

Notes for Classics 3: The Heroic

Saturday, October 20 & Sunday, October 21

Eckart Preu, conductor — Alon Goldstein, piano

- **Elkington** – *Out of the Mist*
- **Mozart** – Piano Concerto No. 21, K. 467
- **Beethoven** – Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55, “Eroica”

Lilian Elkington

Out of the Mist

THE VITAL STATS

Composer: born September 15, 1900, Birmingham, England; died August 13, 1969, Austria

Work composed: 1921

World premiere: Granville Bantock conducted what must have been the premiere with the Midland Institute student orchestra in June 1921. Another performance took place the following June in Harrogate, Yorkshire, under Howard Carr, on December 21, 1922.

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, oboe, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, harp, and strings.

Estimated duration: 8 minutes

How many artists live, create, and die without anyone knowing their work? In the case of women composers, the answer is, sadly, far too many. Historically, women who wanted to write music faced a number of obstacles that often proved insurmountable: lack of education and lack of access to ensembles that would perform their work. Most insurmountable of all the barriers preventing women from pursuing creative outlets are the cultural attitudes women faced about their proper role in society.

The name Iris Mary Lilian Elkington might easily have been included on the list of women whose artistic potential never found an audience but for a serendipitously random accident. In the late 1970s, as musicologist David Brown recalls, “I found a parcel of manuscript scores of four works in a second-hand bookstore in Worthing, Sussex, and purchased them for the princely sum of £3.75. It was one of those ‘moments’ – how could I leave them there?”

Brown discovered a song, two works for violin and piano, and, most significantly, the full score and complete individual parts for Elkington’s only known orchestral work, *Out of the Mist*, composed in 1921.

Elkington married in 1926, whereupon she ceased both performing and composing, even though she lived another 43 years. Perhaps the saddest aspect of Elkington’s story lies in the fact that even her own daughter knew nothing of her mother’s musical accomplishments.

Amazingly, the program note from a 1922 performance of *Out of the Mist* survives, written by Elkington herself:

“This short tone-poem is the outcome of a poignant memory connected with the war. The equal suffering and sacrifice of all classes in the cause of common humanity, which led to the honouring of the Unknown Warrior, have been felt by all, and have been well expressed by Laurence Binyon in the lines:

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea:^[1]_[5ff]
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free, etc.

“When the Unknown Warrior was brought home to his last resting-place ‘there was a thick mist over the Channel, out of which the warship slowly emerged’ as she drew near to Dover. This explanation of the title will give the clue to the understanding of the music. The opening is quiet, with muted lower strings, as the ship feels her way through the murk. Slight rifts in the mist are hinted at by the use here and there of the upper strings; and the melancholy phrases enlarge as the ship creeps onward with her fateful burden. After a pause, mutes are removed, the air grows brighter, and the deep gloom upon men’s spirits is somewhat relieved, though the tension is still strong. Gradually the style enlarges and becomes more elevated as larger views of the meaning of sacrifice calm the spirit. The agitation of the soul reasserts itself, broadens, and leads to the final section, *Largamente appassionata*, ff, as with a burst of sad exaltation the representative of the nameless thousands who have died in the common cause is brought out of the darkness to his own.”

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467

THE VITAL STATS

Composer: born January 27, 1756, Salzburg; died December 5, 1791, Vienna

Work composed: 1785

World premiere: The Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major was performed for the first time on March 10, 1785, in Vienna’s Burgtheater, at a subscription concert for Mozart, with the composer at the keyboard.

Instrumentation: solo piano, 2 flutes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, and strings

Estimated duration: 31 minutes

The piano concerto genre would not exist without Wolfgang Amadé Mozart. Just as J. S. Bach perfected the art of the fugue, Mozart made the solo piano concerto into a significant compositional category. Mozart’s 28 solo keyboard concertos took the piano in new directions and gave it greater stature; they can also be seen as the operatic equivalent of instrumental music. In no other form of the time could composer and performer display their virtuosity and at the same time express a full spectrum of emotion.

As often happened when Mozart faced a concert deadline, he put the finishing touches on K. 467 just hours before its first performance (the date of K. 467’s completion in Mozart’s personal catalogue of works is March 9, 1785, a mere 24 hours before its premiere). This rapid sequence of conception to writing to performance was characteristic of Mozart, particularly for the piano music he performed himself. While we

expect such feats of Mozart, even Mozart's own father Leopold thought this concerto was worthy of praise. "Indeed it is astonishingly difficult," Leopold wrote to Mozart's sister Nannerl.

The fortepiano of Mozart's time was a lighter, quieter instrument than the modern piano, and was invented to allow for greater dynamic possibilities than the harpsichord provided. Mozart wanted greater dynamic range than a typical fortepiano offered, so he custom-designed a special pedal. This fact was given prominent mention in the posted handbills advertising this concert: "On Thursday 10 March 1785 Herr Kapellmeister *Mozart* will have the honor of giving at the Imperial and Royal National Court Theater a Grand Musical Concert for his benefit, at which not only a new, just finished Forte Piano concerto will be played by him, but also an especially large Forte piano pedale will be used by him in improvising ..." This pedal, as described by Neal Zaslaw, was essentially a legless fortepiano pedal board that lay underneath the actual piano and was played with the feet, like an organ. Because the fortepiano's softer dynamic was sometimes subsumed by the full orchestra, Mozart designed this pedal to reinforce low notes, particularly in his improvised cadenzas.

The ability to improvise at the keyboard was a standard component of good musicianship in the 18th century. All competent performers of the time were expected to improvise their own ornaments and cadenzas (a cadenza is an embellishment by the soloist of a cadence, which is defined by the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* as "a melodic or harmonic formula that occurs at the end of a composition, movement or phrase, conveying the impression of a momentary or permanent conclusion." In Mozart's time, cadenzas were usually placed at the end of the first movement of solo concertos. The *Harvard Dictionary* continues, "The soloist, usually without accompaniment, then proceeds in an improvisatory and virtuosic style, drawing frequently on thematic material from the movement itself." Mozart did write down some of his improvised cadenzas for his concertos after he performed them. However, none of Mozart's original cadenzas for K. 467 survive today.

Of the three movements, the central Andante stands out in particular. It contains one of Mozart's most exquisite and recognizable melodies, which has been used in commercials for Estee Lauder and De Beers, among other products. The vocal quality of the melodic line suggests a lyrical aria from an opera, rather than a mere instrumental work.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55, "Eroica"

THE VITAL STATS:

Composer: born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany; died March 26, 1827, Vienna

Work composed: 1802-04. Dedicated to Beethoven's patron, Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian Lobkowitz.

World premiere: Beethoven conducted the premiere on April 7, 1805 in Vienna's Theater an der Wien.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.

Estimated duration: 47 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven was an early admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte, whose early exploits as First Consul of France reaffirmed the motto of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” It had been Beethoven’s intention to dedicate his third symphony to Napoleon, but when Beethoven heard that Napoleon had declared himself Emperor in May 1804, he was outraged. So vehement was Beethoven’s desire to rid his third symphony of any association with the French general that he erased the words “intitulata Bonaparte” from the title page with a knife, which left a hole in the paper. When the score was first printed in 1806, the title page read only, “A heroic symphony ... composed to celebrate the memory of a great man.”

Today, the *Eroica* is considered one of the groundbreaking musical events of the 19th century, but in Beethoven’s time it received a great deal of criticism. Its length alone challenged the audience (depending on the conductor’s tempos and observations of marked repetitions in the score, the *Eroica* runs 45 – 60 minutes). Beethoven acknowledged this, noting in the 1806 edition of the score, “This symphony being purposely written much longer than is usual, should be performed nearer the beginning rather than at the end of a concert ... if it is heard too late it will lose for the listener, already tired by previous performances, its own proposed effect ...”

One critic complained, “In this composition [there is] too much that is glaring and bizarre, hindering greatly one’s grasp of the whole.” Another reviewer, in words that today’s audiences would consider praiseworthy, criticized Beethoven’s “undesirable originality.” The critic went on to say, “Genius proclaims itself not in the unusual and fantastic but in the beautiful and sublime,” and further, that the symphony as a whole was “unendurable to the mere music-lover.”

In the *Eroica*, Beethoven’s idiosyncratic use of rhythm at times verges on the eccentric; certainly it was shocking to audiences accustomed to the more predictable pace of Mozart and Haydn. Of particular note is the notoriously “early” entrance of the horn towards the end of the first movement. Beethoven’s student and biographer Ferdinand Ries recalled, “At the first rehearsal of the Symphony, which was terrible – but at which the horn player made his entry correctly – I stood beside Beethoven and, thinking that a blunder had been made I said: ‘Can’t the damned hornist count? – it sounds horribly false!’ I think I came pretty close to getting a box on the ear. Beethoven did not forgive that little slip for a long time.”

The solemn, majestic *Marcia funebre* (funeral march) can be heard as Beethoven mourning his disappointment in Napoleon, and his vanished dreams of heroism. The final movement, a set of themes and variations, uses music from the Beethoven’s own Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus* from 1801 and an 1802 solo piano work, known today as the *Eroica Variations*. A virtuoso blast from the horn section signals the symphony’s conclusion, a glorious reaffirmation of Beethoven’s heroic ideals.