

The Symphony No. 41 aptly embodies what is now identified as a paradigm of Classical symphonic form: four movements, the first and last in a quick tempo, the second slower, the third a minuet with trio. Unencumbered by norms suggested by any model, however, Mozart's deft imagination distinguishes this work from others in a similar cast. The first movement is characterized in part by the dramatic and effective employment of unexpected pauses in the rhythmic flow through the use of rests, a trait shared with and perhaps influenced by the symphonies of Haydn. After an initial regularity, irregular and changing phrase lengths contribute as well to the dramatic impetus. The serene F major quietude of the second movement's opening is soon disrupted, posed against more restless, rhythmically insistent minor-key episodes. This calm/dark conflict continues throughout, the initial spirit eventually prevailing. The falling chromatic theme and flowing, even accompaniment of the Minuet set a graceful tone for the third movement. The companion Trio provides an earthier, more overtly dancelike mood, which is, however, interrupted by a suddenly more serious tutti outburst. The final movement is exceptional for the richness of its contrapuntal language, a somewhat unexpected -- and, some of Mozart's contemporaries would venture, unfashionable -- attribute in a symphonic work of the time. The four-note motive that begins the movement is put through its paces in a number of guises, most prominently as the beginning of a recurrent canon and fugue subject which occurs both as originally presented and in inversion. The effect is one not of academicism but of great tension and dramatic impulse which, borne bristling and in search of resolution, finds its resting place only in the final bars.



Mozart composed his final three symphonies during the summer of 1788. His entries in the thematic catalog he maintained suggest that all were written during the space of about two months. Much critical discussion has been devoted to the reasons for their composition, for it appeared that Mozart had no specific occasion in mind for their performance. The romantic notion that he composed them without practical purpose is now widely disregarded as being out of character with Mozart's known compositional procedures, and the scholar H. C. Robbins Landon has recently advanced convincing arguments to suggest that they were in fact written for a series of concerts he gave in the fall or Advent season of 1788. Robbins Landon's argument is largely based on an undated letter written by Mozart to his principal benefactor, his fellow Freemason Michael Puchberg. In this letter he refers to his concerts which will begin "next week," concerts which scholars formerly believed never to have taken place. Evidence also supports the idea (advanced by Neal Zaslaw) that Mozart took the three symphonies on the tour he made to Germany the following year, which would further undermine the long-held notion that the composer never heard three of the greatest works in the symphonic literature performed.

One aspect of the symphonies upon which commentators reach universal agreement is their extraordinary diversity of character; each has unique qualities which together utterly explode the myth that the extreme agitation and pathos of the G minor Symphony reflected the abject circumstances in which Mozart found himself at this period.

The begging letters addressed to Puchberg during these months are indeed pitiful documents that might be cited as evidence of Mozart's state of mind at the time he was composing the G minor symphony. But they will hardly do for the mellow warmth, strength and humor of E flat symphony or the elevated grandeur of the "Jupiter" Symphony. Neither should it be forgotten that the tragic qualities so often associated with the symphony today have not always been apparent to all. To Robert Schumann the symphony was a work of "Grecian lightness and grace," while for a later writer, Alfred Einstein, there are passages that "plunge to the abyss of the soul."

The near-quarter century that separates Mozart's first symphony and his last -- the Symphony No. 41 in C major (1788) -- was marked by the composer's recurrent, if not ongoing, interest in the possibilities inherent in this form. Upon examination of the chronology of Mozart's works, one finds that the composition of his symphonies tends to occur in irregularly spaced groups, of as many as nine or ten examples in a row, rather than regularly or singly. What this might suggest, aside from any financially based motivation, is that he employed these various periods specifically for the working out of the problems and challenges of the symphonic form. In surveying these works, one finds that the prominent benchmarks increase almost geometrically as time progresses, so that by the production of the "Jupiter" Symphony two years before his death -- as part of a group of three composed within the space of less than three months -- the full extent of the evolution which has taken place is striking indeed.

# Mozart Symphonies Nos. 40 & 41

## Otto Klemperer - Philharmonia Orchestra

### Symphony No. 41 in C K.551 "Jupiter"

- 1 I. Allegro Vivace 9:15
- 2 II. Andante Cantabile 9:08
- 3 III. Minuet (Allegretto) 4:47
- 4 IV. Molto Allegro 6:40

### Symphony No. 40 in G minor K.550

- 5 I. Molto Allegro 6:39
- 6 II. Andante 9:00
- 7 III. Minuet (Allegretto) 4:24
- 8 IV. Finale (Allegro Assai) 5:17

Recorded by EMI 1962



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