

Overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio)*, K. 384

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

B: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

D: December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria

Premiered on July 16, 1782, at the Burgtheater in Vienna.

Scored for one flute doubling on piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle and strings (approx. 6 minutes).

As the first opera Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed after moving to Vienna, *The Abduction from the Seraglio* was designed to serve several purposes. Above all, it was intended to make a favorable impression on Emperor Joseph II, the Viennese court and musical society, thus promoting Mozart's career as a composer. It was composed to a German text, using spoken dialogue between the arias.

Its subject matter – a European girl rescued by her lover from a Turkish pasha's harem – was intended to demean and ridicule the Turks at a time when the Austrian emperor would be hosting a visit by the Grand Duke of Russia. They were to discuss plans to carve up portions of the encroaching Ottoman Empire which had pushed its borders a great distance through the Balkans. Because of repeated delays in the grand duke's arrival in Vienna, however, Mozart had nearly a full year to work on the opera, from July 1781-May 1782.

In keeping with Austrian traditions in imitating what they thought to be Turkish music, the blustery opening theme has several outbursts involving extra percussion instruments – triangle, bass drum and cymbals. However, traditions borrowed from Italian opera are observed in the three-part, fast-slow-fast design of the overture. Once the opening theme has made its way to a strong cadence, it gives way to a minor-key preview of the opening aria in the opera, the hero Belmonte's lament for his captive lover. After that, the so-called Turkish music returns and if the complete opera were to be performed, the overture would lead into Belmonte's aria. For concert purposes, Mozart brought the overture to a close with the Turkish music.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Mozart's Overture to *The Abduction from the Seraglio* on March 14, 16-17, 2002, with Itzhak Perlman conducting.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Mozart, Overture to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio)*, Sir Neville Marriner conducting the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, EMI 85060.