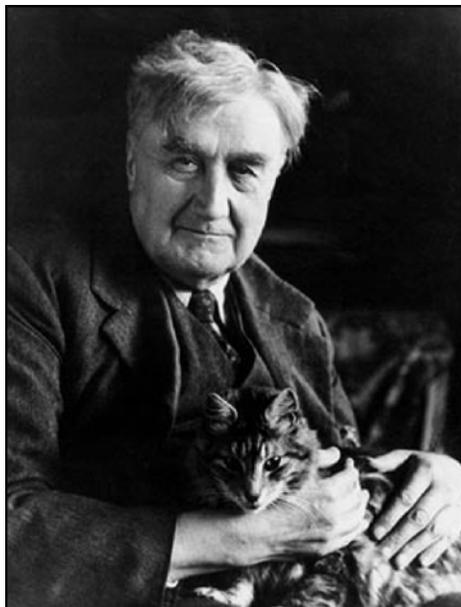


Classics 4: Program Notes

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Ralph Vaughan Williams

*Born in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, October 12, 1872;
died in London, August 26, 1958*



Painfully aware that England's musical reputation had suffered greatly since the death of Purcell in 1595, Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries sought to reestablish a national voice by turning to music of former periods of glory. One way in which he became exposed to vast amounts of old music was by sifting through folk song and church collections for the creation of a new edition of the *English Hymnal*. The daunting job detracted from work on his own original compositions but served him well in the end. "I wondered then if I was wasting my time. But I know now that two years of close association with some of the best (as well as some of the worst) tunes in the world was a better musical education than any amount of sonatas and fugues."

The *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* came about as a direct result of that task. Vaughan Williams had found nine melodies by Tallis in the 1597 *English Psalter*, the third of which—a melody in the Phrygian mode—inspired his first great orchestral work. Vaughan Williams clearly saw something in the melody that had little to do with its original text: "Why fumeth in sight: the Gentiles spite, In fury raging stout?" His *Fantasia* exudes peace and serenity—perhaps poignancy, but hardly any "raging."

He completed the work in June 1910 and conducted the London Symphony in its first performance at the Three Choirs Festival on September 6 in Gloucester Cathedral. The *Fantasia* caused a sensation, bringing him national, then international recognition. One of the contributing factors to its great initial success was Vaughan Williams's foreknowledge of the acoustics of the cathedral. He had in mind not only the resonance of the large space, but also the style of Renaissance church music consisting of spatially separated choirs. The *Fantasia* is scored for two main groups—a small string ensemble and a full string orchestra, from which a solo string quartet is extracted, sometimes forming a third group.

The piece begins with a magical narrowing wedge of chords, from which the Tallis tune enters in fragments before coming together in the cellos, violas, and second violins. A second version of the melody, now with violins, leads to an interlude in which the two "choirs" are treated responsorially. Members of the solo quartet, led off by the viola, launch a more active central section, playing variants of the Tallis theme. The music builds to an impassioned climax, following which the two choirs answer one another with extreme dynamic shifts and striking harmonic contrasts. The piece subsides with fragments of the Tallis melody, ending with its last sweet chord fading away to silence.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe

Scored for strings

Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 54

Robert Schumann

Born in Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810; died in Endenich, near Bonn, July 29, 1856

Schumann's Piano Concerto began its existence in 1841 as a one-movement *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra in A minor. The composer's wife Clara, one of the most important piano virtuosos of the nineteenth century, tried it out at a private rehearsal with orchestra at the Leipzig Gewandhaus just two weeks before their first child was born. Satisfied with the piece, Schumann tried to get it published, but firms were just not interested in a one-movement piece for piano and orchestra. Schumann understood that it would be marketable only if he expanded it into a concerto and so in 1845 he added two movements: an Intermezzo and a Finale.



Clara gave the first performance of the completed Concerto from the manuscript, with her husband conducting, in Dresden on December 4, 1845. She played it again in Leipzig on January 1, 1846, with Mendelssohn conducting, and soon thereafter in Prague and Vienna. The highly successful Concerto was soon adopted by other great pianists and became one of Schumann's most frequently performed works even during his lifetime.

It would be impossible to determine just by hearing the Piano Concerto that the second and third movements were composed four years after the first. Schumann not only tied the movements together stylistically, but also carefully unified them with motivic references. Following the example of Beethoven's last two piano concertos, Schumann introduces the soloist directly: the

Allegro affettuoso begins with a brilliant cascade of chords by the soloist before the oboe enters with the pensive main theme. In both the second and third movements fragmentary links to this theme can be detected.

The first movement loosely adheres to traditional sonata form, but Schumann chose not to include the opening tutti (full ensemble) exposition of a Classic concerto, in keeping with the somewhat reduced role of the orchestra throughout the Concerto. The middle section presents the main theme in the remote key of A-flat major, in a fantasia style befitting the movement's

origins. This lyrical episode is broken off by a turbulent developmental section based on the opening piano cascade, followed by a grand version of the principal theme. The recapitulation, approached by the slowing and quieting of the musical forces, closely follows the plan of the exposition. Schumann wrote out the elaborate solo cadenza, taking care to keep it thematically consistent with the whole. The orchestra rejoins to close the movement with a fast coda.

The relaxed Intermezzo provides a lovely contrast to the grandeur of the first movement. The piano and strings engage in a dialogue soon joined by the winds; a wonderful highlight later appears in the form of a tender solo for the cellos. Hints of the first movement occur near the end, leading without pause to the last movement.

The joyous main theme of the glorious finale, announced by the piano in A major, is motivically related to the main theme of the first movement but is livelier in character. The second subject contains the infamous but delightful syncopated rhythm that continues to disarm performers. An observer at one of Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann's rehearsals for the Leipzig performance declared that "the passage in the finale with the puzzling rhythms did not go at all!" Schumann develops the themes in the finale elaborately and brilliantly. A long coda propels this irresistibly optimistic movement to its conclusion.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, "Jupiter"

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Born in Salzburg, January 27, 1756; died in Vienna, December 5, 1791

Incredible as it seems, Mozart composed his last three consummate symphonies within a three-month period in the summer of 1788: the E-flat major Symphony was completed on June 26, just four days after he had completed the Piano Trio, K. 542; the G minor Symphony on July 25, just eleven days after the Piano Trio, K. 548; and the *Jupiter* Symphony in C major on August 10. The myth that these symphonies were not composed for any



specific occasion—but rather "for art's sake"—arose out of the lack of documentation from the composer's own pen or from corroborating concert announcements or reviews. Mozart's chief correspondent, his father Leopold, had died the previous year, so the flow of informative letters stopped. Nor was he on the best of terms with his sister, another potential source of information. Furthermore, symphonies were typically advertised without specific identification—"A symphony by Mozart" usually sufficed. And, many of the concerts Mozart arranged were private, and consequently rarely reported.

Having painstakingly sifted the evidence, Neal Zaslaw and other Mozart scholars have argued conclusively that it would have gone utterly against Mozart's nature and practice to compose

anything without a commission, planned performance, or financially productive publication in mind. They have also documented that occasions for performance of these symphonies did exist, that they were indeed performed, and that Mozart must have heard some if not all three. One “occasion” was a series of 1788 concerts that H. C. Robbins Landon has convincingly shown to have taken place, contrary to most commentaries. Other occasions for which they might have been written include an aborted visit to London in 1789, a later tour of Germany that probably included performances of some if not all three symphonies under Mozart’s guidance, and concerts he gave in Frankfurt and Mainz in 1790. Several sets of manuscript orchestral parts still exist in various European libraries, providing further evidence of performances in Mozart’s lifetime, which he may or may not have heard.

Mozart’s financial hardship during this time is apparent in his heartbreaking pleas to Michael Puchberg for loans and his dismal financial returns from concerts, tours, publishers, and visits to royalty. Though distressed on this front and annoyed at his lack of recognition in Vienna, Mozart was not contemplating his own mortality—he was looking for the next opportunity just around the bend. Expecting to live into the nineteenth century, he had no idea the C major Symphony would be his last, but he could hardly have left a more summarizing and at the same time forward-thinking work to conclude his symphonic career. According to Mozart’s son, as recorded in the travel diaries of London publisher Vincent Novello and his wife Mary, the C major Symphony was nicknamed *Jupiter* by London concert manager Johann Peter Salomon, whose motivation remains unknown.

The opening theme of the first movement follows one of Mozart’s favorite patterns, one he had picked up from Johann Christian Bach and had begun using as early as his First Symphony: an energetic gesture, followed by a soft, almost pleading phrase. Also of note toward the close of the movement is Mozart’s self-quotation from an arietta he had written a year earlier, “Un bacio di mano,” K. 541, to be inserted in Pasquale Anfossi’s opera *Le gelosie fortunate*. By its inclusion in the Symphony, the music to the words “You are a little dense, my dear Pompeo; go and study the way of the world,” has been raised to a lofty level.

The other-worldliness of the slow movement is brought about partly by the use throughout of muted strings and the absence of trumpets and timpani. Mendelssohn was delighted when he discovered that the masterstroke of the main theme reappearing just before the final cadential section was an afterthought—Mozart had added an extra leaf in the autograph score at that point just to include it.

Mozart’s graceful minuet is almost completely derived from its opening theme, remarkable for its little chromatic descent, which later becomes so contrapuntally entwined that the world of the dance is left far behind. Mozart bases the little melodic figure in the more lightly textured trio on the same descent, now slightly embellished. The loud outburst in the trio’s second half seems to preview the main motive of the finale.

This opening four-note motive (C–D–F–E), having originated in Gregorian chant, was well known in Mozart’s day as the start of the hymn *Lucis creator*. Mozart employed it in several earlier vocal and instrumental compositions, as did numerous other composers who found it extremely useful for combining and developing. Mozart takes this motive along with a wealth of other ideas and combines them in a contrapuntal tour de force that concludes with a

magnificent fugal coda. Little wonder that the Symphony achieved celebrity across Europe as “the symphony with the fugue.” This crowning movement firmly establishes the trend away from conventional “tossed off” symphony closings and points to the symphony of the future in which the finale could be as forceful as the traditionally weighty first movement.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe

Scored for flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

The Great Name Change

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wolfgang Amadeo Mozart". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The word "Wolfgang" is written in a larger, more prominent hand than "Amadeo", and "Mozart" is written in a similar style to "Amadeo". There is a decorative flourish at the end of the signature.

Mozart was baptized *Joannes Chrisost[omus] Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart* on January 28, 1756, yet already in February his father was circulating his name as *Joannes*

Chrisostomos, Wolfgang, Gottlieb, substituting the German form *Gottlieb* for the Greek *Theophilus*. Thus began a series of variants of which Wolfgang himself became the greatest instigator. Well known for his love of word play, he delighted in signing his name in different languages and in anagrams. Beginning in 1770 he became somewhat attached to *Wolfgango Amadeo Mozart*, but from 1777 onward he almost invariably signed his name *Wolfgang Amadè* (or *Amadé*) Mozart.

Though it is unclear why he adopted *Amadè*, which retains the meaning of the Greek *Theophilus*, it is quite clear that he rarely used the Latin form *Amadeus*. When he did so, as in a 1774 letter to his sister, it was in jest. Mozart biographer Maynard Solomon believes that the world adopted *Amadeus* following Breitkopf & Härtel’s widely circulated 1798–1806 edition of Mozart’s works, *Oeuvres complètes de Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. Given nineteenth-century academia’s penchant for things Latin, it is not surprising that *Amadeus* stuck. (For more on Mozart’s name, including where and why Mozart used the little-known variant *Adam*, see Chapter 18 of Solomon’s 1995 Mozart biography.)

It may take time for some to get used to, but in 2001 we at the Stockton Symphony, along with many arts organizations at home and abroad, adopted the form Mozart most favored, *Wolfgang Amadè Mozart*.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe