

Concert program

James Conlon

conductor

Christoph Willibald Gluck

Orpheus and Eurydice: selection of pieces from Act II

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Symphony No. 40 in G minor K.550

Franz Joseph Haydn

Symphony No. 103 "Drumroll"

The program conducted by **James Conlon**, honorary conductor of ORT, transports us to late 18th-century Vienna. With his annual presence here, the American Maestro (of Italian origins) focuses each time on the Viennese repertoire, spanning from Classicism to early Romanticism. This time, we are presented with the most famous of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's** symphonies, his penultimate, and a masterpiece by **Franz Joseph Haydn**, who helped shape the symphonic form.

Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550, is part of a symphonic trilogy composed in a remarkable burst of creativity during the summer of 1788, when he was just thirty-two years old. He never heard any of the three performed in his lifetime, as he found no opportunity to present them before his death in 1791. Of the triptych, this is the most poignant, agitated, and turbulent—characteristics reinforced by its key of G minor, a tonality that for Mozart conveys emotional turmoil. Haydn's atmosphere, however, is entirely different. His Symphony No. 103, known as the "Drumroll" Symphony (also his penultimate of 104 symphonies), begins with the very effect for which it is named: a striking timpani roll. This score, composed in 1795 when Haydn was sixty, epitomizes classical balance and radiant perfection.

Additionally, Conlon brings us excerpts from *Orfeo ed Euridice*, the opera that sought to reform Italian melodrama in 1762 by revisiting one of the foundational myths of musical theater: the story of the legendary singer who, through the power of his art, persuades the god of the underworld to return his beloved wife. **Christoph Willibald Gluck's** opera is a Viennese work with an Italian texture, though the exquisite orchestral interludes in the second act—set in the underworld where Orpheus descends to retrieve Eurydice—exhibit the typically French refinement of Gluck's writing.

James Conlon - bio

Internationally recognized as one of today's most versatile and respected conductors, James Conlon has cultivated a vast symphonic, operatic and choral repertoire. Since his 1974 debut with the New York Philharmonic, he has conducted virtually every major American and European symphony orchestra, and at many of the world's leading opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera. Through worldwide touring, an extensive discography and filmography, numerous writings, television appearances, and guest speaking engagements, Conlon is one of classical music's most recognized and prolific figures. Conlon is Music Director of the Los Angeles Opera (since 2006). He will serve as Music Director of the company until his 20th season in 2026, at which time he will become Conductor Laureate. He was previously Principal Conductor of the RAI National Symphony Orchestra in Torino, Italy (2016–20); Principal Conductor of the Paris Opera (1995–2004); General Music Director of the City of Cologne, Germany (1989–2003), simultaneously leading the Gürzenich Orchestra and the Cologne Opera; and Music Director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra (1983–91). Conlon was Music Director of the Ravinia Festival (2005–15), summer home of the Chicago Symphony, and is now Music Director Laureate of the Cincinnati May Festival-the oldest Choral Festival in the United States-where he was Music Director for 37 years (1979–2016), marking one of the longest tenures of any director of an American classical music institution. He also served as Artistic Advisor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (2021–2023). He has conducted over 270 performances at the Metropolitan Opera since his 1976 debut. He has also conducted at leading opera houses and festivals such as the Wiener Staatsoper, Salzburg Festival, La Scala, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, Mariinsky Theatre, Covent Garden, Chicago Lyric Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, and Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino.

Christoph Willibald Gluck

Erasbach 1714/ Wien 1787

Orpheus and Eurydice: selection of pieces from Act II

duration: about 10 minutes

In 1762, Christoph Willibald Gluck earned a place in the history of music, perhaps more significant than what he would have gained based solely on his merit as a composer. He gave voice in *Orfeo ed Euridice* to the ideas that Count Giacomo Durazzo, superintendent of the imperial theaters, had in mind to reform the traditional Italian opera, which, in his Enlightenment view, had become too frivolous and superficial. The libretto, in which Ranieri de' Calzabigi elaborated on the classical myth of Orpheus and his refusal to accept his wife's death, was constructed with attention not only to the Count's principles but also to the more serious and responsible habits of French *tragédie lyrique*, which emphasized the importance of words and the demands of the drama. This included an "Overture" that was no longer merely decorative but conscious and anticipatory of the text's content, singing that was more declamatory than virtuosic, ample use of choruses, and the incorporation of dances to highlight the instrumental elements deemed necessary for the theatrical narrative. When Gluck found himself working in Paris in the 1770s, it was natural for him to present his masterpiece translated into French, perhaps effectively bringing it back to its cultural roots. *Orphée et Eurydice*, which premiered at the Académie Royale de Musique in August 1774, featured several changes, including the protagonist's role shifting from the contralto castrato voice to that of a tenor, along with an increase in danced sections. In addition to the dance in the second act's opening scene, where the Furies unleash their fury on Orpheus as he descends into the Underworld, a more extended dance was added at the end. The one accompanying his entrance into the Elysian Fields was expanded for the French version into the *Dance of the Blessed Spirits*, enhanced by the insertion of the famous flute solo. With its ethereal timbre, the flute creates a poetry of sound with few parallels, becoming an iconic symbol of a theater capable of storytelling without the need for words.

Daniele Spini

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Sazburg 1756 / Wien 1791

Symphony No. 40 in G minor K.550

duration: about 28 minutes

In the autograph catalog of Mozart's compositions, the last three symphonies are dated as follows: E-flat major (No. 39), June 26, 1788; G minor (No. 40), July 25, 1788; C major (No. 41, Jupiter), August 10, 1788. We have no other information regarding the composition of these three works, which leads us to the surprising hypothesis that, in less than two months, three of the greatest symphonies in the repertoire were completed. What is certain is that at the time, Mozart was working in his residence in Währing, just outside Vienna, and was in severe financial difficulties. This is evidenced by letters to his friend Michael Puchberg, a merchant and fellow Freemason of Mozart, often containing requests for loans. Although there is no definite record of performances of the three symphonies during Mozart's lifetime, it is hard to believe that, given his circumstances, the musician did not plan these works with the intention of earning some money from them. Despite this plan, Mozart was no longer able to organize public concerts on his own: one of the three symphonies may have been performed in Frankfurt on October 15, 1790 (the program for the evening announced "a new grand symphony by Mr. Mozart"), and perhaps it was the G minor symphony that was conducted by Salieri at the Burgtheater in Vienna on April 16 and 17, 1791. This latter hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the presence of the Stadler brothers, clarinetist friends of Mozart, on that occasion: this would explain why the composer added clarinets to the score at a later stage (today both versions are commonly performed). The fact that the G minor symphony soon achieved wide circulation is demonstrated by the numerous copies that were made of it: however, all three works were published posthumously, first in separate parts and only between 1807 and 1810, in full score, in London. If the chronicles of Mozart's last years show that the Viennese public had lost all interest in the composer's instrumental works, after his death the three final symphonies became objects of veneration. Today, it is difficult to understand why, in 19th-century reception, the G minor symphony appeared to be an "airy Greek Grace" (Schumann's words). If we set aside the youthful (but splendid) K.183, which combines Italianate operatic movements with a "sentimental" style, Mozart did not compose other symphonies in minor keys, which he also rarely used in other contexts. This choice is now associated (especially after Hermann Abert's monumental exegesis) with the "abyssal" and "demonic" side of Mozart's creativity: that of *Don Giovanni*, to be clear. However, if one examines the critical literature on the first public performances, one discovers that this description corresponds exactly to the most widely accepted image of the symphony: "it is an imposing picture, but splendid in its proportions; a Phidias-like Jupiter, inspiring awe and love at the same time." Take note: this critic, writing in 1805, is not referring to the *Jupiter* Symphony, but to the G minor symphony! Of course, no one overlooked the torment in the lines of this work: but perhaps we need to rethink the conception of musical classicism. There is no rule that says that, within a solidly constructed edifice, the most intense passions cannot dwell.

Marco Mangani

Franz Joseph Haydn

Rohrau 1732 / Wien 1809

Symphony No. 103 "Drumroll"

Duration: about 29 minutes

The penultimate work in Haydn's entire symphonic corpus, the Symphony in E-flat major No. 103 belongs to the group of the twelve "London" symphonies, so named because they were composed during the two triumphant journeys the composer made to England between 1791 and 1795, at the invitation of the violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon. Haydn had previously received persistent invitations to cross the English Channel, but he had been forced to decline due to his commitments as Kapellmeister at the Esterházy court, from which he was only relieved after the death of Prince Nicholas in September 1790, and the subsequent decision of his son Anton to disband the family chapel. Haydn's contact with English musical practices—beginning in January 1791—proved decisive in the final refinement of his symphonic style, which had evolved from Baroque influences to the admirable formal balance of the "classical" style, achieving the highest results in the "Paris" symphonies. At least two external factors significantly influenced Haydn's compositional activity in England: the availability of an unusually large orchestra for the time (sixty players, more than double

the number at Esterháza), and the direct interaction with a paying audience. Thanks to the size of Salomon's orchestra, Haydn's symphonic style achieved an extraordinary variety of expressive solutions, and an even clearer definition of form. Furthermore, the awareness of writing for a discerning and demanding audience like the London one prompted Haydn to create scores that could "impress" through a continuously varied exploration of instrumental, harmonic, and developmental solutions, as well as distinct and recognizable characteristics. These results were not unrelated to his preference for thematic material with a "folk" character, which permeates the entire group of the "London" symphonies. In this light, the metonymic meaning of the nicknames associated with many of the "London" symphonies, including No. 103, becomes clear; the nickname "Drumroll," though reductive, is not entirely misleading, as it highlights what is, in each instance, the most salient element of an ever-renewing expressive creativity. Thus, the symphony opens with a drumroll and a slow introduction that surprises with a sinuous bass motif that unfolds, passes to the higher instruments, and then folds back on itself. In complete contrast is the joyful theme that opens the following *Allegro con spirito* in sonata form; the material unfolds with perfect coherence, featuring a non-conflictual second theme and a reflective pause in the dancing coda motif. It is in the development section that Haydn's mastery of continuously renewing the basic ideas becomes evident (the introduction's motif even reappears); and the recapitulation offers the surprise of seeing the slow introduction return before the conclusion, thus providing unity to the entire movement. The second movement, *Andante più tosto Allegretto*, is a variation movement, following the double variation scheme so dear to Haydn, consisting of two distinct themes (one in minor and one in major) that are alternately varied. The almost ironic march-like rhythm and the refinement of the instrumentation make this movement one of the most unique of the "London" symphonies. Solemn in its phrasing and rich in delightful echoes, the Minuet features a trio presented *sotto voce*, with a lightness of writing that Mendelssohn would later emulate. As for the finale, *Allegro con spirito*, this sonata-form movement, opened by the horn calls, shows some thematic and structural affinities with the finale of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony, including the intrusion of contrapuntal procedures; however, the movement is essentially based on a single thematic idea, with no secondary themes, and its logic lies in the intricate developments of this theme, in line with the inexhaustible variety of technical and expressive solutions that define Haydn's late style.

Arrigo Quattrocchi

Orchestra della Toscana - bio

Founded in Florence in 1980, at the initiative of the Regione Toscana, the Province and the Municipality of Florence, ORT is considered one of the best orchestras in Italy.

In 1983, under the artistic direction of **Luciano Berio**, it was recognised by the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment as an Orchestral Concert Institution. The average staff consists of 44 musicians who are also divided into agile chamber music ensembles. The Orchestra is based in Florence in the historic Teatro Verdi, where it puts on its seasonal concerts, concerts which are then distributed throughout Tuscany. Today it is under the artistic direction of **Daniele Spini**, appointed in February of 2023; the principal conductor is **Diego Ceretta**. The orchestra performs regularly throughout Italy, many times a guest of the Lingotto Auditorium of Turin, as well as the Teatro alla Scala, the Academy of Santa Cecilia in Rome, as well as in some of the most important European and overseas concert halls, from Carnegie Hall in New York to the Teatro Coliseo in Buenos Aires, and also Halls in Hong Kong and Japan. Its artistic history is marked by the presence of and collaboration with famous musicians such as Salvatore Accardo, Martha Argerich, Rudolf Barshai, Yuri Bashmet, Frans Brüggen, James Conlon, its honorary Conductor, Myung-Whun Chung, Gianandrea Gavazzeni, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Daniel Harding, Eliahu Inbal, Yo-Yo Ma, Emmanuel Pahud, **Daniele Rustioni**, who has also been Music Director and Artistic Director and who is now Conductor Emeritus, and Uto Ughi. The ORT is distinguished by the excellence of the musicians who perform in it, and it is a versatile interpreter of a wide repertoire, from Baroque to Classicism, from Romanticism to the historical twentieth century, with a particular focus on contemporary music, an aspect which has led it to participate in important events such as the Venice Music Biennale and the Strasbourg Music Festival. The ORT conceived and created the "Play It!" Festival dedicated to Italian music of our times; this Festival received the "Franco Abbiati" Music Critics' Award in 2014 as the best initiative. Its concerts are broadcast on Rai Radio Tre and Rete Toscana Classica; it has recorded for Emi, Ricordi, Agorà, VDM Records, Sony Classical, Warner Music Italia, NovAngiqua Records and Dynamic.

The "Verdi" of Florence - bio

It is the largest "Italian-style" theatre in Tuscany (at the time of its construction it was among the seven largest in Italy). Throughout the years, it has kept its main characteristics intact, namely that of being a large popular theatre in the centre of the city, open to all genres of entertainment. Founded as the **Pagliano Theatre** on the remains of the fourteenth-century *Carcere delle Stinche*, it was inaugurated on September 10th, **1854** with Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* or, as it was called at the time, *Il Viscardello*. Its creation is the result of the desire of a former baritone pharmacist Girolamo Pagliano who wanted a performance space designed for the people. In 1901, after being named after Luigi Cherubini, it took the name of **Teatro Verdi**. Its story begins with the great season of melodrama of the late nineteenth century and its charismatic protagonists and continues with the turmoil of the futurist avant-garde movement. From the new operetta genre of the 1920s, we come to the post-war period with jazz and the revue all the way up to the new actors who inaugurated the rebirth of comedy in its many forms. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Teatro Verdi* became a prestigious stage for the most sophisticated pop and rock music and for unconventional drama. Since January 1998 it has been owned by the **ORT Foundation**, home to rehearsals and concerts of the **Orchestra della Toscana**. Since then, the *Verdi* has welcomed classical music with great conductors and world-famous musicians and has reached the present day, following a course that has never been interrupted and that links the history of the theatre to the history of Florence. Thanks to the theatrical companies **Antico Teatro Pagliano**, which runs the theatrical season, and **PRG** which organises pop and rock music events, the *Verdi* still offers an extremely varied programme in terms of quality, genres, and number of events scheduled.

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