

José Maurício Nunes Garcia: *Overture in D*
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:
Serenade No. 10 in B-flat major, K.361 “Gran Partita”
Symphony No. 36 in C major, K.425, “Linz”

The first composer on tonight’s program bucks the trend of the European classical orchestra: José Maurício Nunes Garcia (1767-1830) was an Afro-Brazilian classical composer born in Rio de Janeiro to free black parents, and the grandson of slaves. And he was certainly much more than a brilliant composer: as an ordained priest, he held the most important musical position in Rio de Janeiro as the chapel master of the city cathedral, serving the community as an organist, conductor, and music teacher.

Although Nunes Garcia has commonly been portrayed as a light-skinned man of mixed race—doing an online search will reveal a portrait of him showing European features and complexion—recent scholarship compellingly argues this to be false: his true legacy is one of a black artist in the new world, who while following in the musical footsteps of composers Mozart and Haydn, was “whitened” by historical Eurocentrism.

Most of Nunes Garcia’s compositions are sacred works for choir, both *a cappella* and with orchestra: settings of Catholic chants, masses, requiems, motets, and other works for important occasions such as holy week. *Overture in D* is one of his rare secular compositions that is purely instrumental.

There is much to love in *Overture in D*. The piece’s refined introduction begins gradually, in a solemn minor key, but less than two minutes in, it becomes a fast and festive D major, with violins flying through the exuberant primary theme. This is quickly followed by the clarinets introducing the playful second theme. Nunes Garcia moves the music between these two prominent themes throughout the rest of the work. Only a brief five minutes in length, *Overture in D* is the perfect appetizer, leaving you hungry for more.

What makes a serenade by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) a serenade? In one sense, Mozart’s serenades are like his symphonies in that they are multi-movement works typically written for a mix of strings and winds. But unlike a symphony, Mozart did not compose his serenades for the concert hall: they were meant to be lighter, more intimate works, traditionally for outdoor or open-air evening performances.

Boosting the popularity of the clarinet family were two virtuosos, the brothers Anton and Johann Stadler. It was in 1781 that Mozart moved from Salzburg to Vienna where he met the Stadlers and was impressed with their clarinet prowess. Before this move, Mozart rarely composed for the clarinet, but afterwards, the clarinet gained prominence in some of his symphonies, operas, and chamber music. (Mozart and

Anton Stadler were not only friends and colleagues, they were also brothers in a secret society known as the Freemasons.)

Mozart's Serenade No. 10 is subtitled "Gran Partita," which literally means "big piece with multiple movements." And that's a fairly accurate description, as this piece has seven big movements, each alternating in tempo and style. The first begins with a slow and stately introduction but then quickly dials up the cheerful energy. In contrast, the 2nd and 4th movements are elegant minuets: Mozart uses them as an opportunity to contrast the fuller ensemble sections with more soloistic moments, particularly for the principal clarinet and oboe.

Many would argue that the Adagio third movement is the crown jewel of the serenade, with its soulful melody and sublime accompanimental textures. In the film *Amadeus*, it is this section that is featured in the movie's soundtrack as Mozart's rival Salieri comes to believe that Mozart's music is nothing less than the voice of God.

The fifth movement, *Romanze*, feels like a journey unto itself. It begins and ends slowly and nostalgically, but in the middle becomes energetically propelled by the principal bassoon's dark clockwork bass line. Similarly, the "Theme and Variations" sixth movement also begins modestly, but with each variation a new level of complexity is added to the original idea. Each of the six different variations in this movement portray a different "action shot" of the original theme.

The final *Molto allegro* movement is the dessert of this seven-course meal. Light, sweet, fun, and compared to the other movements, speeds by much too quickly.

These days, if you are traveling between Salzburg (Mozart's hometown) and Vienna (Mozart's big city career), one can hop on a train and make the trip in less than three hours. But back in 1783, a horse and carriage would have taken several days to cover this distance, requiring some careful travel planning. Halfway between these two cities is another provincial capitol, Linz, where Mozart would often stop to recharge from those weary days on the road.

On one occasion, Mozart was invited by a friend to stay for a couple of weeks. This friend was no less than the statesman and nobleman Count Johann Thun-Hohenstein, who was excited to hear a performance of one of Mozart's latest symphonies. Except there was one problem: Mozart hadn't brought any symphonies with him on the trip. So, under the pressure of a four-day deadline and a concert looming, Mozart penned out his Symphony No. 36, nicknamed the "Linz" Symphony.

As the players make their way to the stage for this performance, you will notice that there are no clarinets! Keep in mind that Mozart was composing his clarinet music for the Stadler brothers, who were performing in Vienna, and not in Linz. Thus, no clarinet.

Like the "Gran Partita," the first movement of the "Linz" Symphony also begins with a slow and stately introduction, but then quietly and mysteriously lures the ear to

suspense. Less than two minutes in, the character drastically changes when the full orchestra becomes celebratory and victorious for the rest of the movement. The second movement exhibits a courtly elegance with moments of grandeur. The third movement is a resolute minuet with some special solos for the principal oboe and bassoon in the middle. And the fourth movement returns to the first movement's celebratory character, but this time with supercharged speed: Mozart no doubt wanted his Linz buddies to come away from the concert with a spring in their step.

--David H. Johnson

Comments? Questions? Email me at david.johnson@gcsu.edu.