Mozart Piano Concerto No. 20

Eckart Preu, conductor
Alon Goldstein, piano

Strauss  Don Juan, Tone Poem after Nikolaus Lenau, Op. 20

Mozart  Concerto for Piano & Orchestra No. 20 in D minor
   I. Allegro
   II. Romance
   III. Rondo. Allegro assai

Alon Goldstein, piano

Intermission

Higdon  blue cathedral

Prokofiev  Excerpts from Romeo and Juliet, Suites 1 and 2, Op. 64-bis/64-ter

1. Montagues and Capulets (Suite 2, No. 1)
2. Masks (Suite 1, No. 5)
3. Romeo and Juliet (Suite 1, No. 6)
4. Death of Tybalt (Suite 1, No. 7)
5. Romeo at the Grave of Juliet (Suite 2, No. 7)

This concert will air on WUOT 91.9 FM on Tuesday, March 8, 2016 at 8:00 p.m.
This concert will be rebroadcast on Monday, August 29, 2016 at 8:00 p.m.
Program Notes: Mozart Piano Concerto No. 20

Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

Don Juan, Tone Poem after Nikolaus Lenau, Opus 20 (1888)

Richard Strauss was born in Munich, Germany, on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, on September 8, 1949. The first performance of Don Juan took place in Weimar, Germany, on November 11, 1889, with the composer conducting the Court Orchestra in the Grand Ducal Theater of Weimar.

Instrumentation: Don Juan is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, orchestra bells, triangle, cymbals, suspended cymbals, harp, and strings.

Duration: 17 minutes

The legend of Don Juan seems to have originated in the 16th century. The tale of the libertine nobleman who is damned for his numerous seductions and unwillingness to repent has found expression numerous works. The Austrian poet and philosopher Nikolaus Lenau (1802-50) offered his own, slightly different perspective in his 1844 poem Don Juan. When Lenau's Don Juan is unable to find his womanly ideal, he allows himself to be killed in a duel, exclaiming: “My deadly foe is in my power, and this, too, bores me, as does life itself.”

Richard Strauss was 24 when, in 1888, he first read Lenau's Don Juan. Strauss quickly began to compose an orchestral tone poem based upon the Lenau work. The following year, Strauss was appointed assistant conductor in Weimar. On November 11, 1889, the 25-year-old Strauss conducted Don Juan’s triumphant premiere.

Don Juan opens in bracing fashion with an upbeat orchestral flourish and the strings' introduction of the vaulting theme associated throughout the work with the hero. A series of episodes follows, depicting the Don's numerous conquests. Just when it appears that Don Juan will conclude in triumph, Strauss reminds us of the hero's fate, particularly as related in Lenau's poem. The flurry of activity slams to a halt. The orchestra's troubled repose is pierced by the trumpets' dissonant interjection. Three pianissimo chords seal Don Juan's fate.

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Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 20 in D minor, K. 466 (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna, Austria, on December 5, 1791. The first performance of the Piano Concerto No. 20 took place at the Mehlgrube in Vienna on February 11, 1785, with the composer as soloist.

Instrumentation: In addition to the solo piano, the D-minor Concerto is scored for flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Duration: 30 minutes

Mozart completed his Piano Concerto No. 20, on February 10, 1785, during the height of his success and popularity in Vienna. Mozart was the soloist in the premiere, which took place the following day at a concert he sponsored. Mozart’s father, Leopold, arrived from Salzburg the day of the premiere. Leopold proudly reported: “The concert was matchless, the orchestra excellent.” The Concerto No. 20 is in three movements. The first (Allegro) features the traditional double exposition or introduction of the principal themes. The Concerto begins ominously, with a brooding, syncopated figure in the strings that soon yields to a tempestuous outburst. The soloist launches the second exposition, and predominates to the close. The pianist’s cadenza leads to another fiery statement by the orchestra, but the movement closes in hushed mystery. The second-movement (Romance) is in rondo form. As the title of the movement suggests (and typical of the slow movements in Mozart’s concertos), the Romance is in the character of a song or opera aria without words. The soloist immediately presents the central theme of the Concerto's Rondo (Allegro assai) finale; a restless, syncopated motif in D minor. The storm and stress of the greater part of the Finale are finally swept aside after the cadenza, when soloist and ensemble join forces for a concluding, heroic D-Major proclamation.

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blue cathedral (1999)

Jennifer Higdon was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 31, 1962. The first performance of blue cathedral took place at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 1, 2000, with Robert Spano conducting the Curtis Symphony Orchestra.

Instrumentation: blue cathedral is scored for piccolo, two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, crotales marimba, tam-tam, vibraphone, orchestra bells, bell tree, sizzle cymbal, suspended cymbal, chimes, small triangle, large triangle, bass drum, large tom-tom, tam-tam, harp, piano/celeste, and strings.

Duration: 12 minutes
Program Notes: Mozart Piano Concerto No. 20

Blue...like the sky. Where all possibilities soar. Cathedrals...a place of thought, growth, spiritual expression...serving as a symbolic doorway in to and out of this world. Blue represents all potential and the progression of journeys. Cathedrals represent a place of beginnings, endings, solitude, fellowship, contemplation, knowledge and growth. As I was writing this piece, I found myself imagining a journey through a glass cathedral in the sky. Because the walls would be transparent, I saw the image of clouds and blueness permeating from the outside of this church. In my mind's eye the listener would enter from the back of the sanctuary, floating along the corridor amongst giant crystal pillars, moving in a contemplative stance. The stained glass windows' figures would start moving with song, singing a heavenly music. The listener would float down the aisle, slowly moving upward at first and then progressing at a quicker pace, rising towards an immense ceiling which would open to the sky...as this journey progressed, the speed of the traveler would increase, rushing forward and upward. I wanted to create the sensation of contemplation and quiet peace at the beginning, moving towards the feeling of celebration and ecstatic expansion of the soul, all the while singing along with that heavenly music. These were my thoughts when The Curtis Institute of Music commissioned me to write a work to commemorate its 75th anniversary. Curtis is a house of knowledge—a place to reach towards that beautiful expression of the soul which comes through music. I began writing this piece at a unique juncture in my life and found myself pondering the question of what makes a life. The recent loss of my younger brother, Andrew Blue, made me reflect on the amazing journeys that we all make in our lives, crossing paths with so many individuals singularly and collectively, learning and growing each step of the way. This piece represents the expression of the individual and the group...our inner travels and the places our souls carry us, the lessons we learn, and the growth we experience. In tribute to my brother, I feature solos for the clarinet (the instrument he played) and the flute (the instrument I play). Because I am the older sibling, it is the flute that appears first in this first. At the end of the work, the two instruments continue their dialogue, but it is the flute that drops out and the clarinet that continues on in the upward progressing journey.

This is a story that commemorates living and passing through places of knowledge and of sharing and of that song called life.

This work was commissioned and premiered in 2000 by the Curtis Institute of Music.

--Jennifer Higdon

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Excerpts from Romeo and Juliet, Suites 1 and 2, Opus No. 64-bis/64-ter (1935-6)

Sergei Prokofiev was born in Sontsovka, Russia, on April 23, 1891 and died in Moscow, Russia, on March 5, 1953. The first performance of the ballet, Romeo and Juliet, took place at the Brno Opera House in Czechoslovakia on December 30, 1938.

Instrumentation: The Suites are scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, cornet, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, triangle, xylophone, maracas, bells, tambourine, cymbals, harp, piano/celste, and strings (optional viola d'amore may be replaced by viola).

Duration: 26 minutes

Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet has long been celebrated as one of the greatest ballet scores. But during the period of its creation and early performances, Prokofiev met resistance at every turn. This prompted the great Russian ballerina Galina Ulanova, who danced the role of Juliet at the July 11, 1940 Leningrad premiere, to offer the following toast, a play on the concluding lines of the Shakespeare original:

Never was a story of more woe
Than this of Prokofiev's music for Romeo.

Prokofiev adapted music from his Romeo and Juliet ballet for two Orchestral Suites (premiered, respectively, in Moscow, in 1936, and Leningrad, in 1937) as well as a collection of Ten Pieces for Solo Piano, Opus 75 (1937). Prokofiev completed a third Orchestral Suite in 1946.

This concert features excerpts from the First and Second Orchestral Suites.

I. Montagues and Capulets (Suite 2, No.1)—The brief and fierce introduction is derived from an Interlude that follows the Prince of Verona's warning to the battling Montague and Capulet families. After the introduction, the Dance of the Knights begins.

II. Masks (Suite 1, No. 5)—Romeo, Montague's son, and his friend, Mercutio, arrive at the party wearing disguises. Capulet and his wife enter with daughter Juliet and bid the musicians to play and the guests to dance. At the sight of Juliet, Romeo immediately falls in love with the beautiful young woman.

III. Romeo and Juliet (Balcony Scene) (Suite 1, No. 6)—At night, Romeo stands beneath Juliet's balcony and prays for her to appear. Juliet comes to the balcony, and the two declare their eternal love.

IV. Death of Tybalt (Suite 1, No. 7)—Tybalt challenges Romeo to a duel. Romeo is now married to Juliet, and therefore, is Tybalt's cousin. Romeo refuses to fight. Mercutio intercedes and is mortally wounded by Tybalt. When Romeo learns that his friend has died, he is overcome with anger, and kills Tybalt.

VII. Romeo at the Grave of Juliet (Suite 2, No. 7)—Romeo learns of Juliet's supposed death and rushes to the Capulet tomb. The funeral procession and Romeo's despair build to a shattering climax. Finally, the music subsides to a pianissimo whisper.