

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, (*Jupiter*)
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Duration: Approximately 31 minutes

First Performance: unknown - c. 1788

Last ESO Performance: April, 2012; Jaime Laredo, conductor

Program Notes by Daniel Maki.

The summer of 1788 was a grim one for Mozart, marked by financial problems and the death of his six year old daughter Theresia. In spite of these concerns, in the amazingly short period of six weeks Mozart wrote, among other works, three symphonies which were to be his last, and, by common consent, his greatest efforts in the genre.

Evidence of the composer's unhappy state of mind is not particularly easy to find in this trio of masterpieces, for it is only the second of the three, the famous symphony No. 40 in G minor that can reasonably be construed as a tragic work. The last of the group, far from being mournful, often displays feelings of pomp and regal triumph, and is written in the key of C major, a key often used in eighteenth century music for festive occasions. The reference to Jupiter, king of the Roman gods, came after Mozart's death and was presumably prompted not only out of admiration for the god-like mastery of the work, but also by the stately dotted rhythms and military use of trumpets and drums which to the eighteenth century ear suggested nobility and godliness.

From the outset, the symphony provides a particularly vivid example of the classical style. Unlike their baroque predecessors, who generally maintained a single emotion or *Affekt* throughout a single movement, composers of the classical period commanded a large repertoire of musical rhetorical devices that could be juxtaposed within a given movement. Thus, the opening phrase, with its flamboyant bow strokes, is a strong "masculine" theme, which immediately receives a gently "feminine" answer.

(I hope feminists in the audience will forgive these gender stereotypes.) Other examples from the composer's thesaurus of musical gestures are the march-like theme with the previously mentioned dotted rhythms, as well as an innocuous sounding melody entitled "A Kiss on the Hand," which Mozart had written for insertion into another composer's opera. This innocent little tune, incidentally, becomes the most important theme in the powerful development section.

The beautiful slow movement does contain more than a hint of tragedy, with several poignant sections moving into a minor key. High spirits return in the minuet, although it is not the typically straightforward, graceful dance. As Mozart scholar Neal Zaslaw has written, the proto-romanticism and complexity of the writing are alien to eighteenth century dance music and seem almost a revolutionary critique of the *ancien régime* and its aristocratic minuets. (The French Revolution was, after all, only a few years away.)

The finale of the *Jupiter* is one of the most discussed and analyzed movements in all of music. Here Mozart uses the so-called "learned" contrapuntal style of the baroque period, a practice which, though anachronistic in a sense, was a "retro" style used fairly often by classical composers to achieve a lofty sentiment, particularly in church music.

Beginning with a simple four note motif (C D F E), which was the beginning of a famous hymn as well as a common figure in counterpoint method books of the time (Mozart himself had used the figure in a number of his earlier works), Mozart achieves one of the great *tours de force* in symphonic history. In the coda, the concluding part, no fewer than five motifs are combined in invertible counterpoint (meaning that a lower and higher part can reverse their positions and still make musical sense). The result is a grandeur never before achieved in the finale of a symphony and an achievement which Jupiter himself might envy.

