

Overture to “Euryanthe”

Carl Maria von Weber (1786—1826)

Written: 1821

Movements: One

Style: Early romantic

Duration: Ten minutes

Carl Maria von Weber was one of the first German Romantic composers of the nineteenth century. Like many other Romantics, Weber was involved in a wide variety of musical pursuits and dabbled in literature as well. He was one of the greatest pianists—and guitarists!—of his generation. As a conductor, he was one of the first to conduct standing and with a baton. From contemporary accounts it seems that he was also the sort of conductor whose countenance on the podium transfixed players and audience alike. When Weber wrote about music, he campaigned for a distinctively “German” style of composition. Unfortunately, like so many other great composers like Mozart, Chopin, and Schubert, he died while still in his thirties.

Der Freischütz is Weber’s most successful opera. It tells the story of the young hunter Max, who tries to prove himself as a great sharpshooter before he can marry his beloved Agathe. In the famous Wolf’s Glen scene, Max makes a bargain with evil and forges seven magic bullets. Six of those bullets are guaranteed to hit their target, but the seventh belongs to the Devil and will go where he wills it. Sure enough, in the shooting competition the first six bullets hit their mark, but when the prince asks Max to shoot a dove in flight, the bullets heads straight for Agatha. Her bridal veil deflects it and kills Max’s competitor Kaspar instead.

The *Overture to Der Freischütz* begins mysteriously and includes hunting calls from the horns as well as the ominous harmonies from the Wolf’s Glen scene. The first theme in the faster section comes from the anxious aria that Max sings in the first act. The more hopeful

second theme is the one associated with Agathe. Like the opera, the overture portrays the battle between good and evil. Fortunately, both end triumphantly.

Weber's operas are really the foundation of German romantic operas. When Beethoven heard *Der Freischütz*, he commented, "I never could have believed it of the poor weak little manikin. Weber must write operas now; nothing but operas, one after another."

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