

Program Notes

by Chris Morrison

Reno Chamber Orchestra

“Mostly Mozart” – October 4, 2026

Simon Rivet

Born: Canada

After an early career as a classical guitarist, Simon Rivet turned his interests toward writing music for concert, film, and dance. Following a three-year period of solitude living in a cottage by a small and quiet lake, his music has found inspiration from the surrounding nature, and laid down its roots in the poetry of colorful harmonies, subtle orchestrations, and the integration of space/silence. As an emerging composer, his recent chamber music and orchestra pieces have received recognition from various international competitions. His work is a contemplation on the underlying forces of nature, and, consequently, on humanity’s own internal forces. It is an invitation to stop, open and connect oneself with one’s deeper dimension, to enter one’s “silent sanctuary.” Rivet is currently serving as composer-in-residence with the chamber ensemble Prisme. In 2025, he was the winner of the Kreitler Commission Competition.

Ocean of Quiet

Composed: 2026

Duration: 17 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (one doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 2 horns, timpani, percussion, harp, strings

Ocean of Quiet was commissioned by the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra as the winning entry of the 2025 Kreitler Commission Competition, in partnership with the Chamber Orchestra of Pittsburgh, the Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle, and the Reno Chamber Orchestra. Rivet's application topped a field of 296 applicants from 26 countries in a blind selection process based solely on two submitted compositions. Ocean of Quiet was first performed in Cincinnati on August 8, 2026.

Rivet has written of his composition, “Ocean of Quiet is an ode to the ever-shifting nature of sound and its mysterious Ocean from which it emerges and to which it returns. In listening deeply, we may glimpse a space, a silent sanctuary, that remains untouched by the changing waves of experience, yet holds them all within its depths.”

His score is headed by a quotation from the famous thirteenth century Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, now commonly known simply as Rumi:

“Silence is an ocean. Speech is a river. When the ocean is searching for you, don’t walk into the river. Listen to the ocean.”

The score also includes a guided meditation that can precede the work's performance. The text is reproduced here:

These next few minutes are an invitation to pause, for a brief moment, the usual focus on the outer world, and to bring your attention back to your inner world, to fully arrive – in the space, as well as in

yourself.

Whenever you feel ready, you can find a comfortable position.

And just start by noticing any sensation that's currently present in your body.

Feel the weight of your body being supported by the chair.

Feel your breath coming and going, by itself.

Simply meet your experience however it is.

Now slowly start to open up to the space in the room.

Notice the sounds. Feel its size. The air. The people around.

Let yourself settle and marinate – so to speak – in this spacious ocean of awareness.

In a moment, you'll hear a note.

As the sound begins to fade away, see if you can listen ever more closely.

And remain present and open even as the sound has completely faded away.

Notice the ocean into which the sound has receded.

Alive.

Open.

Yet as the waves on the surface keep moving, its depth remains quiet and undisturbed.

Let yourself settle into that depth, that primordial presence that remains untouched by the content of your experience.

And as the music unfolds, playing and dancing with no specific destination, see if you can remain and return to this ocean of quiet for as long as you wish.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

Died: 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 Marie Antoinette and 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.

Concerto for Two Pianos in E-flat major, K. 365

Composed: 1779

Duration: 24 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings, two solo pianos

Although details are somewhat sketchy, it is widely thought that Mozart composed his one and only concerto for two pianos in 1779, quite possibly for him to play at a private concert along with his sister Maria Anna, known to the Mozart family as “Nannerl.”

Mozart wrote this work after returning to his hometown of Salzburg after a two-year tour around Europe. Along with playing many concerts, he had sought employment in several cities on the tour, including Paris, Mannheim, and Munich. His efforts, though, were unsuccessful, and back in Salzburg, he took a post as court organist. Quickly frustrated by the limitations of that job, Mozart turned his attention to Vienna. The Concerto for Two Pianos proved to be the last piano concerto that Mozart wrote before leaving Salzburg for Vienna to make his name in the wider musical world.

In 1782, as Mozart was trying to establish his reputation in Vienna, he made the instrumentation of this concerto more colorful, adding clarinets, trumpets, and timpani to the original orchestral scoring detailed above, which was based on the instruments available to him in Salzburg. Whatever the complement, though, the orchestra is relatively restrained in this work, thereby directing most of the musical attention to the two pianos, which are given equally important roles to play.

After an orchestral introduction, the first movement turns quickly to the two pianos, which enter with no orchestral backing, a novel effect. The pianos rapidly trade musical ideas in a manner that one commentator calls “wonderfully spacious, as if Mozart is thoroughly enjoying himself and letting his ideas flow freely.” The orchestra mostly supports the soloists, interjecting only occasionally. A bit of drama is added with an excursion into the minor during the cadenza for the pianos, before the movement's cheerful final moments.

The second movement is a gentle, refined, and elegant Andante. The oboe sings a melancholy tune over quiet string accompaniment before the pianos enter with their duet, which is often delicate and sometimes quite ornamental. Soon the pianos and orchestra are trading phrases, taking turns with the melodic lead.

A cheerful, energetic theme leads off the finale. In true Rondo form, that theme recurs several times – often returning in unexpected ways – with contrasting episodes between each repetition. The pianos engage in exuberant rapid-fire exchanges that seem almost competitive. The many surprises and lighthearted moments have led one commentator to call this movement “one of the finest examples of wit and humor in Mozart’s music.”

Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550

Composed: 1788

Duration: 28 minutes

Instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, strings

Mozart’s last three symphonies, Nos. 39-41, were all written during a two-month stretch in the summer of 1788. Why they were written has always presented something of a mystery. Although many writers have suggested the possibility, it would have been very uncharacteristic of Mozart to write simply “for posterity,” rather than with specific performances in mind. Scholar H.C. Robbins Landon thought that the symphonies were composed for a series of subscription concerts Mozart presented during the fall or Advent season of 1788 – or possibly the three “Concerts in the Casino” Mozart planned for a new casino in Vienna’s Spiegelgasse (it is not known whether any of these concerts ever actually happened). Mozart scholar Neal Zaslaw thinks that Mozart took the three symphonies on the 1789 tour he made to Germany.

Whether or not Mozart ever even got to hear the last three symphonies is also open to question. Not too long ago a letter dated July 10, 1802 from musician Johann Wenzel to publisher Ambrosius Kühnel

came to light, in which Wenzel refers to a performance of the G minor Symphony at the home of the music-loving diplomat Gottfried van Swieten. Mozart was apparently present, but supposedly had to leave the room due to the poor quality of the performance. There are also known performances of unidentified Mozart symphonies during 1789 and 1790 that could plausibly have featured any of the final three symphonies. After it was completed, Mozart added to the Symphony No. 40 parts for two clarinets (in the process slightly rewriting the flute and oboe parts), which lends to the suggestion that at some point Mozart had heard the work.

Mozart's financial circumstances were rather dire during this period, and many commentators have heard hints of Mozart's state of mind in the dark colors of the G minor Symphony, one of only two Mozart symphonies in a minor key (the other is the Symphony No. 25, also in G minor). In his book *The Classical Style*, the late Charles Rosen called No. 40 "a work of passion, violence, and grief." The first movement opens with a mood of quiet unease, as the pulsing accompaniment in the lower strings (with divided violas) actually starts the symphony. Then the violins announce the first main theme, with its familiar repeated descending figure. More lyrical is the second theme, which moves into the major key. Of this dramatic music Michael Steinberg wrote, "The first movement raises questions, posits instabilities, opens abysses." Charming yet poignant, the second movement is in 6/8 time and in E-flat major. Moving from strings to clarinet and flute and bassoon, the lilting main theme dominates the movement. But the mood darkens considerably for the movement's central development section.

The third movement has been used in music appreciation classes as an ideal example of the three-part minuet and trio, since the parts are so distinct – the minuet in a stern minor key, dominated by strings, and the graceful central trio in a radiant major key, with woodwinds leading the way in alternation with delicate strings. Largely arranged in regular eight measure phrases, the energetic Finale opens with a series of ascending notes. One noteworthy phrase, marking the transition between the exposition and the development, actually incorporates all twelve notes of the chromatic scale and adds to the music's feeling of instability. Returning to the words of Michael Steinberg, the Finale "must at last be the force that stabilizes, sets solid ground under our feet, seeks to close wounds, and brings the voyager safely – if bruised – into port."