

MOZART AND FRIENDS

Programme Notes

A great change in the musical geography of Europe took place in the second half of the 18th century, as Italy lost its supremacy as “the true academy of Music” (Schütz, 1648), a position it had held for some 200 years. By the end of the century, the most important musicians and musical centres in Europe were to be found in Germany and Austria, above all in the imperial city of Vienna. This week we visit the music of four Viennese composers written in the 1760s and 1770s, just as the city was coming into its own as Europe’s cultural capital.

The earliest piece on the programme is the **Concerto for 2 violins** by **Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf**, included in a 1766 catalogue and probably composed a few years prior. At the time, Ditters was considered the finest violinist in his native Vienna, his playing praised both for its execution and for its ability to “speak to the heart.” He was an increasingly prolific composer, and held posts as *Kapellmeister* to the Bishop of Grosswardein (1765–1769) and Count Schaffgotsch (1770–1794), the latter at the castle of Johannesberg (Jánský vrch) in Jauernig (now Javorník in the Czech Republic). In 1770 Ditters was named a Knight of the Golden Spur, and two years later was ennobled by the Empress Maria Theresia, after which he adopted the surname “von Dittersdorf.” He left details of his life in an autobiography, revealing an engaging, vivacious and learned man. It contains details of his early training, including his teacher’s insistence that he practise playing concertos on only three strings so as to be prepared should a string break during the performance. The majority of Ditters’ violin concertos were composed during the heyday of his performing career in the 1760s, including two double concertos, thought to have been written for performance with his younger brother Alexander. The D-Major Concerto survives in a manuscript copy in an unknown hand in the Danish Royal Library. The score includes cadenzas, probably by Ditters himself, though possibly by the anonymous copyist.

Dittersdorf was a life-long friend of **Joseph Haydn**: besides sharing musical talents and a lively sense of humour, both spent much of their careers away from the hubbub of Vienna at the country palaces of their employers, in Haydn’s case with the Prince Nikolaus Esterházy. At first glance this might seem limiting, but Haydn suggested otherwise: “My Prince was satisfied with all my works; I received approval; as head of an orchestra, I could undertake experiments, could observe that which enhanced an effect and that which weakened it, thus improving, adding to it, taking away from it, taking risks. I was cut off from the world; there was no one in my vicinity to make me unsure of myself or to persecute me; and so I had to become original.”

“Original” is certainly the adjective of choice when describing Haydn’s **Symphony no. 45 in F-Sharp Minor**, composed in 1772. The audacity of the symphony is often overshadowed by the history of its curious ending, a history that is nonetheless worth retelling. Prince Nikolaus undertook the construction of a lavish palace, to be named Esterháza, on the grounds of his favourite residence, a hunting lodge on the south side of the Neusiedlersee. Esterháza became the summer residence of the court, which was

normally housed at Eisenstadt. The summer season at Esterháza gradually became so extended as to include all but a few of the coldest months. This presented a particular problem for the musicians of the orchestra, as described by Haydn's early biographer, Griesinger:

Among Prince Esterházy's Kapelle there were several vigorous young married men who in summer, when the Prince stayed at Esterháza, were obliged to leave their wives behind in Eisenstadt. ("I was young and lusty in those days, too, and thus no better than they," said Haydn apropos of the love-sick musicians.) Contrary to his custom, the Prince once extended his sojourn in Esterháza by several weeks: the loving husbands, thoroughly dismayed over this news, went to Haydn and asked for his advice. Haydn had the inspiration of writing a symphony (which is known under the title of "Farewell" Symphony), in which one instrument after the other is silent. This symphony was performed as soon as possible in front of the Prince, and each of the musicians was instructed, as soon as his part was finished, to blow out his candle and to leave with his instrument under his arm. The Prince and his company understood the point of this pantomime at once, and the next day came the order to leave Esterháza.

Griesinger's tale was backed up recently by the discovery of a letter from the prince to his regent, stating unequivocally that he did not wish to see the wives or children of any of the musicians at Esterháza for even 24 hours, and that anyone who found this order unacceptable or who acted against the command was to be dismissed in disgrace. The only musicians exempt from the ruling were Haydn and his concertmaster, Tomasini. Not coincidentally, they were the only two left on stage at the end of the symphony.

Given this tale, one might have expected the fun-loving Haydn to write a humorous work to preface the unusual ending. On the contrary, the symphony is described by Haydn scholar H.C. Robbins Landon as one of Haydn's most noble and tragic symphonies, and Mendelssohn described it as "a curiously melancholic little piece." It is possibly the only symphony written in the 18th century in the key of F-sharp minor. To even begin to play, the horn players at the court had to order special crooks for their instruments, and all the musicians and their instruments were stretched to the limit. Haydn further chose to create an unusual and disarming tonal structure, with modulations that take the musicians as far afield as B-sharp minor! The Trio of the Minuet includes the Gregorian plainchant "*Incipit lamentatio*" from the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

From Esterháza and Vienna to Paris, where in 1778 the visiting 22-year-old **Mozart** was commissioned to compose a symphony and a **symphonie concertante** for the Concert Spirituel, a popular concert series in the French capital. The form of the symphonie concertante, in which a group of soloists is featured in a work that is generally light in nature, was extremely popular in Paris. This commission was inspired by the Paris visit of four virtuoso wind players from the famous Mannheim orchestra: the flutist Wendling, oboist Ramm, bassoonist Ritter, and hornist Stich, known as Punto. Curiously, the new "Paris" Symphony was performed, but not the symphonie concertante, greatly irking the young composer. In a letter to his father Mozart wrote:

As far as the Symphonie Concertante is concerned, I believe there are some strange things going on. It would seem that I have enemies here as well; but where did I not have them? – I think it's a good sign. I had to write the Symphonie Concertante in the greatest hurry, I really worked very hard, and the 4 soloists were and still are quite in love with the piece. Le Gros [*Director of the Concert Spirituel*] had it for four days so it could be copied. Yet I always found it lying there in the same place. Finally, the day before yesterday I didn't see it anymore – I look under a pile of music

– and there it is, out of sight. But I pretend not to have noticed and ask Le Gros: *apropós*, have you sent out the *Symph. Conc.* for copying? – No – I forgot. Of course, I can't order him to have the piece copied and get it ready, so I didn't say anything. But I went to the concert on the two days it should have been performed. Ramm and Punto came up to me all worked up and asked why my *Symphonie Concertante* was not on the programme? – I don't know. It's the first I've heard about it. I know nothing about it. Ramm was absolutely furious; he railed against Le Gros in French right in the Music Room, saying that it was a dirty trick, etc. What bothers me the most in all this is that Le Gros never said a word to me, I alone was to be kept in the dark – if he had given me some kind of excuse, such as the time was too short, or something of the sort, but nothing at all – I do think, however, the reason behind it all was Cambini, an Italian maestro here, because when we first met at the house of Le Gros, I inadvertently put him down. He has composed quartetti, and I heard one of them in Mannheim; they are quite pretty, and I praised them to him; then I proceeded to play the beginning of the one I had heard, but then Ritter, Ramm and Punto insisted that I continue playing and invent something for the part of the piece I couldn't remember. So that's what I did, and Cambini was quite beside himself; he couldn't contain himself and blurted out: *questa è una gran Testa!* [*What a swelled head!*]. Well, I guess he didn't appreciate what I did.

The Parisians never heard the *Symphonie Concertante*, nor has the score given to Le Gros ever surfaced, but when Mozart wrote to his father a few months later, just before leaving Paris, he stated “Le Gros thinks he alone has that music now, but that's not quite true, for I still have it fresh in my head and shall write it down again as soon as I get home.” If he did so, that score too is lost. Over 90 years later, however, a score in an unknown hand of a *Sinfonie Concertante*, allegedly by Mozart, appeared in the Staats-Bibliothek in Berlin. Many believe that Mozart did indeed return to the piece in Vienna, replacing the flutist with his favourite Viennese clarinetist Anton Stadler, and that this score is the only surviving copy, probably written out from a now lost original. Others believe that this piece has nothing to do with the storied work from Paris, and is perhaps not written by Mozart at all, but offer no evidence of another provenance.

The year Mozart was in Paris, the 28-year-old **Salieri** was in Venice, premiering his comic opera ***La scuola de' gelosi*** (The school of jealousy). Born in Veneto, Antonio Salieri went to study in Vienna at age 16. The Viennese were quick to adopt him, and he won favour with Joseph II: Salieri was appointed director of the Italian opera at court and *Kammerkomponist* at just 24 years of age. From 1776 to 1783 Joseph reorganized the court theatres, replacing Italian opera with spoken drama and the German *Singspiel*, and during this time Salieri turned his attention to his native Italy. The 1778 premiere of *La scuola de' gelosi* was his most successful venture at the time, and spread his fame throughout Europe. When Joseph replaced his German opera troupe with a company specializing in *opera buffa*, he chose Salieri's popular work for its inaugural performances in 1783. The overture became popular as a stand-alone symphony, called ***Sinfonia Veneziana*** because of its premiere in Venice.

The translation of Mozart's letters is by Robert Spaethling, published by Norton in 2000.