

Conductor Sir Thomas Beecham was born into wealth; his father, Sir Joseph Beecham, was the manufacturer of "Beecham's Pills," an all-purpose remedy very popular in Britain. More importantly, though, Sir Joseph was also a lover of music and exposed his son to it from an early age; happily, he raised no objection to Thomas' pursuit of a musical career.

After both formal and autodidactic training, Beecham made his professional debut as a symphony conductor in 1905 with members of the Queen's Hall Orchestra. When he wanted an orchestra to conduct full time, he simply used the resources of the family fortune to start one, which he led for a number of years. In 1910 Beecham began producing operas as a private impresario; he brought to the stage the British premieres of Strauss' Salome and Elektra, and operas by Delius. He founded the Beecham Opera Company, mainly made of British singers, in 1915.

However, even a fortune the size of his could not keep pace with the expenses of such activities. He was declared bankrupt in 1919 and withdrew from music to put his financial affairs into order. Having recovered by 1923, he returned to the podium, and his conducting career soon flourished. In 1928 he made his American debut with the New York Philharmonic; characteristic of his championing of Delius, he founded a festival dedicated to the music of that composer in 1929.

In 1932, Beecham, dissatisfied with the standards of the orchestral scene, founded the London Philharmonic Orchestra, staffing it with the finest players. It quickly became a top-rank ensemble and successfully toured the Continent. He became artistic director at Covent Garden in 1932, and ruled there in his customary autocratic manner. When the war began, Beecham toured the United States and Australia. He was appointed music director and conductor of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (1941-1943) and was a frequent guest conductor at the Metropolitan Opera Company until he returned to England in 1944.

Upon his arrival in England, Beecham discovered that the orchestras there weren't overly enthusiastic at the prospect of working permanently in proximity to his withering tongue and dictatorial manner. Even the London Philharmonic Orchestra, with a new charter that permitted it to make some of its own decisions, showed little interest in having him at the helm full-time. So, typically, Beecham founded a new orchestra in 1946 -- the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra -- and maintained his relationship with this group for the remainder of his career. Beecham had already made a notable number of recordings before World War II. With the coming of the LP record after the war, and into the beginning of the stereo era, he recorded frequently. His recordings of Mozart, Haydn, Handel (he did not like Bach), Delius, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and Sibelius are particularly esteemed; his recordings of Carmen and Madama Butterfly remain classics.



SIR THOMAS BEECHAM, BART.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Mozart Symphony No. 41 In C Major K.551 ("Jupiter")

Jupiter Symphony, byname of Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K 551, orchestral work by Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, known for its good humour, exuberant energy, and unusually grand scale for a symphony of the Classical period. These qualities likely earned the symphony its nickname “Jupiter”—for the chief god of the ancient Roman pantheon. The Jupiter was completed in 1788 and was Mozart’s last symphony, and it is uncertain whether the work was performed during the composer’s lifetime. The nickname was allegedly coined by German musician, impresario, and longtime London resident Johann Peter Saloman and was probably first used in print in a London concert program in 1821.

Mozart rarely composed on a whim. Generally, he wrote on commission (by order of a paying customer or patron) or for his own concerts, or he created new pieces as gifts for friends. Such transactions were usually cataloged in the composer’s letters and writings, which have survived in large number. However, in the case of his last three symphonies (K 543, K 550, and K 551) dating from the summer of 1788, the historical record is silent. Music scholars have found no indication of a commission, so perhaps Mozart composed the works in hopes of selling them or presenting them in a concert in Vienna.

It is also possible, however, that Mozart wrote the 1788 symphonies with the intention of presenting them on a London tour. London had been a recurring theme throughout the composer’s life. He had spent more than a year living in the city as a child; during his adult years in Vienna, he had several close English friends, including singer Nancy Storace and probably also her brother, composer Stephen Storace; and since at least 1786,

he had spoken of traveling to London to present a concert series. In the event of such a concert tour, it was customary for composers to bring new works, preferably a set of three or six symphonies. Whatever the circumstances of their composition, the symphonies were not published in Mozart’s lifetime, and there is no clear evidence that they were performed before Mozart died.

The Jupiter Symphony is the largest and most complex of Mozart’s symphonies. Although at moments jovial, as if Jupiter himself were laughing heartily in the celebratory key of C Major, the work generally carries a serious spirit—especially in the first and fourth movements—that hints at the grand Romantic symphonies, which were soon to come with Beethoven. The authoritative opening movement, in sonata form, is followed by a more subdued second movement, with a lyrical mixture of themes in major and minor keys. The third movement is a stately minuet, and the fourth and final movement, again in sonata form, is bold and brisk, with a strident fugal coda that is a hallmark of the piece.

Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony inspired many composers, especially Haydn, who used it as a model for his own Symphony No. 95 and Symphony No. 98. Perhaps the most succinct reflection on the work’s importance is found in the critiques of German composer and journalist Robert Schumann, who in 1835 wrote, “About many things in this world there is simply nothing to be said—for example, about Mozart’s C-Major symphony with the fugue, much of Shakespeare, and some of Beethoven.” For Schumann, at least, the Jupiter Symphony secured for Mozart an eternal position within the realm of the masters.

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The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Mozart Symphony No. 41 In C Major K.551 ("Jupiter")

- 1 Allegro Vivace 8:42**
 - 2 Andante Cantabile 9:09**
 - 3 Minuet (Allegretto) 5:56**
 - 4 Molto Allegro 6:25**
- Total Time: 30:12**

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