

Notes on the Program

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Symphony No. 1 in E-flat major, K.16 **Symphony No. 41 in C major, K.551, Jupiter**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

At the end of this concert, we will hear the Symphony No. 41 by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a sublime masterpiece from 1788 that exemplifies why its composer occupies a spot on the very top rung of symphonic creation. But first, let us visit the trailhead of the path that led him there.

Mozart was five years old when he composed his first pieces, both for keyboard: an Andante in C major (K.1a) and an Allegro in F major (K.1c). In January 1762 he wrote his F-major Minuet (K.2), which beginning pianists still learn today, and he traveled with his violinist father (Leopold) and his also-precocious sister (Maria Anna, a.k.a. Nannerl, four-and-a-half years his elder) to perform for the Elector in Bavaria, not very far from their native Salzburg. That fall, they were off to Vienna to entertain the royals at Schönbrunn Palace; near the outset of that trip, Wolfgang played his first public recital, in Linz. By June 1763 the whole Mozart family — mother, father, and the two kids — felt ready to embark on a more extended tour. The youngsters performed in several Bavarian cities, Coblenz, Bonn, Cologne, Aix-la-Chapelle, Brussels, and Paris (where Wolfgang celebrated his eighth birthday) before reaching their principal destination, London, on April 23, 1764.

There, the Mozart siblings performed three times in the presence of King George III and the English court, offered recitals at aristocratic homes, and gave several public concerts. They were so warmly embraced in London that they could have remained and made good money, but Leopold decided

against it. He wrote to a friend in Salzburg, “I will not bring up my children in such a dangerous place (where the majority of the inhabitants have no religion and where one only has evil examples before one).” After 15 months in England, the Mozarts wended their way through the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, and Germany. They arrived back in Salzburg at the end of November 1766 — three-and-a-half years after they had left — having mingled with the rich and famous, endured serious illnesses, become savvy travelers, and turned heads everywhere.

In July 1764, during their stay in London, Leopold (as he reported in a letter) was overtaken by a “kind of native complaint, which

IN SHORT

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Works composed and premiered:

Symphony No. 1, composed in the second half of 1764; premiere unknown. Symphony No. 41, composed July 25 (at the earliest) through August 10, 1788; premiere unknown.

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances:

Symphony No. 1, premiered March 30, 1933, Arturo Toscanini, conductor; most recently performed February 6, 1991, Zubin Mehta, conductor. Symphony No. 41, premiered January 13, 1844, Denis G. Etienne, conductor; most recently played November 30, 2013, Alan Gilbert, conductor

Estimated durations: Symphony No. 1, ca. 11 minutes; Symphony No. 41, ca. 35 minutes

is called a cold.” Fearing that such an ailment might develop into tuberculosis, he consulted multiple physicians; was “cys-tered, purged, and bled” by a Portuguese Jew whom he tried to convert to Christianity; and (with his family) removed to temporary lodgings in Chelsea, where the country air hastened his recovery during August and September. There, Nannerl recalled in 1799, after her brother’s death, Wolfgang “composed his first symphony with all the instruments,

above all with trumpets and drums. I had to sit by him and copy it out as he composed.”

There are no trumpets and drums in what is now known as Mozart’s **Symphony No. 1**, and the manuscript of this piece is not in Nannerl’s hand but rather in Wolfgang’s, with numerous corrections in Leopold’s. Probably the piece she remembered was not this one and should be considered missing. This Symphony in E-flat major was almost surely composed during Mozart’s London

The Prodigy

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart so charmed Londoners during performances there that some apparently found it difficult to believe he was truly a child of eight. In 1765 the Hon. Daines Barrington, a lawyer, magistrate, philosopher and naturalist, set out on an investigation. He secured a copy of Wolfgang’s birth certificate, and, with Leopold Mozart’s permission, conducted a private interview with the boy. His findings, presented in a paper filed in the Royal Society’s 1770 *Philosophical Transactions*, include tests of the child’s ability to sight-read a full score, and to extemporize:



Mozart, ca. 1763, captured in an unattributed portrait

Happening to know that little Mozart was much taken notice of by Manzoli, the famous singer, who came to England in 1764, I said to the boy that I should be glad to hear an extemporary “Love Song” such as his friend Manzoli might choose in an opera.

The boy on this . . . looked back with much archness, and immediately began five or six lines of a jargon recitative proper to introduce a love song. He then played a symphony which might correspond with an air composed to the single word *Affetto*. . . it was really above mediocrity and shewed a most extraordinary readiness of invention.

The interview continued with additional examples of Wolfgang’s skill at the keyboard and grasp of compositional elements, until, Barrington wrote:

A favorite cat entered the room and Wolfgang left the harpsichord . . . nor could we bring him back for a considerable time. He would also sometimes run about the room with a stick between his legs by way of a horse.

visit, however. Whether it was really his first surviving symphony is likely though not certain. Nevertheless, it holds on to its traditional designation as his Symphony No. 1.

Leopold's emendations reflect sound judgment and are generally incorporated when this piece is played, which doesn't happen often. But his changes constitute details. At heart, this symphony is by Wolfgang, who demonstrates that he has mastered the structural logic of sonata form and the poignancy of harmonic suspensions in the first movement, achieves a lilting sense of gentility in the second, conveys dancing buoyancy in the third, and possesses a gift for effective orchestration throughout. The piece is not far removed from coeval three-movement symphonies by Carl Friedrich Abel and Johann Christian Bach, works Mozart admired in London. The difference was that those composers were respectively 41 and 29 years old in 1764, whereas Mozart was eight.

Mozart's biography contains such an amazing procession of experiences and achievements that it reads almost like an 18th-century novel. The story of his final three symphonies occupies a full chapter of this life-as-novel — unfortunately, one that falls not terribly far from its end. More than two centuries after they were written, these works — the Symphonies No. 39 in E-flat major, No. 40 in G minor, and **No. 41 in C major (*Jupiter*)** — continue to stand at the summit of the symphonic repertoire, where they keep company with a small and supremely select group of fellow-masterpieces by the A-list of composers.

Almost incredibly, all three of these symphonies were produced in the space of about nine weeks, in the summer of 1788: he began his Symphony No. 39 around the beginning of June, not quite a month after *Don Giovanni* was granted a lukewarm reception at its Vienna premiere, and went on to complete

the succeeding symphonies on July 25 and August 10. Each is a very full-scale work, comprising the standard four movements of the late-Classical symphony. Twelve movements in nine weeks would mean that, on the average, Mozart expended five days and a few hours on the composition of each movement. That doesn't figure in the fact that he was writing other pieces at the same time, or that he was also giving piano lessons, tending a sick wife, enduring the death of a six-month-old daughter, entertaining friends, moving to a new apartment, and begging his fellow freemason Michael Puchberg for assistance that might help him through what was turning into an extended cash-flow crisis.

Mozart, of course, had no idea that these would be his last symphonies. He undoubtedly had every expectation of living well into the 19th century; and although that is not what happened, at least he had another three and a half years in which he might well have written further symphonies. But since he didn't, these three works stand as the summa of his achievement in symphonic music, and in their strikingly different characters one glimpses not only a drawing together of strands of development that had enriched his orchestral music to that point but also hints of what the future might have held.

These three symphonies have been minutely analyzed over the years — especially Nos. 40 and 41 — and they have proved so rich in their structural details that the analytical conversation continues at full force to this day. Still, words come with difficulty when one tries to discuss Mozart's final symphonies. One can dissect their harmonic structures, their deployment of themes, their contrapuntal subtlety, and the mastery of their instrumentation and yet fail to convey the exceptionally well-wrought personalities that each makes evident even at first hearing. In Symphony No. 41, the so-called

Jupiter, Mozart seems intent on showing off his sheer brilliance as an orchestral composer. Its emotional range is wide indeed, prefiguring the sort of vast expressive canvases that would emerge in the symphonies of Beethoven. In this work's finale, Mozart renders the listener slack-jawed through a breathtaking fugal display of quintuple invertible counterpoint, and that in itself may be viewed as looking both backward, to the sort of contrapuntal virtuosity we associate with Bach and Handel, and forward, to the dramatic power of fugue as demonstrated in many of the greatest compositions of Beethoven.

Although its premiere date is unknown, the *Jupiter* Symphony quickly earned a reputation as a work of exceptional qualities. In 1798 a reviewer for Leipzig's *Allge-*

meine musikalische Zeitung referred to Mozart's "formidable Symphony in C major, in which, as is well known, he came on a little too strong." But soon commentators adopted tones of almost universal adulation. By the time Georg Nikolaus von Nissen published his groundbreaking Mozart biography, in 1828, the tenor was firmly set. "His great Symphony in C with the closing fugue is truly the first of all symphonies," declared von Nissen. "In no work of this kind does the divine spark of genius shine more brightly and beautifully."

Instrumentation: Symphony No. 1 employs two oboes, two horns, and strings. Symphony No. 41 calls for flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

What's in a Name?

Mozart's **Symphony No. 41** is universally known among English-speaking music lovers as the *Jupiter* Symphony. As with so many musical nicknames, this one did not originate with the composer. There is no reason to doubt the account provided by the English composer and publisher Vincent Novello, who (along with his wife) visited Mozart's widow and son Franz Xaver in 1829 and reported:

Mozart's son said he considered the finale to his father's Sinfonia in C — which Salomon christened the Jupiter — to be the highest triumph of Instrumental Composition, and I agree with him.

This would have been the German violinist Johann Peter Salomon, remembered especially for having established himself

as an impresario in London and who arranged Joseph Haydn's two stints in Great Britain in the 1790s. It rings true: the earliest concert programs to use the nickname were Scottish and English, and the first printed edition to slap the name on the title page was a piano transcription of the symphony published in London in 1823.



German violinist Johann Peter Salomon