ANTONIO VIVALDI (1678–1741)
Concerto for Two Cellos in G minor, RV 531 (c. 1710)

Vivaldi wrote just one concerto for two cellos. Scholars have not pinned down an exact date of composition, but it probably comes from the 1720s. He almost certainly wrote for the girls’ orchestra at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, the Venice orphanage where Vivaldi served as music director on and off from 1703 to 1740.

The orchestra’s frequent public concerts earned important income for the city-funded orphanage. The orchestra also gave Vivaldi a platform for displaying his extraordinary violin skill and for experimenting with musical forms and effects.

LOOK for Music Director & Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong’s graceful transitions from conducting to playing the harpsichord and back again as he and the strings accompany cello soloists Anne Ridlington and Eric Alterman in Vivaldi’s Concerto for Two Cellos.

This rarely performed gem of a concerto features speedy outer movements in ritornello form (in which solo episodes separate recurrences of a principal theme) and an exquisite, central slow movement. Baroque composers rarely showcased cello virtuosity, but Vivaldi assigned the instrument passages of breathtaking speed, close imitation, and rapid-fire exchanges.

“I’ve never performed this concerto, but I have taught students the first two movements,” said Anne Ridlington, featured with Eric Alterman in the concerto. “They love the first movement because it’s so rhythmic and kind of rock’n’roll. The interplay between the two cellos is fun. Sometimes Eric and I copy each other exactly, sometimes we duet, sometimes we interrupt and overlap. We’ve chosen to match some bowings and styles to each other, but at times we play as separate characters. Why have two cellos if you play identically?”

JESSIE MONTGOMERY (b. 1981)
Records from a Vanishing City (2016)

Imagine a dream in which you walk down a narrow urban lane. Music drifts from every apartment window and shop doorway. The singing and playing and maybe a Miles Davis LP on someone’s record player envelop you. Some of the players listen and respond. Some go their own ways. The sound world around you changes as you walk, as voices rise and fade with proximity. As you turn the corner at the end of the block, the ensemble emits a mysterious harmony that ends the journey without quite bringing closure.

Jessie Montgomery’s 14-minute Records from a Vanishing City is like that. We journey through sonic regions: Murmuring strings beneath a smooth, gentle tune in the horns lead to a pensive oboe song. An interlude for two violas connects to a faster, rhythmically active orchestral elaboration of the viola material. This build-up of mass and momentum evaporates into the stillness of a pair of spectral, widely spaced chords. The ensuing night music features a gorgeous for bassoon. A Miles Davis-inspired muted trumpet builds on that solo. A clarinet wails. A hymn tune emerges. All of it blends and builds to a climax, which quickly subsides. Flute and bassoon recall, without exactly quoting, the viola duet heard earlier. Other voices swirl around them, like eddies near the banks of a stream. All come to rest in another set of fantastical chords that end the piece with the poignancy of a fading cherished memory.

And now, the composer’s own program note:
“Records from a Vanishing City is a tone poem based on my own recollection of the music that surrounded me growing up on Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the 80s and 90s. Artists, truth seekers and cultures of all kinds defined our vibrant community. The embracing diversity burst out with an effortless Eugene’s history, and one of the greatest Mozart scholars, Robert Levin. One of my great disappointments is not hearing Rilling at the Oregon Bach Festival before I came to Eugene, but bringing his Mozart Requiem back.

The completion of the Mozart Requiem this evening is based on the close collaboration between Helmuth Rilling, founding Artistic Director of the Oregon Bach Festival and one of the most beloved conductors in
everydayness in block parties, festivals and shindigs of every sort. Partly because my parents were artists, but also because I just couldn’t help it, I soaked up what surrounded me: Latin jazz, alternative rock, Western classical, avant-garde jazz, poetry and Caribbean dance music, to name a few.

“A year before completing this work, a very dear family friend passed away, and it was decided that I would be the one to inherit a large portion of his eclectic record collection. James Rose was one of the many suns in the Lower East Side cosmos who often hosted parties and generous gatherings for our extended artist family. His record collection was a treasure trove of the great jazz recordings of the 50s, 60s and beyond—he was mad for John Coltrane, but also Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk and-and-and—as well as traditional folk artists from Africa, Asia, and South America. In the process of imagining the music for tonight’s concert, a specific track on a record of music from Angola caught my ear: a traditional lullaby which is sung in call and response by a women’s chorus. This lullaby rang with an uncanny familiarity in me. An adaptation of this lullaby and the rhythmic chant that follows it appears in each of the three main sections of Records. This piece is dedicated to the memory of James Rose.”

SCORED: Scored for flute, one oboe, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

HISTORY: This is the first Eugene Symphony performance.

DURATION: Approximately 14 minutes.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Requiem, K.626 (1791)
Completed by Robert Levin (b. 1947) in 1994

You know Amadeus, the 1991 movie—the one where the dying Mozart, perhaps poisoned by his rival Salieri, lives in a fever dream while frantically composing a Requiem for a mysterious patron?

Good film. But it’s only a movie.

History it’s not. Salieri admired Mozart and certainly did not poison him. Mozart knew his commissioner, one Count

to our community is my small way of honoring the remarkable impact he had on the arts here.”

— Francesco Lecce-Chong

Antonio Vivaldi served as music director of Venice orphanage (at top) Ospedale della Pietà, seen in this 17th-century illustration showing the building as it looked in 1715. The music of John Coltrane and Thelonius Monk (at middle) and other great jazz artists inspired Jessie Montgomery’s composition, Records from a Vanishing City. Pianist, conductor, and musicologist Robert Levin (at bottom) completed Mozart’s Requiem in honor of the 200th anniversary of the composer’s death.
Mozart’s Requiem

Franz von Walsegg, who wanted to keep the commission secret because he liked to claim authorship of works he'd bought from others. Mozart had been writing the Requiem—along with several other pieces—since summer. He was in good health until he took to his bed, on Nov. 20, 1791.

He died on Dec. 5. Mozart left behind a complete, orchestrated Introit and detailed drafts for the Kyrie, the Offertory, and five sections of the Dies Irae sequence. He got just nine bars into the sixth, the Lacrimosa.

LISTEN to Second Trombone Carson Keeble’s beautiful solo in the Tuba mirum section of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Requiem. It is one of the most renowned among the prominent orchestral parts for that instrument.

Mozart’s widow, Constanze, immediately started securing her late husband’s reputation and financial control over his music, starting with the Requiem. She charged Franz Xaver Süssmayr, a student of Mozart, with completing it. She also arranged for a memorial performance, in part to head off any authorship claims Walsegg (who, by the way, paid the full commission for the Süssmayr completion) might make.

Süssmayr duly delivered orchestrations of Mozart’s detailed sketches and about 10 minutes of new music. He said at the time that he'd built it on “scraps of paper” in Mozart’s hand, but later claimed to have entirely made up the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Süssmayr’s version was the completion for a couple of centuries.

Then came Robert Levin, the brilliant Harvard scholar, theoretician and keyboard virtuoso. He celebrated the 200th anniversary of Mozart’s death with his completion of the Requiem, commissioned by Helmuth Rilling, Oregon Bach Festival’s founding Artistic Director.

“I grew up with Süssmayr’s version, and like many musicians, I have a nostalgic and emotional connection to it,” Lecce-Chong said. “But it has obvious problems. Conductors always make quick fixes for the things that annoy them the most. We know that Mozart wrote only about 25% of what we actually hear. And we know that Süssmayr was not a good composer and that he completed the Requiem under great time pressure.”

Lecce-Chong said that Levin corrected voice leadings in Süssmayr’s parts and eliminated mindless orchestral doublings of choral parts. “Mozart never did the obvious thing,” Lecce-Chong said, “and no one knows that better than Robert Levin.”

Lecce-Chong believes that Levin’s biggest contribution is the Amen fugue that concludes the Lacrimosa.

“Mozart gave us just eight bars of Lacrimosa,” he said. “But they are the most stunning eight bars he left us. Süssmayr did a pretty good job of completing the piece. But when he got to the end, it was ‘Ah-MEN’ and done.”

Levin knew that a grand fugue typically ended each major section of masses in Mozart’s time. A tiny fragment of Mozart’s Lacrimosa Amen had turned up in the 1960s. Levin drew on that to create an Amen fugue for the Lacrimosa.

“Süssmayr wasn’t good enough to write such a fugue,” Lecce-Chong said. “Levin’s Lacrimosa fugue gives necessary closure to the Dies Irae sequence and the impetus to move on. This is just one example of how Levin’s alterations and corrections have elevated our experience of this work on every level—musically, emotionally, and spiritually.”

SCORED: Scored for two clarinets, two basset horns, two bassoons, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

HISTORY: First performed by the Eugene Symphony, in this same completion by Robert Levin, in April 2003 under the direction of Giancarlo Guerrero, and last performed, in the completion by Franz Süssmayr, in March 2012 under the direction of Danail Rachev.

DURATION: Approximately 46 minutes.