

WEST VALLEY SYMPHONY
JANUARY 14, 2024
WHO'S ON FIRST BAS(S)?
CATALIN ROTARU, SOLOIST
PROGRAM NOTES

“This characteristically Mozartian delicacy is one of his most delightful trifles.” That is how critic Charles O’Connell described the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* opera. It is a comic opera, the details of which are of no concern here. It is based on a comedy by Beaumarchais and was first produced in Vienna in 1786. The overture is full of grace and delicacy that always marks Mozart’s music. The music hurries along in a succession of coy melodies, brilliantly developed. Toward the end occurs one of the most exciting crescendo passages to be found in all of Mozart’s music.

For many years there was only one cello concerto by **Haydn**: the one in D major from 1783. But there was a question of a missing concerto in C major. Haydn himself mentioned it in his so-called “Draft Catalog” begun in 1765 of the works he had written. But where was it? It hadn’t been published and seemed to have vanished. But there were records of it being performed somewhere between 1761 and 1765 by Haydn’s Esterhazy orchestra and cellist Joseph Weigl. The concerto was presumed lost and to be forever unknown.

Then by chance, in 1961 a Czech musicologist discovered a copy of the concerto in the Prague National Museum. Haydn’s catalog had enough information to confirm conclusively that the work was indeed Haydn’s long missing concerto. Only the date of composition is unknown, but at the latest, it could have been written in 1765 – only 15 years after the death of JS Bach. The newly discovered concerto, lost for nearly 200 years, had its modern premiere in 1962. In this performance, the cello part has been adapted to the double bass.

The **Concerto in C Major** is in three movements, the first is composed in the *galant* style typical of the transition from the Baroque ritornello form and featuring elegant and graceful melodic writing. The second movement, *Adagio*, is particularly affecting. The solo’s entrance on a long-sustained single note, and the movement’s soulful middle section in a minor key, are quite poignant. The lively *Allegro molto* final movement again calls for the soloist to enter on a single held note. In this romp of a finale Haydn gives soloists the chance to demonstrate their skill with plenty of brilliant virtuosity.

Pablo Sarasate (1844-1908) was a Spanish violinist and composer. As a performer he had few equals. George Bernard Shaw said, “His playing left criticism gasping miles behind him”. Famous for the beauty and purity of his tone, he was the dedicatee of concertos by Bruch, Lalo, Wieniawski and Saint-Saëns. As a composer, he mostly wrote works to demonstrate his fabulous technique; deep musical thought was not his goal. The orchestral fantasy *Zigeunerweisen* was written in 1878. Unlike most of his work, it was not based on the style of folk music of Spain, rather his source of inspiration was the gypsy music of central Europe.

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Regarding **Beethoven's Seventh Symphony**, composer Carl Maria von Weber wrote, "...he is quite ripe for the madhouse." Richard Wagner considered the Seventh "the Apotheosis of the Dance." Beethoven wrote that it is "one of my best works."

Beethoven completed the Seventh in July 1812, but it waited until December 8, 1813, for its first performance at the University of Vienna. The concert was a benefit organized by Maelzel (the inventor of the metronome) to benefit soldiers wounded at the Battle of Hanau , October 30, where Austrian and German troops were trying to cut off Napoleon's retreat from Leipzig. Beethoven, who was almost completely deaf at this time, conducted, probably not to the music's advantage if eyewitness accounts are to be trusted. The orchestra was populated by many notable musicians of the time: Romberg and Spohr played violin, and Meyerbeer, Hummel, Moscheles and even Salieri (Mozart's rival) took part. Another young up-and-coming musician named Franz Schubert was in the hall-but was too shy to play in the orchestra. The symphony was received with much acclaim.

The Seventh begins with an extended and masterly introduction that contains the thematic cells of much of the music to come. At its end comes a remarkable passage based on one note, E, repeated 61 times being passed around the orchestra and changing its rhythm, and then the first movement proper begins.

The second movement comes close to being a funeral march and is a theme followed by five variations. The theme is based on one note, E again, repeated 12 times. But monotonous it is not: Beethoven's beautiful harmony provided the variety needed. This movement had to be encored at its premier.

The third movement is a typical, boisterous Beethoven scherzo with a starkly contrasting trio. The finale is a frenzied whirlwind of sound and energy. Sir Charles Groves wrote "for the first time, we find a new element, a vein of rough, hard, personal boisterousness, the same feeling which inspired the strange jests, puns, and nicknames which abound in his letters." It is pure Beethoven.

~ Marty Haub