

Symphony No. 25 in G Minor, K. 183 (K. 173b)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Written: 1773

Movements: Four

Style: Classical

Duration: 25 minutes

In his great book, *Mozart's Symphonies*, Neal Zaslaw writes that if you try to “account for every symphony that has ever been associated with the name of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart” you would get nearly one hundred. Now consider that he only wrote six symphonies during the last eleven years of his life. He wrote the rest—however many that may be—before he turned the age of twenty-five!

Throughout his childhood, Mozart travelled throughout Europe with his overly zealous father, Leopold. The dad wanted to show off his *wunderkind* and make a lot of money. He also wanted to secure long-term employment for his son at some sort of aristocratic court.

The young Mozart's travels enabled him to hear the new trends in music outside of his conservative hometown of Salzburg. One of those trends was the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) style championed by Franz Joseph Haydn. It was a reaction to the cool rationalism of the Enlightenment and gave free expression to extreme emotion. Mozart tried his hand with *Sturm und Drang* on a trip to Italy in 1772 when he wrote the opera *Lucio Silla* for Milan. (The audiences didn't like it.) In 1773, back in his hometown apparently for good, Mozart tried out *Sturm und Drang* in a symphony.

The *Symphony No. 25 in G Minor* is only one of two symphonies that Mozart wrote in a minor key. (The other one is also in G minor.) The opening of the first movement, with its syncopation, dramatic gestures, and plaintive oboe solo is, indeed, full of stormy emotion. A short secondary theme is light and airy; contrast is another hallmark of *Sturm und Drang*.

The second movement—in a major key—gives needed respite from all of the fury. Sighing melodic fragments make up the main theme of this movement, but it is not overly sad. Only briefly, in the middle of the movement, is there any real hint gloom. For the third movement, normally the lightest and cheeriest part of a symphony, a stark minor key returns. The central trio section uses only the woodwinds and horn. The style is happy, but not rambunctious. The final movement begins with the orchestra playing in unison in a hushed manner. Then, the fury of the storm returns.

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Open My Door

Dewa Alit (1973–)

Written: 2015

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Fifteen minutes

A gamelan is an Indonesian orchestra made up of gongs and keyed metal instruments resembling our marimbas and xylophones. Because every gamelan has its own individual tuning, each has its own characteristic and distinctive name.

Born to a family of artists in Pengosekan village in Bali, Dewa Ketut Alit was immersed in Balinese gamelan from early childhood. His father, Dewa Nyoman Sura, and his oldest brother, Dewa Putu Berata, were the most influential teachers in his life. He began performing at age 11, and by age 13 was playing ugal (the leading instrument) in his village's adult group, Tunas Mekar Pengosekan. For seven years, he played in the internationally acclaimed Gamelan Semara Ratih of Ubud village.

Dewa Alit is generally acknowledged as the leading composer of his generation in Bali. His *Geregel* (2000) was influential both in Bali and abroad. *Semara Wisaya*, written for the Boston-based Gamelan Galak Tika, was performed at New York Carnegie Hall in 2004, and *Pelag Slendro* appeared at Bang on a Can Marathon in June 2006. He also writes music for non-gamelan ensembles such as Talujon and MIT's Gamelan Elektrika.

He is regularly invited to teach and compose for gamelan outside Bali, including Gamelan Gita Asmara at the University of British Columbia, Gamelan Galak Tika at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Helena College in Perth, and Gamelan Singa Murti in Singapore.

Seeking a wider path for expressing his approach to new music in gamelan, Dewa Alit founded his own gamelan, Gamelan Salukat, in 2007, performing on a new set of instruments of Alit's own tuning and design.

Dewa's *Open My Door*, written for Germany's Ensemble Modern, received its premiere in 2015. He provides the following notes about the piece:

I am living and thriving in the world of Balinese gamelan music. In the composition for the Ensemble Modern, I explored the ideas that come from my own background and environment in the context of new media and the western instruments. I entitled the piece *Open My Door*. I want to push open a door, entering new spaces. I'm on the road looking for the relationship between gamelan music and western music. First I thought of a concept, then worked on motifs and patterns, and from there I wrote the notation for each instrument.

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La boîte à joujoux
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Written: 1913

Movements: Seven scenes

Style: Impressionistic

Duration: 33 minutes

Debussy adored his daughter that he called Chouchou, the child that resulted from the scandalous affair he had with Emma Bardac. (They married three years after she was born.) While he was in Russia, he sent her a letter:

Your poor papa is very late replying to your nice little letter. But you mustn't be cross with him . . . He's very sad not to have seen your pretty face for so long or heard you singing or shouting with laughter, in short all the noise which sometimes makes you an unbearable little girl, but more often a charming one.

Chouchou inspired Debussy to write his *Children's Corner* suite for piano in 1906. In 1913, another opportunity to dedicate a piece to his daughter arose. The artist André Hellé approached Debussy with a ballet scenario based on his children's book *La boîte à joujoux* (The Toy Box).

Writing the first two scenes came easily for Debussy by "extracting secrets from Chouchou's old dolls," but he confessed the third scene was causing him some trouble: "The soul of a doll is more mysterious than even [poet and playwright] Maeterlinck imagines; it doesn't easily tolerate the kind of humbug so many human souls put up with." Nevertheless, Debussy managed to complete the entire work for piano in the space of about four months. By April 1914, Debussy had started the orchestration. Debussy quotes all sorts of popular songs, other pieces of classical music, and even his own works in the music. He provided a simple outline of the story:

A cardboard soldier falls in love with a doll; he seeks to prove this to her, but she betrays him with Polichinelle [Pulcinella or Punch]. The soldier learns of her affair and terrible things begin to happen; a battle between wooden soldiers and polichinelles. In brief, the lover of the beautiful doll is gravely wounded during the battle. The doll nurses him and . . . they all live happily ever after.

Debussy never finished the piece and World War I prevented all plans to produce *La boîte à joujoux*. Debussy died before the war ended, so the task of orchestrating the ballet fell to his student André Caplet. It finally premiered on December 10, 1919, five months after diphtheria claimed little Chouchou.

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Overture in C

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805–1847)

Written: 1834

Movements: One

Style: Romantic

Duration: Ten minutes

The story of Fanny Mendelssohn is enough to make any modern-day woman's blood boil. She was the older sister of the famed composer Felix Mendelssohn and was equally talented as pianist and composer. But the times, and even her progressive family, kept her back.

Fanny and Felix were the children of a prosperous banker in Berlin. Their grandfather was the famed German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. The father bought a large house so that he could have Sunday afternoon musicales that featured his talented children. When she was thirteen, Fanny played all twenty-four of Bach's Preludes and Fugues from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* from memory. One of her music teachers wrote to the great German poet Goethe praising Fanny: "This child is really something special." Later, he gave the ultimate (not!) compliment: "She plays like a man!"

Fanny's father acknowledged the fact that his daughter was every bit the equal of her brother, but in a totally deflating letter, he put her in her place:

Music will perhaps become his profession, whilst for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the foundation for your being and doing . . . and your very joy at the praise he earns proves that you might, in his place, have merited equal approval.

Later, Abraham sent an even more direct letter: "You must work more seriously and assiduously to realize your actual calling, that of a housewife.

Finally, in 1846, with the support of her painter husband, Fanny began to publish her works: I hope I shall not disgrace you all, for I am no *femme libre* . . . if people like the pieces and I receive further offers, I know it will be a great stimulus to me, which I have always needed in order to create. If not, I shall be at the same point where I have always been.

Alas, it was too little, too late. In 1847, Fanny suffered a massive stroke. At her death, she left over 500 compositions unpublished.

Fanny Mendelssohn's only known purely orchestral work is this *Overture in C*. It begins with a quiet serenity that eventually bursts into an ebullience that can only be associated with the Mendelssohn name. The resemblance of this music to her brother's is uncanny. Or is it the other way around?

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