

Opening Night: Carmina Burana
Program Notes
October 14 -16, 2011

Mozart's creative passion was opera. By the time he bolted from the service of the archbishop of Salzburg (which city had no regular opera house) and moved to Vienna in May 1781, he had composed a dozen pieces for the stage; he was 25 years old. One of the decisive factors in quitting his Salzburg position was the tentative offer a month before of a commission to write a German comic opera from the National Singspiel Theater's administrator and resident poet, Gottlieb Stephanie. The Theater had been established by Emperor Joseph II in 1776 to encourage the production of stage works in the native language, but the enterprise had limped along to that time largely with a few original but uninspired *Singspiels* (comic operas with spoken dialogue, similar to the English ballad opera or the Broadway musical comedy) and translations of French farces and vaudevilles. Stephanie had admired Mozart's work since at least 1775, when he saw a production of *Il rè pastore* in Salzburg while touring the Continent in the entourage of the Archduke Maximilian, and he confirmed the order for the new opera at the end of July. He presented Mozart with a libretto titled *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* ("The Abduction from the Seraglio") closely based on a play by the Leipzig merchant Christoph Friedrich Bretzner, *Belmonte und Constanze*, which had been premiered in a musical setting by Johann André just two months before in Berlin. (Bretzner railed in the Leipzig press against "a certain individual, Mozart by name, in Vienna, who has had the audacity to misuse my *Belmonte und Constanze*," but he had no legal recourse to regain any financial rights in the Viennese production in those pre-copyright times. He eventually changed his mind about Mozart's *Die Entführung*, and even translated *Così fan tutte* into German in 1794.) The original schedule called for *Die Entführung* to be premiered in mid-September as part of the festivities surrounding the visit to Vienna of the Grand Duke (later Tsar) Paul Petrovich of Russia, so Mozart set to work immediately. The royal visit was postponed until November, however, and three of Gluck's operas were staged for the event instead. Intrigues caused further delays in the premiere, until finally Joseph II himself ordered that the preparations be set into motion.

Die Entführung was first heard at the Burgtheater in Vienna on July 16, 1782. It was an enormous hit, the greatest theatrical success of Mozart's life. He reported to his father, Leopold, that "people are absolutely infatuated with this opera," and the critic for *Cramer's Magazin* recorded that it "received the fullest and most general applause." The opera was repeated sixteen times at the Burgtheater in the next two months (and thereafter regularly revived in Vienna), and given in Prague, Mannheim, Frankfurt, Bonn and Leipzig the following year; it had been heard in at least 25 German-speaking cities by 1788. Mozart, however, profited little from the work's popularity, receiving only the initial fee for composing the opera and none of the royalties from subsequent performances in Vienna or elsewhere. Someone else beat him in publishing a piano reduction of the score, so he even lost the income from that source. He felt secure enough in his newfound notoriety, however, to take Constanze Weber as his wife on August 4, 1782.

The story is set in 16th-century Turkey. Constanze, an Englishwoman, has been captured by pirates and sold to the Pasha Selim. Belmonte, Constanze's lover, arrives to rescue her, but he is rebuffed by Osmin, the guardian of the harem (and Mozart's greatest comic creation). Belmonte overhears an interview

between the Pasha and Constanze in which, despite the threat of torture, she rejects the ruler's love and vows to be faithful to Belmonte. Belmonte, inspired, effects an escape for Constanze, but they are caught and brought before the Pasha. He upbraids the lovers for their plot, but magnanimously forgives them and allows them to return home. The exotic Turkish setting and the characteristic music that it engendered (marked notably by the tintinnabulations of drums, cymbals and triangle, the principal instruments Europeans associated with the Janissary bands) found great favor in Mozart's day. Indeed, there was a general and rather feverish late 18th-century vogue for all manner of Orientalisms which was reflected in interior decoration, costume, theatrical productions and music — Haydn and Beethoven also wrote "Turkish" pieces. While the exotic setting may have helped with the immediate success of *Die Entführung*, it is Mozart's music that has maintained the work for over two centuries as one of the most delightful experiences in the operatic repertory. He worked with great care in having Stephanie forge the libretto precisely to his requirements and in creating appropriate and beautiful music to enrich the words; Mozart was fully revealed as a musical dramatist for the first time in this opera. In a long series of letters written to Leopold during the opera's composition, he explained and asked for advice about many details, but his overriding concern in fashioning the music was typical of the philosophy that guided all of his works: "Passions, violent or not, must never be expressed to the point of disgust, and the music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, in short must always remain music."

The brief Overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* both sets the sparkling mood for the comedy to follow and introduces the Turkish atmosphere appropriate to the plot. The first section bubbles with so much youthful excitement and colorful orchestration that Mozart boasted, "I don't believe anyone could fall asleep, even if he hadn't slept at all the night before." The mid-section is given over to Belmonte's air, *Hier soll ich dich denn sehen* ("Here then I shall see you"), which opens the first act. The fast music returns and in the opera goes directly into Belmonte's song, but in concert comes to a full close with an ending provided by Ferruccio Busoni.

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Haydn left Vienna for his second English visit on January 19, 1794, and arrived in London sixteen days later. Having discovered "a dearth of good copyists" on his earlier sojourn, he took along his valued copyist and servant Johann Elssler, but left at home his wife, Anna Maria, a fearsome shrew who undoubtedly helped inspire her husband's long absences. (Haydn remained in England for eighteen months on each of his two trips.) The travelers took up lodgings at No. 1 Bury Street, St. James — an attractive address, especially since it was only an easy ten-minute walk along The Mall to the home of Rebecca Schroeter, the cultured widow of the Queen's former Music Master, John Samuel Schroeter, and Haydn's dearest friend in London. The two had gotten along so well during Haydn's first visit, in 1791-1792, that he wrote of her, in his most candid manner, "[She was] an English widow who fell in love with me.... She was a very handsome woman, though over sixty; and, had I been free, I should certainly have married her." Little is known of their relationship during the 1794-1795 visit. None of their correspondence from that time exists and Haydn's notebook covering those months has not been preserved. "Probably," surmised Karl Geiringer, "she again contributed much to making Haydn's stay in the British capital a happy one." After he returned to Vienna in 1795, Haydn dedicated to Mrs. Schroeter his Piano Trios, Op. 82.

The concerts that Johann Peter Salomon arranged for Haydn's English visit during the spring of 1794 were among the season's most glittering social events. Anticipating a strong demand for tickets among the nobility, gentry and wealthy society, Salomon set the price for admission to all twelve Monday evening concerts (February 10th through May 12th, with two weeks off for the Easter holiday) at a hefty five guineas; a single ticket was available for one-half a guinea, about the cost of a big meal for four with wine in those days. The concerts were given at the elegant Hanover Square Rooms, the site of many of London's most important musical events between 1775 and 1874. The orchestra numbered over sixty players (at Esterháza Palace, Haydn seldom had more than twenty), and included the country's best musicians, with Salomon himself serving as concertmaster. Following the contemporary custom, Haydn sat at the harpsichord, playing along when he wished, and indicated the proper tempos to Salomon, who passed them to the full ensemble. For Salomon's performances of 1794, Haydn created three new Symphonies, Nos. 99-101, with his last three works in the genre being written for the London concerts of the following year. (The Symphony No. 99 and the minuets of Symphonies Nos. 100 and 101 were written in Vienna before he left; the balance of the music was written in England.)

The Symphony No. 100, judiciously placed after the intermission to allow for the gentry's late arrival from their clubs, began the second half of the concert of March 31, 1794 (Haydn's 62nd birthday). This "Grand New Overture," as it was billed, created a sensation that, according to H.C. Robbins Landon, "was the greatest success of Haydn's life." "Encore! encore! encore! resounding from every seat," reported the *Morning Chronicle*. "Even the Ladies themselves could not forbear." The focus of the acclaim was the Symphony's second movement, for which Haydn had written parts for triangle, cymbals and drum, instruments then associated not with the concert hall but rather with military music and with musical depictions of Eastern exoticisms, i.e., "Turkish" music, such as Mozart had used in his *Abduction from the Seraglio*. In addition to its intriguing novelty in a symphonic setting, the percussion sound also called to the minds of British listeners in 1794 the wars that Napoleon was igniting just across the English Channel, which the reviewer for the *Morning Chronicle* heard embodied in the notes of the second movement: "It is the advancing to battle; and the march of men, the sounding of the charge, the thundering of the onset, the clash of arms, the groans of the wounded, and what may well be called the hellish roar of war increased to a climax of horrid sublimity!" In the wake of such colorful descriptions, it is small wonder that the demand for Haydn's "Military" Symphony was immediate and intense: the second movement was encored at its premiere and the entire work was repeated at the Haydn/Salomon concert a week later and at many other of their programs in 1794 and 1795; publications of the music appeared in Britain and on the Continent so quickly that by the end of the year it was Haydn's most frequently performed orchestral score and, until Beethoven's symphonies were widely circulated, was the most popular symphony ever written — Salomon himself even made a piano trio version for home consumption. The sizable returns from this score and the second London visit relieved Haydn of financial worry for the rest of his life. The Symphony remained extremely popular throughout the 19th century, one of only a handful of works that sustained their author's reputation for the decades after his death.

Bernard Jacobson's words of counsel — "A lack of appreciation for Haydn is a species of the inability to enjoy the good things in life" — apply with special force to the "Military" Symphony. The work rolls along with such ease and seeming inevitability, such bounding good cheer and limitless enthusiasm, that Haydn's absolute mastery of form, technique, sonority and expression are apt to be overlooked amid the

waves of well-being inspired by the music. An introduction of slow tempo and austere mien leads to the presentation of the opening movement's sunny main theme, whose striking sonority, for flute and oboes alone, Tovey judged to be unique in Classical music. The strings and then the full ensemble participate in the unfolding of the theme with an invigorating bit of scalar rushing-about. The flute and oboe trio trot out their tune again in a new key, but this soon gives way to an infectious ditty initiated by the violins. The development section begins — with silence. Haydn stops the music dead in its tracks for three full measures, drops into a delicious, unexpected key and only then proceeds with further discussion of the violins' ditty. The flute and oboes keep piping up throughout the development, and finally remember their first melody just when the moment has arrived for the recapitulation. Haydn lamented in the last years before his death in 1809 that he had only just learned to write for the wind instruments. The first movement of the "Military" Symphony, one of the 18th-century's most remarkable adventures in orchestral sonority, is proof that he was too modest.

The *Allegretto*, whose percussion sounds lend the work its sobriquet, was largely lifted by Haydn from his Concerto No. 3 for *Lira Organizzata*, one of at least five such works that he composed in 1786 for Ferdinand IV, the King of Naples. (The curious *lira organizzata* was a sort of hurdy-gurdy whose strings were put into vibration by a resined rotating wheel and altered in pitch by depressing the various buttons on an attached keyboard.) Haydn completely reorchestrated the piece, added the parts for triangle, cymbals and drum, and tacked on a coda, which begins with the solo trumpet signal shortly before the end. In its stateliness and pomp, the *Minuet* looks back to the origins of that aristocratic dance rather than ahead to the scherzos of Beethoven, as do the other third movements of the "London" Symphonies. The finale is a formal hybrid of sonata and rondo which starts out like a simple dash to the finish, but acquires truly symphonic breadth as it proceeds. In the evocative words of Sir Donald Tovey, "The finale begins with one of those themes which we are apt to take for a kitten until Haydn shows that it is a promising young tiger." The percussion instruments are re-enlisted as the work reaches its climax, and this wonderful piece ends amid tintinnabulous splendor.

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About thirty miles south of Munich, in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps, is the abbey of Benediktbeuren. In 1803, a 13th-century codex was discovered among its holdings that contains some 200 secular poems which give a vivid, earthy portrait of Medieval life. Many of these poems, attacking the defects of the Church, satirizing contemporary manners and morals, criticizing the omnipotence of money, and praising the sensual joys of food, drink and physical love, were written by an amorphous band known as "Goliards." These wandering scholars and ecclesiastics, who were often esteemed teachers and recipients of courtly patronage, filled their worldly verses with images of self-indulgence that were probably as much literary convention as biographical fact. The language they used was a heady mixture of Latin, old German and old French. Some paleographic musical notation appended to a few of the poems indicates that they were sung, but it is today so obscure as to be indecipherable. This manuscript was published in 1847 by Johann Andreas Schmeller under the title, *Carmina Burana* ("Songs of Beuren"), "carmina" being the plural of the Latin word for song, "carmen."

Carl Orff encountered these lusty lyrics for the first time in the 1930s, and he was immediately struck by

their theatrical potential. Like Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson in the United States, Orff at that time was searching for a simpler, more direct musical expression that could immediately affect listeners. Orff's view, however, was more Teutonically philosophical than that of the Americans, who were seeking a music for the common man, one related to the everyday world. Orff sought to create a musical idiom that would serve as a means of drawing listeners away from their daily experiences and closer to the realization of oneness with the universe. In the words of the composer's biographer Andreas Liess, "Orff's spiritual form is molded by the superimposition of a high intellect on a primitive creative instinct," thus establishing a tension between the rational (intellect) and the irrational (instinct). The artistic presentation of the deep-seated psychological self to the thinking person allows an exploration of the regions of being that have been overlaid by accumulated layers of civilization. To portray the connection between the physical and spiritual spheres, Orff turned to the theater. His theater, however, was hardly the conventional one. Orff's modern vision entailed stripping away not only the richly Romantic musical language of traditional opera, but also eliminating its elaborate stagecraft, costumes and scenery, so that it was reduced to just its essential elements of production. Orff's reform even went so far as to question the validity of any works written before 1935, including his own, to express the state of modern man, and he told his publisher to destroy all his music (i.e., Orff's) which "unfortunately" had been printed. The first piece that embodied Orff's new outlook was *Carmina Burana*.

Though *Carmina Burana* is most frequently heard in the concert hall, Orff insisted that it was intended to be staged, and that the music was only one of its constituent parts. "I have never been concerned with music as such, but rather with music as 'spiritual discussion,' " he wrote. "Music is the servant of the word, trying not to disturb, but to emphasize and underline." He felt that this objective was best achieved in the theater, but *Carmina Burana* still has a stunning impact even without its visual element. Its effect arises from the monumental simplicity of the musical style by which Orff sought to depict the primitive, instinctive side of mankind. Gone are the long, intricate forms of traditional German symphonic music, the opulent homogeneity of the Romantic orchestra, the rich textures of the 19th-century masters. They are replaced by a structural simplicity and a sinewy, electric muscularity that is driven by an almost primeval rhythmic energy. "The simpler and more reduced to essentials a statement is, the more immediate and profound its effect," wrote Orff. It is precisely through this enforced simplicity that Orff intended to draw listeners to their instinctual awareness of "oneness with the universe." Whether he succeeded as philosopher is debatable. Hanspeter Krellmann wrote in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, "The four aspects of Orff's musical theater [tragedy of archetypes, visionary embodiment of metaphysical ideas, bizarre fantasy and physical exuberance] are usually intertwined; and it is apparent from the works that Orff's main concern is not with the exposition of human nature in tragedy, nor with whimsical fancy, nor with the statement of supernatural truths, nor with joyous exultation. His intention seems to be to create a spectacle." So what then is *Carmina Burana*: a set of ribald songs? a Medieval morality play? a philosophical tract? Perhaps it is all of these. But more than anything, it is one of the most invigorating, entertaining, easily heard and memorable musical creations of the 20th century.

Orff chose 24 poems from the *Carmina Burana* to include in his work. Since the 13th-century music for them was unknown, all of their settings are original with him. The work is disposed in three large sections with prologue and epilogue. The three principal divisions — *Primo Vere* ("Springtime"), *In Taberna* ("In the Tavern") and *Cour d'Amours* ("Court of Love") — sing the libidinous songs of youth, joy and love.

However, the prologue and epilogue (using the same verses and music) that frame these pleasurable accounts warn against unbridled enjoyment. “The wheel of fortune turns; dishonored I fall from grace and another is raised on high,” caution the words of *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi* (“*Fortune, Empress of the World*”), the chorus that stands like pillars of eternal verity at the entrance and exit of this Medieval world. They are the ancient poet’s reminder that mortality is the human lot, that the turning of the same Wheel of Fortune that brings sensual pleasure may also grind that joy to dust. It is this bald juxtaposition of antitheses — the most rustic human pleasures with the sternest of cosmic admonitions — coupled with Orff’s elemental musical idiom that gives *Carmina Burana* its dynamic theatricality.

The work opens with the chorus *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*, depicting the terrible revolution of the Wheel of Fate through a powerful repeated rhythmic figure that grows inexorably to a stunning climax. After a brief morality tale (*Fortune plango vulnere* — “*I lament the wounds that fortune deals*”), the *Springtime* section begins. Its songs and dances are filled with the sylvan brightness and optimistic expectancy appropriate to the annual rebirth of the earth and the spirit. The next section, *In Taberna* (“*In the Tavern*”), is given over wholly to the men’s voices. Along with a hearty drinking song are heard two satirical stories: *Olim lacus colueram* (“*Once in lakes I made my home*”) — one of the most fiendishly difficult pieces in the tenor repertory — and *Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis* (“*I am the abbot of Cucany*”). The third division, *Cour d’Amours* (“*Court of Love*”), leaves far behind the rowdy revels of the tavern to enter a refined, seductive world of sensual pleasure. The music is limpid, gentle and enticing, and marks the first appearance of the soprano soloist. The lovers’ urgent entreaties grow in ardor, with insistent encouragement from the chorus, until submission is won in the most rapturous moment in the score, *Dulcissime* (“*Sweetest Boy*”). The grand paean to the loving couple (*Blanzifor et Helena*) is cut short by the intervention of imperious fate, as the opening chorus (*Fortuna*), like the turning of the great wheel, comes around once again to close this mighty work.

Karl Schumann wrote of the universality of Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, “No individual destiny is touched upon — there are no dramatic personae in the normal sense of the term. Instead primeval forces are invoked, such as the ever-turning wheel of fortune, the revivifying power of spring, the intoxicating effect of love, and those elements in man which prompt him to the enjoyment of earthly and all-too-earthly pleasures. The principal figure is man, as a natural being delivered over to forces stronger than himself.”

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