**Notes on Tonight’s Program**

The year 1786 was one of the most fruitful years for **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** as a composer. In addition to tonight’s concerto (completed December 5, and presumably first performed soon thereafter), there are two other piano concertos, the opera *Marriage of Figaro*, a horn concerto, various chamber works, and the *Prague* Symphony K. 504, finished two days after this concerto, and like the concerto scored without clarinets. Mozart’s autograph score of the concerto yields a very interesting case of his reworking the soloist’s initial entrance, shifting the rhythmic activity to the beginning of each bar: he crosses out his first version and adds the new one on empty staves above it (see the reproduction below.)

The first movement begins with a series of grand chords for full orchestra, rather in the manner of a symphony; many of the subsequent thematic ideas in the initial orchestral section are united by three-note upbeat figure. This motive is the source of a good deal of elegant contrapuntal writing throughout the movement, especially in the development, where strings, winds, and soloist course through various keys in imitation of one another. Mozart left no cadenza for this movement; our soloist plays her own this evening.

*Mozart, Piano Concerto K. 503, Autograph Manuscript*

**Sergei Rachmaninoff** composed his Piano Concerto No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 1, in 1892, at age 19. He revised the work thoroughly in 1917. He dedicated the work to Alexander Siloti, one of his piano teachers and his first cousin, who would also give the premiere performance of his Second Concerto in C minor. Rachmaninoff modeled his work after the Grieg Concerto in A minor, with its famous quasi-cadenza in crashing octaves after an opening orchestral chord; he follows Grieg as well in his episodic sonata-form construction with many tempo changes, and with the climactic return of the main theme in the cadenza proper near the end of the movement.

**Sergei Prokofiev’s** initial sketches for his Third Piano Concerto reach back before the First World War; he began anew on it in 1917 and completed it in 1921, when it was introduced by the Chicago Symphony with the composer as soloist. A work of marked virtuosity, it has its share of Prokofiev’s signature sardonic character and percussive piano writing, but also has moments of striking lyricism, as in the clarinet solo in the opening Andante. The Allegro portion of the movement commences with a rush of ascending scales leading to the entry of the soloist; a march punctuated by castanets and a triplet idea serve as additional themes, and these return in reverse order in the reprise. The movement closes with another scalar flourish.

**Johannes Brahms** did not complete a symphony until he was in his forties, long after he had established himself as one of Europe’s leading composers. His first essay in symphonic composition eventually became his first piano concerto; sketches for what was to become his first symphony were supposed to have existed as early as 1855 (unfortunately for future students of his music, he habitually destroyed early drafts of his works), but he did not complete the piece until 1874. The premiere took place at Karlsruhe on 4 November 1876, with Brahms in the audience and Otto Dessoff conducting. A few days later, Brahms himself conducted it at Mannheim. The public response was initially lukewarm; several decades would pass before it would establish itself in the repertory.

In both outer movements the main thematic ideas first appear in portentous slow introductions. In the opening movement, the initial rising three-note chromatic motive in the violins returns in force at the outset of the Allegro (and is quoted in the middle movements as well). Many other details of the introduction also foreshadow events in the main body of the movement, including a rising arpeggio that is the kernel of the main theme of the Allegro. On the page, perhaps more so than to the listener, the movement is rhythmically very complex—what sound like downbeats are almost always upbeats—and as always with Brahms, there are brilliant displays of counterpoint. Listen also for the “fate” motive of repeated notes from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. The coda is more relaxed, closing with a sighing statement of the main theme.

A very placid hint of the symphony’s opening ascending chromatic idea can be heard again near the outset of the lovely Andante. This movement is a three-part song, with gliding woodwind and soaring string themes in the middle section. In the reprise, the closing theme is shared by solo violin and horn. The third movement is again tripartite, not quite a scherzo, though with playful elements, as when things almost come to a halt at the end of the triple-time central trio. We have another glimpse of the rising chromatic idea from the first movement near the end. In both of these interior movements, the Brahms hallmark of three-against-two rhythm is much in evidence.

The Finale begins with a gravity similar to that of the first movement. In the slow introduction, we first hear a drawn-out statement of what will be the movement’s main theme. A pizzicato dialogue, soaring wind lines over rushing string scales, a horn solo, and a quiet chorale in the trombones (playing here for the first time in the symphony) are all items that will also recur in the main movement. The movement unfolds as a symphonic rondo, with a hushed second theme in the strings. As a denouement, the trombone chorale from the introduction blazes forth triumphantly before the symphony gallops to a close.

The early part of December 1786 was an especially busy time for Mozart, who was by then planning his visit to Prague the following month for performances of The Marriage of Figaro. He apparently performed this concerto in Vienna on December 5, 1786, the day after he completed the score, and on the day following that premiere he wrote the final double bar in the score of his Symphony No. 38 in D major (K. 504, the first symphony he had composed in more than three years), which he probably introduced a week or two later. He took the symphony to Prague, where he arrived as a hero and enjoyed the greatest success of his life. By the time he arrived there, on January 11, 1787, Figaro was already in production and its tunes had been taken up by the public and turned into dances. Mozart not only attended performances of his wildly popular opera, but conducted one of them himself, and on January 19 he gave a concert in which he conducted his new symphony, which became known as the "Prague" Symphony. While that symphony and has figured in the concert repertory ever since then, the concerto composed at the same time fell into an incredibly prolonged neglect following Mozart's death. There is no record of his performing any of his concertos during that famous visit to Prague; he played K. 503 again in Vienna on April 7, 1787, and again in Leipzig on May 12, but when Artur Schnabel performed the work with the Vienna Philharmonic under George Szell in 1934, the event was noted as the first performance of this work in that city since Mozart's own, some 147 years earlier. It was not until after the Second World War that this concerto took its place in the repertory, and was recognized as one of the very greatest works of its kind.

The last three concertos Mozart composed before this one—No. 22 in E-flat (K. 482), No. 23 in A major (K. 488), No. 24 in C minor (K. 491)—are associated with Figaro. All three of them were written more or less concurrently with the opera, and there are reminders of this in Mozart's use of the orchestra, particularly the expressive writing for the winds. Don Giovanni, commissioned during that triumphal visit to Prague, was produced there in October 1787, and Così fan tute did not materialize until 1790, but it is with Così that this Concerto in C major shares its most striking features. The parallel here, as the distinguished Mozart and Haydn authority H.C. Robbins Landon has suggested, is one between "the stage work in which Mozart most brilliantly and perfectly solved the structural, dramatic and musical problems which had occupied so much of his best operatic efforts" and the concerto that "contains the essence of Mozart's approach to the sonata form: unity within diversity." In his discussion of the piano concertos, Mr. Landon did not hesitate to designate this one "the grandest, most difficult and most symphonic of them all," while noting also "the complete negation of any deliberate virtuoso elements."

The opening of this concerto has been compared frequently with that of Mozart's final symphony, the "Jupiter" (No. 41, also in C major, K. 551): it is not merely festive, as so many big C-major concert works of its period are, but more specifically majestic (and, needless to add, Mozart knew how to achieve this quality on a very persuasive level, without any huffing-and-puffing or any sort of self-conscious gesture). This distinction was emphasized by Cuthbert Girdlestone in his book on the Mozart concertos; he cited the marking for the opening movement—Allegro maestoso, rather than brillante—and observed, "Few of Mozart's compositions show themselves to the world with so original a frontispiece and none opens in such bold tones. Its heroic nature is apparent in its first bars—not the sham heroism of an overture for which a few impersonal formulas suffice, but that which expresses greatness of spirit."

Beyond that, however, and despite the work's symphonic character, for Girdlestone the parallel was not with the "Jupiter" Symphony, and not with any of the stage works, but with yet another towering work in C major from roughly the same period, the String Quintet, K. 515. In the concerto's opening tutti, elaborate as well as majestic, is a four-note motif whose rhythmic pattern is more or less the same as that of the famous opening theme of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (21 years in the future when this concerto was composed). The other themes in this movement are related to this motif, and one of these, formed by joining a "second half" to it, comes close to being a far more striking anticipation of the Marseillaise (composed five months after Mozart's death). But once the piano enters, the entire question of resemblances or "pre-echoes" simply evaporates under the sheer breadth and variety in Mozart's exploration of his fairly modest basic materials.

(This concerto is one of the several by Mozart for which his own cadenzas have not survived. Garrick Ohlsson plays one written by his colleague Alfred Brendel.)

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Piano Concerto No. 25 in C, K.503

JOANNES CHRISOSTOMUS WOLFGANG GOTTLIEB MOZART, who began calling himself Wolfgango

Amadeo around 1770 during his first trip to Italy and switched to Wolfgang Amadè in 1777, but who never used

Amadeus except in jest, was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5,

1791. He completed the C major piano concerto, K.503, on December 4, 1786, and played it in Vienna later that

month. Mozart left no cadenzas for this concerto; at these performances, Imogen Cooper plays cadenzas by Alfred

Brendel.

IN ADDITION TO THE SOLO PIANIST, the score of this concerto calls for an orchestra of one flute, two oboes,

two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

In just under three years, Mozart wrote twelve piano concertos. It is the genre that absolutely dominates his work

schedule in 1784, 1785, and 1786, and what he poured out—almost all of it for his own use at his own concerts—is

a series of masterpieces that delight the mind, charm and seduce the ear, and pierce the heart. They are the ideal

realization of what might be done with the piano concerto. Beethoven a couple of times reaches to where Mozart is,

and perhaps Brahms, too, but still, in this realm Mozart scarcely knows peers. K.503 is the end of that run. It comes

at the end of an amazing year, amazing even for Mozart, that had begun with work on The Impresario and Figaro,

and whose achievements include the A major piano concerto, K.488, and the C minor, K.491; the E-flat piano

quartet; the last of his horn concertos; the trios in G and B-flat for piano, violin, and cello, as well as the one in Eflat

with viola and clarinet; and the sonata in F for piano duet, K.497. Together with the present concerto he worked

on the Prague Symphony, finishing it two days later, and before the year was out he wrote one of the most personal

and in every way special of his masterpieces, the concert aria for soprano with piano obbligato and orchestra, “Ch’io

mi scordi di te,” K.505.

Such a list does not reflect how Mozart’s life had begun to change. On March 3, 1784, for example, he could report

to his father that he had twenty-two concerts in thirty-eight days: “I don’t think that this way I can possibly get out

of practice.” A few weeks later, he wrote that for his own series of concerts he had a bigger subscription list than

two other performers put together, and that for his most recent appearance the hall had been “full to overflowing.” In

1786, the fiscal catastrophes of 1788, the year of the last three symphonies, were probably unforeseeable, and one

surpassing triumph still lay ahead of him, the delirious reception by the Prague public of Don Giovanni in 1787.

Figaro was popular in Vienna, but not more than other operas by lesser men, and certainly not enough to buoy up

his fortunes for long. Perhaps it is even indicative that we know nothing about the first performance of K.503.

Mozart had planned some concerts for December 1786, and they were presumably the occasion for writing this

concerto, but we have no evidence that these appearances actually came off.

What has changed, too, is Mozart’s approach to the concerto. It seems less operatic than before, and more

symphonic. The immediately preceding one, the C minor, K.491, completed March 24, 1786, foreshadows this, but

even so, K.503 impresses as a move into something new. Its very manner is all its own. For years, and until not so

long ago, it was one of the least played of the series; it was as though pianists were reluctant to risk disconcerting

their audiences by offering them Olympian grandeur and an unprecedented compositional richness where the

expectation was chiefly of charm, operatic lyricism, and humor.

This is one of Mozart’s big trumpets-and-drums concertos, and the first massive gestures make its full and grand

sonority known. But even so formal an exordium becomes a personal statement in Mozart’s hands—“cliché

becomes event,” as Adorno says about Mahler—and across the seventh measure there falls for just a moment the

shadow of the minor mode. And when the formal proclamations are finished, the music does indeed take off in C

minor. Such harmonic—and expressive—ambiguities inform the whole movement. Mozart always likes those

shadows, but new here are the unmodulated transitions from major to minor and back, the hardness of his

chiaroscuro. The first solo entrance is one of Mozart’s most subtle and gently winsome. The greatest marvel of all is

the development, which is brief but dense, with a breathtaking harmonic range and an incredible intricacy of canonic

writing. The piano has a delightful function during these pages, proposing ideas and new directions, but then settling

back and turning into an accompanist who listens to the woodwinds execute what he has imagined.

**Mozart’s** Piano Concerto No. 25 in C major (K. 503) is the last in a group of twelve ‘grand’ or ‘great’ piano concertos that Mozart wrote for his own use in Vienna. They were all composed between 1784 and 1786 in a remarkable burst of creative inspiration and led to triumphs for Mozart as both composer and piano virtuoso. He would write only two more piano concertos after these, one in 1788 (K. 537) and another entered into his handwritten catalogue of works two weeks before his death in January 1791 (K. 595). After K. 503 he would turn his attention primarily to symphonies and operas.

In extolling the virtues of the concerto form, musical essayist Donald Francis Tovey writes: “Nothing in human life and history is much more thrilling or of more ancient and universal experience than the antithesis of the individual and the crowd; an antithesis which is familiar in every degree, from flat opposition to harmonious reconciliation, and with every contrast and blending of emotion, and which has been of no less universal prominence in works of art than in life. Now the concerto forms express this antithesis with all possible force and delicacy.”

The first movement of K. 503, marked Allegro maestoso, is a substantial and complex musical structure that vibrantly combines the qualities of force and delicacy that Tovey identifies. The imposing orchestral ritornello opens with descending fanfares, which introduce the principal thematic material of the exposition (almost always involving three eighth-note upbeats to a stressed downbeat). There is a turn to C minor that can be heard as a foreshadowing of the soloist’s later rendering of the second theme in E-flat major. In the development section, this second theme is treated expansively, culminating in a marvelous passage of eight-part polyphony. After the soloist’s cadenza, the movement is concluded not with the broad fanfares of the opening, but with an energized version of the three-eighth-note material.