

**Program Notes**  
**September 18 and 19, 2010**  
**By Chris Morrison**



**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

**b. January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria**

**d. December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria**

No reminder is really needed of the unique stature of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the history of Western music. His vast catalog of compositions – over 600 of them, including some 15 operas, 17 masses, 50 symphonies, 20 piano concertos, 23 string quartets, and so on (the list can go on for quite some time) – epitomizes the German-Austrian Classical style. His music is recognized and loved all over the world for its melodic, harmonic, and textural richness and beauty. The son of a well-known violinist and pedagogue, Mozart was one of the greatest prodigies ever, playing his first public concert at age five and composing his first music at seven. Before reaching the age of ten he had already played recitals in front of the likes of King George III of England. He traveled throughout Europe through his teens. After failing to find a secure post elsewhere, and having grown dissatisfied with his career in Salzburg, Mozart moved to Vienna, where he spent the last decade of his life. While he enjoyed some successes with his new operas and piano concertos, life there grew more and more precarious, leading to his early death at age thirty-five.

**Symphony No. 28 in C major, K. 200**

**Composed: 1774**

**Duration: 20 minutes**

It's a little odd to think of a seventeen-year-old as facing a major crossroads in his life. But that was the situation with which Mozart was faced in 1773 and 1774. Long heralded across Europe as one of the great young musicians of his day, now Mozart was looking for a job. Unfortunately, his hometown of Salzburg represented an increasingly unattractive option. In 1772 the city's Archbishop, a fairly enthusiastic patron of the arts, died, to be succeeded by the much less sympathetic Hieronymus von Colloredo. Mozart, already a bit tired of the provincial nature of his home, found the possibilities there limited and started to long for more exciting surroundings.

In October 1772, Mozart and his father Leopold traveled to Italy (already Mozart's third trip there), primarily for the premiere of the opera *Lucio Silla* in Milan. On the way home in mid-1773, they stayed for a time in Vienna. Throughout their journey Leopold was on the lookout for a position for his son, preferably in the court of some noble, but with no success. As Leopold wrote to his wife after a visit to Vienna's Imperial Court, "The Empress was very gracious, but that was all." So they returned to Salzburg, where Mozart settled down for the next fifteen months. It was a very productive period musically, and among the works he composed was the Symphony No. 28. There is some doubt about whether No. 28 was written in 1773 or 1774; the consensus seems to place it in November of the latter year, meaning that it was actually written months after Nos. 29 and 30, and was the last of the "Salzburg" series of symphonies. He

subsequently turned his attention to operas, concertos and piano music, only returning to writing symphonies four years later, with No. 31, the “Paris,” of 1778.

The Symphony No. 28 is a relatively extraverted, lighthearted work, with trumpets adding brightness to the textures. Four strong, descending chords open the first movement, followed by a flourish from the strings and the balance of the energetic first theme. By contrast, the second theme, played first by strings, then winds, is dainty and delicate. A lively third idea closes the exposition. Phrases from the opening melody are developed, that elaboration continuing into the closing recapitulation of themes. The light-as-air second movement is dominated by an elegant, flowing melody played delicately by muted violins. The tune is frequently punctuated, like the main theme of the previous movement, by trills. Winds play a supporting, coloristic role as this theme is elaborated on, with some turns into a minor key lingering only briefly.

In the Menuetto’s main theme, oboes play along with the violins. The French horns are also highlighted later with two unaccompanied phrases. Elegant and relaxed, this movement has none of the rustic quality of some of Franz Josef Haydn’s minuets. The tempo picks up considerably, though, in the Finale. The playful first theme and charming second are both characterized by scurrying movement. After a brief development of the opening gestures of the first theme, winds provide additional color as the themes make their return. Increasingly intense repetitions of a gesture from the opening idea provide an exciting coda to this sparkling, vivacious Finale.



**Antonín Dvorák**

**b. September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, Bohemia (now Czech Republic)**

**d. May 1, 1904, Prague. Bohemia (now Czech Republic)**

Possibly the greatest composer ever from what is now known as the Czech Republic, Antonín Dvorák brought a distinctive, nationalistic ethos to his music, employing folk influences (melodies and dance rhythms as well as legends and stories) as inspiration throughout his considerable catalog of music, which includes ten operas, nine symphonies, thirteen string quartets, and a host of other symphonic, chamber and vocal compositions. Early on he made a living as a violist and organist, writing his first symphonies and chamber works in his spare time, but by the 1870s, with the encouragement and assistance of Johannes Brahms, he was able to devote himself almost entirely to composition. From 1892 to 1895 Dvorák, by then one of Europe’s most celebrated composers, lived in the United States, serving as director of New York’s new National Conservatory. He was inspired by the African American and Native American music he heard there to write his famous *American Quartet* and *New World Symphony*.

**Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 33**

**Composed: 1876**

**Duration: 38 minutes**

1876 was a significant year for Dvorák. The death of his second, infant daughter that year led to the composition of his heartfelt choral work, the *Stabat Mater*, which was subsequently performed throughout Europe to great acclaim. Also, Dvorák's friendship with Johannes Brahms led that same year to a publishing deal with Brahms's publisher, Fritz Simrock, which also helped build Dvorák's reputation. Brahms remained Dvorák's lifelong friend, and the influence of Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1 (1858) on Dvorák's one and only Piano Concerto has often been noted. Composed in August and September of 1876, Dvorák's Concerto was written for the prominent Czech pianist Karel Slavkovsky, who gave the work its premiere in Prague at a special "Slavonic Concert" on March 24, 1878, with Adolf Cech conducting the orchestra of the Prague Provisional Theater.

Dvorák set his sights high in his Piano Concerto: the scale is large, the language dramatic. But Dvorák was a string player, and he struggled mightily with the piano part (as can be seen in the many corrections, erasures, and cuts in the manuscript score). Certainly the role of the piano in the Concerto is not typical, as the composer himself recognized: "I see I am unable to write a Concerto for a virtuoso; I must think of other things." Rather than taking on the usual protagonist role, the pianist here is much more of a collaborator with the orchestra. Many pianists have found the writing for the piano soloist rather ungainly; one rather unkind commentator wrote that the solo part was written "for two right hands." Several revisions over the years have attempted to make the piano writing in the Concerto more idiomatic; the most successful and frequently played is that of Vilem Kurz, produced in 1919. Even so, the Concerto has received something of a bad rap over the years, and has stayed only at the fringes of the standard repertoire, championed by the likes of Sviatoslav Richter and Rudolf Firkušny. It is still a very enjoyable, substantial, melodic, and characteristically Dvorákian work.

The opening movement's orchestral introduction presents the movement's two main themes. The first is imperious and symphonic; Dvorák was apparently very pleased with this melody, which is first heard in the lower depths of the orchestra, then later elaborated on by the piano. The second theme is more restrained, in the manner of a hymn. This balance of dramatic and lyric continues throughout the movement. Other ideas, some of rather a folk music cast, are briefly treated. The pianist is kept quite busy throughout – although, as mentioned above, it only occasionally really takes the lead – and the orchestration is quite colorful, with notable contributions from the woodwinds.

A gentle, pastoral melody from the French horn opens the second movement, taking on the feeling of a lullaby as the winds, pianist, and strings elaborate on the theme. Another, somewhat more assertive theme is then introduced by the piano and taken up by the bassoon. These ideas are developed in a dialogue between the soloist and orchestra. With just a couple of brief, dramatic outbursts, this movement was aptly described by one writer as "a long-lined meditation, autumnal and nocturnal in atmosphere."

The piano opens the third movement with a rhythmic, fanfare-like idea that makes several appearances later. After that comes the playful main theme, in the vein of the Dvorák's famous Slavonic Dances. Unlike those Dances, though, where Dvorák composed his own dance tunes based on national styles, here he employs an actual folk song (the song's words, out of character with the grand way the tune is treated in this movement, have been translated "I won't go home, I

won't go home, My cruel wife would beat me because I ate all her noodles"). The second melody, heard only briefly, has rather an exotic, almost Asian air about it. But most of the movement is devoted to the dance theme, which appears in several guises, including a cadenza for the soloist and, in combination with the fanfare idea, in the Concerto's exciting final moments.



### **Franz Schubert**

**b. January 31, 1797, Vienna, Austria**

**d. November 19, 1828, Vienna, Austria**

Franz Schubert is one of the best-loved and most important composers of the nineteenth century, his music consistently marked by a remarkable melodic gift, rich harmonies, and an expansive treatment of traditional forms. During his short but extremely prolific career, he composed nine symphonies, dozens of chamber and solo piano works, and a host of operas and liturgical works. His songs, numbering over 600, virtually created the genre of the art song. He started composing in his teens, and some early works came to the notice of Antonio Salieri, who worked with the young composer on composition and music theory. After a couple of unhappy years spent as a schoolteacher by day and composer by night, Schubert decided to pursue a career as a full-time composer, leading a somewhat bohemian life while creating a vast number of compositions that, at the time, attracted little attention. Only gradually did his music win acclaim, inspiring a remarkable burst of creativity in the mid 1820s. By that time, however, he was suffering badly from the syphilis and (possibly) typhoid fever that would take his life at age 31.

### **Symphony No. 2 in B-flat major, D. 125**

**Composed: 1814-1815**

**Duration: 32 minutes**

Schubert had some of his earliest musical experiences playing in a string quartet with his father and older brothers. He could also sing, and in 1808 won a position in the choir of the Imperial Kapelle. This enabled him to continue his studies at the Staatskonvikt, a boarding home where the Choir School was housed. He also began several years of work with Antonio Salieri – today a much-maligned figure, but then a very respected composer and teacher who remarked of the young Schubert, “That boy can do it all.” Along with his singing, Schubert also started playing violin and viola in (and occasionally conducting) the Staatskonvikt student orchestra. The symphonies and other orchestral works of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven that they played almost every evening influenced greatly Schubert’s own early orchestral compositions, which in many cases were given their premieres by the students.

The Symphony No. 2 was written between December 10, 1814 and March 24, 1815 (that prolific year of 1815 also saw Schubert producing his Third Symphony, a piano sonata, some 150 songs, and many other works). The Staatskonvikt orchestra may have given the Symphony a run-through, and there may have been an 1816 private performance at the home of Otto Hatwig, a

local violinist. But, as was the case with so many of Schubert's major works, the public premiere of the Symphony No. 2 didn't take place until decades after the composer's death – on October 20, 1877, when August Manns conducted the symphony at London's Crystal Palace.

More ambitious than the Symphony No. 1 of 1813, the Second Symphony exhibits the influence of Beethoven, whose Symphony No. 7 and *Wellington's Victory (Battle Symphony)* Schubert may have heard in Vienna in December 1814. Opening with a slow, stately introduction, the first movement is dominated by two main themes. The vigorous first, played by bustling strings, is rather similar to a tune from Beethoven's Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus*. A more lyrical second theme is presented initially by violins and clarinet. Both these themes receive some brief development, with the scurrying motion of the first tune underlying all in the strings.

The slow second movement takes the form of a theme and five variations. The elegant starting point of the variations is a tranquil theme heard first in the strings. Most of the variations play with the instrumentation and accompanying harmonies, rather than the actual notes, of the tune. The first and third variations highlight the violins and winds, and the second alternates between low strings and woodwinds. The more aggressive fourth variation moves into a minor key, but tranquility returns with the final variation, as the vigorous motion of the previous variation moves into the background as the original mood of the theme returns.

The third movement, no longer the graceful minuet of years past, has now, again through Beethoven's example, become something much more dynamic. The outer sections of the tripartite movement are brusque and energetic; they frame a central section much lighter in mood and texture, as the oboe and the other winds, violins and pizzicato bass play a variant of the theme from the previous movement. Opening almost as though in mid-thought, the Finale is a whirlwind: rhythmically playful (Schubert's favorite rhythmic pattern, long-short-short, is heard throughout this movement and also in the first and second), brisk, and energetic.