Sea monsters are not always the best addition to a plot — just ask Jean-Philippe Rameau. The mythical creatures nearly sunk Rameau’s opera *Dardanus*, and not even the music could save the absurd *libretto* (text of the opera). The plot centers on Dardanus, who wins the hand of a Phrygian princess in the midst of a brutal war (and relentless sea monster attacks). There are other forces at work, as well — a sorcerer named Isménor and the gods continually meddle and tamper with our hero. Rameau tried to incorporate more instrumental music to balance out the more ludicrous moments, but this only crowded the work; as one critic remarked, the 1744 revival was “so laden with music that for three whole hours the orchestral players do not even have time to sneeze.” Perhaps due to this musical abundance, many of Rameau’s works function perfectly well as concert music out of context, as we will hear today.

**LISTEN FOR:**
1. The *Overture* opens with the gallant, regal dotted rhythms associated with the French overture, a musical form with a slow, stately opening followed by a sprightly second section.
2. *Entre Pour Les Guerriers* The minor-hued second movement is full of gravitas and splendor. The title translates to “Entrance of the Warriors”—can you hear a military parade?
3. *Bruit de guerre* The third movement is called the “Sounds of War,” and gets off to a galloping start with rapid, fluttering string parts. Does it sound like a battle in progress?
4. *Chaconne* The final movement is a theme and variations form called the *chaconne*, with a repeating bass line that serves as a foundation for figuration and decoration. The longest movement, this finale brings the work to a dignified close. How many variations can you detect?

**CHRISTOPH WILLIBALD VON GLUCK** (1714–1787)

*Don Juan: Ballet Music* (1761)

*Don Juan, ou Le Festin de Pierre* (Don Juan, or the Stone Guest’s Banquet) follows the titular character’s descent into hell after murdering the father of his lover in a duel.

The music stood alone, even in its time — choreographer Gasparo Angiolini remarked in the program for the premiere that Gluck’s music was self-sufficient due to its gestural style that powerfully conveys the sense of the plot. Today, the music must stand alone, because the original choreography has been lost. Though the work begins in a sunnier place — with major harmonies and elegant dance forms such as the gavotte — the work becomes more agitated in the fifth movement of the suite, with darker harmonies that begin to foreshadow the final, dramatic descent into hell.

**Listen for:** Don Juan’s shift into high drama, with the swirling, furious figuration in the strings and fateful use of the brass. The most striking sections of this suite incorporate elements of a musical style known as *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress), known for rapid scalar passages, leaping figures, nervous tremolo, and dissonant and dark harmonies.
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Symphony No. 36 “Linz” (1783)

Usually the first year of marriage is full of newlywed bliss, but Mozart and his bride Constanze Weber had to contend with Leopold Mozart’s fatherly disapproval of their union. The couple traveled from Vienna to Salzburg in an attempt to win over Papa Mozart, but the visit was awkward and Leopold was not swayed. And so on October 30th, the couple moved on to Linz to stay with Count Thun-Hohenstein (a family friend). Mozart wrote excitedly to his father upon his arrival of their host’s hospitality and kindness; however, there was an unexpected time crunch: “On Tuesday, November 4, there will be an academy [concert] in the theater here and, as I have not a single symphony with me, I am writing a new one at breakneck speed.”

LISTEN FOR:
1. The Allegro spiritoso begins with a slow introduction, a technique popularized by Haydn. This is the first time Mozart had used the device in a symphony, to build suspense at the outset. The Allegro has a slight hint of a military march, but it is still festive and bright.
2. The Adagio second movement may have just been a typical lilting, graceful slow movement. However, Mozart incorporates trumpets and drums—another symphonic first for the composer.
3. Minuet and Trio The third movement is “conventionally pompous,” as one writer described it, with a charming oboe and bassoon duet in the trio.
4. The Finale, with the instruction to play “as fast as possible,” is incredibly exuberant.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Before the Concert
1. All three pieces exist in an atmosphere of intense drama — from sea monsters to damnation to the blistering disapproval of one’s father and a tight deadline. Which of the three do you think is the most musically intense?

After the Concert
2. The one reviewer described having so much music that the performers couldn’t pause to sneeze — was the Rameau the busiest of the three pieces today, to your ears?
3. Mozart’s symphony sounds surprisingly sophisticated, cohesive, and worked-out, even though he wrote it in a rush. How might the piece have improved with even more time to write and revise?