

Quad City Symphony Orchestra  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
Masterworks V: From East to West

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CHEN YI (b. 1953)

*Duo Ye* for chamber orchestra

**Instrumentation:** Flute, oboe, E-flat clarinet, clarinet, bassoon, horn, percussion, and strings.

**Premiere:** Beijing Symphony Orchestra, 1985.  
**QCSO Premiere.**

Although composer Chen Yi has become well-known for her fusion of traditional Chinese and Western classical music, her early training in music was mostly Mozart, Beethoven, and other European masters. "I was trained as a classical musician when I was young, starting piano when I was three and starting violin when I was four," she told journalist Bruce Duffie in 2005. "But for the whole time, the training was based in Western classical music until the Cultural Revolution."

The tumult of the time upended Chen's life. "When I was a teenager, I was sent to countryside to work as a farmer. I have gone through two years of hardship, made to work as forced labor, to have to bring wash and to have to have the so-called re-education." Though personally difficult, this period proved extremely formational for her. "For that time I started to learn about human beings' value, also the importance of civilization and education."

After her farm work concluded, she was admitted to China's prestigious Central Conservatory of Music. It was then that she began to bridge West and East, returning to the countryside as a student to collect folk melodies. It was a profound time of self-realization. "There is my native language that

the farmers spoke... It's not classical. It's not Mozart! It's not Beethoven that I'm used to. Then I started to realize that I should find my own voice... I realized that I have to think into my cultural roots very deeply in order to find my own voice, to have a unique language to speak in."

Written in 1985, *Duo Ye* was inspired by one such



Composer Chen Yi

trip to the remote Guangxi district, where Chen observed a touching celebratory ritual. "Duo YE is a form of age-old traditional song and dance...in which people stand in a circle with a bonfire in the center, and dance in slow steps towards one direction." Villagers sing a short melodic phrase while a village leader improvises a song of welcome or celebration. "The warm scene left such a deep impression on me that I wrote a piano solo piece 'Duo Ye' as a result of this field trip." Chen orchestrated the piano piece for chamber orchestra in 1985, and eventually adapted it for full orchestra as well.

Chen Yi eventually emigrated to the United States with her husband, composer Zhou Long, to attend Columbia University. Both became U.S. citizens in 1999.

### *Duo Ye* Listening Guide

♫ **TEXTURE:** Chen balances two main kinds of textures in the work's opening: long melodies in unison contrasted with short, punctuated chords.

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** In addition to broad melodies, the work features a striking variety of short instrumental colors, including pizzicato and percussion. Chen has said that her time working in the performance of traditional Chinese opera gave her a broad and encyclopedic knowledge of the possibilities of percussion.

♫ **FORM:** The piece begins with a quick, rhythmic introduction followed by an extended whispered, quiet passage. Chen gradually reintroduces the introduction's accompanying rhythm, and the work's conclusion (coda) is an energetic and inexorable crescendo. Listen for a somewhat unexpected ending.

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION:** During the middle slow passage, listen for the distinctive oboe and flute solos in slow passage, including distinctive pitch bends. While in Western music such bends are common for strings and rare for woodwinds, they are very characteristic of winds in Chinese music.

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

### Violin Concerto No. 4 in D major, K. 218

**Instrumentation:** Solo violin, two oboes, two horns, and strings.

**Premiere:** Unknown; probably in Salzburg with the composer as soloist in 1775.

**QCSO Premiere.**

If they worked together in the twenty-first century, we might describe Mozart and fellow Salzburg violinist as "frenemies", that is, a mix of friends and enemies. "I began an interesting long letter to you," he wrote his father Leopold from Vienna in 1781, "but I wrote too much about Brunetti in it, and was afraid that his curiosity might tempt him to open the letter." And few days later he sent the original letter. "*Te Deum laudamus!*" he sarcastically wrote, echoing the famous hymn of Christian celebration. "At last that coarse, mean, Brunetti is off, who disgraces his master, himself, and all the musicians."

Mozart and Brunetti knew each other from their time together in the orchestra of the Archbishop of Salzburg. This was the time in Mozart's life between his travels as a child prodigy and the beginning of rise to prominence in the imperial capital of Vienna, a rise cut short by his untimely death in 1791.



Young Mozart. (Photo: Classical Music Communications.)

During the time when he worked with Brunetti in Salzburg, Mozart composed five violin concertos for himself to play the court orchestra. We know little about the dates and details of the premieres of these works, but we do assume that Mozart was himself the soloist to premiere each, and that he envisioned these works as vehicles to hopefully raise his public profile beyond Salzburg.

However, by the time he moved to Vienna to seek his fortune, Mozart had determined, quite rightly, that the most effective and immediate avenue for him to meet the public was not as a violinist, but as a pianist. This shift is itself an amazing testament to Mozart's wide-ranging talents, being roughly the equivalent of deciding that, after successfully training for a major league baseball career, he simply opted for the NFL instead.

This left, however, five brilliant violin concertos that could happily be passed to other performers. And, despite his deep personal

dislike of Brunetti, Mozart clearly respected his erstwhile colleague as a musician, making several adjustments to his prior works for solo violin to suit Brunetti's gifts. The D major concerto is one such work, with Mozart's revisions making the piece an extremely challenging but highly gratifying work for the soloist. One can almost imagine the composer, no longer writing for himself, gleefully throwing down technical challenges to the man he detested, who also happened to be the artist he admired.

### Mozart Violin Concerto No. 4 Listening Guide

#### First movement: Allegro

♫ **FORM:** Like most of Mozart's concertos, this begins with a "double exposition", where the orchestra plays through the concerto's themes first before the soloist takes center stage. The soloist has the option to play along with the first violins, or not, during this introductory passage.

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** Notice the minimal size of the orchestra: no flutes, no bassoons, and no clarinets (the latter of which was not yet in wide use in 1775). Mozart often scaled the orchestra way back for concertos, so as not to overwhelm the solo line.

♫ **FORM:** Although it has come to mean any passage designed for virtuosic display by a soloist, the term "cadenza" literally means "cadence", or the end of a musical phrase. As in most classical-era concertos, the first movement cadenza comes near the end of the movement's second-to-last musical phrase. The orchestra plays what is called a "cadential 6/4" chord to set the soloist off and running; this type of chord has the

paradoxical character of being both settled and full of expectation.

### **Second movement: Andante**

♪ **ORCHESTRATION:** The solo violin part is often much higher in pitch than the accompaniment during this slow movement. This keeps the accompaniment from overwhelming the solo during quieter passages. There are some striking moments, however, where the solo violin part plays lower while the accompaniment floats carefully above.

♪ **TEXTURE:** Most of the opening passages have long notes in the accompaniment. But about halfway through, Mozart “opens the windows” a bit, with a brief passage of very short staccato accompaniment.

♪ **FORM:** This movement also features a cadenza, also on a cadential 6/4 chord near the movement’s end. Notice the difference in character from the first movement: here the virtuosity demonstrated is of an expressive, not a technical, variety.

### **Third movement: Rondeau**

♪ **FORM:** As is widely known, a rondo is a movement where one important principal theme recurs often, between statements of other contrasting themes. Usually the various interspersed themes share a tempo and meter with the main theme, but here Mozart changes tempo and meter often. This gives the movement the feeling of frequently “starting anew”.

♪ **ORCHESTRATION:** Notice how the horns and oboes mostly play opposite the strings, and mostly play longer chords to contrast the strings’ often quick and sprightly passages. Historically, this is a very typical role for winds and horns; the whole section was at one

time called the “harmonie”, or the section of the orchestra that held down the chords (and also played for important outdoor events).

♪ **FORM:** Atypically for a concerto, the movement ends quietly, on an elegant *pianissimo* (very soft dynamic).

## **ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)** **Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61**

**Instrumentation:** Two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

**Premiere:** November 5, 1846, Gewandhaus, Leipzig, with composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy conducting.

**QCSO Performance History:** The first and only QCSO performance of Schumann’s Symphony No. 2 was in March 2009, with Mark Russell Smith conducting.

In 1839, Robert Schumann was often in great anguish. He and the brilliant pianist Clara Weick were deeply in love, but caught in an endless battle with her father about their desire to marry. Yet, on December 11 of that year, he wrote Clara in an ecstatic mood. “Oh, Clara, I have been in paradise today!” he wrote. “They played at the rehearsal a symphony of Franz Schubert’s. How I wish you had been there, for I cannot describe it to you. The instruments all sing like remarkably intelligent human voices, and the scoring is worthy of Beethoven. Then the length, the divine length, of it! It is a whole four-volume novel, longer than the choral symphony. I was supremely happy, and had nothing left to wish for, except that you were my wife and that I could write such symphonies myself.”

Both wishes would be granted in short order: the two would overcome the legal

blockades erected by Clara's father and be married less than a year later, and mere months after that would bring the premiere of Schumann's first symphony, the "Spring" Symphony in B-flat. He would go on to contribute three more to the genre in the fifteen years preceding his death in 1856.

The symphony of Schubert's that had so impressed Schumann in 1839 was Schubert's Ninth, the so-called "Great" symphony in C major. And, although we lack direct testimony that Schumann's third successful attempt at a symphony (now numbered No. 2 based on confusing publication histories) was directly inspired by Schubert's ninth, the connections are compelling. Certainly, many composers chose keys in homage to the works of historical masters they admired,

particularly those (e.g., Brahms, Mahler) who wrote symphonies in C minor (with the requisite "triumph" of C major), modeled after Beethoven 5. Schumann himself would be the recipient of such homage: it is widely believed that Edvard Grieg wrote his own Piano Concerto in A minor to honor Schumann's concerto in the same key.

Like the performance of Schubert's Ninth in 1839, Schumann's own C major symphony would receive its premiere in Leipzig in 1846, also under the baton of Felix Mendelssohn. Despite the work's generally noble and optimistic tone, for Schumann it memorialized one of many difficult times in his life. "I wrote my symphony in December, 1845," he would write later to a conductor friend, "and I sometime fear my semi-invalid state can be divined from the music. I began to feel more myself when I wrote the last movement, and was certainly much better when I finished the whole work. All the same, it reminds me of dark days." This association for the composer seems highly dissonant with the mostly optimistic tone of the work, demonstrating that for Schumann, like Tchaikovsky and others, some of the happiest music can come from a composer's least happy times.



Figure 1 Clara and Robert Schumann, around 1850 (Photo: Getty Images)

### Schumann Symphony No. 2 Listening Guide

#### First movement: *Sostenuto assai* — *Allegro, ma non troppo*

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** In the opening slow passage, which some have likened to a German chorale prelude, Schumann foregrounds the solemn strings while the horns and trumpets comment stoically. Meanwhile the woodwinds make very sneaky entrances, underscoring subtle emotional shifts in the harmony and

helping to drive to a noble climax. This leads swiftly into quicker, more adventurous-sounding music.

♪ **DYNAMICS:** Schumann makes frequent use of wide dynamic shifts; though much of the movement is exultant and loud, he will often intercut a measure or two of softer music.

### **Second movement: Scherzo: Allegro vivace**

♪ **FORM:** For Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, the second movement was usually the slow movement. From the middle of the nineteenth century, however, composers experimented with putting the dance movement in the second place, followed by the slow movement.

♪ **FORM:** This scherzo includes not one but two “trios”, or passages separating restatements of the main scherzo theme.

### **Third movement: Adagio espressivo**

♪ **TEXTURE:** After an introductory passage in the strings, notice how the melodies between solo oboe and solo bassoon interact. This is an example of the art of “counterpoint”, or composing two melodies in balance. Such passages frequently recur in this movement.

♪ **MELODY:** Like his hero Schubert, Schumann was well-known as a composer of songs. Notice his many sprawling, song-like melodies, which carefully balance natural-feeling stepwise motion with some very pungent leaps.

### **Fourth movement: Allegro molto vivace**

♪ **AFFECT:** Like the first and second movement, this movement includes some of Schumann’s most high-energy, joyful, and intense music.

♪ **HARMONY:** About a third of the way through the movement, Schumann makes an unusual move. While music in a minor key will frequently reach an

arrival point in the parallel major key (known as a “Picardy Third”), rarely will major music resolve into the parallel minor. But this is exactly what Schumann does, combining the unusual harmonic shift with some long silences and a reduction to very quiet dynamics. The moment feels like a “downer”, but this becomes an opportunity to begin again, although in a somewhat more restrained mood. The journey back to the triumphant music of the opening provides the emotional framework for the rest of the movement.