Im Sommerwind (1904)

ANTON WEBERN was born in Vienna, Austria, on December 3, 1883, and died in Mittersill, Austria, on September 15, 1945. The first performance of Im Sommerwind took place in Seattle, Washington, on May 25, 1962, with Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra. Im Sommerwind is scored for three flutes, two oboes, English horn, four clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, six horns, two trumpets, timpani, cymbals, triangle, two harps, and strings. Approximate performance time is twelve minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: December 11, 12 and 13, 1975, Alexis Hauser, Conductor.


A nton Webern composed Im Sommerwind (subtitled an “Idyll for Large Orchestra”) in the summer of 1904. The Viennese composer completed the first draft, in condensed score form, on August 5. Webern finished the orchestration on September 16. The title of Im Sommerwind (“In Summer Wind”) is taken from the poem of the same name by German writer Bruno Wille (1860-1928), part of his Offenbarungen eines Wachholderbaums (“Revelations of a Juniper Tree”). Wille’s Im Sommerwind is an extended, rhapsodic depiction of a country summer’s day.

When Anton Webern composed Im Sommerwind, he was a twenty-year-old student at the University of Vienna. Later that same year, Webern began studies with Arnold Schoenberg. As a result, Webern would abandon the late-Romantic expression found in such works as Im Sommerwind for a minimalist style of extraordinary brevity and concentration. The totality of Webern’s published works — consisting of hundreds of chamber, orchestral and vocal compositions — is approximately of three hours’ duration.

Im Sommerwind was not performed during the composer’s lifetime. The work was “brought to light” in 1961 by the noted Webern scholar, Hans Moldenhauer. Im Sommerwind received its premiere in May of 1962 at the First International Webern Festival, held at the University of Washington, in Seattle. Eugene Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Webern often reviewed the score of Im Sommerwind with his students as a demonstration of the conservative nature of his early compositions. Nevertheless, Im Sommerwind’s bewitching atmosphere — the result, in great part, of Webern’s evocative orchestration — already presages the more famous works of one of the 20th century’s most influential composers.
Im Sommerwind begins with a hushed introduction (Ruhig bewegt) that opens in the strings, soon joined by the other members of the orchestra. A solo oboe introduces a buoyant motif that will play a significant role throughout the work. Several contrasting episodes, notable for their mercurial changes of mood and color, soon follow. The mood finally calms, with the ethereal atmosphere of the opening measures returning at the work’s conclusion.

**Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat Major, K. 271 (“Jeunehomme”) (1777)**

**WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART** was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna, Austria, on December 5, 1791. In addition to the solo piano, the “Jeunehomme” Concerto is scored for two oboes, two horns and strings. Approximate performance time is thirty-two minutes.

*First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: January 16, 17 and 18, 1986, Philippe Entremont, Piano and Conductor.*

*Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: March 30, 31 and April 1, 2000, André Watts, Piano, Yoel Levi, Conductor.*

In his book *The Great Pianists*, Harold C. Schonberg, Music Critic Emeritus of the *New York Times*, offers this description of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s early years:

At the age of three he was picking at the harpsichord—not aimlessly, as most babies would, but carefully selecting thirds and other consonances. This amused him for hours at a time. At four he was studying little minuets. At five he was composing them. His ear was so accurate that it was bothered by quarter tones, and so delicate that the close-up sound of a trumpet made him faint dead away. At six he was taken from Salzburg by his father, an eminent violinist, teacher, theoretician and all-around musician, on his first tour. Then tour followed tour. So was spent the childhood of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

During those many tours throughout Europe, the young Mozart dazzled audiences with his own compositions, including several Concertos for piano and orchestra. Mozart composed the first of these works in April of 1767, when he was 11 years old. Ten years and seven more Concertos would follow before the creation of the E-Flat, K. 271. Mozart, then Konzertmeister at the Court of the Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, composed the work in January of 1777.

Mozart wrote the Concerto for the visiting French virtuoso, Mlle. Jeunehomme. Little is known of the dedicatee of this Concerto, but given the challenging nature of the solo writing, one must assume Mlle. Jeunehomme was indeed a fine pianist. It should be added that Mozart, too, often played his E-flat Concerto, and to great acclaim.

Scholars characterize the “Jeunehomme” as the Mozart’s first “mature” Piano Concerto. The work’s operatic slow movement, along with its wealth of melodic inspiration and inventive
departures from convention, all point the way to the glories of Mozart’s later Concertos. For these reasons, the “Jeunehomme” is the earliest of Mozart’s 27 Piano Concertos to maintain an important presence in the concert repertoire.

Musical Analysis

I. Allegro — The “Jeunehomme” opens with the first of many surprises. Concertos of Mozart’s time traditionally opened with a purely orchestral exposition of the movement’s principal themes. Here, the soloist immediately presents the vigorous opening theme in dialogue with the orchestra. The pianist then defers as the orchestra introduces several engaging melodies. The soloist returns with an extended trill immediately before the close of the orchestral exposition and then assumes center stage with his own elaboration of the principal thematic material. The brief development interjects a degree of melancholy into this otherwise cheerful movement. The recapitulation begins with another “dialogue” presentation of the opening theme, this time with the roles of the orchestra and soloist reversed. A repetition of the opening theme leads to a cadenza and some brilliant passagework by the soloist to conclude the opening movement.

II. Andantino — The slow movement, in the key of C minor, opens with throbbing muted strings providing a somber introduction to the entrance of the pianist. The highly vocal writing for the soloist, coupled with dramatic interjections by the orchestra, recall the tragic Italian opera seria of Mozart’s time. The mood brightens somewhat with a sudden modulation to E-flat Major, but pathos soon returns with a reprise of the opening section. The strings remove their mutes for the Andantino’s closing measures, intensifying the final outburst by soloist and orchestra.

III. Rondeau; Presto — The soloist introduces the scurrying principal theme of the Rondo finale. The orchestra immediately follows suit and in typical rondo form, the principal theme alternates with several contrasting sections. Highly atypical among the contrasting episodes is an extended graceful and subdued Minuet (Menuetto; Cantabile) that offers a striking departure from the Rondo’s general exuberance. After the soloist’s cadenza, the Rondo theme returns. A decrescendo, juxtaposed with a forte exclamation by soloist and orchestra, cap the playful mood of the finale’s closing measures.

Eine Alpensinfonie, Opus 64 (1915)

RICHARD STRAUSS was born in Munich, Germany, on June 11, 1864, and died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, on September 8, 1949. The first performance of An Alpine Symphony took place at the Philharmonie in Berlin, Germany, on October 28, 1915, with the composer conducting the Dresden Hofkapelle Orchestra. An Alpine Symphony is scored for two piccolos, four flutes, three oboes, English horn, heckelphone, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, four bassoons, contrabassoon, eight horns, four Wagner tubas, four trumpets, four trombones, two tubas, timpani (two players), two harps, celeste, organ, bass drum, cow bell, cymbals, glockenspiel, snare drum, tam tam, thunder
machine, triangle, wind machine and strings. Approximate performance time is forty-eight minutes.

First ASO Classical Subscription Performances: January 17, 18 and 19, 1985, Hiroyuki Iwaki, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription Performances: October 12, 13 and 14, 2000, Donald Runnicles, Conductor.

The Genesis of An Alpine Symphony

Richard Strauss was fifty when, in February of 1915, he completed his final tone poem, *An Alpine Symphony*. However, the idea of a composition based upon a mountain adventure occurred to Strauss many years before. As a boy, Strauss was part of a group that became lost during an ascent into the mountains. During the return, Strauss and his companions were caught in a vicious thunderstorm. Strauss informed his friend, Ludwig Thuille, that after the incident, he sat at the piano and tried to recreate his experiences in music. Strauss confessed, “naturally it had conjured up a lot of nonsense and giant Wagnerian tonepainting.” In 1900, Strauss told his parents that he was considering a symphonic poem that “would begin with a sunrise in Switzerland. Otherwise, so far only the idea (love tragedy of an artist) and a few themes exist.”

In 1911, Strauss finally began composition of *An Alpine Symphony*. After the success that year of his comic operatic masterpiece, *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss hoped for a new libretto from his collaborator, author Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal: “I am waiting for you and in the meantime worry myself with a symphony that actually however gives me less enjoyment than shaking cockchafers from a tree.”

Other projects intervened, slowing the progress of *An Alpine Symphony*. Then, on November 1, 1914, Strauss began orchestrating the work, completing *An Alpine Symphony* in approximately three months’ time. Strauss worked on the tone poem while residing at his villa in Garmisch, which provided a breathtaking view of the Bavarian Alps.

The composition of *An Alpine Symphony* inspired some of the composer’s most memorable quotes. Strauss proclaimed: “I shall call my *Alpine Symphony* the Antichrist, since there is in it moral purification through one’s own strength, deliverance through labor, and worship of nature, eternal and magnificent.” In a far lighter vein, Strauss said of his efforts on *An Alpine Symphony*: “I wanted for once to compose just as a cow gives milk.”

“At last I have learned to orchestrate”

The premiere of *An Alpine Symphony* took place at the Philharmonie in Berlin on October 28, 1915. Strauss himself conducted the Dresden Hofkapelle Orchestra. It is clear that by this time, Strauss maintained a far more favorable opinion of his *Alpine Symphony* than when he wrote his acerbic 1911 letter to Hofmannsthal. “Now at last I have learned to orchestrate,” he proclaimed
at the general rehearsal. A few weeks after the premiere, Strauss wrote to Hofmannsthal, “You must hear the Alpine Symphony on 5th December; it is really a fine piece!”

After the conclusion of the Second World War, Strauss was invited to London to conduct at a festival celebrating his music. “I should most prefer to conduct the Alpine Symphony,” Strauss informed the organizers of the event. The grand performing forces required for An Alpine Symphony forced Strauss to substitute his Sinfonia Domestica. Still, the fact that Strauss originally chose An Alpine Symphony for the prestigious London festival tells us much about the esteem the composer held for his last tone poem.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that An Alpine Symphony has attracted criticism, even from those who generally admire Strauss's music. Critics have focused upon the work's length and its occasional bombast. Conductor Erich Leinsdorf wittily summarized this view when he characterized An Alpine Symphony as:

one of the happier inventions of Strauss, except that it is too long and requires too large an orchestra to have complete unity of purpose. It is as if a speaker who had a small topic came with a huge manuscript of ten or fifteen thousand words and delivered a light after-dinner speech in stentorian tones.

But even those who criticize An Alpine Symphony acknowledge it offers music of extraordinary grandeur, excitement and beauty. In the hands of a sympathetic conductor and virtuoso (and very large!) orchestra capable of meeting the work's extraordinary demands, An Alpine Symphony emerges as a thrilling sonic adventure, worthy of its majestic subject.

**An Alpine Symphony**

The 24-hour adventure depicted in An Alpine Symphony consists of 22 sections, played without pause. The composer provided the following titles for the episodes:

---

Nacht (Night)  
Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise)  
Der Anstieg (The ascent)  
Eintritt in den Wald (Entry into the forest)  
Wanderung neben dem Bache (Wandering by the brook)  
Am Wasserfall (At the waterfall)  
Erscheinung (Apparition)  
Auf blumige Wiesen (On flowering meadows)  
Auf der Alm (On the alpine pasture)  
Durch Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrwegen (Lost in the thickets and undergrowth)  
Auf dem Gletscher (On the glacier)
Gefahrvolle Augenblicke (Dangerous moments)
Auf dem Gipfel (On the summit)
Vision
Nebel steigen auf (Mists rise)
Die Sonne verdüstert sich allmählich (The sun gradually becomes obscured)
Elegie (Elegy)
Stille vor der Sturm (Still before the storm)
Gewitter und Sturm—Abstieg (Thunder and Tempest—Descent)
Sonnenuntergang (Sunset)
Ausklang (Waning tones)
Nacht (Night)