

Chapel Hill  

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*Philharmonia*

Sunday, 10 March 2024  
3:00 p.m.

Moeser Auditorium  
University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

Donald L. Oehler, Music Director

***All in the (Weber) Family***

**Overture to *Oberon*, J 306**

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)

**Concerto in E-flat major, K 482**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

*Allegro*

*Andante*

*Allegro; Andantino cantabile; Allegro*

Mimi Solomon, piano

— *Intermission* —

**Symphonic Metamorphosis of  
Themes by Carl Maria von Weber**

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

*Allegro*

*Turandot; Scherzo*

*Andantino*

*Marsch*

## All in the (Weber) Family

Two branches of the family named Weber have their places in the history of music. The more famous is the north German branch, represented by Carl Maria von Weber. But his cousin Constanze Weber Mozart, from the Mannheim-Vienna branch, is notable too; first as the wife of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and then — as his widow — keeper and promoter of his legacy. Our first two offerings today represent in effect those branches of the family. Carl Maria von Weber appears also in our third offering, a symphonic work based on themes from his music, composed by Paul Hindemith.

### Carl Maria von Weber

Younger than Beethoven, older than Schubert, he died a bit earlier than either. He wrote operas and smaller forms, not symphonies; mostly working in different parts of the musical world from his more celebrated contemporaries. Relatively few of his compositions are performed regularly today: one opera and overtures from two others, several works for clarinet, and some piano pieces. But his influence on later musicians was substantial. His piano works presaged those of Chopin and Liszt; his opera *Der Freischütz*, the earliest romantic German opera, influenced Wagner and others; his instrumentation was admired by Berlioz and Debussy; Stravinsky modeled a composition after one of his; and Benny Goodman's 1930s band adapted one of his melodies as its theme song, *Let's Dance*.

Carl Maria von Weber was born in 1786 in the Lübeck area of northern Germany, to a mother who was a singer and a father who was a soldier of fortune and also directed a traveling theater troupe. (The “von” was an affectation invented by his father.) When Carl showed musical talent at a young age, his father set out unsuccessfully to make him a prodigy in the mold of the young Mozart. Notable among his teachers were Michael Haydn (Joseph's brother) in Salzburg and Abbé Vogler in Vienna.

At 14 Weber wrote his first publicly performed opera. At 18, on Vogler's recommendation, he was made director of the opera at Breslau. Attempts to “reform” that company led to frustration, so he (and his father) moved to the court at Württemberg. There he got into real trouble, running up debts while his father embezzled the Duke's money. They were arrested, imprisoned, and banished.

After wandering from one German city to another, he landed in Munich, where he met clarinet player Heinrich Baermann, with whom he toured and for whom he wrote two concertos and other pieces which have become staples of the clarinet literature. That tour did much to establish Weber's fame. After brief stays in Berlin and Prague, in 1817 he settled in Dresden, where he remained as director of the opera for the rest of his life.

In 1821 *Der Freischütz* had a triumphant premiere in Berlin, and was soon being performed all over central Europe. But tuberculosis was slowly taking Weber's energy. He accepted a commission from the Royal Opera in London to write an opera with a libretto loosely based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He went to England in 1826 to finish *Oberon* and conduct its premiere. It was there that he died in June at age 39.



## **Weber: Overture to *Oberon*, J 306**

Weber's physician advised against his trip to England to produce *Oberon*, but he went anyway. The libretto he was given did not really please him (he planned to rework it later in German), but he learned English so he could set it to music. The strain of writing new numbers and conducting the rehearsals may have contributed to his death not long after the work's successful premiere.

The plot is a variation of the story in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; the characters of Oberon, Titania, and Puck are in it. The hero carries a magic horn with which he can summon help from Oberon's forces. He and his bride-to-be are the central characters in the story.

Weber starts the overture simply, with a call from that magic horn. After some tone painting to represent the fairies there is a sharp loud chord, and the main section begins with a depiction of the young lovers escaping from her tyrannical father. The second theme introduced by the clarinet quotes the hero's love aria, and later the violins play the exultant climax of the heroine's aria "Ocean, Thou Mighty Monster". In the development there is a section of stomping rhythm depicting Puck and his friends. At the end, the heroine's aria gives the work a splendid peroration.

However frail Weber's health was at the time, he managed to write a brilliantly happy overture.

## **Mozart: Concerto in E-flat major, K 482**

When the 21 year old Mozart, accompanied by his mother, visited Mannheim during his search for a position more appropriate than the one he had in Salzburg, they were given a warm welcome by the Weber family. The father was a bass player and copyist, and he had four talented daughters — three of whom later sang leading roles in Mozart's operas. Mozart fell immediately for 18 year old Aloysia. But he failed to get the desired position from the Elector, so he and his mother moved on. On his way back to Salzburg (after his mother died in Paris) Mozart stopped again at Mannheim, finding that Aloysia had cooled toward him. Later, when he moved to Vienna, he was attracted to her younger sister Constanze, and over his father's objections married her. (This was a few years before her cousin Carl Maria von Weber was born.)

Wolfgang and Constanze had a good marriage for almost ten years. When he died she was left nearly destitute, but she was resilient. She married again, and with her new husband carried out a very successful campaign to have Mozart's music recognized, performed, and published. By the time she was widowed again she was quite well off. She and Aloysia retired in comfort to Salzburg, where she died at age 80.

At about the midpoint in their marriage, Mozart had two years of notable success, financially as well as artistically. Besides *Le Nozze di Figaro* and smaller works, he wrote a half dozen splendid piano concertos to be performed by him at subscription concerts. Today we present the third of that series.

In the year of his infatuation with Aloysia, Mozart had written another concerto in E-flat (K 271), the earliest of his concertos still regularly performed. Its slow movement is also in C minor, and its finale is also interrupted by a short minuet section. This scheme worked well in 1777, and again in 1785.

Today's concerto is exceptional in its instrumentation: the usual pair of oboes is replaced by a pair of clarinets, giving the wind choir a softer sound. Mozart's fondness for the clarinet was partly due to his friendship with an excellent player of that instrument, Anton Stadler. Perhaps Stadler was in the orchestra when Mozart gave the first performance of this concerto; there is no way to know.



As in most first movements of concertos of that time, the orchestra plays an exposition of themes without the soloist, then there is a second exposition with the soloist taking the lead. Here the orchestra's opening theme is never played by the soloist; instead the solo part proceeds in an improvisational manner, inventing new themes along the way. When it plays alone the orchestra reprises its original material, but the soloist goes her own way, sometimes in dialog with the winds. Near the end there is the usual *cadenza* by the soloist, then the orchestra closes the movement alone.

For the *Andante*, Mozart turns to the somber relative minor key. Muted strings introduce a mournful theme, and the soloist plays a variation of it, so one expects a conventional theme and variations movement. But the winds are given two variations by themselves, in the major mode; the second of these features a lovely dialog between flute and bassoon. Then the winds join the others in the minor mode for the final variations. This beautiful movement was encored at the first performance.

The melancholy mood is banished by the *Allegro* rondo that follows, introduced by the soloist with a galloping theme. The rollicking ride runs through a reprise of the first themes, then the music comes to a pause, with a short passage by the soloist slowing the tempo. A stately minuet melody is presented by the winds and repeated by the soloist and strings. This section ends with a short *cadenza*, after which the rondo resumes its happy journey. After a longer *cadenza* and one more reprise of the main themes, the concerto ends with a joyous fanfare.

Commentators have noted similarity between the minuet in this finale and the episode that interrupts the celebration in the last scene of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, when the Count begs forgiveness from the Countess for his flirtation with Figaro's fiancée. In both cases the dramatic effect of the slow section is to heighten the exuberance when the fast tempo resumes. There can be little doubt that Mozart's love of the stage — and of singers like the Weber sisters — affected his non-theatrical works too.

**Mimi Solomon** is a Lecturer in the music department at UNC-CH. She performs and teaches widely, especially in chamber music settings such as the Kinhaven Festival in Vermont, where she spends part of every year. She is a graduate of Yale and Juilliard, where she studied with Peter Frankl and Robert McDonald. She has toured in Asia and Europe, and spent nearly a decade in Paris. With her husband, violinist Nicholas DiEugenio, she has made recordings, including their project *Unraveling Beethoven* which features contemporary composers. (The couple met at Kinhaven in 2010 while collaborating on Beethoven's *Archduke Trio*.)



### **Hindemith: Symphonic Metamorphosis of Themes by Carl Maria von Weber**

Paul Hindemith, one of the most important composers of the first half of the 20th century, was born near Frankfurt, Germany, in 1895. His father, who wished he had been a musician, saw to it that his children got musical training. Paul, the most talented, studied violin and composition at the conservatory in Frankfurt. In his teens he joined the Frankfurt opera orchestra. In 1916, at age 20 he was made its concertmaster.

As World War I dragged on, even prominent musicians were drafted. At first Hindemith had special duty in a band and formed a string quartet, but during the German retreat in 1918 he was in the trenches surviving grenade attacks. After the war (in which his father was killed), Hindemith resumed his role as concertmaster, but he turned more to the viola, on which he became one of the world's finest players. As a composer he favored an avant-garde artistic style that was to cause him trouble later. (For example, he wrote a triptych of one-act operas that scandalized the public; one was

about sex-obsessed nuns, another poked fun at the most sacred German music of the time, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.) In the 1930s he developed a more conservative style, writing in 1933 the opera *Mathis der Maler* and a widely played symphonic suite from its music.

With the rise of the Nazis Hindemith's life became complicated. He wanted to continue his career in Germany, and was supported by conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler who portrayed him as a good model for a modern German composer. But his early "decadent" music — and the fact that his wife was half-Jewish — made him an easy target for purity propagandist Joseph Goebbels. Performance of his music was banned. In 1938 he and his family left, moving first to Switzerland, then the USA.

Shortly after Hindemith came to the USA in 1940, he was approached by choreographer Léonide Massine about writing a new ballet. Two years earlier he had written a ballet for Massine, about St Francis of Assisi. Now Massine suggested music based on compositions by Weber. After studying some of Weber's piano music, Hindemith put together a couple of movements, but in his style rather than Weber's. Massine was unhappy with what he called a "personal" approach to the music. Then Hindemith found out that Massine planned to use sets designed by Salvador Dali. Hindemith had seen one of Massine's ballets with Dali's sets, which he thought were "stupid". They agreed to forget the project. But the Weber themes stayed in Hindemith's mind, and he started to work on a purely instrumental piece using them. The result is the 1943 work we play today.



Hindemith with his viola

The themes chosen by Hindemith vary in emotional tone from wistful to boisterous, but none evoke sadness, tragedy, or even great seriousness. As a result, this is a joyful work, which may be why it is the most popular of all Hindemith's compositions. In structure it is like a classical symphony, with allegro first and last movements, a scherzo, and a slow movement. All but the scherzo are based on Weber's largely forgotten works for piano four hands. The Weber themes are presented more or less as written, and the "metamorphosis" does not actually change them very much. The music is always tonal — although Hindemith was apt to change tonality abruptly and often. (The key signature is without sharps or flats, but the actual notes are all over the place.)

The first movement, built on themes from the piano duet Op 60 #4, is a stately and somewhat pompous march in A minor. The trio section in the major mode features the winds.

The second movement is called *Turandot; Scherzo*. Ask a music lover about *Turandot* and you will be told it is an opera by Puccini. But the story of a princess who requires her suitors to pass a difficult test is much older, and has been used many times, including in a play by the German poet Friedrich Schiller. During his stay in Württemberg, Weber was asked to write music for a court theater performance of Schiller's play; he produced an overture and a few other numbers. For the overture he recycled an earlier piece with a "Chinese" theme in characteristic pentatonic tonality:



This and its sequel provide the thematic material for the outer parts of Hindemith's A-B-A' scherzo, but altered with a few "wrong" notes:



In the A section this is repeated over and over by various parts of the orchestra in a long crescendo with a background of trills and swirling triplets. The B section is a jazzy *fugato* played by the winds and percussion, on a subject derived from the main theme. The much shortened A' section ends with the music fading away in the percussion, chimes intoning the first four notes of the main theme.

The earliest of the Weber themes, from the piano duet Op 10 #2, provide the material for the lovely *Andantino* third movement. The first theme is introduced by the clarinet, then elaborated by other winds and the strings. In the middle section the second theme is passed around the orchestra. In the final section the first theme is decorated by elaborate and rapid flute figurations.

The finale is another march, in brisk tempo, based on the piano duet Op 60 #7. (This movement is often played alone in a band arrangement.) The principal melodies are carried mostly by the brass, while the woodwinds and strings accompany them with swarms of rapid triplets. The work ends happily with a triplet and a final bang.

Notes by Lawrence Evans