

The bulk of the movement involves the interplay of brief fragments of the themes presented during the exposition. The fairly simple cadenza is the only surviving solo cadenza Mozart wrote into a score. Usually, he either wrote out cadenzas separately or improvised them in performance. Generations of composers and pianists have taken advantage of the creative freedom allowed in the cadenza to supply their own.

The **second movement** is the only piece Mozart ever composed in F-sharp minor, the relative minor to A major. While the mood is extremely intense, the orchestration is quite light; and it is probable that the piano part was originally embellished with improvised ornamentation.

The sprightly rondo of the **finale** is a sharp contrast to the pathos of the preceding movement. It suggests a happy release from a dark night of the soul.

The soloist in this performance is Evgeny Kissin. He is accompanied by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Fabio Luisi.



University of the Third Age
Benalla & District Inc.



*Programme
Notes
26th April,
2024*

Acknowledgment of Sources

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Smyth | The Wreckers
The Guardian 2022
Lucy Caplan for the Boston Symphony Orchestra |
| Beethoven | Symphony No. 2
Sophia Philharmonic Orchestra Bulgaria – https://sofiaphilharmonic.com/
Timothy Judd – The Listener's Club |
| Mozart | Piano Concerto No. 23
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn for the North Carolina Symphony Orchestra 20
Classic FM Radio UK https://www.classicfm.com/ |

YouTube Links to Recordings

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Smyth | The Wreckers
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbpp2tiNCXk |
| Beethoven | Symphony No. 2
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdvcIE6kVuE&t=2127s |
| Mozart | Piano Concerto No. 23
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4S6UYv8-W4&t=711s |



About today's music and composers

Ethel Smythe – Overture to “The Wreckers”.



Ethel Mary Smyth was born in London on April 22, 1858, and died in Woking, Surrey, on May 8, 1944.

Smyth wrote her opera *The Wreckers* in 1902-04 originally in French, on a libretto by her frequent collaborator Henry Brewster. It was first produced in Leipzig two years later in German and at Covent

Garden in English in 1909.

A female composer in a time when women were thought to be incapable of writing good music, Smyth was bisexual, - an openly queer person who had relationships with Woolf and activist Emmeline Pankhurst, among others and an outspoken feminist and advocate for women's rights.

‘She was a stubborn, indomitable, unconquerable creature. Nothing could tame her, nothing could daunt her,’ said conductor Thomas Beecham, speaking in 1958 about the composer Ethel Smyth. “She is of the race of pioneers, of path-makers,” agreed her friend Virginia Woolf. “She has gone before and felled trees and blasted rocks and built bridges and thus made a way for those who come after her.”



A passionate activist ... Ethel Smythe at a 1912 meeting of the Women's Social and Political Union in London

Yet in other ways, Smyth embraced convention. Born to an affluent British family, she attended conservatory in Leipzig, where she crossed paths with composers including Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Antonín Dvořák, and Johannes Brahms. In the U.S., she cultivated friendships with elite figures of the arts and music world.

In the U.S., she cultivated friendships with elite figures of the arts and music world. She was, in effect, an insider-outsider: a rebelliously free spirit who also performed her music in Queen Victoria's drawing room, and who, in 1922, was named a Dame of the British Empire - the first composer to be made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

WA Mozart - Piano Concerto 23 in A major, K 488



The piano concertos of Mozart are one of the greatest examples of the blending of practical musicianship with sheer musical genius, and No. 23 is no exception. They run from mere childhood offerings, which are themselves still wonders to behold, via the great masterpieces of Mozart's Viennese years, right through to his final years, when his concertos were marked out as coming from the pen of a genius.

He composed his Piano Concerto No. 1 when he was eleven years old and Piano Concerto No. 27 when he was near death at the age of thirty-five. Piano Concerto No. 23 comes right smack-bang in that Viennese masterpiece period. It was probably written around the same time as his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* was premiered, and was almost certainly included in one of Mozart's numerous but necessary subscription concerts. Indeed, around twelve of the twenty-seven concertos were composed across a two-year period from 1784 to 1786, when Mozart would have been between twenty-eight and thirty. As with many of his piano concertos, it is a very positive-sounding work, nearly always trying to look on the bright side.

The A-major concerto, one of his most popular, is not only a powerfully emotional work—especially the second movement—but is also of historical interest. One of three concertos he was to perform in Vienna during the Lenten season of 1786, K. 488 was completed in March and was among the first of his works to make use of clarinets.

This concerto belongs to a group of five that Mozart dedicated to his early patron Joseph Wenzeslaus von Fürstenberg, the reigning Prince of Donaueschingen in southwest Germany, a well-known centre for the promotion of new music to this day. In a letter to the prince, Mozart reveals that these were works “for my own use and for a small group of music-loving friends”.

The **opening movement**, in the modified sonata form used for the classical concerto, comprises two lyrical principal themes—rather than the usual contrasting themes—separated by a more harmonically unstable bridge, plus a syncopated closing theme.



Joseph Wenzel zu Fürstenberg in 1772



The **first movement's** Allegro con brio erupts as a spirited, irrepressible force. It knocks us off our feet with an overwhelming energy unique to Beethoven. As this wild musical rollercoaster ride unfolds, listen to all of those swirling lines, sudden ferocious jabs, and defiant statements which seem

to overturn the elegant, well-balanced table of classicism.

This is music which rumbles and growls, pulling us through a series of modulations in the development section, and then arriving at a coda which amazingly pushes the limit even further (Listen to the passage beginning at 10:40). The final bars seem to place Bach counterpoint in the middle of a boisterous celebration.

The **second movement** (Larghetto) begins with a beautiful, flowing melody, unfolding as a quietly passionate dialogue between the strings and woodwinds. Listen to the way this initial statement develops into an increasingly complex conversation between instrumental voices. A series of far-flung adventures take this melody in unexpected directions.

Throughout the Second Symphony, there are moments of sudden volatility where the classical orchestra seems to be pushing beyond its limits. One example comes at the movement's climax, beginning around 16:08, where a motivic fragment takes on a life of its own, repeating persistently and rising as a defiant statement.

The **third movement** discards the minuet-trio model of Haydn. Instead, we get a full-fledged Scherzo, filled with wild frivolity. Here, the orchestral voices are engaged in boisterous play. The jokes continue in the exuberant **final movement** (Allegro molto), which begins with a musical "hiccup." In the final moments, listen carefully for the most extreme practical joke of all. The strings draw us into a mysterious, shivering, hushed tremolo, and then the other voices jump out, as if to yell, "boo!"

We listen to and watch a performance of the Symphony by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Christian Thielemann.



6.

Smyth wrote six operas, a Mass, countless chamber works and even a ballet, but she is best known today for her 1910 song *The March of the Women*, which became the official anthem of the suffragette movement.



The Wreckers - set in a remote corner of 18th-century Cornwall - was inspired by a trip to the Isles of Scilly in 1888. There, she came across what she later recalled as a "weirdest and most fascinating" sight: Piper's Hole, a coastal cave of "unearthly" strangeness.

She was further entranced upon learning some unsavoury local history: in the 18th century, coastal villagers would "wreck"

passing ships by luring them to the shore, murdering their crews, and plundering their valuables, invoking ancient salvage rights that allow them to murder a shipwrecked crew for profit. But when two of the community resist this and the strictures of their own roles, tragedy ensues.

Librettist Henry Brewster and Smyth were clear that they weren't making this a piece about the Cornish people and wrecking specifically," she says. "For them it was a symbol of Britain and its insularity."

"It's about the women in it finding their voice. Its central character, Thurza, tries to break free from the restricted world she is forced to live in. And Smyth subverts all the operatic themes. She made the moral heart of the opera a mezzo, a voice type normally consigned to the witches/bitches/breeches roles; and the soprano, Avis, is a really feisty character – not the classic transgressor saved by a prince charming".

We see and hear the overture to the opera performed by the Queer Urban Orchestra, a musical organization dedicated to the promotion of fine arts in the New York City metropolitan area. QUO was founded in July 2009 as planning meetings started for NYC's first orchestra specifically serving the LGBTQ community. Membership is open to all adult musicians regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Since their inaugural concert their membership has grown to 60 musicians.



3.

Ludwig van Beethoven Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 36



1802 was not a good year for Ludwig van Beethoven.

It was around this time that the 31-year-old Beethoven disclosed the persistent deterioration of his hearing to a childhood friend. In a letter to Franz Wegeler, a physician, he wrote of his fear and humiliation:

For almost two years I have ceased to attend any social functions, just because I find it impossible to say to people: I am deaf.

In October of 1802, Beethoven drafted the famous “Heiligenstadt Testament,” an unsent, private letter in which he reflected on his despair, admitted to thoughts of suicide, and then arrived at a life-affirming conclusion—that he would move forward and find meaning and solace in the creation of art.



“From today on, I will take a new path,” Beethoven told his piano student, Carl Czerny. This “new path” ushered in Beethoven’s “heroic” middle period, opening the door to Romanticism with ferocious and revolutionary new sounds, and dramatic, expanded forms which had never before been imagined.



Once Beethoven's residence now a museum in his honour

Heiligenstadt, now a suburb of Vienna, was a small, pastoral town where Beethoven spent six months at the recommendation of his otologist. This is where most of the Second Symphony was written.

Set in the triumphant, celebratory key of D major, the Symphony occupies a world far removed from Beethoven's personal darkness. It erupts as a force of nature, filled with spirited vitality, humour, and even frivolity. Hector Berlioz once remarked, “this

Symphony is smiling throughout.”

“Two worlds at once they view, Who stand upon the confines of the new,” wrote the musicologist George Grove in a couplet describing Beethoven's Second Symphony. Indeed, 4. this is music which glances backwards while looking forwards.



Interior of the Theater an der Wien 1803

Although soon eclipsed by the “Eroica,” the Second Symphony was considered a long and bewildering work when it was premiered at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna on 5 April 1803.

The program included Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto and the oratorio, Christ on the Mount of Olives, along with a repeat performance of the First Symphony.

Excerpts from two reviews give us a sense of how shocking this music was for the first audiences. One reviewer wrote,

“It is a noteworthy, colossal work, of a depth, power, and artistic knowledge like very few. It has a level of difficulty, both from the point of view of the composer and in regard to its performance by a large orchestra (which it certainly demands), quite certainly unlike any symphony that has ever been made known. It demands to be played again and yet again by even the most accomplished orchestra, until the astonishing number of original and sometimes very strangely arranged a great unity, just as the composer had in mind”.

Following a second performance in 1804, a Viennese critic for the ‘Zeitung fuer die Elegante Welt’ (Newspaper for the Elegant World) famously called the piece:

“a crass monster, a hideously writhing, wounded dragon that refuses to die and, though bleeding in the finale, furiously thrashes about with its stiffened tail”.

The Music



The symphony follows the classical four-movement cycle.

The introduction's thirty-three measures begin with a musical “call to order.” Then, amid an array of conversing voices, the music seems to search, as if unsure of the way forward.

As tension mounts, disparate elements gradually come together, and a majestic and momentous structure emerges. In the final bars of this introduction, you may be reminded of the massive sonic “pillars” which open Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. There is also an uncanny foreshadowing of the falling fourth motif we hear in the first climax of the Ninth Symphony's introduction.