



MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Sunday, April 12, 2015 at 4:00 P.M.

Howard Community College

Columbia, Maryland

First Lieutenant Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

State of the Art

Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

Overture to *The Barber of Seville*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

Violin Concerto No. 3 in G, K. 216

Allegro

Adagio

Rondeau: Allegro

SSgt Sheng-Tsung Wang, soloist

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 2 in D, Opus 36

Adagio; Allegro con brio

Larghetto

Scherzo; Trio

Allegro molto

The U.S. Marine Band will perform Sunday, April 19 at 2:00 P.M. in the Mount Pleasant High School Auditorium in Wilmington, Delaware. The program will include works by Dukas, Rodgers, Prokofiev, and Williams.

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PROGRAM NOTES

State of the Art

Gioachino Rossini and the opera, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the concerto, Ludwig van Beethoven and the symphony: these three masters established the “state of the art” for these genres during their lifetimes. Rossini set the standard in opera by composing nearly forty of them in half as many years, dominating the scene in Italy for several decades and enduring in popularity today. Mozart excelled in every genre of music of his time, including the concerto, composing twenty-seven for piano and five for violin, both instruments he played fluently. Beethoven’s work is more concentrated; with only nine symphonies, he forever altered expectations so that every symphonic composer who followed him would stand in his shadow. The three “state of the art” pieces on this afternoon’s program have withstood the test of time, continuing to delight and move us today.

Overture to *The Barber of Seville*

Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868)

Not all composers featured in today’s concert halls found fame and material wealth during their lifetimes. Luckily for Gioachino Rossini, he was beloved by the audiences of his day, making him one of the most popular and wealthy composers of the early nineteenth century. Extraordinarily prolific, Rossini wrote many of his thirty-nine operas very quickly, including *The Barber of Seville*, which he claimed to have completed in thirteen days. Despite an opening night fiasco filled with onstage accidents and rowdy supporters of Rossini’s rival in the audience, *The Barber of Seville* became a great success, even earning high praise from later Italian opera master Giuseppe Verdi as “the most beautiful comic opera ever written.”

The opera sets the first part of the *Figaro* trilogy by playwright Pierre Beaumarchais, the same group of plays which inspired Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*. Count Almaviva schemes to court the young Rosina under the watchful eye of her guardian Doctor Bartolo. After a series of disguises, tricks, and mistaken identities, the young lovers succeed in marrying without being thwarted by the Doctor.

The familiar music of the overture is easy to hear as comic, especially when paired in our minds with the cartoon imagery of Bugs Bunny shaving Elmer Fudd in Looney Tunes episode “Rabbit of Seville” (1950). Yet Rossini composed the overture three years before *Barber* for a far more serious opera called *Aureliana*, which dealt with the weighty topics of heroes and military conflict in the Roman Empire. He sanctioned the overture’s addition to *The Barber* after the première, not an unprecedented tactic since he had already used the same music for yet another opera, *Elisabetta, regina d’Inghilterra*. The overture features the best of Rossini: singing melodies, bubbly textures, sparkling orchestral colors, and even a taste of his trademark “Rossini crescendo” in which he gradually adds instruments over a repeated rhythm to create a stunning build in intensity.

Violin Concerto No. 3 in G, K. 216

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

The image of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart at the keyboard is easy to conjure, perhaps familiar from film and reinforced by his vast number of piano concertos and sonatas. But Mozart with a violin? Though a less familiar association, Mozart played violin very well. His teacher was his father Leopold, who was an important violin teacher and scholar of the time. Young Wolfgang even performed his own Violin Concerto No. 3 in 1777, conveying praise to his father that the audience had loved “my beautiful, pure tone.”

He composed the piece two years earlier, in 1775, the same year he produced all five of his violin concertos. At nineteen, he had recently returned to his hometown of Salzburg after traveling and performing around Europe, where he heard the finest musicians and grew to appreciate the musical strengths of each region. After such excitement, he was underwhelmed by Salzburg: “There is no stimulus [there] for my talent. When I play or when any of my compositions are performed, it is just as if the audience were all tables and chairs.” Yet he wrote prolifically there, including both instrumental and vocal music. Like Rossini, Mozart wrote superb operas. The two composers shared a gift for melody, a fondness for Figaro, prolific outputs, and an unabashed willingness to share music between their pieces. For Mozart, who wrote magnificently in all genres of his day, this sometimes meant borrowing themes between instrumental and vocal music, as is the case for his third Violin Concerto.

The first movement of the G major Violin Concerto shares its opening with the aria “Aer tranquillo” from a short opera called *Il re pastore* which Mozart wrote a few months earlier. The aria extols the virtues of the simple, pastoral life, sung by a soprano *castrato* in the role of a happy shepherd who doesn’t yet know that he is the heir to the kingdom. The music from the drama is nearly identical to the concerto, suggesting an interesting manner of hearing the concerto as a drama itself, with the soloist and orchestra as main characters.

The opening movement features mostly happy conversation between our protagonists, with the orchestra presenting the themes first and then commenting on the violin’s version of them. A more serious dialogue ensues before restating the original ideas, this time with opportunity for the soloist to customize the music and showcase individual personality in the solo violin cadenza. In the slow movement, both orchestral violins and solo violin sing long, beautiful melodies supported by a bed of gentle triplets from the accompanying players. The finale alternates an exciting opening refrain with various interludes, including an elegant dance and a folk tune called the “Strassburger,” which became a nickname for the concerto as a whole. The orchestra encourages the violinist to take one last solo cadenza before uniting for the final refrain.

Staff Sergeant Sheng-Tsung Wang, violin soloist

Violinist Staff Sergeant Sheng-Tsung Wang joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Chamber Orchestra in June 2007. Staff Sgt. Wang began his musical instruction at age eight after emigrating to the United States from Taiwan. Upon graduating in 1993 from Centennial High School in Ellicott City, Maryland, he earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in violin performance from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he studied with Victor Danchenko. He earned his doctor of musical arts degree at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he studied with Gerald Fischbach. His notable instructors include Eugene Drucker of the Emerson String Quartet, Elaine Mishkind, and the late Mark Ulrich. Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” Staff Sgt. Wang founded the Gemini Piano Trio and has been heard as part of the Arts Club of Washington concert series and on National Public Radio. He has performed at the following festivals: the Quartet Program at the State University of New York in Fredonia; Yellow Barn Music Festival in Putney, Vermont; La Jolla SummerFest in California; and the Taos School of Music in New Mexico. In addition, he has taught at Peabody Preparatory in Baltimore, Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland, and the Levine School of Music in Washington, D.C.

Symphony No. 2 in D, Opus 36

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

While Rossini's overture and Mozart's concerto borrowed from the drama of their serious operas, Beethoven had more than enough drama in his personal life. He wrote his second symphony while coming to terms with his impending deafness. Beethoven spent the summer of 1802 in the pastoral town of Heiligenstadt upon the suggestion of his doctor that the quiet of the countryside might improve his hearing. After several months there with no marked improvement, he wrote to his brothers that he was abandoning hope of recovery, choosing to live in solitude only for his music:

Ah, how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the *one sense* which ought to be more perfect in me than in others . . . What a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing . . . Such incidents drove me almost to despair; a little more of that and I would have ended my life—it was only *my art* that held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me.

Beethoven certainly had much soul-stirring music left within him, including seven more symphonies that broke boundaries and became staples of the orchestral repertoire. Yet, while at Heiligenstadt he wrote the Second Symphony in D, firmly rooted in the classical tradition of his predecessors Franz Joseph Haydn and Mozart, a work full of life-affirming vitality and cheerfulness in the midst of his personal trauma.

The symphony opens with a slow introduction. Even with an initial gesture strikingly similar to that of the Rossini overture, Beethoven's glowing orchestral colors feel grander and more spacious, setting the stage for music that centers more on development of building blocks than singing melodies. The Allegro molto that follows buzzes with rhythmic electricity from nearly omnipresent fast notes, either as part of the main idea or, more often, in the inner accompaniment voices, keeping the music alive from within.

The second movement brims with tenderness from start to finish, perhaps with a taste of the pastoral that might reflect Beethoven's surroundings at Heiligenstadt and hint at the Sixth Symphony to come. Even here in the slow movement, Beethoven uses rhythm to keep the music flowing with an almost constant motor element, more leisurely than in the first movement, but never allowing the long melodies to stagnate. He labels the third movement Scherzo, the first such break from the traditional Minuet movement in a symphony. True to its marking as a musical "joke," the music is full of surprising dynamic contrasts and rustic humor.

The last movement bursts out of the starting gate full of humor with a high 'hiccup' and low groan, a set of motives that has been commonly described as a comic depiction of Beethoven's gastric troubles, which apparently flared up in times of stress. The movement flies by in a flurry of activity, seeming compact until Beethoven veers off the Classical course set by his predecessors into an extended coda that accounts for a third of the movement. Here the symphony bottles its enthusiasm, teasing the ears with extended sections in soft dynamics before releasing into the inevitable grand closing gesture.