About the Music.

Few musical figures can compare with the career, output, and popularity of the Pesaro-born **Gioachino Rossini.** The famously swift-working composer produced nearly forty stage works for the major Italian and French opera houses of his era, This enterprise occupied Rossini for nearly two decades before he settled into an early but admirably luxurious retirement at age thirty-seven. His works represent a game-changing mixture of craftsmanship and innovation in nineteenth-century opera. Their frequent revival and reevaluation since the late twentieth century ensures that one of opera's most significant legacies will remain strong into the future.

Since Rossini left little in the way of purely symphonic music, his opera overtures have become concert staples. The **Overture** to his 1813 *dramma giocoso* ***L'Italiana in Algeri*** (*The Italian Girl in Algiers*) wonderfully encapsulates Rossini's style. Its delicate opening for pizzicato strings conceals a series of impish *buffo* outbursts and rollicking surges. Woodwinds soon introduce several vocal themes from the opera, which Rossini deftly builds into a succession of mini-climaxes before reaching the final culmination.

As one of America's most enduring and frequently performed composers, **Samuel Barber** blazed a formative trail amid tradition and innovation in twentieth-century music. Born a prodigy to a musically gifted family in West Chester, Pennsylvania, he produced an astonishingly varied array of works for an equally distinguished roster of collaborators and won a range of accolades, including two Pulitzer Prizes for music. Though scores such as *Adagio for Strings* and *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* resound powerfully in the public ear, Barber's catalog abounds with other such symphonic treasures as the **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.**

Most accounts of the Concerto's genesis have relied on anecdotes recently dispelled by fresh evidence from the correspondence of Barber and other parties involved. The work began as a commission in 1939 from industrialist Samuel Fels for Iso Briselli, one of Barber's fellow graduates in the inaugural cohort of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. After negotiating the Concerto's scope and receiving half the $1,000 fee, Barber set to work on the score that summer in Europe, intending for Briselli to debut it the following year with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Though the violinist responded favorably to the first two movements, concerns from Fels and Briselli's coach, Albert Meiff, about the heft and technical merits of Barber's conception started to unravel the project. Ultimately, Briselli's rejection of the third movement on the grounds of its brevity (not its performability, as is frequently claimed) led him to step away from the collaboration, though Barber continued working on the score.

Fritz Reiner conducted a private performance of the Concerto at Curtis in 1940 before soloist Albert Spalding debuted it with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy in February 1941. It soon gained a foothold in the repertoire as one of the most frequently performed twentieth-century violin concertos.

The opening *Allegro* movement plunges straight into the main melodic ideas, bypassing a traditional introduction. The material relies on a variety of short, expansive musical themes that ascend, descend, and curve in waves, introduced and developed along the lines of sonata form. Throughout the first movement, the violinist stands out in varied cadenza-like episodes that alternate with the full ensemble, with much spirited writing for the woodwind section. The middle *Andante* movement swells with Brahmsian lyricism, the orchestra introducing the main theme before the soloist further transforms it. Then, the breakneck *Presto in moto perpetuo* tests the limits of the performer, who plays for all but roughly two dozen measures of the movement, with triplets and double stops demanding tremendous dexterity.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed his three final symphonies — No. 39 in E-flat major, No. 40 in G minor, and the **Symphony No. 41 in C major** (the **"Jupiter"**) — in a creative burst during the summer of 1788. This trio looms large in the repertoire of any musician, commanding evergreen respect and wonderment. Even a composer as formidable as Richard Strauss (a passionate devotee of "the divine Mozart") once said after a performance of Symphony No. 41, "We can still all of us learn something from that."

Despite their renown, much about the final symphonies remains shrouded in conjecture. Early performances are also difficult to confirm, given how concert program advertisements of the time listed orchestral works under vague titles. An intended series of concerts by Mozart at a new casino in Vienna's Spiegelgasse, which were to have featured these late symphonies, may or may not have taken place. Adding to the mystery, this period witnessed various misfortunes in Mozart's life, among them depression, a reversal of steady income amid various downturns in the fortunes of the Holy Roman Empire and its capital city of Vienna, and the death of an infant daughter. Such tragedies make the final symphonies all the more striking in their scope and tone.

The famous nickname of "Jupiter" does not stem from Mozart but was likely devised by impresario Johann Peter Salomon. Such praise may seem like persiflage, but the symphony's majestic qualities are beyond dispute. The first movement, *Allegro vivace,* presents one of Mozart's most elevated treatments of sonata form, balancing regal and lyrical thematic ideas, not to mention quotations from his own aria "Un bacio di mano," with celestial composure. The slower

Andante cantabile movement unfolds with remarkable delicacy, evoking the arias of Mozart's late operas, with a persistent undercurrent of discontent that is eventually quelled. Gaiety resumes with the sprightly *Menuetto* movement, in which Mozart masterfully uses strings, woodwinds (notably without clarinets), and horns in ever-more-innovative combinations. All this prepares the *Molto allegro* finale, which opens with a famous rising four-note theme. Soon, however, Mozart juggles four other ideas around it, creating one of the contrapuntal miracles of the eighteenth century.

— Ryan Prendergast