



ABOUT THE MUSIC

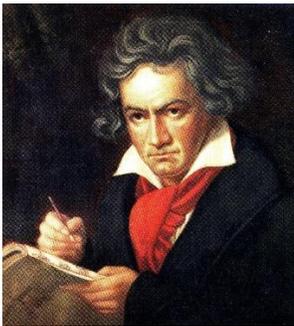
Fantastique!

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Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Overture to Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus [The Creatures of Prometheus]



COMPOSER: born December 16, 1770, Bonn; died March 26, 1827, Vienna

WORK COMPOSED: 1801. Dedicated to Princess Christiane, wife of Beethoven's patron, Prince Lichnowsky.

WORLD PREMIERE: The *Creatures of Prometheus* premiered on March 28, 1801, in Vienna's Burgtheater and performed several times that year and in 1802. Beethoven dedicated it to Princess Christiane, a respectable amateur pianist and wife of Prince Lichnowsky, his patron at the time.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 5 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Writing music for theatrical purposes held little interest for Ludwig van Beethoven. Aside from his opera *Fidelio* and incidental music for a few plays (including *Coriolanus* and *Egmont*), Beethoven was primarily an orchestral and chamber music composer. *The Creatures of Prometheus* is Beethoven's only ballet; his frustration with its egotistical choreographer Salvatore Viganò, the Empress Maria Theresa's court ballet master, effectively squelched any further interest he may have had in the genre.

Beethoven was initially drawn to the ballet's central figure, the Titan Prometheus. According to Greek mythology, Prometheus defied the gods by bringing literacy and the arts to humanity, as well as the basic element of fire. Such a heroic symbol appealed to Beethoven, who saw in Prometheus qualities of his own personality: a native rebelliousness and idealistic nature. (In the story, Zeus punished Prometheus for his arrogance by chaining him to Mt. Olympus and causing a vulture to tear out his liver; each day the liver was magically renewed so the voracious raptor could continue feasting. Prometheus endured this punishment until Hercules scaled the mountain and killed the vulture.)

Beethoven and Viganò's ideas about *The Creatures of Prometheus* clashed. Viganò was more interested in showing off his skill and that of his wife, Mademoiselle Cassentini, herself a noted dancer, than in

portraying the Prometheus story. Accordingly, Viganò outlined a plot in which Prometheus becomes a peripheral generic “creator.” Two of his “creatures,” (statues, in this case, portrayed by Viganò and his wife) come to life and are thereby given consciousness and enlightenment by the god Apollo at Parnassus. The two statues become the focus, while Prometheus himself is largely ignored.

For Beethoven, the whole appeal of this ballet lay in the character of Prometheus himself. He had no interest in writing a musical vehicle for Viganò and his wife to parade their talents. An early admirer of Napoleon, Beethoven also saw in Prometheus qualities he associated with the French general. Napoleon styled himself as an Age of Enlightenment knight in shining armor who rescued the downtrodden; his actions echoed the battle cry of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” Inspired by Napoleon’s early career, Beethoven began writing in 1803 what became his Third Symphony. The “Eroica,” to whom he dedicated it (Beethoven later repudiated Napoleon and removed the dedication from the score after he heard the news in the spring of 1804 that Napoleon had declared himself Emperor of France).

The music of the *Overture* opens with several chords full of anticipatory tension, followed by a slow introduction. After the introduction, the music shifts without pause to the main thematic material, which is full of the lively rhythmic energy that became Beethoven’s trademark. Neither the complete music for the ballet nor the ballet itself is performed today; only the overture survives in the orchestral repertoire.

ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN

Me he perdido [I’ve Gotten Lost]



COMPOSER: born 1981, San Juan, Puerto Rico

WORK COMPOSED: 2015, for the American Composers Orchestra

WORLD PREMIERE: The ACO gave the first performance on October 16, 2015, at the Brookfield Place Winter Garden in New York City.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, bass drum, glockenspiel, mechanical percussion, tam-tam, vibraphone, MIDI keyboard, harp and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 6 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Puerto Rican-born composer and multi-instrumentalist Angélica Negrón writes music for accordions, robotic instruments, toys and electronics, as well as for chamber ensembles, orchestras, choirs and film. Her music has been described as “wistfully idiosyncratic and contemplative” (WQXR/Q2), while *The New York Times* noted her “capacity to surprise.”

Me he perdido was commissioned by the American Composers Orchestra; in the music, Negrón incorporates several robotic or mechanical instruments which are situated amongst the audience and play with the orchestra. In an interview after the premiere, she talked about how the role of these

mechanical percussion instruments evolved. “The robotic instruments gradually revealed a dynamic life of their own that changed the way I wrote for them,” she explained. “I started realizing the spatial potential of the robotic instruments and how, given their placement amongst the audience, they could be more direct in their immediacy because of their proximity to the listeners.” The location of the premiere also influenced Negrón’s approach to composing the music. “As soon as I heard the piece I was writing for ACO was going to be premiered at Brookfield Place’s Winter Garden, I knew I wanted to incorporate some kind of installation-based instruments that could somehow connect the orchestra with the audience in an immersive and engaging way... The instrumental writing of the piece was also highly influenced by the space’s reverberation, so there’s a lot of echoing gestures and resonant chords that will hopefully benefit from the natural acoustics of the space.”

To realize her acoustic ideas, Negrón teamed up with instrument builder Nick Yulman, who created the mechanical percussion instruments for *Me he perdido*. These robotic instruments, or modules, incorporate traditional Indonesian gamelan (tuned brass percussion vessels in various sizes) together with samples of woks and pans from Negrón’s kitchen. The result is an ethereal soundscape that incorporates resonance, sound decay, and silence as fundamental aspects of the total sound.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 23



COMPOSER: born January 27, 1756, Salzburg; died December 5, 1791, Vienna

WORK COMPOSED: Mozart may have begun composing this concerto in 1784. In the catalog of works he began keeping that year, Mozart noted that he completed it on March 2, 1786, in Vienna.

WORLD PREMIERE: Most likely in March 1786 at a Lenten concert in Vienna, although the exact date and other details of the premiere performance are undocumented. As with most of his concertos, Mozart wrote this one as a subscription concert to generate income; whenever it premiered, Mozart would have conducted it from the keyboard and performed the solo part.

INSTRUMENTATION: solo piano, flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 26 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote the majority of his piano concertos during the 1780s, and, as was his habit, he often worked on several compositions simultaneously. Such is the case with the Piano Concerto No. 23 in A major, K. 488, one of three piano concertos (along with the E flat, K. 482 and the C minor, K. 491) Mozart wrote at the same time as his opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*.

On first inspection, there seems little similarity between K. 488, a lyrical, reflective work, and the exuberant silliness that embodies much of *Figaro*. However, a closer look reveals some interesting parallels between the concerto and the opera. There are moments in *Figaro*, particularly the Countess’ poignant aria, “Porgi amor,” in which she laments her loveless marriage, and in the finale when the Count begs forgiveness, which echoes the emotional depth and tenderness of the concerto.

Correspondingly, passages in the concerto, particularly in the Adagio, are vocal – if not operatic – in both construction and conception.

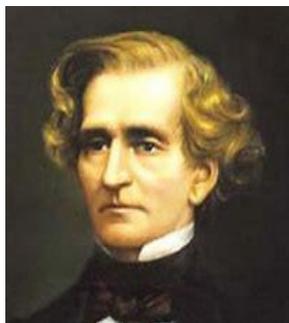
When performing, Mozart improvised cadenzas for all his concertos, although many do not survive in written form. Other composers, most notably Ludwig van Beethoven, composed and notated cadenzas for several of Mozart's piano concertos. Mozart's original cadenza for K. 488 not only survives but also was notated directly into the score.

K. 488 stands out for other reasons. Although oboes were standard instruments in 18th-century orchestras, Mozart uses clarinets in K. 488 instead. Mozart loved the sound of this instrument, and its dark round tone adds a pensive, melancholy quality to the orchestration, particularly the Adagio. Mozart also abandoned typical piano concerto conventions by writing the Adagio in a minor key. Mozart's choice of a minor tonality, and the particular key itself, F-sharp minor, were rare departures from his usual practice, and lend poignancy to this music.

K. 488 was published in 1800; throughout most of the 19th century, it was one of only a few of Mozart's concertos to be performed. It became, and remains, one of Mozart's most popular and beloved works.

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Symphonie fantastique



COMPOSER: born December 11, 1803, La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France; died March 8, 1869, Paris.

WORK COMPOSED: Between January and April of 1830, although some of the material Berlioz included was written as early as 1819.

WORLD PREMIERE: François-Antoine Habeneck conducted the premiere in Paris on December 5, 1830. Two years later, on December 9, 1832, Habeneck, with Berlioz in the orchestra playing timpani, conducted a substantially revised version, also in Paris.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (one doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas (ophicleides), 2 sets of timpani, bass drum, cymbals, bells, snare drum, 2 harps and strings.

ESTIMATED DURATION: 49 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Say what you want about Hector Berlioz: he was an arrogant, selfish, self-obsessed man, full of vitriol (try reading his music criticism sometime), and he drove poor Harriet Smithson, the inspiration for his *Symphonie fantastique*, who was so unfortunate as to marry him, to drink and despair. All true, to be sure, but none of Berlioz' deficits as a human being take away from the fact that at age 27, he wrote, by general agreement, the most astonishing and groundbreaking first symphony any composer has yet produced.

This feat is all the more surprising when we realize that Berlioz completed his *Symphonie fantastique* just three years after Beethoven's death. When heard in that context, it is possible to appreciate how truly original this music is. Berlioz was no doubt inspired by Beethoven's symphonic innovations, especially Beethoven's use of a program in his Sixth (Pastoral) Symphony, but, typically, Berlioz pushed the programmatic elements further than any composer had previously done.

Berlioz' inspiration for the *Symphonie fantastique* was born from his obsession with Smithson, an Irish actress he first saw in a production of *Hamlet* in 1827. Berlioz spoke almost no English, so it seems clear that his violent infatuation with Smithson was carnal rather than courtly. (Berlioz and Smithson did not meet for another five years, after the premiere of the revised version of the *Symphonie*.)

What made Berlioz' program so innovative and shocking to his audiences was the extent to which the story was overtly autobiographical and literary. Along with Smithson, who was musically transformed into the *idée fixe*, or recurring theme, of the symphony, Berlioz drew on plots from literature, most notably *Faust*, in his exploration of the ruinous and glorious nature of love. What audiences, both then and now, often misunderstood was the quintessentially romantic nature of Berlioz' program. He was not interested in a literal depiction of events, but rather the transformation of his emotional response to those events into music.

Berlioz insisted that his music could not be understood or appreciated without its accompanying program, which he provided to audiences at the first performances of the work. Its five movements, in roughest outline, proceed as follows: *Part I: Dreams – Passions*: Boy meets girl. *Part II: A Ball*: Boy obsesses about the girl. *Part III: A Scene in the Country*: While strolling about the countryside listening to shepherds' songs, the boy convinces himself girl doesn't return his love. *Part IV: March to the Scaffold*: In despair, the boy takes a less-than-fatal dose of opium, enough to induce horrible visions and hallucinations, including a death march to the guillotine. *Part V: Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*: Still hallucinating, the boy dreams his funeral is a witches' Sabbath, and his beloved joins in the diabolical festivities.

Or, as Leonard Bernstein so eloquently put it, in one of his Young Peoples' Concerts, "Berlioz tells it like it is... You take a trip, you wind up screaming at your own funeral."

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media).

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