American Songbook

The years around 1850 that brought California into the Union were also a time of burgeoning American musical identity. The "melting pot effect" that permeated most aspects of American life had an equally powerful impact on the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic qualities of American Song. The emergence of ragtime, the blues and jazz in the late 1800s into the twentieth century became national obsessions and forever changed America's musical landscape.

Pennsylvania-born Steven Foster (1826-1864) listened to and studied the music of over one hundred popular touring minstrel shows. "Camptown Races," "Swanee River" and "Oh! Susannah" are among his most well-known songs with a distinctly "American" flavor. He had a rare gift as a melodist which culminated in one of his last songs, "Beautiful Dreamer."

WC Handy (1873 –1958) was the self-proclaimed Father of the Blues. He didn't invent the form but was the first to publish it, greatly increasing its accessibility and popularity. In his early 20s, he toured throughout the southern US, Mexico, Cuba and Canada as a cornet player and bandleader all the while listening to various styles of Black popular music. His "Saint Louis Blues" from 1914 was one of the first blues songs to succeed as a pop song. He selected the key of G for this song, inspired by square dance music of Mississippi African Americans.

George Gershwin (1898-1937) was and remains one of the most beloved American songwriters. He was a songwriter and composer of larger forms such as opera, symphonic works, film and stage productions. Proportionately, his songs were positive in spirit during the gloomy Great Depression and the rise of radio broadcasts ensured his notoriety. "Fascinating Rhythm" is a

collaboration with his brother Ira for the Broadway musical “Lady Be Good.”

*This performance opens with Irving Berlin’s “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” from 1911. Ironically, it is a march rather than a ragtime song, but its snapping rhythms are a hallmark of the American melodic sound.

Giovanni Bottesini Concerto No. 2 in B minor for Double Bass and Orchestra

The northern Italy born composer, Giovanni Bottesini (1821–1889) was a musician of remarkable and unjustifiably neglected importance. As a child, Bottesini studied the timpani and violin before successfully auditioning as a double bassist at the Milan Conservatory. It’s probable that he wouldn’t have chosen the double bass if it wasn’t for the need of a scholarship to attend the lauded school and the fact that the remaining funds were dedicated to the study of the bassoon and double bass. After just four years of study with his new instrument, Bottesini went on to a career of composition and performance that rivals many of the great artists we commonly associate with this era.

On the double bass alone, Bottesini elevated musical and technical expectations; to this day his large number of works for solo bass are foundational for advanced players. Opera was a big part of his life; he wrote six operas, lead opera companies from Havana, London, to Paris and was chosen by Giuseppe Verdi to lead the premiere of Aida in 1871.

From the moment his Second Double Bass Concerto begins, Bottesini asserts the singing qualities of the instrument and suggests his childhood violin studies informed not only the range

of the melodic material, but also its generous ornamentation. No virtuosic convention is spared in this tour-de-force, including an extended unaccompanied cadenza at the close of the first movement.

Where the outer movements of the concerto delight with vigorous virtuosity, the touching second movement has the feeling of a deeply personal Italian operatic scene at the most intense moment of a character's journey.

The dramatic third movement suggests a Cuban influence from the composer's time spent in Havana as director of the Italian opera there a dozen years before this concerto was written.

One fun fact about the composer is that he would often play his double bass onstage during the intermission of operas he was conducting. Many of these "fantasias" remain in the repertory and are still played by double bass virtuosos today.

Songs of Mexico

From the conductor: As a passionate advocate for American music I am aware of the many influences that come together to create the "American Sound." In a similar way, the music of any culture or country evolves over time, owing to various indigenous and imported influences. With the wonderful Hermanos Herrera from nearby Fillmore, CA we have selected four Mexican songs of varying styles. La Malagueña with its Son huasteca high falsetto technique, the lovesong, Sabor a Mi, a bolero with Cuban roots, La Adelita, one of the most famous corridos or narrative song of the Mexican Revolution and the typical ranchera Allá en el Rancho Grande, famously covered by Elvis Presley, we show the incredible melodies of our neighbors to the South.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K. 551 "*Jupiter*"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) is possibly one of the greatest composers of western classical music genres in human history. His more than eight hundred works were written during his thirty-five short years and only tell part of the story of a musical prodigy of the first order.

Throughout Mozart's life, his father, Leopold, tirelessly promoted Wolfgang's prodigious talents as a violinist, pianist and emerging composer. His older sister, "Nannerl" shared billing during early extensive European tours, but she ultimately would not be included in the most ambitious tours Wolfgang and Leopold would undertake in subsequent years.

Tours served to acquaint towns with the Mozart family talents as well as entice employers to offer full-time positions. Throughout his life, Wolfgang would find the tethers of steady employment necessary to maintain his lifestyle incompatible with his ambitions and ever-developing talents. The result of this tension was near constant stress about debts and what he saw as inflexibility to accommodate opportunities. Employers dangled modest compensation to prevent Mozart from seeking other opportunities. In short, life was complicated for this massive talent! He and his wife, Constanza, had six children, two of whom survived infancy. One of the most astounding aspects of his compositional life is how compositions of differing genres and purposes were written concurrently, each with such individuality and polish. Mozart would compose twenty-two operas, forty-one

symphonies, several dozen concertos, masses and a multitude of solo and chamber works.

So much has been written about the astonishing genius of Mozart, it's hard to overstate what a musical juggernaut he was. In considering what I could possibly add to the conversation about the crown jewel of his symphonies, the 41st (not to mention the myriad other genres he also mastered), I was reminded about the volume and circumstances impacting his output in a given year.

For example, in the time span from August of 1787 to August 1788, culminating in the composition of the "Jupiter" Symphony, he completed and premiered thirty-six works! This isn't an unusual feat in Mozart's prolific life and shouldn't be seen as the result of a benevolent outpouring of musical genius. Since he was a creator without legacy wealth, often practical considerations prompted his torrents of musical activity and shaped the nature of some works, whether as a composer or performer.

Changing politics in Mozart's Vienna in the early 1780s was one such consideration. Emperor Joseph II didn't create lavish court presentations like earlier monarchs, so these high-society events fell to a less centralized aristocracy and different types of public events that, in the case of Mozart, gravitated toward his special talents on the keyboard. A notable 1784 "marathon" of twenty-two performances in thirty-eight days serves as an example of the frenzy of opportunities composers jockeyed for.

The mid-1780s was a huge turning point in our knowledge of the constraints, pressures and successes of Mozart's life as documented by his father, Leopold. Upon the death of his doting

and domineering father in 1787, the volume of first hand accounts detailing travel, compensation and interpersonal relationships surrounding Mozart's works dropped precipitously, obscuring the motivation of subsequent works, such as his three final symphonies, composed without an evident commission.

What we do know from pleading correspondence with his Masonic brotherhood is that Mozart's extravagant Viennese lifestyle and financial missteps were taking a huge toll. He and his wife Constanze were downgrading their living expenses at the same time significant medical treatments bore down on the exhausted and exasperated genius. Nevertheless, music composition continued alongside efforts to convince music aficionados to subscribe to his musical output as a way to steady his income stream.

Some historians speculate Mozart's three final symphonies were written as a response to Haydn's "London Symphonies" composed in 1782 for a hoped tour to England. Mozart possessed the sheet music to Haydn's works and was clearly influenced by the German Maestro. Whatever the motivation, it seems there was no known financial imperative to write them, but as a trio, the contrast in musical material ranks them among the most important of Mozart's works.

In accordance with Austrian tradition, festive militaristic music would be set in the key of C and the "*Jupiter*" Symphony's opening gestures complete with trumpet and timpani fanfares may have been a reflection of the 1788 war between Austria and the Turks. In any case, Mozart created dazzling interplays of rhythmic vitality and poignant melodic simplicity whose freshness make his forty-first symphony a staple of the symphonic repertoire.

The first movement uses the complete orchestral forces and three principal themes. The heralding main theme is heard at the opening of the work, followed shortly thereafter by a chromatic melody with gentle ornamentation. The third theme is introduced before the development section and becomes the principal tool for the section's dramatic harmonic journey. Listen for the return of the earlier themes as Mozart unwinds from the development section back to the home key.

The second movement is a slow, stately dance called a Sarabande. Originally a disreputable Central American dance exported to Europe in the 1700s, it became a key baroque dance form, especially in France. The music has three beats per measure, and in Mozart's hands a simple initial melody evolves into florid, graceful and emotionally intense episodes.

A minuet and trio as the contrasting third movement was expected by this time in music history. Often the music has a rustic dance feel. In this case, Mozart's minuet uses falling melodic gestures and unexpected dynamic shifts. The trio is a mostly delicate dialogue between winds and strings with a brusque but short-lived middle section.

The finale of the Jupiter Symphony is the subject of much study and excitement among musicians. The intrigue has to do with the layering of musical material that is perfectly chosen to allow for an infinite variety of interplay. There are four main subjects listeners should focus on. The first is the stretched opening melody by the violins. The second is a group of four notes (the same pitches!) played by the entire orchestra. The third figure is a fanfare followed by a motoric scale. The final main melody is an ascending partial scale with an ornament. The result of this genius collection of music is a movement of drama, but with

such solidity, that the web of material is seen as a pillar of musical achievement.