

GREAT CONCERTOS – A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

Wednesdays, October 18 to December 8, 10:00 A.M. to 12 Noon
Fairfield Senior's Centre, 81 Lothian Avenue, Etobicoke

Coordinator and Presenter: Rick Phillips

Course Overview: The concerto – a musical work for solo instrumentalist(s) and orchestra – is often the focal point of most orchestral concerts. The relationship between the soloist(s) and the orchestra can range from argumentative to cooperative and conversational, and often within a virtuosic display of skill and talent. Some of the world's greatest musicians, composers and performers, past and present, have concentrated on the concerto as the conduit to their audiences. In this series, using legendary recordings, we will trace and explore the history and evolution of the concerto, its form and structure, symbolism and interpretation, arriving at a deeper musical understanding, appreciation....and love.

“Nothing in history is more thrilling or of more ancient and universal experience than the antithesis of the individual and the crowd; an antithesis which is familiar in every degree from flat opposition to harmonious reconciliation.” Sir Donald Francis Tovey – British musicologist (1875-1940)

October 18. Brandenburg Concertos by J. S. Bach

The six concertos composed by Bach for the Margrave of Brandenburg in the 1720s are textbook examples of the “concerto grosso” or “large concerto” – one of the most popular forms of the Baroque era. Each of the six concertos features a different group of solo instruments, with or in contrast to the orchestra, creating colourful combinations of sonorities, textures, styles and methods.

October 25. Clarinet Concerto, K. 622 by W. A. Mozart

Late in his life, Mozart fell in love with the sound of the clarinet – at the time, a relatively new and quickly-developing instrument. The result was several works featuring the instrument, the most popular being the great clarinet concerto, Mozart's last, his own favourite, and often considered the greatest among the many he penned.

November 1. Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 73, “Emperor” by L. van Beethoven

So nick-named because of its imperial majesty and grandeur, the “Emperor” Concerto pushed the range of the piano, as well as the conventions of the eighteenth-century classical concerto. Less of a dialogue between soloist and orchestra and more of a dramatic struggle ending in victory, the “Emperor” is a wonderful combination of the heroic, the poetic and the joyful.

November 8. Violin Concerto, Op. 77 by J. Brahms

Brahms himself was a pianist, not a violinist, and his Violin Concerto was misunderstood at first, once described as “being written against the violin, not for it.” But today, it is one of the best-loved of all concertos – a wonderful mix of deep Romantic passion with a warm and tender lyricism.

November 15. Cello Concerto, Op. 104 by A. Dvorak

Composed when the great Czech composer was living and working in the United States, the cello concerto by Dvorak, (one of the few in the repertoire) is a magical and moving combination of his native Bohemian folk influences melded with American traits. After Brahms heard it, he said, “If I had realized one could compose a cello concerto like this, I would've composed one long ago.”

November 22. No class because presenter is away

November 29. Violin Concerto, Op. 47 by J. Sibelius

It is sometimes said that the music of the great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius appeals more easily to people of northern climes, like us Canadians. Sibelius had been trained as a violinist, and this concerto – his one-and-only – is a tribute to his knowledge and love for the instrument. Long avoided because of its fiendish difficulty, today it is part and parcel of the standard violin concerto repertoire.

December 6 “Rhapsody in Blue” by G. Gershwin and Piano Concerto in G by M. Ravel

George Gershwin composed “Rhapsody in Blue” in 1924 as a way of presenting American jazz and popular music traits within the traditional piano concerto form. It worked, and a few years later, Gershwin hosted French composer Maurice Ravel in New York City, taking him to jazz clubs in Harlem. Ravel enjoyed the rhythm and energy of jazz, incorporating those traits into his own Piano Concerto in G.

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