JOSEPH HAYDN
Symphony No. 39

Franz Joseph Haydn was born in Rohrau, Lower Austria, on March 31, 1732, and died in Vienna on May 31, 1809. He composed his Symphony No. 39 before 1770, possibly as early as 1765; the date of its first performance, which certainly took place at Esterháza under the composer’s direction, is unknown. The symphony is scored for two oboes, four horns, and strings, with the addition of an unwritten bassoon and harpsichord continuo.

ABOUT THE MUSIC
Symphonies in minor keys are relatively rare in the Classical era, and they almost always aim at the expression of somber or even tragic emotions, whereas only a few decades earlier, in the Baroque era, composers routinely chose minor keys for works even of a quite jolly character. For some reason, Haydn’s output for a decade beginning in the last half of the 1760s reveals a much greater emphasis on the minor mode, a change once called a “romantic crisis,” which was later labeled “Sturm und Drang.” But attaching such literary terms to Haydn’s music suggests an inspiration that was simply not present.

Haydn’s biographer, H.C. Robbins Landon, spoke of an “Austrian musical crisis,” but it still fails to explain the sudden surge of interest in such accompanying expressive devices as increased syncopation, leaping melodies, a wider range of dynamic markings, and the use of contrapuntal forms. Whatever the reason for this delight in the minor mode, Haydn’s Sturm und Drang symphonies provided a concentrated opportunity to exploit a certain intensity of musical expression and to pass it on to later composers.

With Symphony No. 39 (the numbering does not accurately reflect the order of composition), the first and last movements are high points of the new style; moreover, they introduced a new wrinkle in orchestral scoring that was later adopted by Mozart and others. This was the use of four horns, two each in the keys of G and B-flat. The valveless horns of the day could play only a very limited number of notes closely related to the key in which they were pitched. This meant that the instrument was all but useless in those parts of the movement that modulated away from home. By employing sets of horns in the key of the tonic and of the secondary key of the movement, Haydn was able to use horn sound far more significantly than would have been the case otherwise. This solution to a perpetual problem was taken up by Mozart and other composers of the day.
The opening of the first movement is masterful in its new projection of tension through the simplest means: Haydn keeps the entire full statement of the principal theme at a hushed, piano dynamic, and he inserts unexpected bars of rest between the phrases to throw the rhythmic parsing out of kilter. His attention is hypnotically fixed on the first subject, using it also in the secondary key of B-flat and in contrapuntal extensions throughout. The slow movement, for strings only, is still somewhat old-fashioned compared to the rest of the work. The minuet, back in G minor, is stern enough to match the remainder of the symphony, though the Trio is unexpectedly fuller and more lush in its scoring (usually it is the lighter element of such dance movements). The finale returns once again to the energy levels and dynamic drive of the opening movement, with restless leaps, racing scales and sudden dynamic shifts.

JESSIE MONTGOMERY
Records from a Vanishing City

Jessie Montgomery was born in New York City on December 8, 1981. Records from a Vanishing City was commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, which gave the first performance in Carnegie Hall on October 27, 2016, playing in its usual manner with no conductor. The score calls for flute, oboe, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

ABOUT THE MUSIC
Native New Yorker Jessie Montgomery, a composer, violinist and educator, grew up in a part of the country that is particularly yeasty in its wide range of musical styles and approaches, something that has shaped the open comprehensiveness of her own music. She has degrees from Juilliard and New York University and is currently a graduate fellow in composition at Princeton University.

Her comments about Records from a Vanishing City provide a vivid image of the place where she lives, whose musical spirit she captures here:

Records from a Vanishing City is a tone poem based on my recollections of the music that surrounded me as I grew up on Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the 1980s and 1990s. Artists, truth seekers and cultures of all kinds defined our vibrant community. The embracing diversity burst out with an effortless everydayness in block parties, festivals and shindigs of every sort. Partly because my parents were artists – but also because I just couldn’t help it – I soaked up all that surrounded me: Latin jazz, alternative rock, Western classical, avant-garde jazz, poetry and Caribbean dance music, to name a few. A year before completing this work, a very dear family friend passed away and it was decided that I would be the one to inherit a large portion of his eclectic record collection. James Rose was one of the many suns in the Lower East Side cosmos who often hosted parties and generous gatherings for our extended artist family. His record collection was a treasure trove of the great jazz recordings of the 1950s, 1960s and beyond – he was mad for John Coltrane, but also Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman, as well as traditional folk artists from Africa, Asia and South America. In the process of imagining this piece, a particular track on a record of music from Angola caught my ear: a traditional lullaby which is sung in call and response by a women’s chorus. This lullaby rang with an uncanny familiarity in me. An adaptation of this lullaby and the rhythmic chant that follows it appears in each of the three main sections of Records. This piece is dedicated to the memory of James Rose. Records from a Vanishing City was commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. Orpheus’s world premiere performance of the work at Carnegie Hall was supported in part by a Project Grant from New Music USA.
Wolfgang Mozart
Requiem in D minor

Joannes Chrisostomus Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart, who began to call himself Wolfgang Amadeo about 1770 and Wolfgang Amadé in 1777 (and never Wolfgang Amadeus) was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791. It is traditionally said that the first performance of the Requiem was given in the new monastery church at Wiener Neustadt on December 14, 1793, billed as a composition by Count Franz von Walsegg, who had commissioned it anonymously with the intention of passing it off as his own, for use on the occasion of a solemn Mass in memory of his wife. Yet Mozart’s old friend Baron van Swieten performed a Requiem—presumably Mozart’s own—at a concert given eleven months earlier as a benefit to support the composer’s widow and two surviving children. Mozart’s instrumentation is most unusual, though it fits the expressive needs of a Requiem: he omits all the brighter woodwind instrument—flutes and oboes—and replaces the clarinet with its darker relative, the basset horn. He also omits horns from the brass section. The resulting ensemble consists of solo vocal quartet (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), mixed chorus and an orchestra of basset horns, bassoons, and high trumpets in pairs, three trombones, strings and organ (as continuo instrument).

ABOUT THE MUSIC
Sometime early in the summer of 1791, Mozart received a mysterious visitor, a “gray messenger,” who offered him 50 ducats as the first half of a commissioning fee for the composition of a Requiem. Mozart accepted because he badly needed the money, but the oddity of the incident and his own depression and ill health conspired to make him unduly morbid. At times he took the strange messenger to be an emissary of Death. Actually the messenger was an agent for one Count Walsegg, who demanded secrecy because he intended to pass the Requiem off as his own composition and perform it in memory of his recently deceased wife.

Mozart seems to have composed the Requiem in three stages interrupted by other responsibilities (the composition and premiere of La clemenza di Tito in August, completion of The Magic Flute and of the Clarinet Concerto in September). He worked on the Requiem until mid-October, when his wife Constanze took the score away from him because she feared it would damage his now-precarious health.

Mozart began to be obsessed with the notion that he was writing the work in preparation for his own death, and he even raved that he had poisoned himself (from which delusions arose the legend that his “rival” Salieri had in fact poisoned him, a tale that has been thoroughly disproved, but keeps popping up nonetheless). Mozart’s fatal illness seems to have been rheumatic fever, which he had suffered in childhood. Eighteenth-century medicine was not yet aware of the connection between rheumatic fever and cardiac weakness.

A lucid spell in November allowed him to work on the Requiem and even to make one final public appearance to direct the performance of his Little Masonic Cantata on November 18. Two days later he took to the bed that he never left. Mozart is supposed to have discussed his plans and sketches for the Requiem with his pupil Franz Xaver Süssmayer. On December 3, he felt a little better, but the following day he took a serious turn for the worse. The still-youthful composer died an hour after midnight, early on December 5, eight weeks short of his thirty-sixth birthday.

Constanze’s first concern was to get the Requiem completed. She needed the remainder of the commissioning fee and feared that, if the work was not completed, she would have to return the portion already spent. Mozart had finished only the opening Introit in full score, with the complete orchestration, but he had substantially sketched the Kyrie. With one exception, he had completed solo and choral voice parts of the long Sequence (the Dies irae, etc.) and the Offertory, with the orchestral bass line.
The final section of the Sequence, the Lacrimosa, was still just a fragment; Mozart had composed the choral parts for the first eight measures—as far as the powerful crescendo on a rising chromatic line in the soprano—and then, as if the effort was too much for him, he broke off the manuscript entirely.

Constanze sought another composer to finish the work. She first approached Joseph Eybler, who began work with devotion and insight, but when it came to composing original material, he gave up. Eventually Süßmayer took it over, recopying the entire completed part of the manuscript and finishing the rest of the work.

In any case, the remaining movements—Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei, Communio seem to be Süßmayer’s work, though they are close enough to Mozart’s style to make credible his assertion that he was working with notes from the master. Later he explained that everything from the verse “judicandus homo reus” (the third line of the Lacrimosa) was his own, though he repeated Mozart’s Kyrie fugue in the closing Communion, following a common practice at the time. However much we may wish that Mozart had lived to complete the entire Requiem, we can be grateful for a performable version made possible through Süßmayer’s assiduous devotion. Still, many musicians over the years have noted infelicities in detail and elements that simply do not correspond to Mozart’s style; several editors have undertaken to produce an improved version of the score. Among these, Robert Levin has studied every aspect of Mozart’s work—harmonic usage, instrumentation, proportions in the planning of whole movements, etc.—for decades. Despite the sometimes radical nature of his edition, it is also carefully conservative in retaining as much as possible of the familiar version. He has altered the Lacrimosa somewhat and takes it into a brief fugue (unlike Süßmayer’s two simple chords) for Amen. He corrected “tonal discrepancies” in the Sanctus and reshaped the Hosanna fugue to follow the structural proportions of a genuine Mozart fugue. He somewhat revised the later part of the Benedictus and the return to the Hosanna fugue, edited out what seem to be Süßmayer’s oversights in the later parts of the Agnus Dei, and adjusted the layout of the text in the fugue Cum sanctis tuis.

Compared to Mozart’s earlier Mass compositions, the Requiem is a work of somber and impressive beauty, darker in color, but rising to great heights of power and drama (as in the first two lines of the Lacrimosa, probably the last notes he ever penned), and soaring with the ineffable grace that was his, but clearly filled, as well, with the commitment of immediate and urgent personal expression.