

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born in Salzburg; January 27, 1756

Died in Vienna; December 5, 1791

Selections from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (“*The Abduction from the Seraglio*”), K. 384

Composed in 1781-1782.

Premiered on July 16, 1782 in Vienna.

Mozart’s creative passion was opera. By the time he bolted from the service of the archbishop of Salzburg (which city had no regular opera house) and moved to Vienna in May 1781, he had composed a dozen pieces for the stage; he was 25 years old. One of the decisive factors in quitting his Salzburg position was the tentative offer a month before of a commission to write a German comic opera from the National Singspiel Theater’s administrator and resident poet, Gottlieb Stephanie. The Theater had been established by Emperor Joseph II in 1776 to encourage the production of stage works in the native language, but the enterprise had limped along to that time largely with a few original but uninspired *Singspiels* (comic operas with spoken dialogue, similar to the English ballad opera or the Broadway musical comedy) and translations of French farces and vaudevilles. Stephanie had admired Mozart’s work since at least 1775, when he saw a production of *Il rè pastore* in Salzburg while touring the Continent in the entourage of the Archduke Maximilian, and he confirmed the order for the new opera at the end of July. He presented Mozart with a libretto titled *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (“*The Abduction from the Seraglio*”) closely based on a play by the Leipzig merchant Christoph Friedrich Bretzner, *Belmonte und Constanze*, which had been premiered in a musical setting by Johann André just two months before in Berlin. (Bretzner railed in the Leipzig press against “a certain individual, Mozart by name, in Vienna, who has had the audacity to misuse my *Belmonte und Constanze*,” but he had no legal recourse to regain any financial rights in the Viennese production in those pre-copyright times. He eventually changed his mind about Mozart’s *Die Entführung*, and even translated *Così fan tutte* into German in 1794.) The original schedule called for *Die Entführung* to be premiered in mid-September as part of the festivities surrounding the visit to Vienna of the Grand Duke (later Tsar) Paul Petrovich of Russia, so Mozart set to work immediately. The royal visit was postponed until November, however, and three of Gluck’s operas were staged for the event instead. Intrigues caused further delays in the premiere, until finally Joseph II himself ordered that the preparations be set into motion. *Die Entführung* was first heard at the Burgtheater in Vienna on July 16, 1782. It was an enormous hit, the greatest theatrical success of Mozart’s life. He even felt secure enough in his newfound notoriety to take Constanze Weber as his wife on August 4, 1782.

Die Entführung aus dem Serail (usually translated as “*The Abduction from the Seraglio*,” though Eric Blom’s “*The Elopement from the Harem*” is more faithful to the story) is set in 16th-century Turkey. Constanze, an Englishwoman, has been captured by pirates and sold to the Pasha Selim. Belmonte, Constanze’s lover, arrives to rescue her, but he is rebuffed by Osmin, the guardian of the harem (and Mozart’s greatest comic creation). Belmonte overhears an interview between the Pasha and Constanze in which, despite the threat of torture, she rejects the ruler’s love and vows to be faithful to Belmonte. Belmonte, inspired, effects an escape for Constanze, but they are caught and brought before the Pasha. He upbraids the lovers for their plot, but magnanimously forgives them and allows them to return home.

The brief Overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* both sets the sparkling mood for the comedy to follow and introduces the Turkish atmosphere appropriate to the plot. The first section bubbles with so much youthful excitement and colorful orchestration that Mozart boasted, “I don’t believe anyone could fall asleep, even if he hadn’t slept at all the night before.” The mid-section is given over to Belmonte’s air, *Hier soll ich dich denn sehen* (“*Here then I shall see you*”), which opens the first act. The fast music returns and in the opera goes directly into Belmonte’s song, but in concert comes to a full close with an ending provided by Ferruccio Busoni.

Constanze sings of her sadness in being separated from her lover, Belmonte, in the aria *Welcher Wechsel herrscht in meiner Seele* — “*What sadness has transformed my soul*.”

After Pasha Selim threatens Constanze when she will not give him her love, she vows to be true to Belmonte in the spectacular aria *Martern aller Arten*.

The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, timpani, percussion and strings

Duration: c. 26 minutes.

GUSTAV MAHLER

Born in Kalischt, Bohemia; July 7, 1860

Died in Vienna; May 18, 1911

Symphony No. 1 in D major

Composed 1883-1888, revised 1892-1893.

Premiered in Budapest on November 20, 1889, conducted by the composer.

Though he did not marry until 1902, Mahler had a healthy interest in the opposite sex, and at least three love affairs touch upon the First Symphony. In 1880, he conceived a short-lived but ferocious passion for Josephine Poisl, the daughter of the postmaster in his boyhood home of Iglau, and she inspired from him three songs and a cantata after Grimm, *Das klagende Lied* (“*Song of Lamentation*”), which contributed thematic fragments to the gestation of the Symphony. The second affair, which came early in 1884, was the spark that actually ignited the composition of the work. Johanne Richter possessed a numbing musical mediocrity alleviated by a pretty face, and it was because of an infatuation with this singer at the Cassel Opera, where Mahler was then conducting, that not only the First Symphony but also the *Songs of the Wayfarer* sprang to life. The third liaison, in 1887, came as the Symphony was nearing completion. Mahler revived and reworked an opera by Carl Maria von Weber called *Die drei Pintos* (“*The Three Pintos*,” two being impostors of the title character) and was aided in the venture by the grandson of that composer, also named Carl. During the almost daily contact with the Weber family necessitated by the preparation of the work, Mahler fell in love with Carl’s wife, Marion. Mahler was serious enough to propose that he and Marion run away together, but at the last minute she had a sudden change of heart and left Mahler standing, quite literally, at the train station. The emotional turbulence of all these encounters found its way into the First Symphony, especially the finale, but, looking back in 1896, Mahler put these experiences into a better perspective. “The Symphony,” he wrote, “begins where the love affair [with Johanne Richter] ends; it is based on the affair which preceded the Symphony in the emotional life of the composer. But the extrinsic experience became the occasion, not the message of the work.”

The Symphony begins with an evocation of a verdant springtime filled with the natural call of the cuckoo (solo clarinet) and the man-made calls of the hunt (clarinets, then trumpets). The main theme, which enters softly in the cellos after the wonderfully descriptive introduction, is based on the second of the *Songs of a Wayfarer*, *Ging heut’ Morgen übers Feld* (“*I Crossed the Meadow this Morn*”). This engaging, folk-like melody, with its characteristic interval of a descending fourth, runs through much of the Symphony to provide an aural link among its movements. The first movement is given over to this theme combined with the spring sounds of the introduction in a cheerful display of ebullient spirits into which creeps an occasional shudder of doubt.

The second movement, in a sturdy triple meter, is a dressed-up version of the Austrian peasant dance known as the *Ländler*, a type and style that finds its way into most of Mahler’s symphonies. The simple tonic-dominant accompaniment of the basses recalls the falling fourth of the opening movement, while the tune in the woodwinds resembles the *Wayfarer* song. (Note particularly the little run up the scale.) The gentle trio, ushered in by solo horn, makes use of the string glissandos that were so integral a part of Mahler’s orchestral technique.

The third movement begins and ends with a lugubrious, minor-mode transformation of the European folk song known most widely by its French title, *Frère Jacques*. It is heard initially in an eerie solo for muted string bass in its highest register, played above the tread of the timpani intoning the falling-fourth motive from the preceding movements. The middle of the movement contains a melody marked “Mit Parodie” (played “col legno” by the strings, i.e., tapping with the wood rather than the hair of the bow), and a simple, tender theme based on another melody from the *Wayfarer* songs, *Die zwei blauen Augen* (“*The Two Blue Eyes*”). The mock funeral march of this movement was inspired by a woodcut of Moritz von Schwind titled *How the Animals Bury the Hunter* from his *Munich Picture Book for Children*.

The finale, according to Bruno Walter, protégé and friend of the composer and himself a master conductor, is filled with “raging vehemence.” The stormy character of the beginning is maintained for much of the movement. Throughout, themes from earlier movements are heard again, with the hunting calls of the opening introduction given special prominence. The tempest is finally blown away by a great blast from the horns (“Bells in the air!” entreats Mahler) to usher in the triumphant ending of the work, a grand affirmation of joyous celebration.

The score calls for two piccolos, four flutes, four oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, seven horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

Duration: c. 58 minutes.