CHASTERS MOZART + MAHLER

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2024 | 7:30 PM
CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

Terrence Wilson Piano

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria Died December 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria

Piano Concerto in A Major, K.488

- 1. Allegro (11'30")
- 2. Adagio (7'30")
- 3. Allegro assai (8')

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on December 5 and 6, 1998, with pianist Sara Davis Buechner and conductor Keri-Lynn Wilson.

The winter of 1786 found Mozart at the height of his popularity in Vienna. He was a celebrity in demand and seemingly everywhere in the city. With theaters closed for the Lenten season, there was even more work than usual. There were private concerts to conduct for the local noblemen and Emperor Joseph. He revised his opera *Idomeneo* and completed a one-act comic opera, *The Impresario*. Mornings were devoted to work on a new opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, that would premiere later in May. Students showed up at his door in the afternoons for lessons. In the evenings, he frequently produced his subscription concerts, including his appearance as the soloist in three new piano concertos. Somehow, he found time to complete several other works. If he was lucky, a good game of billiards or an evening's opportunity to go dancing offered diversions. For the most part, as his father, Leopold, noted, Wolfgang was "up to his ears" in work.

Between 1782 and 1786 in Vienna, Mozart composed fifteen remarkable piano concertos, beginning with the A Major, K.414 (or number twelve). The second A Major Concerto, K.488 (number twenty-three), belongs to a group of three, including the E-Flat Major, K.482, and C Minor, K491, composed for the 1786 Lenten season. Mozart entered the A Major Concerto into his catalog of works on March 2, 1786, indicating the work's completion. He completed the C Minor Concerto, K.491, just three weeks later.

The key of A Major seems to inspire some of Mozart's most lyrical writing. In this work, he seeks to establish a distinctive orchestral color by omitting oboes, trumpets, and timpani. In choosing a single flute, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, and strings to partner with the piano, Mozart creates a gentler concerto that captures, in the words of Alfred Einstein, "the transparency of a stained glass window." The music often approaches the intimacy of chamber music. The colors glisten from the use of instruments and shifting harmonies.

Interestingly, the only time Mozart used clarinets in his piano concertos was in this group of three from the winter of 1786. Whether he was simply exploring the instrument's tone colors or some other reason is unknown. His masterpieces for clarinet, the Quintet and Concerto, remained a few years in the future.

The second creative impulse at play is the influence of Mozart's increasing focus on opera. This concerto overflows with melody. While the piano is the "lead character" of the work, each of the winds plays a prominent solo role, almost, at times, as if they were characters in an operatic ensemble.

Like most Mozart concertos, the **first movement** allegro begins with an orchestral exposition that introduces the main themes. The strings start with a melodic eight-bar phrase that the winds immediately repeat with a varied ending. The entire orchestra (tutti) furthers this idea until we reach a cadence. The violins introduce a second theme lightly accompanied by the rest of the strings. Notice how the bassoon and then the flute enter to add color to the theme. Another orchestral tutti concludes the first exposition.

Piano Concerto in A Major, K.488 continued

Now, it's the pianist's turn to play the opening theme with simple elegance. But after the opening phrase, the pianist embellishes the music with scale passages in the right hand. The challenge is to play these passages as a melodic line.

Following another orchestral tutti that we'll recognize as the ending of the exposition, Mozart writes a pause followed by a soft passage that leads into the development. Here, the piano enters into a "conversation" with the winds. Florid writing for the pianist's right hand moves things along with interjections from the winds and occasionally the strings. One final run in the piano segues into the recapitulation, where listeners will notice the return of the gentle opening theme. Recapitulations are never a literal repeat of the exposition. The general structural outline may be evident, but Mozart continues embellishing the ideas until the orchestra reaches a grand pause, signaling it's time for the pianist's cadenza. This extended solo passage further develops the musical material in a virtuosic manner. Although Mozart wrote a cadenza for this concerto, at this Wichita Symphony performance, Terrence Wilson will play the cadenza by Ferruccio Busoni (1866 – 1924).

The **second movement**, adagio (slowly), is a lament in the key of F-sharp minor. Listeners with some music training will recognize F-sharp minor as the relative minor of A Major, meaning it has the same key signature. It's not a key that Mozart uses often but it seems to have connotations with despair. The piano takes the opening. The music moves hesitantly and with a general falling shape to its contour. A magical chord change near the end of the piano's solo briefly allows a ray of light, but the cadence snuffs out hope.

The orchestra enters with its lamenting melody that introduces a chromatic (half step) chord change that's like a stab of pain. Eventually, Mozart finds his way back to A major, where the clarinets offer some respite during a brief middle section. This section leads back to the repeat of the opening. The movement concludes with a mysterious pizzicato passage for strings accompanying a sparse piano line that takes wide leaps of anguish.

The **third movement** (allegro assai or very fast and lively) is like a burst of sunshine that dispels the gloom. The movement is in Rondo form, so that this theme will recur several times. This movement overflows with melodic invention and good humor. Just as the second movement offered a brief contrast of A major, this movement surprises us with a sudden momentary and dramatic shift to F-sharp minor, casting a dark cloud into our imagination. But soon, a cheerful duet by the clarinets lets us know not to take it seriously. There are more opportunities to note how Mozart exploits the wind section. Sometimes, people don't think of Mozart as a great orchestrator, but that's clearly not the case here, as he handles his winds with creativity and character.

The A Major Concerto is one of Mozart's most popular. In the context of his overall work, Mozart is on the brink of elevating his craft and genius to an entirely new level with his opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. The depth of feeling, the richness of his harmony, and the characterization of instruments heard in the Concerto anticipate the brilliance of Figaro and the music of Mozart's last years of his short life.

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Piano Concerto in A Major, K.488 continued

Symphony patrons who attended a recent Wichita Symphony concert may have heard a piano concerto by Brahms, Gershwin, or Rachmaninoff. You may note a distinct difference in the sound of a Mozart piano concerto compared to those composed one hundred or more years later.

Mozart played a piano that bears little resemblance to the behemoths of the modern concert stage with their eighty-eight keys, cast iron frames, and nine-foot length. Pianos in Mozart's day were still relatively new and rare. Invented by Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655 – 1731) of Padua, Italy, in about 1700, the instrument, like those of today, was distinguished by an action where pressing the keys activated a hammer action to strike the strings, as opposed to the action of a harpsichord where the keys elevated a jack with a quill that plucked the strings.

The piano allowed the player to shape phrases and dynamics with gradations of pressure applied by the fingers to the keys. Pianos could play loud and soft, and acquired the name "fortepiano" in the 18th century. These early pianos looked like harpsichords with their wing shape. A related "cousin" to the piano, known as a clavichord with a more rectangular shape, was used in households and intimate spaces. It was so soft people could barely hear it from ten feet away and had no use in a concert venue.

Mozart was familiar with all three types of keyboard instruments. He most likely encountered pianos on his childhood tours to larger cities and courts. Evidence of his familiarity with the instruments appears around 1774 when instructions like "crescendo" (becoming louder) and diminuendo (getting softer) occur in his keyboard pieces. He used a piano (most likely one built by Johann Stein of Augsburg) for his Viennese debut in 1781. Mozart acquired a piano built by Anton Walter for his household around 1783. He frequently transported this piano around Vienna for his many performances. It can still be seen today at the Mozart Museum in Salzburg. All the keyboard concertos, beginning with those composed shortly after arriving in Vienna (K. 414 in A Major of 1782 was the earliest), were composed for the piano.

Even with its technical advances, the Walter piano had only 61 keys for five octaves compared to the eightyeight keys and over seven octaves of the modern-day piano. Mozart worked within these parameters, and one never senses that he wanted to break the limitations as Beethoven often does.

The ability of the piano to sustain tones and create gradual dynamic changes led to Mozart developing a "singing" (cantabile) melodic style that was ideal for blending with the orchestra's woodwinds. Nowhere is this seen more than in his piano concertos.

Today, we think nothing of performing Mozart on our modern pianos. While early music and authentic performance practitioners offer opportunities to hear Mozart played on replicas of early pianos, our ears are used to the concert grands designed to project over larger orchestras and into cavernous concert halls.

What's with the "K." after Mozart's titles?

The "K," followed by a number, reflects a chronological list of all of Mozart's compositions. The "K" is the initial for Ludwig von Koechel, who published the first catalog of Mozart's music in 1862. For reference, he had the list kept by Mozart's father, Leopold, of music composed by the young boy and a catalog that Wolfgang started

Piano Concerto in A Major, K.488 continued

in February 1784, where Mozart entered the date of each work's completion. Mozart also entered a brief excerpt of the opening bars, known as an "incipit." Koechel assigned K.1 to a keyboard piece composed in Salzburg when Mozart was five and ended his catalog with K.626, the number assigned to the Requiem that Mozart was working on at the time of his death.

Scholarship and later discoveries led to further catalog revisions, most notably by Alfred Einstein in 1937 and a trio of Austrian and German scholars in 1964. While the ordering of Koechel's catalog has been maintained mainly by scholars when precise evidence existed, subsequent revisions informed by scholarship and discovery indicate multiple works under a "K" number with a letter. Thus, for K. 1, six short keyboard pieces are lettered 'a' through 'f.' Occasionally, scholars assigned new "K" numbers to some works, even though the original numbering has survived. Other works of recent discovery or dubious origin are assigned to an appendix ("Anh." For "Anhang" in German).

Many recordings of the A Major Concerto by great pianists are available. You will find several good performances on YouTube. Before coming to the concert, you will enjoy this performance by the renowned Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini, who just passed away on March 23, 2024 with the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by one of the 20th century's leading Mozart specialists, Karl Böhm.

https://youtu.be/DXeBFhqViYq?si=EnvunOWHwP9Q0wkr

GUSTAV MAHLER

Born July 7, 1860 in Kalischt, Boehmia Died May 18, 1911 in Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 1 in D Major

- 1. Slowly. Sluggishly. Like a sound in nature. Then very leisurely.
- 2. Powerfully, but not too fast.
- 3. Solemn and measured without dragging.
- 4. Turbulently.

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on October 14 and 15, 2006, with Andrew Sewell conducting.

Mahler's Orchestra

Without question, Gustav Mahler's First Symphony is one of the most remarkable and audacious first efforts for composing a symphony. Part of that reason lies before you as you take in the forces of the instruments arrayed across the stage. This symphony will not be for just any symphony orchestra, it will specifically be for, by Mahler's title page, a symphony for "large orchestra." For this evening's performance, the Wichita Symphony lists eighty-seven musicians. Go to Boston, Chicago, New York, or any other big city orchestra, and you may find upwards of one hundred musicians on the stage with additional stands of string players, bringing the number of violins, violas, cellos, and basses to sixty (or more) instead of the fifty or so aligned with Wichita.

Let your eyes fall upon the winds and brass sitting behind the strings. Those of you with balcony seats will have a bird's eye view. Here's where you really see the difference between the Mozart orchestra that opened the concert and a typical Mahler orchestra.

Throughout much of the 19th century, orchestras hadn't changed much from Beethoven's day at the beginning of the 19th century. Most wind sections were in double winds, meaning there were two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, and two bassoons. Occasionally, someone might add a piccolo or a contrabassoon, such as Beethoven did in his Fifth and Ninth Symphonies.

A typical 19th-century brass section might include two or four horns, two or three trumpets, three trombones, and, after about 1830, a tuba. Percussion sections were often just timpani with maybe a few smaller percussion instruments like a triangle, cymbals, and a bass drum.

Richard Wagner began expanding the orchestra for his operas. Following Wagner's lead, Bruckner used triple winds and eight horns, some of them including Wagner Tubas, in his late symphonies after 1880. However, for the symphonies of Brahms and Dvorak, the two leading composers known to audiences in cities like Berlin, Prague, and Vienna in the 1880s, the orchestras would have been mostly recognizable to Beethoven.

In the wind section of Mahler's First, he adds additional instruments. Some players play a second instrument ("doubling") interchangeably with their primary instrument. Consequently, you'll see four flutes. The third and fourth players will double on piccolo. There are four oboes, with the third doubling on English horn. Four clarinets find the third doubling on bass clarinet and the fourth on E-flat clarinet. There are just three bassoons, but the third doubles on the contrabassoon.

The brass section is Wagnerian for its size. There are seven horn parts, and an eighth will assist the principal.

There are four trumpets, three trombones (with an option for an additional trumpet and trombone), and a single tuba. Mahler knew that adding more tubas tended to muddy their sound.

The percussion section consists of timpani for two players, a bass drum, cymbals, a triangle, and a tam-tam (gong).

And let's not forget to add the harp, which will add distinctive coloring to the sound.

These instruments will create a palette of sound that is instantly recognizable as Mahler. The large forces are not for volume alone, although there will be times when the volume is loud. Mahler also strives for great delicacy and transparency. His sound is unlike Bruckner's, who treats winds, brass, and strings as three instrumental families of block-like textures, much like an organ. Mahler, an expert conductor who knew his instrumental capacities intimately, asked for sounds regarded as unconventional and unique to individual instruments. He was an alchemist when it came to creating orchestral colors.

Mahler notates his score throughout with precise instructions. He might ask the strings to play with the wood of the bow (col legno) to create a clicking sound. The horn players sometimes insert their fists into the instrument's bell to create a buzzy or "stopped" sound. Or, he'll ask the horns to play with their bells up. In the closing moments of the Symphony, some orchestra horn sections take the "bells up" instruction literally and stand up. It's a symphonic climax like no other! Occasionally, the instructions are notes to the conductor. At one point in the third movement, Mahler notates that if the tuba can't play the low note soft enough, then have it played by the contrabassoon!

What's It About? The Issue of Absolute Versus Programmatic Music.

19th-century debate simmered whether music could describe an extramusical story or a program, or if it was simply music or absolute. We could say that Beethoven started the argument with his "Pastoral" Symphony where he used music to describe the countryside, a country dance, a thunderstorm, and the post-storm emergence of the sun. Berlioz furthered the concept of program music with his *Symphonie fantastique*, and Liszt did the same with his tone poems and dramatic symphonies, referencing specific literary sources or imagery. Richard Wagner developed a system of leitmotifs in his operas to stand for characters, events, and objects to relate an underlying story and commentary in the orchestra to what was happening onstage. Richard Strauss, beginning in the 1880s, would create orchestral tone poems complete with detailed extramusical associations.

For composers of symphonies throughout the 19th century, most, like Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Dvorak, Bruckner, and Tchaikovsky, followed the traditions established by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in which symphonies had no specific story elements. Mahler's First (1888) was composed three years after Brahms' Fourth and Dvorak's Seventh. A listener familiar with those masterpieces would recognize how different Mahler's is, not just from the perspective of the orchestra's size.

Mahler composed the First Symphony over six weeks between January and March 1888 while serving as an assistant conductor for the Leipzig City Theater. He drew upon some previously composed songs as source material, most notably from his *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Once completed, Mahler wrote to his friend Fritz Löhr, "It

became so overpowering as it flowed out of me like a mountain river!... for six weeks, I had nothing but my desk in front of me!"

For the first performance on November 20, 1889, by the Budapest Philharmonic, conducted by Mahler, he listed the new work as a "Symphonic Poem in Two Parts." Mahler failed to provide a story or programmatic content. Unsurprisingly, the audience was confused, especially by the severe mood change in the work's second half. The audience and critics judged the work a failure.

The score lay dormant for several years until Mahler returned to it in 1893, revising it with changes that made the work "more slender and transparent." For the performance of the new version in Hamburg in October 1893, Mahler added to the title "Titan – a Tone Poem in Symphonic Form." Titan referenced a romantic-period novel by Jean Paul (1763 – 1825). The reference is meaningless and of no help to those of us (everyone?) who haven't read the book. Mahler eventually dropped the novel's reference, but we often find "Titan" affixed to the Symphony's title. Today, it means nothing more than a "gigantic piece in size and power."

Mahler kept tweaking his programmatic description, and by the time of the third performance in Weimar (1894), the work had acquired the following descriptive notes:

Symphony "Titan"

From the Days of Youth, Music of Flowers, Fruit, and Thorns

Part I:

- 1. Spring and No End
- 2. Blumine (Flowers)
- 3. Under Full Sail (Scherzo)

Part II:

- 4. The Hunter's Funeral Procession (in the manner of Callot)
- 5. From Hell to Paradise

The Symphony continued to make progress, with some applauding in appreciation and others inclined to boos and catcalls. Mahler wrote, "My symphony was received with furious opposition by some and with wholehearted approval by others. The opinions clashed amusingly in the streets and the salons!"

For a fourth performance in Berlin (1896), Mahler decided he had enough of trying to explain the programmatic content and removed all of the literary references, including the title "Titan." He also dropped the short second movement, *Blumine*, which some judged trivial. The title of the entire work was now simply Symphony in D Major.

Still, as often happened throughout his life, Mahler complained that listeners did not understand his music. Following a 1900 performance of the Symphony, the notorious Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, a dogged proselytizer for composers like Brahms but a thorn in the side of others, wrote about Mahler's First, "One of us must be crazy, and it is not !!"

^{1.} The Blumine movement disappeared and was presumably destroyed by Mahler until 1966 when a copy of the Hamburg score was discovered in a Yale University collection by Mahler biographer Donald Mitchell. It was performed in 1967 and occasionally is played today as a stand-alone work. It has a noteworthy solo for the trumpet.

With Mahler disavowing program notes, we're left to create our reactions to the music as listeners. However, the music gives us many clues to Mahler's intent. The German music critic Adolf Weissman (1873 – 1929) declared that Mahler's music is "program music without a program." Mahler said, "A symphony must be like a world; it must embrace everything." By his own confession, Mahler's symphonies contain autobiographical elements that articulate his "experience and suffering." There is a side-by-side duality that celebrates the joy of life and an awareness of mortality. In the end, Mahler's true genius was creating a hybrid of unspecified programmatic music with the traditional symphonic voice of absolute music.

If audiences of Mahler's day did not fully grasp the meaning behind the music, Mahler sensed that his time would come. Mahler's music captures the existential angst of the *fin de siècle* world that Eduard Munch also portrayed in his famous painting *The Scream* (1893). Those who followed the classical music world in the 1960s will remember the Mahler revival in the United States led by Leonard Bernstein. Truly, Mahler's music spoke to an angst-driven public of concertgoers during the Cold War, and those same anxieties continue to inform Mahler's relevance to our own time.

The Individual Movements

The **first movement** begins with one of the most remarkable openings in the symphonic literature. Mahler described it as "sounds of nature, not music." It's music of dawn. Just as Wagner began his opera Das Rheingold with an extended introduction using an E-flat Major harmony to depict the Rhine River, Mahler activates his sound world with a quietly held pitch held by the strings from the bass through the entire section to the highest range. It's an A, the same pitch used for tuning the orchestra. This 'A,' serving as a primordial element, will be constant throughout the introduction.

Mahler was a lifelong walker and observer of nature. His childhood home was not far from a military barracks. He incorporates the sounds of nature and parade ground music throughout his symphonies. Against the backdrop of the strings 'A', Mahler introduces sounds from the world of nature and the world of humans. We hear an imitation of a cuckoo¹ and a distant fanfare heard first like a memory played by clarinets and then by trumpets "in the distance." These elements are like "building blocks" for Mahler, who uses them to generate new ideas.

After the introduction, Mahler introduces his first primary theme in the cellos. For this, he quotes from his song cycle, Songs of a Wayfarer (1885/85), choosing the melody from the second song, "Over the Fields I Went at Morning." It's joyful walking music that captures the love for being amidst nature. The opening interval is a descending fourth, so the melody grows out of the cuckoo motive that Mahler already established. The melody is developed and repeated by other instruments of the orchestra creating a tapestry of counterpoint infused with variants of birdcalls. This section becomes the exposition of a traditional sonata form and will repeat.

The development section returns us to the music of the opening. The motives of nature we heard earlier are in abundance. Mahler introduces a new motive in the cellos that has a feeling of longing or loss. A new folklike

^{1.} Using a descending interval of a fourth for his cuckoo call was taking some composer's liberties. The Viennese music educator and critic Robert Hirschfeld (1858 – 1914), who was not sympathetic to Mahler's music, called Mahler out on the cuckoo cry noting that the cuckoo's cry was a descending minor third, not a fourth! The descending fourth made a better structural building block from Mahler's perspective.

tune in the horns offsets this glimpse into the shadows. The music is delicate throughout. Listen to enjoy the tone colors of the orchestra.

A crescendo builds, and finally, with an outburst of fanfares, we receive the first actual fortissimo climax marking the recapitulation. The "recap" is not literal but continues the journey, or walk, we've undertaken and brings the movement to a joyful conclusion.

The **second movement** is a traditional scherzo in what we might expect from Schubert or Bruckner. The music is a bumptious peasant dance beginning with a bass pattern derived from the cuckoo motive's descending fourth interval. We hear catchy, folklike tunes and special effects like "stopped" horns and string glissandos contributing to a "schmaltzy" effect. The trio offers a gentle and tender contrast in the form of a ländler, a popular country dance of Central Europe that shares some common traits with the Viennese waltz. The scherzo section's return concludes the movement in a straightforward ABA structure.

The **third movement** confused listeners in Mahler's day. It begins softly with timpani playing a new rhythmic variant of the bass line (again, the cuckoo interval) that started the scherzo. A solo bass with a mute on the strings begins a tune. It's a familiar tune found in both French and German cultures. We recognize it as the French children's tune *Frère Jacques*, except it's heard in a solemn minor key. Mahler presents the song just as we remember it as children, with different instruments entering in staggered appearances that we call a round. Originally, Mahler was inspired by a familiar illustration from a children's book showing a deceased hunter being escorted to his grave by a contingent of forest animals. The common folksong becomes a funeral march. Mahler probably saw a humorous irony in the picture and captured that in his music.

A pair of oboes interrupt the solemn proceeding with music in the Klezmer style, followed by an intrusion by a village band. For Mahler, this sequence was a mash-up of his world of nature, Jewish upbringing, and village bands. Audiences at the early performances were perplexed and even outraged by this intrusion of popular elements into a "serious" symphony. From Mahler's perspective, these interruptions were just parody, an aspect he would frequently return to in his symphonies.

In a contrasting middle section, Mahler draws from the melody of the fourth *Songs of a Wayfarer*, "The Blue Eyes of My Beloved." The gentle music with a lovely harp accompaniment conveys a sense of nostalgia and loss.

The funeral march returns and the movement dies away quietly. Don't be fooled into applauding here. Mahler indicates the fourth movement follows without pause except for the silence written into the score. What follows is a deliberate shock.

The **fourth movement** begins with an orchestral "scream." Mahler described it "like lightning from a dark cloud – the cry of a deeply wounded heart." A recently failed love affair may have been behind Mahler's anguished cry.

This movement is a titanic struggle and the climax of the entire Symphony. The music will swirl, ebb and flow. You will hear motives from the first movement as Mahler continues the musical development of his ideas. The

first brilliant climax will be deflected, and the introduction will return. Even in his most turbulent moments, Mahler finds relief in the natural world. Finally, the fanfares return and bring a triumphant conclusion to the Symphony.

Listening to a Mahler Symphony is like a journey with a beginning and an ending. Everything along the way adds meaning and emotion to the entirety, leading to the conclusion that can be triumphant or tragic, depending on the Symphony. If this is your first Mahler experience, enjoy the ride, and don't worry about capturing all the details. Listen to the colors of sound produced by the different instruments. What emotions do you feel? Listen intently and try not to let your mind wander. Life outside the concert hall will return soon enough.

If you've been through this Symphony before, try listening to how the building blocks of the introduction evolve throughout the piece. How do the musical textures change during the work, and how do they affect the flow of the music?

Whether this is your first time or many times, listen to the piece again when you can. Catch the Wichita Symphony performance when it airs on Radio Kansas. Make Mahler the musical journey of your lifetime, and the music will reveal endless pleasures and understanding.

If you'd like to get a headstart on your Mahler experience before the Wichita Symphony performance, try this one by the Staatskapelle Dresden conducted by Fabio Luisi.

https://youtu.be/DXeBFhqViYg?si=EnvunOWHwP9Q0wkr

Or, listen to this classic performance by Leonard Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic. Even if the horns choose not to stand up at the end, it's still an exciting performance.

https://youtu.be/ISBfOpztUZM?si=6c-Otg_4eKhbu2K3