

MOZART, MENDELSSOHN & SCHUMANN

with the NASHVILLE SYMPHONY



CLASSICAL SERIES

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1 & 2, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

MARKUS STENZ, *conductor*

JUHO POHJONEN, *piano*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op. 27

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

**Concerto No. 23 in A Major for Piano
and Orchestra, K. 488**

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro assai

Juho Pohjonen, piano

— INTERMISSION —

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Symphony No. 2 in C Major, Op. 61

Sostenuto assai - Allegro ma non troppo

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Adagio espressivo

Allegro molto vivace

*This concert will last approximately 1 hour and
55 minutes, including a 20 minute intermission.*

TONIGHT'S CONCERT | AT A GLANCE



FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op. 27



- This work is based on two interlinked poems by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, to whom the young composer was introduced by his teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter. At their meeting, the writer put Mendelssohn to the test by having him sight-read scores by Mozart and Beethoven.
- Published in 1795, Goethe's source text takes a counterintuitive approach to describing a seafaring voyage. Here, the calm sea is a threat to the sailor because there are no waves to convey his vessel; when the wind stirs, it brings an overwhelming sense of relief at the promise of returning to land.
- Mendelssohn's piece begins with a slow introduction, followed by a fast section in sonata form, with the two sections linked by related thematic material. He conveys the feeling of stillness by using long, mysterious, sustained harmonies.



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto No. 23 in A Major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 488



- For Mozart, the piano concerto was a genre that allowed him to write music that was pleasing to his audience while at the same time pushing his creative boundaries. Thanks to his singular mix of musicality and innovation, Mozart can be credited as one of the artists who drove the popularity of the solo concerto.
- The composer wrote this piece in the 1780s, while living in Vienna — a period when he was able to draw on his dual identity as composer and performer. Biographer Robert Gutman observes that the piano concerto “became...the very core of his extraordinary success in Vienna.”
- Mozart is also well-known, of course, for his operas, and the dramatic sensibility found in many of his Viennese piano concertos is due to the fact that they were, in a sense, “substitute operas,” meant to be performed during the Lenten season, when the law forbade theaters to operate.
- Mozart introduced his Piano Concerto No. 23 in the spring of 1786, just before the debut of his recently completed *The Marriage of Figaro*. He was especially proud of this work.



ROBERT SCHUMANN

Symphony No. 2 in C Major, Op. 61



- Schumann was initially known for his piano writing, but after his marriage to celebrity pianist Clara Wieck in 1840, he was emboldened to begin writing symphonic works — thanks to encouragement from his spouse.
- He began composing his Symphony No. 2 in 1845, during a time of tremendous difficulty. He'd experienced a series of nervous breakdowns the year before, and composing the Second represented a process of healing for him.
- In a letter to his publisher, Schumann expressed concern that his delicate emotional state would be evident to listeners. “I began to feel more myself when I wrote the last movement, and was assuredly better when I finished the whole work,” he wrote. “Still, it reminds me of dark days.”
- For this piece, the composer drew on several inspirations from the past — Beethoven, Schubert, J.S. Bach — while bringing his own original ideas to symphonic genre.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN



Born on February 3, 1809,
in Hamburg, Germany;
died on November 4, 1847,
in Leipzig, Germany

Composed: 1828; revised 1834

First performance: December 1, 1832, in Berlin,
with the composer conducting

First Nashville Symphony performance:
These are the orchestra's first performances.

Estimated length: 12 minutes

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op. 27

“**W**hat your pupil already accomplishes bears the same relation to the Mozart [of 1763] that the cultivated talk of an adult person does to the prattle of a child.” That was the verdict of the 72-year-old Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1821, when the legendary German writer first encountered the 12-year-old prodigy Felix Mendelssohn.

Carl Friedrich Zelter, one of the Wunderkind's most important teachers and a close friend of Goethe, introduced his young pupil to the writer. The poet put him to the test by having Mendelssohn sight-read original autograph scores by Mozart and Beethoven, after which the young musician presented one of his own compositions. The experience moved Goethe to recall the impression that Mozart had made on him almost 60 years before, when *that* boy genius traveled Europe with his family and gave a performance at the request of Goethe's father.

Mendelssohn's phenomenal accomplishments while still a child were the prelude to great things to come within his all-too-short lifespan. Dubbed “the 19th-century Mozart” by his friend Robert Schumann, he lived just three years longer than his famous predecessor. In 1828, seven years after that first encounter with Goethe, after which they became friends, Mendelssohn composed his first musical engagement with Goethe's writing in the concert overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, which refers to a pair of interlinked poems. He wasn't the only one to be inspired by these works. In 1815 Beethoven had completed a cantata to these texts (actually setting the words of the poems), and Schubert and fellow composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt also composed settings.

Goethe's notably conservative musical taste made him indifferent to the music of Beethoven and Schubert, whose treatments of his work he

declined to acknowledge. Unlike those composers, Mendelssohn opted to compose a stand-alone concert overture — a predecessor to the full-blown Romantic tone poem that emerged in later decades. He was certainly aware of Beethoven's earlier setting. Biographer R. Larry Todd suggests that the composer and critic Adolf Bernhard Marx, a close friend of the Mendelssohn family, may have planted the idea of having the younger composer write a purely orchestral composition inspired by Goethe's poems to test out Marx's theories about “music's capacity to express substantive ideas.”

The poems themselves, published in 1795 by Goethe's friend Schiller, are brief and conceived as a complementary pair. In contrast to the conventional image of the violently stormy sea as a metaphor for danger, Goethe makes its becalmed state signal dread and threat, while the appearance of the wind is a marker of salvation from this perilous stasis, ushering the advent homeward. Here are the texts in translation:

“Calm Sea”

Deep stillness rules the waters, / The sea rests motionless / And the sailor gazes with alarm / At the smooth flat surfaces around him. / No wind from any direction! / A deathly, terrible stillness! / In the vast expanse, / Not a single wave stirs.

“Prosperous Voyage”

The mist is clearing, / The sky turns bright, / And Aeolus loosens / The bonds that triggered fear. / The winds rustle, / The sailor stirs. / Quickly! Quickly! / The waves rise up again, / The distant shore draws near; / Already I see land!

As the journalist Scott Horton observes: “[The philosopher Edmund] Burke developed a distinction between the beautiful, something that flows from immediate sensory perceptions, and the sublime, forces of which we have little understanding though we recognize their ability to dominate or destroy us.” Nature is the realm where these differences are played out strikingly. “A brisk wind and a bright sky bring prosperity and happiness. But a storm or a vacuum presented peril; the mirror-like surface of the sea might be beautiful, but beneath that surface lurked untold and mysterious dangers.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Mendelssohn translates the pair of poems into a musical narrative that begins with a slow introduction (“Calm Sea”) followed by a fast section in sonata form (“Prosperous Voyage”), linking the two by using related thematic material. He elicits a visceral sense of “deathly, terrible stillness” through long, mysterious, sustained harmonies that give no hint of resolution. The impression of a “heavy tedium” (Mendelssohn’s description) becomes overpowering.

Many decades later, Mahler would resort to a similar ploy — even in the same key, D major — to generate a sense of nature awakening to life at the beginning of his First Symphony. It’s a considerable challenge for the conductor to draw out the right pacing and indication of fresh possibility, indicated by the flute solo that leads into the Allegro. Mendelssohn characteristically fuses his classical sense of proportion with romantic imagery, anticipating aspects of another great seafaring score to come, Wagner’s *The Flying Dutchman*.

A reviewer of the premiere performance in 1830 described the piece as a “tone painting for orchestra which offered a musical commentary on Goethe’s two poems.” But Mendelssohn adds a subtle touch perhaps only implicit in the second

poem. After the excited fanfares that signal the sighting of land, the music suddenly grows quieter as it heads into the development. Mendelssohn intensifies the pattern in the coda, building to an ecstatic climax but then pulling away suddenly from the note of joyful triumph, diminishing to echo the “stillness” music from the opening. Was the saving vision a mirage?

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage is scored for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon, 2 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani and strings.



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born on January 27, 1756
in Salzburg, Austria;
died on December 5, 1791
in Vienna

Concerto No. 23 in A Major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 488

Composed: 1786

First performance: In the spring of 1786, with the composer as the soloist

First Nashville Symphony performance:
December 15 & 16, 1958, with soloist Robert Casadesu and music director Guy Taylor

Estimated length: 26 minutes

The tension between music as pleasurable entertainment (if not outright “ear candy”) and as a challenge that requires effort from the listener is timeless. Certainly Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was no stranger to the pressure to write entertaining music that obliged the tastes and expectations of his audience. But he developed a reputation among contemporaries as a “difficult” composer through his provocative innovations.

Mozart can be credited as one of the major figures to elevate the solo concerto genre to its lofty status, and his legacy of piano concertos represents an achievement on par with what Haydn accomplished for the symphony.

The piano concerto took center stage as a genre in which Mozart could combine both aspects: the need to captivate his following while at the same time pushing boundaries. In fact, he can be credited as one of the major figures to elevate the solo concerto genre to its lofty status. Mozart's legacy of piano concertos above all represents an achievement on a par with what Haydn accomplished for the symphony.

The composer's abrupt break in 1781 with the imprisoning security of his Salzburg employer opened the door to a bold new phase of his career as he staked his fortunes on Vienna. His first few years in the European musical capital of the time were flush with a sense of hope and possibility. He worked his way through the complexities of Viennese social and musical politics to carve out a freelance career, making it up as he went along. The mix involved private lessons and an increasingly demanding series of concerts featuring Mozart as keyboard soloist. His virtuosity served as an indispensable calling card to capture the attention of the fickle Viennese audience; it was also a vehicle to introduce his latest music.

Earlier, in Salzburg, Mozart had composed a handful of keyboard concertos. But his situation in Vienna during the 1780s enabled him to achieve an ideal synthesis of elements in his concertos, drawing on his double identity as composer and performer. The biographer Robert Gutman has observed that the piano concerto "became the symbol of his ascending popularity, the very core of his extraordinary success in Vienna."

The piano concertos also bear a fascinating relationship with the realm of opera, in which Mozart hoped above all to make his mark. The operatic/dramatic sensibility found in so many of his Viennese concertos has a practical reason. These were in a sense substitute operas, meant for performance at special subscription concerts during the Lenten season, when the law forbade theaters to operate. He introduced the Piano Concerto No. 23, for example, in the spring of 1786, when opera was very much on his mind. His freshly completed *The Marriage of Figaro* was about to debut at the Imperial Court Theater in May. Mozart had also introduced his comic one-act Singspiel, *The Impresario*, for a competition earlier that year. His personal catalogue of compositions records the completion of his A-major Concerto on March 2,

1786. The composer was especially proud of this work, as it was one of a set that he presented to a patron from his childhood later that summer.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The lyrical aspects of Mozartean opera come to the fore in this concerto — above all, in the first two movements. From the start, the music reveals its particular character to be one of understated, almost introspective charm — all the more gripping for being so unforced. Mozart's orchestra calls for a pair of clarinets instead of the usual oboes, which also gives a warmer tint to the sound picture. If K. 488 were a time of day, it would be the wistful but still glowing moment of late afternoon.

In keeping with the first movement's lyrical nature, the piano part tends toward the elegant and subtle rather than obvious bravura. The curtains part after the orchestral exposition to reveal the soloist almost casually taking up the theme. Throughout, Mozart shapes the discourse into a civilized rapport between piano and orchestra.

The graceful shape of the main theme, as well as its passing but unmistakable touches of melancholy, foreshadows the inward-looking and subdued sensibility to come in Mozart's last year. He would choose the same key of A major for the autumnal Clarinet Concerto of 1791 — a key that the Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein remarks has "the transparency of a stained-glass window" in the composer's hands.

The unusual specification of Adagio for the slow movement (as opposed to the expected Andante) is as surprising as the pathos of its tonality, F-sharp minor. The soloist, unadorned, is given the task of introducing the songlike melody, set to a lilting 6/8 rhythm, while the orchestral colors partake of chamber-like transparency. Then, in one of Mozart's great scene changes, the piano announces the theme of the rondo finale. Its leaping, syncopated joyfulness counterbalances all that has gone before with a newfound sense of release. In this work, observes Einstein, "Mozart again succeeded in meeting his public halfway without sacrificing anything of his own individuality."

In addition to the solo piano, Mozart's score calls for flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns and strings.

ROBERT SCHUMANN



Born on June 8, 1810,
in Zwickau, Germany;
died on July 29, 1856,
outside Bonn, Germany

Composed: 1845-46

First performance: November 5, 1846, with Felix Mendelssohn conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance: November 18-20, 1992, with music director Kenneth Schermerhorn

Estimated length: 38 minutes

Symphony No. 2 in C Major, Op. 61

The son of a bookseller, Robert Schumann always harbored an alter ego as a poet and wrote verse throughout his life. His work as a music critic — especially as editor of the ground-breaking *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* — was probing and prophetic. Schumann's artistic vision was inspired in part by his close affinity with literary figures from the first blushes of German Romanticism. The composer himself proved instrumental in writing the script for musical Romanticism, bringing a new sensibility to bear on the cultural understanding of what his predecessors had achieved. Schumann synthesized the language of the Viennese classicists and the counterpoint of Bach with his own brand of Romanticism.

The prospect of writing a symphony was highly fraught for Schumann, who initially chose to concentrate on composing music for solo piano. While he had attempted and abandoned several early attempts at composing a symphony, soon after he married Clara Wieck in 1840, Schumann finally found his way into the genre. Clara, who was also a celebrity pianist, encouraged him to expand his ambitions beyond the confines of the keyboard, and Schumann took just four days to sketch out his First Symphony (subtitled “Spring”) early in 1841. He also wrote a symphony in D minor that same year but held it back from publication, later revising it and publishing it as his Fourth Symphony.

The psychological mood that accompanied the creation of the Second Symphony, however, contrasted dramatically with the happy confidence Schumann had enjoyed during the first years of his marriage. The year 1844 brought the worst yet in a series of nervous breakdowns that had periodically plagued Schumann, and composing the Second represented a process of healing for him. Sadly, this proved only temporary, and he

would die a dozen years later in an asylum.

To his publisher, the composer later confessed that he feared the “semi-invalid” state in which he composed this music might be all too apparent to listeners: “I began to feel more myself when I wrote the last movement, and was assuredly better when I finished the whole work. Still, it reminds me of dark days.”

The Second Symphony takes a widely encompassing view of the past, while at the same time representing something of a personal epic — a temporary triumph of order over chaos and irrational fate. Along with Beethoven's “heroic” symphonies and the “victorious” resolution of the Fifth in particular, Schubert's “Great” Symphony also provided significant inspiration. Schumann had helped reclaim Schubert's forgotten score from oblivion, arranging for Mendelssohn to conduct the posthumous premiere in Leipzig in 1839. Just a few weeks before embarking on the Second Symphony in 1845, Schumann had been once again deeply impressed by a fresh encounter with the Schubert, a work he famously praised for its “heavenly length.”

Yet another guiding spirit that permeates the Second is that of J.S. Bach. Following his breakdown of 1844, Schumann took up a close study of Bach's counterpoint. The beautiful synthesis of craft, logic and inspiration exemplified by the Baroque master helped him regain composure. The biographer John Daverio observes that a significant shift in his attitude toward composing resulted. While Schumann's gift for inspired improvisation had previously played a significant role, now “primacy of place [was given] to the act of reflection, to a more sober attitude toward the business of putting notes to paper.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Second Symphony begins with a sustained, slow introduction in which a simple fanfare is entrusted to the brass, though it is darkly shrouded by a fog of meandering strings. This fanfare will serve as a unifying core motif in the subsequent movements. The first movement proper gains tremendous momentum from Schumann's exploitation of a pronounced dotted-rhythm idea, which becomes the engine for a long and eventful development.

Another kind of energy pervades the ensuing Scherzo, with its skittishly fleeting patterns in duple time rather than the conventional triple meter. The movement contains two separate trios (a Beethovenian touch), the second of which encodes a motif that spells out the name of Bach in its German musical "transliteration" (B-flat-A-C-B). There's also a hint of Bach in the melodic contours of the C-minor Adagio, arguably the single most beautiful slow movement in Schumann's cycle of four symphonies. It evokes a romantically filtered memory of Baroque pathos, and Schumann incorporates a fugal episode before recapitulating the Adagio's principal melody.

Yet Schumann's reverence for his predecessors, so apparent in the chain of influences on this score, goes hand in hand with his bracingly original approach to the symphonic genre. This originality is above all apparent in the remarkable architecture

of the finale, as well as in its transformation of thematic ideas. The overall character recalls the exhilarating energy of the first movement, as prominent dotted rhythms once again impart a sense of momentum excitedly pressing forward. Schumann also works in a speeded-up version of the Adagio melody as a second theme, continuing a cyclic recall of material from earlier in the symphony.

Schumann adds an unexpected gesture to this process of integration. A startling change comes before the movement reaches its midpoint, as the musical argument is revealed to carry the possibility for yet another metamorphosis, this time with the entrée of a haunting new strain first heard on oboe. This melody alludes to Beethoven's song cycle *To the Distant Beloved* (a coded message for Clara) and, in turn, to Schumann's own *Piano Fantasy*. The new, unexpected melody is nevertheless readily assimilated to its symphonic context and is woven ever more prominently into the proceedings. After a glorious meshing of the finale's themes in the coda, Schumann brings the opening fanfare motto to the fore — now no longer doubtful and hesitant — to round out the Symphony in a spirit of jubilation and confidence restored.

The Symphony No. 2 is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings.

—Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR



MARKUS STENZ
conductor

Chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and conductor-in-residence of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, Markus Stenz is known for performances of great expressive scope, probing interpretations of German repertoire, and an audacious command of contemporary music. His previous appointments have included general music director of the City of Cologne and Gürzenich-Kapellmeister, principal guest conductor of the Hallé Orchestra, principal conductor of the London Sinfonietta,

and artistic director and chief conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

During the 2018/19 season, Stenz leads the much-anticipated world premiere of *Fin de Partie* by György Kurtág at La Scala in November, broadcast live on RAI-Radio 3. At Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and the Tivoli-Vredenburg concert hall in Utrecht, he conducts the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra in concerts that range from Debussy's *La Mer* to Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, alongside works by Elgar and Julian Anderson.

At the Seoul Philharmonic, Stenz is joined by the virtuoso Andreas Ottensamer for Lutoslawski's Dance Preludes and Stamitz's Clarinet Concerto No. 7, in a program that includes Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel* and Ravel's *Boléro*. He concludes

the season in Korea with performances of Rachmaninoff's *The Isle of the Dead* and Scriabin's *Le Poème de l'extase*. Also this season, Stenz returns to the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra to lead the Australian premiere of Qigang Chen's Violin Concerto, performed by Maxim Vengerov, alongside Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

Since his debut as an opera conductor at La Fenice in Venice, Stenz has led many world premieres, including three operas by Hans Werner Henze. He has appeared at many of the world's major opera houses and international festivals, including Teatro alla Scala, La Monnaie, English National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Edinburgh International Festival and the Bregenz Festival.

Stenz's extensive discography includes the complete symphonies of Mahler with the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne on the Oehms Classics label. His recording of Mahler's Fifth Symphony was selected for the Quarterly Critics' Choice by the German Record Critics' Award Association. He has made more than 60 recordings with the Gürzenich Orchestra.

Stenz has been accorded an Honorary Fellowship by the Royal Northern College of Music and the Silberne Stimmgabel ("Silver Tuning Fork") by the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. He resides in Cologne, Germany, with his wife and two children.

ABOUT THE SOLOIST



JUHO POHJONEN
piano

Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen performs widely in Europe, Asia and North America with orchestras, in recital and in chamber music. He is also an ardent exponent of Scandinavian music, and his growing discography offers a showcase of compositions by Finnish compatriots, including Esa-Pekka Salonen and Kaija Saariaho.

During the 2018/19 season, Pohjonen appears as soloist with the Pacific Symphony and Bay Atlantic Symphony in performances of the Mozart's Piano Concerto in A major, K. 488, and he performs with the Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra as soloist in Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2. He

enjoys an ongoing association with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, appearing with the Escher Quartet in performances of the Mozart Piano Concerto in A major, K. 414.

Pohjonen opened the season in a duo concert with Swedish cellist Jakob Koranyi, with whom he appears in Malmö and undertakes a European tour in February. Other highlights of Pohjonen's 2018/19 season include his recital debut at the 92nd Street Y in New York, in a program that features Scriabin's Eighth Sonata and *Dichotomie* by Salonen.

Pohjonen has previously appeared in recital in New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center; at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; and in San Francisco, La Jolla, Detroit and Vancouver. He made his London debut at Wigmore Hall and has given recitals throughout Europe. He has performed as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic and Mostly Mozart Festival, and with orchestras throughout Scandinavia. He has collaborated with today's foremost conductors, including Marin Alsop, Lionel Bringuier, Marek Jankowski, Kirill Karabits, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Pinchas Zukerman, and he has appeared on multiple occasions with the Atlanta Symphony and music director Robert Spano.

Pohjonen's newest recording with cellist Inbal Segev features cello sonatas by Chopin and Grieg, and Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*. His debut recording, *Plateaux* on Dacapo Records, featured works by Scandinavian composer Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen performed with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra and conductor Ed Spanjaard.

Pohjonen began piano studies in 1989 at the Junior Academy of the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. He continued work with Meri Louhos and Hui-Ying Liu-Tawaststjerna at the Sibelius Academy, from which he obtained a master's degree in 2008. He was winner of the 2009 Klavier Festival Ruhr Scholarship and is an alum of The Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two). He earned first prize at the 2004 Nordic Piano Competition in Nyborg, Denmark; first prize at the 2000 International Young Artists Concerto Competition in Stockholm; a prize at the 2002 Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition; and the Prokofiev Prize at the 2003 AXA Dublin International Piano Competition.