

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Wed. October 18, The 113th Tokyo Opera City Subscription Concert**Franz Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809)

Symphony No. 49 in F minor, Hob.I:49 "La Passione"

Given the title ‘father of the symphony’, Haydn produced more than 100 symphonies in his lifetime, which are considered to be of the highest artistic quality as well as of great historical importance. During his thirty years at Esterházy, he composed twenty-five of these symphonies, having at his disposal an ensemble of professional players with which he could explore and experiment, and which would serve to foster his creative abilities as well. In fact he was somewhat isolated from the rest of the musical world but wrote in a letter to a friend the benefits he gained from it: “As director of an orchestra, one is free to experiment, to see what makes for effect or weakens it.... I was isolated from the world; no one could confuse or frustrate me in my course, and so I was bound to become original!”

In 1761, Haydn was offered the position of Vice-Kapellmeister (the assistant to the main musical director, Gregor Joseph Werner) for the Esterházy royal family. When Werner died in 1766, Haydn was promoted to the position of Kapellmeister. It was during this period from the late 1760's to the early 1770's that Haydn would turn his focus to composing minor-key symphonies, which later came to be referred to as the composer's *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Surge) style.

Symphony No. 49 (1768) was one of these works, composed in the key of F minor and displaying the restlessness, turbulent moods, and deep intensity of emotions that were hallmarks of this later style. In addition to the predominance of the F minor key in all four movements, the composer would also incorporate dramatic shifts between loud and soft dynamics and a wide melodic range, as well as shifting harmonies throughout. Haydn presents this work in the older *sonata de chiesa* (church sonata) style, opening with a slow movement, and with the three remaining movements alternating fast-slow-fast, with only the Trio of the third movement shifting to F major for a small glimmer of brightness in the otherwise serious work.

Haydn's symphonies are often given subtitles and this one is no different. The subtitle *La Passione* is believed to have been designated by the publisher and may have referred to Good Friday services. One Haydn scholar, H.C. Robbins Landon stated that "in the opening...we

seem to sense the winding line of penitents before the Cross...[with the] music's somber, majestic beauty..." The contrasts in the following movements maintain the dramatic edge alternating between agitated syncopations in the second movement, to the more formal dance steps of the third, and on to the most dramatic final movement, displaying a great passion that would forever influence his (and others') symphonic works to come.

Work composed: 1768 **World premiere:** 1768 (probably)

Instrumentation: 2 oboes, bassoon, 2 horns, strings

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Kindertotenlieder (Songs on the Death of Children)

Kindertotenlieder (Songs on the Death of Children) were originally part of a collection of over 400 poems written by Friedrich Rückert, who had lost two of his young children to scarlet fever during the winter of 1833-1834. These deep expressions of grief were taken up by Mahler who would set five of these poems in this song cycle composed between 1901 and 1904. Interestingly, Mahler did not have any children of his own when he began to work on these compositions, (though later he one of his own daughters would succumb to scarlet fever in 1907). Instead it is believed these expressions took him back to thoughts of his own childhood, where seven of the fourteen children in his family died as infants. The brother he was closest to was a year younger than himself and sadly died while Mahler held him in his arms. This brother's name was Ernst and happened to share the same name as Rückert's son, so there seemed to have been a number of links in Mahler's mind when he was drawn to these poems.

Mahler indicated important instructions when these works were performed stating: "these five songs are intended as one inseparable unit, and in performing them their continuity should not be interfered with", seemingly following the emotional journey of the grieving parent. The composer sets these songs using a much smaller orchestral ensemble setting a much more intimate scene. For example the first song opens only with a solo oboe and horn before the voice enters, and only adding bassoon, with cellos joining in a higher register. This song, "**Now the sun intends to rise so bright**" expresses the initial shock and disbelief that the world continues to go on in spite of this personal tragedy.

The second song in the cycle, "**Now I see clearly why such dark flames**" reflects back at the deep intensity of the light in their child's eyes which may have been a sign of their impending death and ultimate reflection in the night sky as stars. The third song "**When you dear mother**" features the English horn in a heartfelt solo, while the violins remain silent as the lower strings set a darker somber tone as the singer describes the surreal feeling of expectation to see their child by their mother's side around the house as if nothing had

happened, followed by the realization and deep sadness that their child is in fact gone far too soon from this world.

The fourth song "**Oftentimes I think they have merely gone out**" begins to share insights as the parent goes through their grief process, at times being fooled into thinking their child has merely gone for a walk and will return home soon, but then comforting themselves with the heavenly walk their child is taking, and the hope that they will eventually follow and meet up with them. The full ensemble plays together here in symphonic form to lead into the final song. "**In this weather, in this bluster**" opens with the full symphonic effect to create a stormy scene, unsettled as the parent questions whether there was something else they could have done. Eventually though the realization and peaceful setting return, acknowledging the child is safe from any storm, as if they are in their mother's house, 'sheltered by the hand of God.' Mahler wrote in a letter to a friend: "I placed myself in the situation that a child of mine had died. When I really lost my daughter, I could not have written these songs any more."

Work composed: 1901-1904 **World premiere:** 1905, Vienna

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, timpani, percussion (tam-tam, glocken), harp, celesta, strings, solo mezzo-soprano

► Please refer to page 34 for the English translation of the lyrics.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, D.485

At a mere 19 years old, Schubert composed his Fifth Symphony in the fall of 1816 following an extremely active period in his compositional life, having written nearly one quarter of his lifetime output in the previous year. And although he was known more for his lieder in Viennese music circles when he was alive, his development of symphonic pieces was a key part of his work as a composer, as he emulated those who had come before him.

When Schubert was only 11 years old, he was accepted as a chorister in the Imperial court chapel, which allowed him to study at the Stadtkonvikt, a communal boarding school that also housed the choir. It was there he sang and studied under the tutelage of Antonio Salieri, which gave him a solid grounding in composition. He also performed in the school orchestra, and as first violinist was at times given the opportunity to lead rehearsals. As part of this group, as well as in informal performances with the amateur orchestra that developed out of his familial quartet, Schubert became immersed in the symphonic works of composers such as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

After Schubert's voice changed at the age of fifteen, he left the chapel, and it was in these ensuing years leading up to the composition of the Fifth Symphony, that he composed, not only the four previous symphonies, but a large-scale opera, chamber music, works for the church, as well as hundreds of songs. After composing the Fifth Symphony, Schubert would write only one other complete symphony.

Perhaps the greatest influence one can hear in this work comes from Mozart in the form of his 40th symphony. Symphony No. 5 is the only symphony that Schubert composed besides the *Unfinished* without a slow introduction to open the entire work and is the most lightly scored as well, with the strings being complemented by only a flute and pairs of oboes, bassoons, and horns. As with his other symphonies, the Fifth Symphony did not get published until the 1880's, but was premiered in public at Vienna's Theater in der Josefstadt on October 17, 1841.

Work composed: 1816 **World premiere:** October 17, 1841, Vienna
Instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Symphony No. 7 in B minor, D.759 "Unfinished"

Various referred to as either Symphony No. 7 or No. 8, the *Unfinished Symphony* followed several years after six complete symphonies were written in Schubert's productive years between October 1813 and February 1818. In the ensuing years, Schubert began work on several symphonies but completed only one, the "Great" Symphony in C major. This was not unusual for the composer, as he had unfinished works in many other genres as well, however there seems to be a fair amount of mystery around this particular work, and speculation as to the reason why he may have left this work unfinished.

During Schubert's lifetime, there actually was no mention of this work. The composer apparently gave the manuscript to Josef Hüttenbrenner shortly after the initial work on it was done (the manuscript is dated October 30, 1822), with the first two movements intact, and on the back the first nine measures of the intended third movement, a scherzo. (Later a piano sketch showing not only the first two movements, but also the scherzo in its entirety as well as the beginning of a trio was discovered.) Josef eventually gave the manuscript to his brother Anselm who proceeded to store it in the back of a drawer, where it remained until Josef revealed in a letter in March of 1860, to the Viennese musician, Johann Herbeck, that his brother "possesses a treasure in Schubert's B minor symphony, which we rank with his Great C major symphony, his instrumental swan song, and with all the symphonies of Beethoven – only it is unfinished."

Since that time there have been various theories over the intended 'missing' movements. Some suggested that Anselm had lost the manuscripts to the remaining movements (not too farfetched perhaps, since his servants had apparently used another Schubert score as kindling in the 1840s). Others had thought that perhaps the final movement had been written, but used instead for his *Entr'acte* for the play *Rosamunde*, since it too had been written in the (not so usual for the time) key of B minor. In fact, there have been performances that have included 'realizations' of the third-movement sketch as well as the aforementioned *entra'cte* in an attempt to complete Schubert's unfinished work.

In time, though, the melodic and timbral explorations, as well as the harmonic innovations that Schubert was delving into with this work, have come to be appreciated more frequently through the performance of the first two movements alone, as the composer worked his way towards his vision of the 'grand' symphony, which would follow in short order. However, with the composer's impending illness, at times bed-ridden, house-bound or even hospitalized on and off beginning in 1822, several more years would pass before he would write his final complete symphony. Yet the *Unfinished Symphony*, as it came to be called by the publisher, was the first of Schubert's symphonies to be printed, and premiered finally in 1865, the composer himself never having heard it performed in his lifetime.

Work composed: 1822 **World premiere:** 1865, Vienna
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, strings

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