

# Mozart Birthday Concert with the London Mozart Players

Sunday 28 January 2024

## Mozart

Symphony No 1 in E flat  
Violin Concerto in G  
Divertimento in B flat major  
Symphony No 29



## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

### Symphony No 1 in E flat, K16

- I *Molto Allegro*
- II *Andante*
- III *Presto*

Mozart arrived in London in April 1764 on an extensive tour that had taken him and his family to Paris, Brussels and several German towns. He and his sister Nannerl had been acclaimed at various courts and in public, and their father Leopold, who organised the concerts and occasionally took part in them, had every reason to be pleased with the financial success of the tour.

When Mozart came to England he was eight years old. He had begun composing seriously at the age of six, and during the year he spent in London he studied composition with Johann Christian Bach, the youngest son of Johann Sebastian. This 'English' Bach and Karl Friedrich Abel (a pupil of J S Bach) were the

dominant figures in the musical life of London at the time. J C Bach recognised Mozart's exceptional talents and guided his rapid progress in composition more like a fatherly friend than a teacher. It was inevitable that the early symphonies of his pupil followed the pattern that J C Bach and others had developed from the Italian overture. But Mozart never merely copied other composers. He absorbed only those influences that furthered the development of his genius, and these he made his own.

Mozart and his family stayed in Chelsea, a suburb of London at the time, during the summer of 1764, which meant a less busy life for little Wolfgang and it allowed him to try his hand at composing his first symphony. His Symphony No 1, K16, lacks the depth and thought of his more mature works, but it has none of those awkward moments one would expect in the composition of a child. The musical forms are concise and well proportioned and, though there is virtually no symphonic development, the ideas are treated in that instinctive manner that later became a feature of Mozart's most profound compositions.

## Concerto for violin and orchestra in G, K216

- I *Allegro*
- II *Adagio*
- III *Rondeau Allegro*

If one did not know Mozart to have been an outstanding virtuoso pianist, his 23 piano concertos, which make high demands on the interpretative artist, provide the evidence for this. Mozart was not, however, merely a celebrated keyboard player, but also (during his years at Salzburg) a violinist of repute, who on many occasions played concertos by himself and other composers. Leopold Mozart had not failed to instruct his universally gifted son in violin playing, although Mozart himself did not take his ability as a violinist very seriously.

Of Mozart's seven violin concertos, five were written in 1775; K216, in G, was composed in September of that year. There has been much speculation on how one is to account for the intense interest which Mozart showed in the violin concerto. It is, however, fairly certain that he wrote the concertos for himself and possibly also for Antonio Brunetti, an Italian who was employed as solo violinist at the court of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart had since 1770 been leader of the orchestra maintained by that archbishop, whom he came to hate vehemently. As such, it was his duty to take part in court concerts, and not to neglect the violin, therefore he was in the habit of practising regularly.

In Mozart's time the Austrian violin concerto belonged entirely to the sphere of superior entertainment music, and Mozart's violin concertos are no exceptions in this respect; high though their artistic quality is, they were composed with the intention of entertaining and giving pleasure. There is a clear relationship between his violin concertos and his serenades, divertimentos and cassations; some of the serenades contain what are virtually violin concertos. It is therefore not surprising that many motives and turns of melody with which we are familiar from his Salzburg serenades also figure in his violin concertos; a similar musical ethos is often unmistakable.

Although the concertos cannot be compared in matters of violin technique with those of Paganini, they nevertheless demand a high level of ability, and demonstrate impressively the extent of Mozart's own facility as a violinist.

It is true that in Mozart the virtuosity is always coupled with a cantabile line so that brilliance constantly takes on expressive qualities, passage work often being blended with the unfolding of melodic ideas. There is no doubt that in their grace, innocence, sensitivity and serenity these concertos are unique in the contemporary repertoire.

Mozart's concerto movements are distinguished above all by a prodigal abundance of contrasting ideas, each with its clearly defined character, which are brought together with wonderful skill. This is certainly the case in the opening movement of the G major concerto, K216. Here the soloist is not content to take over the thematic material which has been presented initially by the orchestra, but introduces many new ideas. Thus, for example, the development section, which carries the music into minor keys, is based entirely on fresh motives that also permit dialogue between the solo violin and oboe.

The *adagio* has given rise to numerous expressions of warm appreciation, and it certainly justifies them, because it is one of the most beautiful movements of 'middle period' Mozart – a *notturmo* with muted strings (the oboes here are replaced by flutes) and magnificent flowing melodies for the solo violin.

In the final Rondo, a colourful succession of contrasting ideas pass by in review. Two of the sections stand out particularly as regards their tempo and rhythmic character: a gavotte-like *Andante* in G minor, in which the accompanying strings play *pizzicato*, and an *Allegretto* in folk-song style which gives a glimpse of the *Strassburger*, a dance tune very popular at the time, which the Mozarts mentioned on several occasions in letters.

## Divertimento in B flat, K137

- I *Andante*
- II *Allegro di molto*
- III *Allegro assai*

In 1772, at the age of 16 and between two concert tours in Italy, Mozart produced a large number of instrumental compositions, among them eight symphonies and four divertimenti. All these works were intended for the orchestra of the Archbishop of Salzburg of which Mozart had been the leader for three years before he was officially nominated to this post in 1772. He regarded the problems arising from his

many duties as a challenge and his early successes as a performer and composer seemed to indicate a brilliant future. Aided and supervised by his father, who also played in the Archbishop's orchestra, he easily coped with every kind of practical difficulty, but his optimism was, as it turned out, misplaced – at least as regards his later years.

The compositions of 1772 reflect this optimism. They also show that Mozart was no longer a child when he wrote them, as in some of the slow movements he invented phrases and harmonic progressions of such depth and beauty that he must have been aware of the romantic aspects of love.

The Divertimento K137 probably dates from the early months of 1772. It is quite possible that the work was first performed as a string quartet with Mozart, and perhaps also his father, taking part. Though Mozart never called K137 a divertimento it can be regarded as such. The sequence of the movements is somewhat unusual, since the slowest and most romantic, traditionally the second, is here the first. The following *Allegro di molto* is very fast and the finale is no ordinary *Allegro*, for when Mozart adds the indication *assai*, meaning *rather*, he wants the piece to be played as fast as musically possible.

### Symphony No 29 in A, K201

- I *Allegro moderato*
- II *Andante*
- III *Menuetto: Allegretto -- Trio*
- IV *Allegro con spirito*

Having spent a large part of his youth touring as an infant prodigy, with his father and sister, Mozart returned to Salzburg in March 1773, where he was employed as a court musician by the ruler of Salzburg Prince-Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo. Mozart had many friends and admirers in Salzburg and took advantage of the opportunity to compose in many genres, including symphonies, sonatas, string quartets, serenades, and the occasional opera. Despite these artistic successes and his increasing musical sophistication, Mozart gradually grew more discontented with Salzburg and made increasingly strenuous efforts to find a position elsewhere.

Mozart and his father left Salzburg twice between 1773 and 1777, seeking more elevated positions. Symphony No 29, K201 was

composed in April 1774, between extended visits to Vienna (July to September 1773) and Munich (December 1774 to March 1775). Symphony No 29 and its immediate chronological predecessor, No 25 in G minor, are regarded as Mozart's finest symphonies before the final ten. Mozart was still a teenager when he wrote them. He had journeyed to Vienna for two months in summer 1773, and perhaps his exposure to the capital inspired him to invest his symphonies with more profound ideas and emotions. In any case, these two early symphonies are not only more substantial in content but are also a fair bit longer than almost all of the symphonies written earlier.

The orchestration is typical of Mozart's and Haydn's earliest symphonies, with a decided emphasis on the strings. Edward Tatnall Canby stated aptly that the symphony is 'scored simply for strings with inconspicuous oboe and horn contributions'.

The scoring belies the extraordinary innovation Mozart makes in the first movement. He precedes Beethoven's treatment of the development in his *Eroica* symphony, introducing an entirely new theme in the development section and extending the coda. The *Andante* in D, with the strings muted, is an exercise in grace and elegance. The *minuet* is rhythmically unusual – not the usual straightforward  $\frac{3}{4}$  at all – and the lovely trio in E contains surprising depths of feeling. The scurrying *Finale*, like the opening *Allegro*, contains numerous imitative passages where a motto is copied by another section of the orchestra. An example lies in the opening of the lyrical second subject, introduced by the second violins and taken up by the first. Mozart also makes use of a tried-and-true device known as the 'Mannheim rocket', a rapidly ascending scale that, in this case, leads to an 'explosion' only in the cadential two chords that conclude the symphony.

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## London Mozart Players

Don't let their name mislead you – they don't just play in London, and they certainly don't just play Mozart! As well as their residencies at Fairfield Halls in Croydon, St John the Evangelist in Upper Norwood, and Opus Theatre in Hastings, LMP are well known internationally for working with many of the world's greatest conductors and soloists. They're proud to have developed a reputation for making and playing adventurous, ambitious

and accessible music, and for being at the forefront of embedding arts and culture into the life of local communities across the UK and beyond.

LMP work with schools and music hubs around the UK and beyond to inspire the next generation of musicians and music lovers. They're continuing their long tradition of promoting young talent: Nicola Benedetti, Jacqueline du Pré and Jan Pascal Tortelier are just three of many young musical virtuosi championed early in their careers by them. In 2021, violin virtuoso Leia Zhu was appointed as their Young Artist-in-Residence: this is a nurturing and collaborative relationship to encourage her young talent.

After celebrating their 70th birthday in 2019, they soon found themselves navigating orchestra life during the pandemic. During that time, they created an award-winning digital concert series which reached millions of people – reaffirming LMP's commitment to their audiences.

LMP launched Croydon's Borough of Culture in April 2023, and they'll be continuing to host their own concerts and events throughout the year.



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