

Tafelmusik

MOSTLY MOZART

Programme Notes

By Allen Whear

Mozart's thematic catalogue contains an entry dated August 10, 1787: "*Eine kleine NachtMusick*, comprised of an Allegro, Minuet & Trio, Romance, Minuet & Trio, and Finale." In English this is usually called "A Little Night Music," but a more apt translation could be "A short *notturmo*," or simply "A serenade."

Why he interrupted work on the second act of *Don Giovanni* to write this elegant work of entertainment music – destined to become an icon in the classical canon – is not known. During his Salzburg years, Mozart had written numerous serenades for different combinations of instruments, usually for outdoor performances. His more recent Viennese examples were for wind band, called *Harmoniemusik*, so a work of this type for strings alone was out of the ordinary.

Serenades of the period typically began with a march, which functioned as a way of drawing attention and announcing the start of festivities. The famous fanfare in the opening bars of this work launches a sonata-form movement filled with accessible, charming melodies – quite different in character and function from other recent string chamber music such as the great Quintets in G Minor and C Major.

Only four of the five movements originally noted survive: the first Minuet & Trio have never been found. The Romance is a miniature rondo in C Major, with a central episode in minor providing the only hint of conflict to its gentle nature. Each phrase of the sturdy Minuet starts in Salzburg style with only two voices, doubled in octaves. But it's as if Mozart could not restrain himself from colouring in the harmonies as those phrases progress. A Trio in a graciously lilting *Ländler* style provides contrast. The Finale is a cheerful rondo that anticipates the popular tunes Mozart would write for Papagano in *The Magic Flute*. The late Robbins Landon felt that the Romance "might, quite simply, be the most beautiful piece of occasional music ever written, hence its enduring appeal" – words which fittingly describe the work as a whole.

Mozart's concertos, particularly the piano concertos – his personal performance vehicle – owe at least as much to the operatic aria as to either baroque concerto models or classical

sonata form, and he developed the symphonic aspect of the concerto to a new level of sophistication. The Concerto in D Minor is a perfect example: scored for flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns, trumpets, plus timpani and strings, he continues his exploration of the independent roles of solo woodwind instruments begun in earlier concertos.

This concerto was the first of only two he would write in the minor mode, and the choice of D Minor was not casual. In Mozart's music this key is associated with demonic forces (*Don Giovanni*), vengeance (*The Magic Flute: Queen of the Night*), death (Requiem: *Introit*), and hell (Requiem: *Dies irae*), to list just a few examples. With restless syncopations and groaning upbeats in the bass, tension builds as the orchestra establishes the ominous mood of an opera scene in the extended opening ritornello. The piano solo enters with entirely new music, as in a recitative. Once this extreme instrumental contrast is presented, all kinds of combinations are explored – piano solo with winds, with strings, then accompanying the orchestra – as a rich array of themes are introduced and developed in the course of a complex sonata structure. And then the movement ends, ever enshrouded in mystery.

The term *romance* dates back to French strophic lyric poetry, and its musical genesis came about with settings of such poetry for the *opéra comique*. Dittersdorf introduced the instrumental romance to Vienna a dozen years before Mozart's concerto. It began to appear in the middle of symphonies and string quartets as well as concertos. In his *Klavierschule*, Daniel Gottlob Türk wrote that "The Romanze...must have a simple, agreeable, and naïve melody appropriate to its original purpose." Mozart enhances this contrast with the first movement by having the piano enter alone in the initial statement, the first time in one of his concertos. As in *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, it is in rondo form, and contains a central episode in the minor. In this case, the episode is quite agitated, the piano's turbulent triplets making a connection in spirit with the outer movements.

Leopold Mozart wrote that before the premiere in February 1785 Wolfgang "did not even have time to play through the Rondo, as he had to supervise the copying." Fortunately, the piano again opens this movement alone, so at least the orchestra heard the principal theme's tempo and character as the ink on their parts dried. The jagged theme immediately erases the calm of the Romance, and returns us to the dark, tempestuous atmosphere of the first movement. A central episode of *buffo* character makes two brief appearances, but finally takes hold in the coda, finishing the concerto in high spirits.

Throughout the 19th century, the D-Minor was Mozart's most popular concerto; its dramatic character had obvious appeal for the Romantic imagination. It has been performed continuously since that February evening in 1785. One of only six concertos that does not

have surviving cadenzas by Mozart, Beethoven performed this work frequently, and composed cadenzas for it, as did Mendelssohn, Clara Schumann, Brahms and many others. Beethoven's are frequently played on the modern stage because his style matches Mozart's most closely. In recent years, however, the 18th-century practice of performers writing or improvising original cadenzas has been revived, and Mr. Brautigam joins in this spirit by offering his own cadenzas.

We have the violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon to thank for instigating Haydn's last twelve symphonies, the iconic set known as the *London* or *Salomon* Symphonies. A native of Bonn, Salomon settled in London in 1780, becoming involved in every form of musical activity there, attracting attention as a fine performer and eventually as an organizer of concerts. Upon hearing the news of the death of Haydn's patron, Prince Nicolaus Esterházy, in 1790, Salomon made a beeline to Vienna, where he reportedly called on Haydn, saying, "I am Salomon of London and I have come to fetch you. Tomorrow we shall arrange an *accord*." And indeed, he made Haydn an offer he could not refuse: to come to London with guaranteed commissions, to be feted and to finally reap the financial rewards of his international fame. After decades of faithfully serving the Esterházy's, Haydn was more than ready to travel, and had long had his eye on the London "market." Mozart and Beethoven had also, at various times, considered such a journey.

Haydn had a keen sense of the musical taste of London audiences, and relished the chance to write for the large and skillful orchestral forces available. During the first two seasons of concerts the orchestra numbered between 40 and 60 players, well beyond what was available back in Austria. He arrived in England on New Year's Day, 1791. As he would later write, he had crossed the channel "without vomiting," and soon recovered soon enough to observe: "My arrival caused a great sensation throughout the city." The first series of Salomon's concerts took place beginning in Lent of that year and were an overwhelming success. Haydn stayed on through the winter in order to participate in the next season, near the close of which the Symphony in C Major, eventually numbered No. 97, had its first performance on May 3, 1792, in the Hanover Square Rooms.

Most of Haydn's late symphonies have slow introductions, and these often contain clues and coded references to what will follow. In the second bar, a motive appears over a beautiful diminished seventh chord; this is also used to link the introduction to the Vivace, where it reappears at key structural points in the movement. A bar of absolute silence separates the two principal themes, the first made up of fanfares capitalizing on the presence of trumpets and timpani, the second a graceful country *Ländler*.

The Adagio is a series of variations characterized by imaginative touches of orchestration. Note the dramatic appearance of trumpets and timpani in the F-Minor variation, and the bizarre sound of violins playing *sul ponticello* (on the bridge) in the return of the main theme.

In the Minuet, the phrases are written out without the traditional exact repetitions, allowing Haydn to introduce wonderful changes of instrumental color and wry jokes. For example, at a particularly soft phrase ending, the timpanist seems to come crashing in early. When the phrase is repeated, the listener braces himself for the same punch line, but Haydn once again defies expectations. In the reprise of the Trio, which Geiringer characterized as “one of the most typically Austrian pieces Haydn ever wrote,” the first violinist is instructed to play an octave higher, with the marking *Salomon solo ma piano*, a teasing reference to Haydn’s friend. In the same phrase, savour the yodeling upbeats in the violins, woodwinds, and finally even in the horns!

The Finale is loaded with Haydnesque mischief, all constructed from simple ingredients: scale fragments and a “laughing” rhythmic motive. Near the end, Haydn gives the impression that these tricks are exhausted, as the music softens and slows to a simple cadence of mock gravity. But this proves to be yet another setup, this time for the boisterous conclusion.