

Notes on the Program

BY JAMES M. KELLER, NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC PROGRAM ANNOTATOR

Overture to *La clemenza di Tito*, K.621

“Ch’io mi scordi di te? ... Non temer, amato bene,”

Scene and Rondo, K.505

Piano Concerto in D major, “Coronation,” K.537

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born

January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died

December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Works composed and premiered

La clemenza di Tito Overture: composed early September 1791; the opera premiered September 6, 1791, at the Theatre of the Estates (a.k.a. National Theatre) in Prague, the composer conducting

“Ch’io mi scordi di te?”: completed December 26, 1786; premiered February 23, 1787, at Vienna’s Kärntnertheater, soprano Nancy Storage, soloist, the composer conducting and playing the obbligato piano

Piano Concerto in D major: composition completed February 24, 1788; probably premiered April 14, 1789, at the court in Dresden, the composer leading from the keyboard

New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances

La clemenza di Tito Overture: premiered April 11, 1935, Werner Janssen, conductor; last played March 20, 1982, Rafael Kubelík, conductor

“Ch’io mi scordi di te?”: premiered January 14, 1982, mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade and pianist Paul Jacobs, soloists, Zubin Mehta, conductor;

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had a busy year in 1791, which was nothing unusual. He was already working on his Requiem and his opera *Die Zauberflöte* when a commission arrived from the Bohemian Estates in Prague for an opera to celebrate the coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia. Prior to acceding to that position, Leopold had served as Grand Duke of Tuscany from 1765 to 1790. Mozart was only 14 when their paths had first crossed; the Duke received the prodigy and his father at the Pitti Palace in Florence when the Mozarts were touring Italy. When his brother Joseph II died, in February 1790, Leopold stood next in line to be named King of Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary. Mozart traveled to Frankfurt, at his own expense, to witness the formal coronation ceremony, and his singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem*

last played February 6, 2001, mezzo-soprano Angelika Kirchschrager, soloist, André Previn as pianist and conductor

Piano Concerto in D major: premiered March 25, 1926, Wanda Landowska, soloist, Wilhelm Furtwängler, conductor; last played October 13, 2001, Alicia de Larrocha, soloist, André Previn, conductor

Estimated durations

La clemenza di Tito Overture: ca. 5 minutes

“Ch’io mi scordi di te?”: ca. 11 minutes

Piano Concerto in D major: ca. 33 minutes

Serail was revived as part of the festivities. Leopold's accession would not be celebrated in Prague until September 1791, and it was natural that the music-loving capital of Bohemia would also include opera as part of the festivities.

La clemenza di Tito was proposed as a suitably noble subject for the coronation opera. Brimming with political intrigue, it tells the tale of the first-century Roman Emperor Tito (Titus Flavius Vespasianus), of the failed assassination plot against him which was orchestrated by his friend Sesto (goaded on by love for Vitellia, who challenges Tito's right to the throne but would settle for being his wife — a goal that keeps evading her), and of Tito's magnanimous decision to forgive the very malefactors who had tried to topple his government and take his life. Vague parallels could be drawn with King Leopold II, who, in his long reign over Tuscany, had earned a reputation as a wise and generous peacemaker, one whose own moral core had led him to ban the use of torture in his realm.

Mozart essentially finished his score in the coach *en route*, with Franz Xaver Süssmayr efficiently copying out parts and, it seems, personally writing the workaday recitatives that fill many of this opera's pages. (This is the same Süssmayr who, some months later, after Mozart's death, would be drafted to fill out sections of the Requiem that Mozart left incomplete.) Only one week remained in which to polish the piece on site, and it was probably in the final days leading to the deadline that Mozart wrote the opera's grand and dignified overture. The *Krönungsjournal für Prag* reported, "The composition is by the famous Mozart, and does him honor, although he did not have much time to write it and was moreover afflicted by an illness during which he had to complete the final part of it."

La clemenza di Tito was only a modest success at first, but audiences warmed to it quickly: by the final night of its Prague run, on September 30, it had grown into a popular hit. Mozart was not there to

Second Choice at Best

The eminent composer Antonio Salieri was the first choice of the impresario who was arranging the festivities for the coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia. However, Salieri was swamped with responsibilities at Vienna's Court Theatre: five visits by the impresario — so claimed the



composer — could not sway him. Domenico Cimarosa was also considered, but in the end it seemed more efficient to engage Mozart, who had recently written a stand-alone "vocal rondo" on the text "Ecco il punto ... Non più di fiore," drawn in part from Metastasio's libretto for *La clemenza di Tito*.

Drawing by Johann August Rosmässler that appeared on the frontispiece of the piano score of Mozart's La clemenza di Tito, published by Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1795

there to witness the acclaim. He had returned to Vienna to prepare for the premiere of his other new opera, *Die Zauberflöte*. As Mozart wrote from Vienna on October 7–8 to his wife, Constanze, who was at the spa in Baden because of her health, “It’s the strangest thing, but the same evening that my new opera was given here for the first time with such applause, *Tito* had its final performance in Prague, also with extraordinary applause.”

Triumphant ovations on the same night in two of Europe’s leading musical capitals could only inspire hope that the tide was turning for the financially beleaguered composer. Sadly, two months later he would be dead, leaving his wife (with their two sons) to fend as best she could. One of the ways Constanze set about raising money was by mounting benefit performances of *La clemenza di Tito* in various German and Austrian cities, where it invariably met with great approval.

Although Mozart’s concert arias fall a bit between the cracks in terms of genre, and while they range in style and quality, at their best they can be powerful works of impressive musical and dramatic inspiration. Certainly that is the case with the recitative and aria “**Ch’io mi scordi di te? ... Non temer, amato bene,**” which is the most imposing of them all. This ten-minute scena shares the monumental quality found in Mozart’s two works that directly preceded it, the C-major Piano Concerto (K.503) and the *Prague* Symphony.

We do not know for sure who wrote the text, although some have speculated that it was Lorenzo da Ponte, Mozart’s librettist for *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte*. Mozart had already set these words (with a different introductory recitative) in March 1786 as an insertion aria (K.490) for a private revival of his opera *Idomeneo*. In the earlier context, the character Idamante (the son of Idomeneo) insists that he will remain true

to his beloved Ilia, resisting pressure to proclaim his affection for Elettra, whom he does not love. “You ask that I forget you?” he sings. “Fear nothing, my beloved, / my heart will always be yours.”

The text would have seemed tailor-made as a going away gift, and so it was when Mozart recomposed the piece for the February 23, 1787, farewell-to-Vienna performance of soprano Nancy Storace. Mozart entered the work in his catalogue as having been composed “für Mad.selle Storace und mich,” attaching his name one last time to that of a soprano whom he particularly appreciated, and connecting himself with her musically as well, replacing the earlier setting’s obbligato violin with his own instrument, the piano, as the singer’s partner.

Later that year, in October 1787, Mozart was flying high, buoyed by *Don Giovanni*’s successful premiere in Prague. Hoping to capitalize on his triumph, he soon began planning a series of *Akademien*, subscription concerts, to be held in Vienna during the upcoming Lenten season. Such concerts had brought him considerable income in recent years, and providing new works for them had accounted for the remarkable series of 12 piano concertos that he had produced during the prior three seasons. However, for reasons that are unclear, it seems that Mozart’s Lenten concerts did not materialize in 1788. As a result, the **D-major Piano Concerto (K.537)**, the only one he had completed for those projected performances, seems to have waited for its premiere for more than a year.

The eventual unveiling took place as something of a fluke. In the spring of 1789 Mozart (in the company of his friend Prince Carl Lichnowsky, who would later be a patron of Beethoven’s) went to Berlin in order to give some concerts. Composer and prince traveled from Vienna to Budwitz, then to Prague, and finally to Dresden, where they arrived on April 12, Easter

Sunday. Mozart reports in a letter to his wife, penned on April 16, that he was still in Dresden, despite his having written three days earlier that by this time he had expected to be in Leipzig. “What?” he writes, “Still in Dresden? – Yes, my dear; – I will relate everything to you in detail” – which he does, including how he was introduced to the “Directeur des plaisirs” responsible for the entertainment of the Elector of Saxony, Friedrich Augustus III. The Director, Mozart continues,

asked me if I would not like to perform before his Highness. I answered that although that would be a mark of the highest favor, it did not depend on me alone and thus I could not stay – and that was the end of it. ... During lunch came word that I was to play at Court the next day, Tuesday the 14th, at half past five. – That is something extraordinary, for it is usually very hard to get a

hearing here; and you know that I had no intentions to perform in this place. ... The next day I played at Court the new Concerto in D; the day after, on the morning of Wednesday the 15th, I received a rather pretty snuff-box ...

The circumstances indicate that Mozart must have had the orchestral parts for his concerto with him. Probably he intended to play it in Berlin, and it’s quite likely that he did, though if so, no record of the event survives. The next documented performance took place the following autumn, at the Frankfurt Stadttheater, where, on October 15, 1790, Mozart played two concertos at festivities celebrating the coronation of Leopold II as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (not to be confused with his later coronation as King of Bohemia, for which Mozart would compose *La clemenza di Tito* in 1771). Leopold II traveled from Vienna for the event, and

Angels and Muses

Ann Seline Storace (1765–1817) – for whom Mozart composed “**Ch’io mi scordi di te? ... Non temer, amato bene.**” and who went by the name of Nancy – was born in London to an Italian father (a double bassist who had settled in that city) and an Irish mother (herself the daughter of the proprietor of London’s Marylebone Gardens). From 1783 to 1787 she was a star of the Italian Opera Company at Vienna’s Burgtheater, where she was particularly noted for her brilliance in opera-buffa parts. That she was a fine lyric singer of impressive stamina is evident from the music that Mozart wrote for her in the role of hard-working Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, which she premiered on May 1, 1786.

Storace was so widely adored in Viennese musical circles that when she returned to the stage following a four-month absence in 1785 (occasioned by her sudden, unexplained loss of voice during the premiere of one of her brother’s operas), Lorenzo da Ponte wrote a celebratory poem, “Per la ricuperata salute di Ophelia,” which was jointly set to music by Mozart, Salieri, and an obscure composer named Cornetti; the work is regrettably lost.

Nancy Storace left Vienna in 1787 and would spend most of the rest of her career at the King’s Theatre and Drury Lane in London. On February 23 of that year she gave her farewell concert at Vienna’s Kärntnertortheater, on which occasion Mozart paid her tribute by playing his D-minor Piano Concerto (K.466) as well as this concert aria. One imagines that the hall must have gone wild when he teamed up with Storace for this new “insertion aria turned concert aria” that so vibrantly proclaims enduring affection.



Pietro Bettolini's 1788 drawing of Nancy Storace

took along with him a considerable entourage of courtiers, including 17 musicians — but not Mozart. The composer must have been more than a little hurt; he did, after all, hold the title of Imperial Chamber Composer.

Notwithstanding his regret, Mozart decided he should get himself to Frankfurt all the same, and even pawned some silverware to pay his way. With so many powerful personages assembling there he felt that he could not miss the opportunity to place himself somewhere near the fringe of the coronation spotlight. He took along two piano concertos to play at his concert, the F-major (K.459), of 1784, and the still-new D-major (K.537).

No commissions or job offers resulted from this initiative, which Mozart described as “a splendid success from the point of view of honor and glory, but a failure as far as money was concerned.” The D-major Concerto assumed the nickname *Coronation* because of its connection to these

festivities. For unknown reasons the F-major did not: both have equal claim to it.

Instrumentation: *La clemenza di Tito* Overture calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, plus timpani and strings. “Ch’io mi scordi di te?” employs pairs of clarinets, bassoons, and horns, as well as strings and solo soprano and solo piano. The D-major Piano Concerto requires flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings, in addition to the solo piano.

Cadenzas: Mozart left no cadenzas for the D-major Piano Concerto, although one is explicitly called for in the first movement. In these concerts, Ms. Uchida plays the Wanda Landowska cadenza.

The portion of this note pertaining to La clemenza di Tito is extracted from an article that originally appeared in the program books of the Washington National Opera, and is used with permission. ©James M. Keller

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

“Ch’io mi scordi di te? ... Non temer, amato bene,” Scene and Rondo, K.505

Ch’io mi scordi di te? Che a lei mi doni puoi consigliarmi? E puoi che in vita? Ah no. Sarebbe il viver mio di morte assai peggior! Venga la morte! intrepido l’attendo. Ma ch’io possa struggermi ad altra face, ad altr’oggetto donar gl’affetti miei, come tentarlo? Ah! di dolor morrei!

*Non temer, amato bene,
per te sempre il cor sarà.
Più non reggo a tante pene,
l’anima mia mancando va.
Tu sospiri? O duol funesto!
Pensa almen, che istante è questo!
Non mi posso, oh Dio! spiegar.
Stelle barbare, stelle spietate,
perchè mai tanto rigor?
Alme belle, che vedete
le mie pene in tal momento,
dite voi, s’egual tormento
può soffrir un fido cor.*

You ask that I forget you? You can advise me to give myself to her? And this while yet I live? Ah no. My life would be far worse than death! Let death come — I await it fearlessly. But how could I attempt to warm myself to another flame, to lavish my affections on another? Ah! I should die of grief!

Fear nothing, my beloved,
my heart will always be yours.
I can no longer suffer such distress,
my spirit fails me.
You sigh? O mournful sorrow!
Just think what a moment this is!
O God! I cannot express myself.
Barbarous stars, pitiless stars,
why are you so stern?
Fair souls who see
my sufferings at such a moment,
tell me if ever faithful heart
could feel such torment.