Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Sir Andrew Davis, Interim Artistic Director

Wednesday, May 29, 2019 at 8:00pm
Thursday, May 30, 2019 at 8:00pm
Saturday, June 1, 2019 at 8:00pm

Jeremy Denk, leader & piano
Simon Rivard, conductor*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Overture to Don Giovanni, K. 527*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Piano Concerto No. 14 in E-flat Major, K. 449
I. Allegro vivace
II. Andantino
III. Allegro ma non troppo

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Rondo in A Minor, K. 511

Intermission

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major, K. 503
I. Allegro maestoso
II. Andante
III. Allegretto

Jeremy Denk’s appearance is generously supported by Indra and Rags Davloor.

As a courtesy to musicians, guest artists, and fellow concertgoers, please put your phone away and on silent during the performance.
ABOUT THE WORKS

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Overture to Don Giovanni, K. 527

Born: Salzburg, Austria, January 27, 1756
Died: Vienna, Austria, December 5, 1791
Composed: 1787–1788

Don Giovanni owes its life to the love affair between Mozart and Prague, beginning with the composer’s earlier opera, The Marriage of Figaro. A success at its Vienna première in May 1786, Figaro was a triumph that December in Prague. Mozart was immediately commissioned to write a new opera, in celebration of a royal wedding in October of 1787. Librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, his collaborator on Figaro, suggested the time-honoured tale of Don Juan and the stone guest. Don Giovanni was finished in time, but because of rehearsal problems, Figaro (arguably a more appropriate choice for a nuptial celebration) was substituted. But Don Giovanni did receive its maiden performance in Prague, with the composer conducting, and proved an even greater success than Figaro.

According to the composer’s wife, Constanze, the great overture to Don Giovanni was written during the night of October 27, less than two days before the première. Mozart asked for punch to keep himself awake, to no avail, falling asleep until 5am, yet still able to complete it for the copyist’s arrival at 7am.

Mozart took the view—self-evident today, but novel back then—that an overture should not be an independent piece of music, but should convey the opera’s basic mood and subject matter, if not its actual melodies. In the first scene of this opera, Don Giovanni murders the Commendatore, only to find that he returns, in the second act, as a statue come to life, condemning Giovanni to hell for his misdeeds.

The overture begins with the Commendatore’s terrifying second act entrance, with great opening chords hinting at awesome powers. The 30 bars that follow are a catalogue of anxiety and dread: dotted and syncopated rhythms, pervasive chromaticism, sudden accents, loud dissonant chords, trembling strings, and unforgettable rising and falling scales in the violins and flutes. Then the terror, like a bad dream, simply melts away, into a scampering opera buffa overture that is pure Figaro and, occasionally—as in the dialogue between brusque, staccato descending-scale figures and skittish violin replies—pure Rossini.

The Don Giovanni overture, when performed as part of the opera, comes to a gentle halt, leading seamlessly into Act 1. Mozart composed an alternate, boisterous ending for concert performance. On a separate sheet of paper inserted into the autograph score, he wrote out the extra dozen bars—undoubtedly at 6:59am, with his free hand, while shaving.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana
In May 1781, Mozart was unceremoniously discharged from the service of Hieronymus von Colloredo, Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. Delighted to be free from this unappreciative and demeaning relationship, he relocated from the cultural backwater of Salzburg to the bustling musical metropolis of Vienna. The city was ripe for artists with his talent and drive and before long he was deep into a busy schedule of teaching, composing, and performing.

Because he was best known as a pianist, he focused on writing music for that instrument. He composed 12 superlative piano concertos between February 1784 and December 1786 (the first six alone belong to 1784). They are deeper in feeling, broader in scope and richer in colour than any written before; in years to come, they would serve as models of their kind, for Beethoven, Brahms, and other similarly inspired composers.

This concerto was the first of the “golden dozen”. Mozart completed it on February 9. Unlike most of the 12, which he composed for himself to play, he wrote it for his pupil Barbara Ployer, daughter of Prince-Archbishop Colloredo’s Viennese agent. Compared with his subsequent piano concertos, it is more modest in duration and calls for a smaller orchestra. Some scholars speculate that his reason for reducing the accompanying ensemble was to give soloists the plausible option of performing it as a chamber work, with string quartet accompaniment, when no orchestra was available.

Although it may lack the grand gestures and colourful orchestration of its successors, it certainly fulfills in terms of attractiveness and entertainment value. The occasional emotional shadow and a certain nervous energy lend diversity to the otherwise straightforward charm of the first movement. The second movement is gentle, almost dream-like. Quite possibly the concerto’s most successful segment is the last. Its singular, forward-pressing momentum makes it one of Mozart’s most exciting finales. The renowned Mozart scholar Stanley Sadie wrote that this movement, “with its spirited counterpoint and its running application of variation techniques, must stand as one of Mozart’s supreme and most powerfully original creations of his early Viennese period.”

Program note by Don Anderson

Rondo in A Minor, K. 511

“Pivotal” is an apt word to describe this diminutive solo piano piece: as reflective of a moment in time in Mozart’s life; as exemplifying the imminent transition from Classical to Romantic musical thought; and, within the narrative of this evening’s program, as the central turning point.

Mozart recorded its completion in his personal thematic catalogue on March 11, 1787.
He had just returned to Vienna from a journey to Prague crowned by the heady success of *The Marriage of Figaro* and the commissioning of *Don Giovanni*. The creative ardour informing what came to be known as his “golden dozen” piano concertos (bookended by the two concertos on tonight’s program) was all but spent, and along with it his own need for public piano performance. It is tempting to see this work as an introspective turning point in the composer’s life—a meditation on his relationship with the piano itself.

There is no record of a public première of the Rondo, leading some scholars to speculate that it might have been improvised on the spot during one or another public performance, either just before leaving Prague or shortly after his return to Vienna. Whether or not this was the case, the characteristic rondo form of the piece is highly amenable to improvisation: an A-B-A-C-A pattern, where “A” is a recurring theme and “B” and “C” are episodes. As William Cowdery has noted, the three main sections increase in pianistic complexity, for example, dividing the beat into progressively smaller units, with “A” primarily using eighth notes, while “B” uses sixteenths, and “C” uses triplet-sixteenths. And the “A” section is more and more elaborately ornamented each time it returns.

The orderly framework encompasses a huge range of emotion, though, played out in the tension between the feelings aroused by the theme in the “A” section and unsuccessful attempts to escape those feelings in the other sections. How one hears that theme is highly personal. Some have called it despairing, forlorn and dejected, even depressive; others, Vladimir Horowitz among them, disagree, instead calling it pensive and reflective, and cautioning against approaching it too slowly, based on equating slow with profound. However one chooses to hear the theme, it is inescapable, recurring, one way or another, almost 50 times in the course of this profoundly moving work.

Program note by David Perlman

**Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major, K. 503**

**Composed: 1786**

By the time he composed K. 503, Mozart was turning away from concert life in favour of opera, and so was shedding his need for new piano concertos, which for several years had served as the principal vehicles for the public display of his talents as a composer and performer. Nevertheless, in K. 503 he produced a magnificent work—sophisticated and subtle, highly original, and full of surprises. It is in C major, the key of some of his most heroic and “Olympian” utterances; all three movements are more massive and symphonically conceived than is typically the case in a Mozart concerto, and all three have an unmistakable air of formality. (For instance, both outer movements feature ostentatious displays of learned counterpoint—something rare in concertos.) The work is grandly scored, too, complete with trumpets and drums (though not Mozart’s beloved clarinets).
From the fanfare-like opening bars, the first movement is all pomp and splendour, including a militaristic little march among its themes (it sounds a bit like “La Marseillaise”). But though mostly bright and festive, the music sometimes veers off strikingly into darker emotional territory, and though rich in ideas, it is cohesive and intently argued. Recurring harmonic and rhythmic features create a dense network of cross-references; Mozart slips again and again unexpectedly into minor keys, for instance, and obsessively develops an innocent-sounding rhythmic motif (short-short-short long) introduced within the first 20 bars. It is hardly surprising to learn that Beethoven greatly admired and was influenced by K. 503, especially this complex and dramatic first movement.

The second and third movements are scarcely less rich, though here, too, powerful unifying forces are at work. The Andante, in which the studiously plain alternates with the lavishly ornate, is elegant and poised, avoiding the emotional ambiguities and startling, troubling digressions one finds in many Mozart slow movements. The rondo finale hints at the formality of the ancien régime: the main theme is a gavotte, a courtly French dance that was already old in Mozart’s day. Though outwardly joyful and optimistic, this movement, like the first, is coloured by contrasts of major and minor keys, and when a lyrical theme is introduced in the middle of the proceedings, the music acquires new poignancy.

Program note by Kevin Bazzana

THE ARTISTS

Jeremy Denk
conductor and piano

Jeremy Denk made his TSO début in April 2009.

Jeremy Denk is one of America’s foremost pianists. Winner of a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship, and the Avery Fisher Prize, Denk was recently elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Denk returns frequently to Carnegie Hall and in recent seasons has appeared with the Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and Cleveland Orchestra, as well as on tour with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, and at the Royal Albert Hall as part of the BBC Proms.

Highlights in 2018/19 have included a three-week recital tour of the US, including appearances in Washington, D.C., Seattle, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh, and culminating in his return to Carnegie Hall. He has also returned to the Atlanta and Colorado Symphonies, and continued his work as Artistic Partner with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, opening the season directing Beethoven 5 from the keyboard.

Also this season, Denk reunited with his long time collaborators, Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis, on an eleven-city tour of the US. He also performed and curated a series of Mozart Violin Sonatas (“Denk & Friends”) at Carnegie Hall. Abroad, he returned to the Barbican in London, UK to reunite with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, made his début with the City of Birmingham Symphony, and returned to the Helsinki Philharmonic. He also appeared in recital in Europe, including his return to Wigmore Hall as part of a three-year residency. His recording c.1300–c.2000 was released in February by Nonesuch Records with music ranging from Guillaume de Machaut to Stockhausen and Ligeti.

Jeremy Denk graduated from Oberlin College, Indiana University, and the Juilliard School. He lives in New York City, and his website and blog are at jeremydenk.net.

Simon Rivard
conductor
Simon Rivard made his TSO début in October 2018.

Simon Rivard was named as one of CBC’s “30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians under 30” (2017). Since 2018, he has served as RBC Resident Conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Conductor of the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra.

At the TSO, he is mentored by Interim Music Director Sir Andrew Davis, and by the musicians of the Orchestra. In addition to conducting school and family concerts, he has been a cover conductor for Ludovic Morlot, John Storgårds, Thomas Søndergård, and Bramwell Tovey. With the TSYO, he led a successful opening concert, featuring Bernstein’s Symphonic Dances from West Side Story.

In 2018, he was invited to participate in the first Conducting Mentorship Program at the Verbier Festival Academy (Switzerland). In addition to being mentored by Valery Gergiev and Derrick Inouye, he acted as assistant conductor to Sir Simon Rattle, Gianandrea Noseda, Marc Minkowski, and Gábor Tákacs-Nagy. At the conclusion of the Verbier Festival, he was awarded a Special Prize to help him pursue his mentorship with Gergiev and Noseda.

In 2017/18, as Resident Conductor of the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra, Simon Rivard conducted over 30 concerts. Throughout the season, he was an advocate for collaboration with Indigenous artists and local arts organizations. Also in 2017, he stepped in for Jean-Philippe Tremblay as Music Director of the Orchestre de la Francophonie, leading successful performances in Montreal, Quebec City, Domaine Forget, and Ottawa.

He has been associated with the Orchestre des jeunes de l’Ontario français—an orchestra for young francophones from all over Canada—since August 2017. He has also worked at the Fondation du Dr Julien, an organization offering free music lessons to socio-economically disadvantaged children in Montreal. In 2015, he travelled to a Haiti orphanage with a team of professionals to offer three weeks of arts lessons to the children.

Simon Rivard has received support from the millennium Excellence Awards, Sibylla Hesse Foundation, Jeunesses Musicales du Canada, McAbbie Foundation, Schulich School of Music (Wayne Riddell and Gerald Wheeler prizes), and Verbier Festival.