

**Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21**  
**Program Notes**  
**December 2 - 4, 2011**

Since Haydn is so closely associated with the genres of instrumental music, it is perhaps surprising to learn that from 1775, when the music-loving Prince Nicolaus established a full-time opera company at his sumptuous Esterháza Palace in western Hungary, until the Prince's death in 1790, he was one of the busiest opera producers in Europe. As part of his duties as court Kapellmeister, Haydn was not only responsible for the regular Tuesday and Saturday orchestral concerts, he was also in charge of the opera and marionette theaters. He composed music for each of these functions, organized the repertory and performers, oversaw the music library and instrument collections, and conducted the performances. To say that he was busy is to seriously understate his situation. One representatively hectic period began on March 10, 1778, when the Pauli Company, a group of itinerant players, took up residence at Esterháza to present plays in translation (for which Haydn also provided incidental music). For over nine months, from the date of the troupe's arrival until three days before Christmas, there was a German play, an Italian opera or a German marionette opera at Esterháza every night except Easter Day or when the Prince was not in residence. In 1786, Haydn conducted 125 performances of seventeen operas, eight of them premieres. So great was the Prince's love of opera that, when fire gutted the opera house on November 18, 1779, he had the ground cleared and a new corner stone laid within a month. While construction went forward on the new building — grander, of course, than the original — the entire company was moved into the closer confines of the marionette theater, whose stage was specially renovated to accommodate the life-size singers.

Haydn composed sixteen Italian operas and five German *Singspiels* for the Esterházyz between 1762 and 1783, but none was more significant than *La Fedeltà Premiata* ("Fidelity Rewarded"), which was not only his most successful comic opera during his lifetime (36 performances at Esterháza following its premiere on February 25, 1781 as well as productions in Vienna and Pressburg) but also the work that opened the new palace theater built to replace the one that had burned to the ground in November 1779. Prince Nicolaus' two greatest passions were music and hunting, so Haydn chose for his new opera a libretto by Giambattista Lorenzi that Domenico Cimarosa had set for Naples in 1779 as *L'Infideltà Fedele* ("Faithful Infidelity"), a tale set in a mythical land that featured a hunt scene and action centered around the Temple of Diana, goddess of the hunt. In the convoluted story, a sea monster that annually threatens the land will ultimately relent only if a hero offers himself as a sacrifice; until then, the monster can be appeased only by an offering of two faithful lovers. Three young couples try variously to express and conceal their affection because of this edict until Diana resolves the situation and unites the appropriate lovers in the final scene.

To preface *La Fedeltà Premiata*, Haydn devised a rollicking sonata-form overture with a galloping main theme, a horn call as the subsidiary subject, and a fully worked-out development section. Prince Nicolaus was delighted with the production, and when he returned to Esterháza later that year following a visit to Paris, Haydn welcomed him home with the new Symphony No. 73 in D major ("*La Chasse*" — "*The Hunt*"), which borrowed the Overture to *La Fedeltà Premiata* as its finale.

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“We never go to bed before one o’clock and I never get up before nine.... Every day there are concerts; and the whole time is given up to teaching, music, composing and so forth. I feel rather out of it all. If only the concerts were over! It is impossible for me to describe the rush and bustle. Since my arrival, your brother’s forte-piano has been taken at least a dozen times to the theater or to some other house.” Father Leopold Mozart had reached a rather brittle 66th year when he sent these lines off to his daughter, Maria Anna, from Vienna on March 12, 1785, just two days after Wolfgang had premiered his C major Piano Concerto (K. 467) at the Court Theater. Leopold had ventured from Salzburg to the busy Austrian capital city to visit Wolfgang and his wife, and to check on their growing brood, including the most recent addition — Karl Thomas, born the preceding September. (Mozart had six children in the nine years of his marriage; only two survived him.)

Leopold, who arrived in February after repeated invitations from Wolfgang, was both pleased and exhausted by his son’s frantic schedule. Since theatrical and operatic performances were proscribed during Lent in 18th-century Catholic countries, the late winter was always the busiest time of the year for instrumental music. The younger Mozart, who depended heavily for his livelihood on the success of his concerts during these months, produced his own programs, acting as impresario, composer, pianist, accompanist and conductor. The year of this paternal visit — 1785 — proved to be a good one for Mozart, probably the best he knew in Vienna. His list of subscribers was longer that spring than any other; his music was in demand; and he had invitations to perform at some of the city’s best houses. Perhaps the single greatest thrill for Leopold in all this activity, however, was hearing the praise of his son from the most respected living musician in Europe. On February 12th, soon after Leopold’s arrival, the venerated Joseph Haydn appeared at a reading session of the last three quartets that Wolfgang had dedicated to him (K. 458, 464 and 465). It was at this soiree that Haydn dispensed his famous evaluation of Mozart’s unique talent, as proudly reported in Leopold’s next letter to his daughter: “I declare to you before God, and as I am an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know, either personally or by name.” They were probably the sweetest words ever to come into Leopold’s ear. Concerts, popularity, good prospects, and the unstinted praise of a great man — father and son must have been delighted to share this time together, the pinnacle of celebrity in Wolfgang’s career.

Leopold wrote to Maria Anna that the new C major Concerto (K. 467) had an excellent reception at its first performance on March 10th. The applause, he allowed, was “deafening,” and the audience was even moved to tears. Amid the acclaim, however, the sensitive, professional musician in Leopold sensed a disturbing element in much of his son’s recent music. He felt that this Concerto was not only “astonishingly difficult,” but that it also held an expressive undercurrent which would not continue to please the Viennese public. When the copyist dropped off the parts for the work, for example, Leopold questioned him about some of the harmonies, assuming that many of the flats and sharps were in error. They were not, he was assured. These curious new harmonies were what Mozart had written. The deeply felt emotionalism of the D minor Concerto (K. 466), completed only three weeks before this one, was proving to be not simply an experiment or a temporary aberration, but an integral element in Mozart’s mature style. As time passed, the Viennese, like Leopold, were bewildered by this music and its incipient Romanticism, and the success of 1785 soon faded. Mozart composed three more piano concertos in the

following year, but then his subscribers melted away. No longer able to secure support for his own concerts, the need for concertos evaporated, and he wrote only two more during his last five years. By 1785 Mozart was composing his most important works to please only his own Muse. That he did so proved to be a tragedy for him but a treasure for us.

“The first movement [of the C major Concerto],” wrote Abraham Veinus, “is in truth majestic. The orchestra has breadth and grandeur, the solo part dignity and brilliance, and the movement as a whole is anchored in a kind of firm and magnificent pride.” Its orchestral introduction opens with a soft, martial strain for unison strings answered by the winds. Other themes follow in abundance before the entry of the soloist, who accompanies the return of the martial melody in its use as the main theme of the exposition. A brief excursion into the shadowy key of G minor by the pianist leads to the second theme in the bright, expected G major. Alfred Einstein estimated that the development, “with its modulations through darkness to light, is one of the most beautiful examples of Mozart’s iridescent harmony and of the breadth of the domain embraced in his conception of C major.” The unison strings tiptoe in once again with the martial theme to begin the recapitulation.

The *Andante*, which achieved great popular fame as the music for the 1967 Swedish film *Elvira Madigan*, is one of Mozart’s most sensually beautiful creations. The muted strings, the pulsating triplet rhythms of the accompaniment that gently oppose the meter of the melody, the exquisite scoring, and the rich harmonic palette fill this music with a dreamlike quality that presages the tender Romanticism of Schumann and Schubert. The sparkling rondo-finale joins the rollicking spirit of the opera buffa and the intensity and wealth of expression of the symphony with the virtuoso elements of the concerto to bring this radiant work to a bounding close.

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Bruckner worked on his Third Symphony for seventeen years, from its initial conception in 1873 until its final revision in 1890, and much of the story of his life is reflected in its history: the inspiration from and sycophantic fealty to Richard Wagner; the crushing rejection of his music for so many years; the extensive reworkings of his scores so they might find better favor; and the eventual success — even triumph — of his symphonies in the period before his death.

Bruckner first heard the music of Richard Wagner at a performance of *Tannhäuser* in 1863, and its effect had the force of a religious conversion. It was from that day that Bruckner determined to be a serious composer of large works, and his first symphonic attempt dates from that year. Wagner, a dozen years the elder, assumed the position of a guiding star in Bruckner’s life, and Bruckner toiled away with the hope of some day gaining the approval of his idol. That day came in September 1873, when he made the pilgrimage to Bayreuth where Wagner was overseeing the construction of the Festspielhaus. With the manuscripts of the Second and still-unfinished Third Symphonies in hand, Bruckner approached “the Master” and asked him just to glance at them. If Wagner would give his approval, Bruckner suggested, he would be most grateful to dedicate one of them to him. Bruckner persisted, and he left the scores for Wagner to examine. Wagner was taken with the Third Symphony, especially with the bold opening trumpet theme (Wagner nicknamed Bruckner, “the trumpet”) and he agreed to allow it to be dedicated to

him. Bruckner was given a friendly reception on his return, and was overjoyed at the news. So much in a tizzy was he that the next morning he could not recall which of the two works Wagner had preferred. "Master," he anxiously wrote, "The Symphony in D minor — the one where the trumpet starts the theme?" "Yes! Yes! Best wishes, Richard Wagner," came back the reply. Bruckner saved that scrap of paper for the rest of his days.

The euphoria early connected with this "Wagner Symphony," however, turned to bleak disappointment when the work was first played. Bruckner, with a plodding patience fueled by a stubborn belief in his own abilities, finally convinced the conductor Johann Herbeck to schedule the work for a Vienna Philharmonic concert in December 1877, though the score had already been rejected three times by that organization. Unfortunately, just six weeks before the performance Herbeck suddenly died, and it appeared that Bruckner would once again be frustrated in bringing his music to the public. However, August Göllerich, a member of the Austrian parliament, father of one of Bruckner's students and an eventual biographer of the composer, used his influence to see that the concert proceeded as planned. No conductor could be found to replace Herbeck, however, so Bruckner had to take up the baton for himself. He had almost no experience as an orchestral conductor, and the players were openly hostile to both his lack of technique and his music. His rehearsals were not helped when the directors of the Conservatory, who dropped in to observe this curious composer flailing away at his strange music, broke out in derisive laughter as they stood in the wings. As an added liability, Viennese opinion, led by the redoubtable Eduard Hanslick, was strongly against Wagner, and because of Bruckner's close association with Wagner — and especially since Wagner's name appeared on the title page of this Third Symphony — a cold reception was almost guaranteed. The performance was a disaster. The audience fled *en masse* during the finale, and when Bruckner finished there were barely two dozen people left in the hall. As he turned around to accept the smattering of applause from those who had stayed, the orchestra sheepishly stole off the stage. Standing on the podium in his baggy peasant clothes, dazed, tears streaming down his cheeks, Bruckner was numb to the comfort offered by the faithful few who remained. One was the seventeen-year-old Gustav Mahler, who was to help in making the piano duet arrangement of the Symphony. Another was the music publisher, Theodor Rättig. He had been following the progress of the work, and he came up to tell Bruckner that he would publish the score at his own expense, which was done the following year. Bruckner was not to be consoled on this disastrous evening, however, and, in his thick country dialect, he mumbled, "Lasst mi aus, die Leut woll'n nix von mir wissen" — "Let me go. The people don't want to know anything about me."

Bruckner composed almost nothing for the next two years. The first glimmer of public recognition came with Hans Richter's performance of the Fourth Symphony in 1881, and Bruckner was again encouraged to take up the pen. The heartache of the Third Symphony did not leave him, though, and, urged on by some friends led by the brothers Joseph and Franz Schalk, he returned to the work in 1888. With the well-meaning but heavy-handed interference of the Schalk brothers (and against the advice of Mahler) he made changes in both the orchestration and the form of the work. (A previous revision before the premiere had expunged the quotations from *Die Meistersinger*, *Tristan* and *Die Walküre* that were in the earliest version of the score, the one that Wagner had seen.) By the time these were done and the Third Symphony published for a second time, in 1890, Bruckner had become a revered figure in Viennese music and the premiere of the revised version on December 12th was such a resounding success that he

took twelve curtain calls at its conclusion. The year 1891 saw at least two public celebrations in his honor, both with the support and participation of the venerable Emperor Franz Joseph — then in the 43rd year of his reign, with another 25 years remaining. Bruckner had at last reached the fame and love that seemed to have been squelched forever when the Third Symphony was new.

Bruckner's Third Symphony is the first of his works to show all of the characteristics of his fully mature style. It is actually the fifth composition in this form that he wrote — a very early one in F minor that he always disclaimed and another (No. "0") that was added to the canon only after the later ones were well established precede what is known as "No. 1." Despite its close connection with Wagner, only some of the traits of its scoring and harmonic usage reveal a debt to that composer. It bears none of the grandiloquent emotional or intellectual content of the music dramas. Its form derives from Beethoven, and even the key (D minor) and the tremulous opening mirror those of the Choral Symphony. The tunefulness of its interior themes (*Gesangsperiode* in the mouth-filling original German) traces its heritage to Schubert. (Though separated by more than a generation, Schubert and Bruckner had the same counterpoint teacher — Simon Sechter.) The grandeur of conception and mystical vision are, however, uniquely Brucknerian.

The Symphony's opening seems to rise from the very earth itself. Over a quivering string background, the trumpet intones a stark theme outlining the most fundamental tones of the harmonic spectrum — the fifth and the octave. This opening summons builds to a massive unison outburst from the full orchestra answered by a subdued response in the strings. The cycle — trumpet call, outburst, response — is repeated as a transition to the second theme group, a lyrical strain in the "Bruckner rhythm" of three-plus-two. Amid a series of growing climaxes, a chorale theme from Bruckner's *Mass in D minor* is introduced before the pace slows and quiets to usher in the development. Initiated by a series of hushed, hymn-like chords and the return of the tremulous string motive, it is devoted largely to an exploration of the trumpet call in both its original and inverted configurations. The recapitulation follows the progress of the exposition, and is capped with a ringing coda hurled forth by the full ensemble.

The *Adagio* forms a poignant contrast to the granitic splendor of the preceding movement. Its intense, devotional quality reflects the simple Catholic faith which Bruckner unswervingly observed all of his life. The movement is in three-part form: the outer sections majestic and stirring; the central portion more flowing. Bruckner's tendency to arrange these magnificent slow movements around waves of sound, each with greater dynamic impact and elaborate figuration than the preceding one, drives the movement forward. The scherzo and trio also shows these awesome "waves" of sound. (One of music's most glorious moments is the instant after such a movement ends and the hall seems to continue vibrating out of pure sympathetic joy.) The trio, lighter in mood and sound, has much of the aura of a country dance.

The finale begins with an expectant motive in the strings and builds quickly to a full-throated pronouncement by the brass. The second theme is a combination of two ideas — a lilting refrain in the strings and a hymn-like phrase for horns and trombones. About the use of these apparently contrasting themes Bruckner is reported to have said, "Thus is life. The polka signifies the humor and gaiety of the world; the chorale, its pain and sadness." Following the development and recapitulation, the great cycle of the Symphony is completed by the reintroduction of the first movement's trumpet theme in the coda. In

broad, striding measures, the key turns to D major for a grand, heroic closing affirmation of Bruckner's faith in the power of music and of his God.

In language whose high tone and transcendent vision is an appropriate companion for the Third Symphony, Lawrence Gilman wrote of Bruckner, "He was and is a seer and prophet — one who knew the secret of a strangely exalted discourse, grazing the sublime, though his speech was both halting and prolix. He stammered, and he knew not when to stop. But sometimes, rapt and transfigured, he saw visions and dreamed dreams as colossal, as grandiose, as awful in lonely splendor, as those of William Blake. We know that for Bruckner, too, some ineffable beauty flamed and sank and flamed again across the night."

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