

Carl Maria von WEBER

(1786 – 1826)

Symphony No. 1 in C Major, opus 19, J. 50

Composer, conductor, virtuoso, novelist, and essayist, Carl Maria von Weber is one of the great figures of German Romanticism. Weber was the quintessential Romantic artist, turning to poetry, history, folklore, and myths for inspiration and striving to create a convincing synthesis of fantastic literature and music. Weber's works, especially his operas "Der Freischütz", "Euryanthe", and "Oberon", greatly influenced the development of the Romantic opera in Germany. He was also an innovative composer of instrumental music, and his works influenced composers such as Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, and Felix Mendelssohn. His orchestration has also been highly praised and emulated by later generations of composers; in fact, Hector Berlioz referred to him several times in his "Treatise on Orchestration" while Claude Debussy remarked that the sound of the Weber orchestra was obtained through the "scrutiny of the soul of each instrument".

Carl Maria Weber was the eldest of the three children of Franz Anton von Weber and his second wife, Genovefa Brenner, an actress. In 1798, Weber went to Salzburg to study with Michael Haydn and, subsequently, to Vienna to continue his studies with Abbé Vogler. Vogler was so impressed by his pupil's talent that he recommended him to the post of Director at the Opera in Breslau. His personal life during this time remained irregular: he left his post in Breslau in a fit of frustration, was on one occasion arrested for debt and fraud, and was involved in a variety of scandals. However, he remained successful as a composer. Suffering from tuberculosis when he visited London, he died there during the early morning hours of June 5, 1826. He was buried in London, but 18 years later his remains were transferred to and re-buried in Dresden.

Weber composed his First Symphony, op. 19 (J. 50) between mid-December 1806 and early January 1807, and followed soon after with his Second Symphony. Both symphonies were composed for the court of Duke Eugen Friedrich Heinrich von Württemberg, for whom Weber started to work in 1806. In fact, the orchestration of the two symphonies reflects the resources that were at his disposal at the time, which did not include clarinet, used so well by Weber in other venues. Little is written about this delightful work which follows a standard four-movement symphonic structure. Its tuneful nature readily reminds the listener of the composer's proclivity for operatic writing, and this symphony could easily be comprised of tidbits from the composer's opus of such works.

Criticism of Weber often holds the symphonies to be competent, but goes no further. The works demonstrate, however, much promise for the way he would later treat orchestral passages in his stage works. In the context of his day, they were written approximately two years after Beethoven completed his Third Symphony ("Eroica") and suffer when compared to that work. At the same time, Beethoven's Third was then more the anomaly than a model for symphonists, and Weber should not be expected to approach the kind of work that Beethoven had written. When compared to the efforts of other composers of his day, Weber produced admirable symphonies that deserve to be performed far more frequently.

OF NOTE:

Weber's cousin, Constanze, was the wife of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.