

***Symphony No. 39 in E-flat Major, K. 543***  
**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

Written: 1788

Movements: Four

Style: Classical

Duration: 26 minutes

Given today's financial climate, Mozart's situation in 1788 has added poignancy. The prospect of a new, lucrative job had just fallen through. Emperor Joseph's court composer had just died and Mozart was hoping to be the replacement. The emperor did give Mozart a job, but it wasn't what he was expecting. He was to write little dance tunes for the court for disappointingly small pay: "too much for what I do; too little for what I could do." In order to economize, Mozart moved his family to smaller accommodations further away from the center of activity: "I consider this will do equally well, if not better, for I have little to do in the town, and without the hindrance of numerous visitors I shall have more time for work . . . while these rooms will be cheaper and pleasanter, too. . ."

In spite of his economizing, Mozart was desperately in need of cash. In June he wrote to his fellow Mason Michael Puchberg, almost begging for a loan:

"If you would be so kind, so friendly, as to lend me the sum of one or two thousand gulden for a period of one or two years, at suitable interest, you would be doing me a most radical service! You will no doubt yourself realize and acknowledge that it is inconvenient, nay, impossible, to live from one installment of income to another! Without a certain necessary capital sum it is impossible to keep one's affairs in order. Nothing can be done with nothing!"

In spite of his straightened circumstances, Mozart was churning out music at a furious rate. In the space of just over two months he wrote the three symphonies, the last he would ever write, that are the crowning achievements of his entire symphonic output. They may have been

for a series of subscription concerts scheduled for the summer, but there is no record of them actually happening. In addition, there is no record of the first performance of any of these symphonies or, indeed, of *any* performance of them during the remaining years of his life.

You might expect Mozart's music from such gloomy circumstances to be gloomy itself. Not so! Instead, he gives us the full range of classical emotions in those three symphonies. The first movement of his *Symphony in E-flat* begins with a slow and dramatic introduction, itself a rarity for a symphony by Mozart. This leads to a faster section that begins with a hush but develops into downright ebullience. The slow second movement begins with a simple little melody and then shifts to a more impassioned second theme. The third movement is a robust dance. The central section, with its duet of clarinets, resembles an Austrian *ländler*. The finale, with just one theme, is full of light humor and joy.

On June 27, the day after he completed this symphony, Mozart again wrote to his friend Puchberg:

"I have not the heart to enter your presence as I am obliged to tell you frankly that I cannot possibly pay back so soon the sum you lent me, and must beg you to have patience with me! I am very sorry that as things are you cannot help me as I could wish. My circumstances are such that I must absolutely get money. But, good God! -- in whom am I to put my trust?" And so, Mozart's money problems persisted until the end of his life. Fortunately for us, this didn't seem to hinder his genius.

*Never Far Away*

**Bright Sheng (1955B)**

Written: 2008

Movements: Three

Style: Contemporary

Duration: 22 minutes

This will come as no surprise to friends and alumni of the University of Michigan: there is a genius living in Ann Arbor. Since 1995, Bright Sheng has been a member of the composition faculty at the University of Michigan. Since 2003 he has been the Leonard Bernstein Distinguished University Professor of Music. In November 2001, Bright Sheng received the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, the so-called AGenius Award. The Foundation noted that Sheng is a fresh voice in cross-cultural music . . . an innovative composer who merges diverse musical customs in works that transcend conventional aesthetic boundaries.

Bright Sheng was born in Shanghai and began piano studies at the age of four with his mother. During the infamous Cultural Revolution, when he was just fifteen, he was sent to the Chinese province of Qinghai. While there, he worked as a pianist and percussionists in a folk music and dance troupe. When China's universities reopened in 1978, he was one of the first students accepted by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He moved to New York in 1982 and studied at Queens College and Columbia University. He studied with George Perle, Hugo Weisgall, Chou Wen-chung, Jack Beeson, and Mario Davidovsky. He also studied conducting and composition with Leonard Bernstein privately until Bernstein's death in 1990. Bright Sheng provides the following commentary on *Never Far Away*.

In linguistics, pidgins and creoles refer to languages developed out of necessity by

people who do not share a common tongue in a specific geographic area, a kind of >contact language.= At this initial state, the communication (called pidgin) can be quite simple, only to fulfill the needed verbal interaction. Yet once the language is used long enough, especially when children learn it as their first language, it can develop into an affluent language with a far more complex structure and richer vocabularyCthe emergence of a creole.

Sometimes I feel it might be appropriate to apply this linguistic phenomenon to my compositional approachCan evolving musical style, fused from several different ones, expressive enough for me to comfortably and effectively communicate my musical thoughts with the listener, while each musical creole is personal, depending on the sources from which it was drawn.

*Moonlight Shadows* [the first movement] is inspired by a Chinese folk song on a young girl=s longing, under the moonlight, for her faraway lover. *The Drunken Fisher* [the second movement] is inspired by a Chinese classical instrumental work, of the same title, written for *Qin*, a seven-string zither, portraying a tipsy fisherman=s sentiments returning home at sunset while rowing a fishing boat. A three-note pentatonic motif is used in different ways throughout the third movement, therefore the title “*Doctored Pentatonics.*”

If your native culture is still the inspiration of your work, you are never far away from home.

*Never Far Away* was co-commissioned by the San Diego Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, the Grand Rapids Symphony and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and written

for Yolanda Kondonassis. The premiere performance took place on October 24, 2008, by the San Diego Symphony, conducted by Jahja Ling, with the subsequent performances on January 22, 2009, by the Dallas Symphony, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, and this evening by the Grand Rapids Symphony, conducted by Bright Sheng, all with Yolanda Kondonassis as the soloist, to whom the work is dedicated.

*8 2009 John P. Varineau and Bright Sheng*

***Mr. Tambourine Man***  
**John Corigliano (1938- )**  
Written: 2003  
Movements: Seven  
Style: Contemporary  
Duration: 35 minutes

When John Corigliano started composing, the American music scene was ripe for a new direction. Audiences were tired of composers who seemed to write only for themselves. As Corigliano put it, “When you have a philosophy that you don't give a damn what the audience thinks, when . . . you're not talking to people and they know you're not talking to them, they go away.” Corigliano has a different philosophy: “I think it is the job of every composer to reach out to his audience with all the means at his disposal.@” He provides the following comments about *Mr. Tambourine Man*:

When Sylvia McNair asked me to write her a major song cycle for Carnegie Hall, she had only one request: to choose an American text. I have set only four poets in my adult compositional life: Stephen Spender, Richard Wilbur, Dylan Thomas (whose major works generated the oratorio *A Dylan Thomas Trilogy*) and William M. Hoffman. . . . “aside from asking Bill to create a new text, I had no ideas.

Except that I had always heard, by reputation, of the high regard accorded the folk-ballad singer/songwriter Bob Dylan. But I was so engaged in developing my orchestral technique during the years when Dylan was heard by the rest of the world that I had never heard his songs. So I bought a collection of his texts, and found many of them to be every bit as beautiful and as immediate as I had heard, and surprisingly well suited to my own musical language. I then contacted Jeff Rosen, his manager, who approached Bob Dylan with the idea of re-setting his poetry to my music.

I do not know of an instance in which this has been done before (which was part of what appealed to me), so I needed to explain that these would be in no way arrangements, or variations, or in any way derivations of the music of the original songs, which I decided to not hear before the cycle was complete. Just as Schumann or Brahms or Wolf had reinterpreted in their own musical styles the same Goethe text, I intended to treat the Dylan lyrics as the poems I found them to be. Nor would their settings make any attempt at pop or rock writing. I wanted to take poetry I knew to be strongly associated with popular art and readdress it in terms of concert art—crossover in the opposite direction, one might say. Dylan granted his permission, and I set to work.

I chose seven poems for what became a thirty-five minute cycle. Prologue: Mr. Tambourine Man, in a fantastic and exuberant manner, precedes five searching and reflective monologues that form the core of the piece; and ‘Epilogue: Forever Young,’ makes a kind of folk-song benediction after the cycle's close. Dramatically, the inner five songs trace a journey of emotional and civic maturation, from the innocence of “Clothes Line” through the beginnings of awareness of a wider world (‘Blowin' in the Wind’), through the political fury of ‘Masters of War,’ to a premonition of an apocalyptic future (‘All Along the Watchtower’), culminating in a

vision of a victory of ideas ('Chimes of Freedom'). Musically, each of the five songs introduces an accompanimental motive that becomes the principal motive of the next. The descending scale introduced in 'Clothes Line' resurfaces as the passacaglia which shapes 'Blowin' in the Wind.' The echoing pulse-notes of that song harden into the hammered ostinato under 'Masters of War'; the stringent chords of that song's finale explode into the raucous accompaniment under 'All Along the Watchtower'; and that song's repeated figures dissolve into the bell-sounds of 'Chimes of Freedom.'

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