more prominent, while the orchestra mostly accompanies. The second movement, which is slower and more cantabile, is especially notable for expressive runs in the solo instrument. There is constant

movement throughout the entire work, and 16th-note passages, particularly those in the first movement, are extremely intricate and quite difficult. Despite these complexities, the work joyously concludes with a rollicking finale in 9/8 meter.

PHILIP GLASS (1937-) **Piano Concerto No. 3**

In the 1930s, Glass' Jewish parents emigrated from Lithuania to the United States, eventually settling in Baltimore. As a young boy Glass played the flute, but the most profound musical influence came from his father, who owned a record shop. Over the years Glass spent many hours listening to all types of music and developed an immense fondness for modern sounds. While earning a degree in mathematics and philosophy, he became fascinated with 12-tone music and decided to study piano and composition at The Juilliard School of Music. Later on he received a Fulbright scholarship for additional lessons in Paris with the eminent pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger.

Glass began his compositional career in the Western classical tradition, but he also collaborated outside this realm with many different notable artists, such as Ravi Shankar and Twyla Tharp. The result has been an outpouring of diverse works that range from operas and symphonies to film scores, ballets, world music, and even rock and electronic music.

At first it may seem incongruous to place concertos by J. S. Bach and Philip Glass alongside each other, but there are connections between the two works. Glass and his colleague, the phenomenal pianist Simone Dinnerstein, share an immense admiration for J.S. Bach, and when writing a work in Dinnerstein's honor, it was only natural for Glass to turn to the great master as a model. Despite a gap of over 250 years, the two compositions use similar

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musical language. Scored for only strings and keyboard, both follow a three-movement plan and are characterized by continuous movement, traditional tonality, and repetitious interweaving of thematic material. Like Bach, Glass writes tutti and solo sections that are not always clearly defined, and their interactions with each other are conversation rather than adversarial.

Despite these similarities, Glass' work is distinctive, thanks in part to influence of minimalist composer Steve Reich. Unlike the older master, Glass' Concerto is marked by slow-changing harmonies, stepwise melodies, and incessant repetitions in rhythm, ostinato patterns, and undulating arpeggios. The third movement is dedicated to the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt and contains a beautiful, meditative theme, along with tolling bells in the piano's lowest register. Although there are occasional crescendos that briefly lead toward climactic points, each movement gently subsides

and ends softly. The repetitious rhythms and melodies, along with a lack of dynamic and tempo contrast, create a mesmerizing effect that has helped create Glass' widespread popularity.

The Shreveport Symphony, along with several other orchestras around the world, co-commissioned Concerto No. 3, and it was premiered by Dinnerstein in September 2017. Glass' Concerto and Bach's Keyboard Concerto in G minor appear together in a new album, *Circles*, performed by Dinnerstein and the Boston-based string orchestra, A Far Cry.

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