

## The Two Towers

Once more, the editors of **ON STAGE** have asked me to pen my thoughts, this time in anticipation of our September 2014 season of music at the Symphony Orchestra of India. And once more in service of the NCPA's mission to bring classical music to a wider audience through a genuine appreciation I am thankful for the opportunity and the continuing support of our readership.

How often we delight in an 'all Mozart' or 'all Beethoven' concert, and how often symphonic organizations across the globe delight in the guaranteed ticket sales as much as the audience delights in the glorious music. Why is that? Why is the effect not the same if we considered an 'all Bach' or an 'all Brahms' or an 'all Tchaikovsky' programme? It is a question of the sonic experience. Music must first and foremost move the heart; and then also in some measure move the intellect of the listener by audibly recognizable proof of skill, in formal architecture, tonal relationships and so forth. The blend of the two must be so pure and seamless, void of heavy handed expectation on either side, that the listener thoroughly enjoys the experience – without being assailed. Therefore the aggrandized, agonized spirit of Mahler or the intellectual highbrow of Bach is required by its nature – the very thing that makes it great - to be a challenge to the senses? This is not to say that the audiences of the 'classical' period were not challenged, but rather that music from this extraordinary era is pure and seamless and void of heavy handed expectation and allows complete, often transfixed enjoyment for long periods of time. I wondered whether it was wise to write on Mozart and Beethoven. After all, so much has already been written. But then, the compelling nature of these two life forces- these 'Two Towers' - made it impossible to resist. My fascination lies in the historical record and less in musical analyses.

### **Mozart**

By the time Mozart was writing the three works featured in our 'all Mozart' programme, life in Salzburg was already changing. The works come fairly close together, all written between 1775 (Violin Concerto) and 1779 (Sinfonia Concertante) with the Piano Concerto in the middle in 1777. All three have Mozart's unmistakable style, and do not display any indications that life for the composer might have become difficult, if not unbearable. In 1771 Hieronymus Colloredo was elected Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, defeating the widely popular dean of Salzburg, and thenceforward treated as an outsider with a coolness and reserve that only Salzburg can show. He was the last to hold the position, until 1803 when Salzburg was secularized under the advancement of the Napoleonic ideals that had swept Europe. Colloredo's predecessor, Prince Archbishop Sigismund of Schrattenbach was a different figure altogether. The Catholic church held an unassailable position under this lavishly projected, doctrinally conservative, old fashioned churchman, who believed in things as they should be, without being worried about trifles like practicality or finances. Under him, Leopold Mozart was able to finance tours, on which he took the young Wolfgang, gaining fame, enrichment, and supporting a network of musical patronage for those who played for the archbishop's household. Schrattenbach was not a musician, but was determined that lavish things should attend his exalted position – a policy from which the Mozart's benefitted. Colloredo, on the other hand, although he was an amateur violinist, was a deeply religious churchman intent on political, financial and religious reform. The Mass was shortened in favour of a simplified purer usage, (not good for musicians who set it to music). The finances fell off completely, and retiring court musicians were not replaced. Consequently, the music making at court fell into shambles, well chronicled in the official complaints of Leopold Mozart, and Wolfgang's position at court

was the source of enmity and struggle, since he could not support his artistic needs and was noticeably and frequently absent. The finest early symphonies and concerti come from this period, with an unlikely spike in religious music in 1779, perhaps prompted by a scolding. So we might owe these marvelous works to their historical background and the fact that Mozart was more moved to hone his instrumental style than to write in service of the church. The Violin Concerto in G (*Strassburg* – named for the lively tune in the last rondeau) is one of the more often played Mozart concerti. The Piano Concerto No. 9 (*Jeunehomme*) as well as the *Sinfonia Concertante* are both marvelous revelations in E-flat major, a key in which Mozart consistently conveyed extraordinary drama and beauty. His first and three other symphonies, horn concerti, divertimenti and the *Magic Flute* all reveal themselves in E-flat. Albert Einstein called the piano concerto Mozart's *Eroica*, perhaps because of the key the two pieces share, or perhaps because of the early and unusual entrance of the piano, innovative and daring – or perhaps because Mozart was 21 years old at the time. At any rate, the title *Jeunehomme* is a misspelling of the last name Jenamy. Victoire Jenamy was a young girl Mozart had met in 1773.

### **Beethoven**

With Beethoven, we also see the decline and secularization of Princely Power. The Beethoven family that had moved to Bonn from Malines with Grand Elector Clemens August of Bavaria would be present two generations later to see the complete dissolution of the Grand Electors of Cologne. The Elector Maximilian Franz – the last real power broker in that position – was a patron to Ludwig in his youth. In 1787 at the urging of good friend Count Waldstein, Maximilian Franz allowed Beethoven to leave Bonn for a much longed for trip to Vienna. Beethoven planned the trip to Vienna primarily to seek out Mozart and perhaps engage in some lessons with him. There was a fateful meeting, in which Mozart was duly impressed with Beethoven's pianism and inventive improvisation. 1787 is a year marked with interest for researchers. It is the year that Beethoven met Mozart, but it is also the year that Beethoven's beloved mother died, forcing an untimely return to Bonn and cutting off any chance to forge any relationship between our 'two towers'. How we all wonder where this would have led. This blow of fate was only made worse by the drunken behavior of his father, which became worse until the man's death in 1791. This would mark the end of the Bonn years and the psychological release in moving to Vienna forever, but too late to connect with Mozart. Meanwhile, in 1787, Goethe had penned his play *Egmont*, for which Beethoven would later compose incidental music. The famous overture represents all the power and inventiveness of Beethoven's style, and is a fine complement to the music of the *Eroica* and the Fifth symphony. Whether writing a symphony or incidental music, Beethoven is completely obsessed with dramatic force and rhythmic tautness. Listeners will recognize the Beethovenian signature of 'di-di-di-dah' – as prevalent in the fifth symphony as *Egmont*.

From the patronage of Elector Maximilian Franz – to the patronage of Prince Lobkowitz and Archduke Rudolf in Vienna, Beethoven was to be present at the dissolution of the entire Austrian aristocracy, as Napoleonic forces swept through, setting up puppet states as they went. The *Eroica* Symphony and the *Emperor* Piano Concerto – are products of this period and though their premiers and their dedications were to great Austrians, their revolution and their innovation - is decidedly Napoleonic. Following its completion in August 1804 Beethoven presented the *Eroica* in Prince Lobkowitz' living room in several private patronage performances before its official public performance on April 7, 1805 at the famous *Teater an der Wien*. Although there are still critical errors in the score, hotly debated amongst musicians, Beethoven had an unusually extraordinary chance to correct and revise his work. Lobkowitz

paid for the rights to the work for six months, and the ‘fully paid-up’ orchestra rehearsed and performed several times during this period.”

Everything we know about this piece suggests cosmic changes in the musical landscape, and it would ever change how people perceived symphonic writing, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, despite Beethoven telling us that he was ‘embarking upon a new road’ – the musical form and content came from a boiling cauldron of gold that was put to the furnace years earlier. The ‘new road’ is better explained as the sentiments of a man whom, close to suicide, pulls back from the brink and channels energies into artistic endeavour. The new road is life itself after the outpouring of the *Heiligenstadt* testament, where Beethoven lays bare his personal struggle with deafness and ponders life as it is, and life as it might have been. The force of the pain and struggle is surely the source of this extraordinary music, and how unlucky for him and how lucky for us. The “marche funèbre” of the second movement is without doubt the Requiem he never wrote. Whether it was for the grand man to whom the symphony is dedicated or in memoriam for his own condition, it eloquently contains all the ingredients of a first rate requiem.

In 1803 Beethoven took on Archduke Rudolf as a student. The two became fast friends and despite considerable political instability, Rudolf still paid towards Beethoven’s needs, famously rounding up support and a princely sum of florins so that Beethoven would remain in Vienna and not take a position offered in Germany. The dedication of the *Emperor* Piano Concerto along the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, the *Archduke* Trio and *Missa Solemnis* is a completely understandable reciprocal devotion. The Piano Concerto comes from the same 1809-12 period in which the *Egmont* music was written. Meanwhile, the defeat of Napoleon and the surrender of France in 1814 after nearly 24 years of continuous war led the way for the Congress of Vienna – which Beethoven must have witnessed. It reestablished governance that had no interest in *republicanism* or *enlightenment*. As Europe slipped back into the bad habits that would eventually lead again to world war, Beethoven seems to have his soul fixed on a different path. Later works would have us revel in harmonic experimentation, while he - now completely deaf - would hold firm in that awesome silence to the lofty ideals of Brotherhood and Peace.