

Tafelmusik

MOZART'S PIANO

Program Notes
by Charlotte Nediger

J.C. BACH SYMPHONY IN G MINOR, OP. 6, NO. 6



Of Johann Sebastian Bach's many children, four enjoyed substantial careers as musicians: Carl Philipp Emanuel and Wilhelm Friedemann, born in Weimar to Maria Barbara; and Johann Christoph Friedrich and Johann Christian, born some twenty years later in Leipzig to Anna Magdalena. The youngest son, **Johann Christian**, is often called "the London Bach." He was by far the most travelled member of the Bach family. After his father's death in 1750, the fifteen-year-old went to Berlin to live and study with his brother Emanuel. A fascination with Italian opera led him to Italy four years later. He held posts in various centres in Italy (even converting to Catholicism) before settling in London in 1762. There he enjoyed considerable success as an opera composer, but left a greater mark by organizing an enormously successful concert series with his compatriot Carl Friedrich Abel. Much of the music at these concerts, which included

cantatas, symphonies, sonatas, and concertos, was written by Bach and Abel themselves. Johann Christian is regarded today as one of the chief masters of the galant style, writing music that is elegant and vivacious, but the rather dark and dramatic Symphony in G Minor, op. 6, no. 6 reveals a more passionate aspect of his work.

J.C. Bach is often cited as the single most important external influence on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Mozart synthesized the wide range of music he encountered as a child, but the one influence that stands out is that of J.C. Bach. Mozart spent fifteen months in London as a boy, in 1764–65, and Bach took the seven-year-old prodigy under his wing. Wolfgang's sister Nannerl recalls in her memoirs:

Herr Johann Christian Bach, the Queen's teacher, sat [Wolfgang] between his legs: the former played a few bars, and the other continued, and in this way they played a whole sonata, and someone not seeing it would have thought that only one man was playing it.

In 1778 Bach visited Vienna, and Mozart wrote to his father:

You may easily imagine his joy and mine when we met again. [...] I love him from my heart (as you know), and esteem him; and as for him, there is no doubt that he praises me warmly, not only to my face, but to others also, and not in the exaggerated manner in which some speak, but in earnest.

C.P.E. BACH SYMPHONY FOR STRINGS IN C MAJOR WQ 182/3



Mozart also greatly admired the works of the older **Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach**, but from a distance: there is no evidence that the two ever met. Copies of keyboard solos by C.P.E. were included in the notebooks assembled by Leopold Mozart for his children. Wolfgang encountered his music again in Vienna at the home of Baron Gottfried van Swieten, who had served as Austrian envoy in Berlin. Van Swieten held weekly gatherings at his home in Vienna, to which he invited musicians to perform the works of the Lutheran Bachs, as well as the oratorios of Handel. Mozart was a regular guest at these assemblies. Here he would have encountered C.P.E.'s **Six symphonies for string orchestra, Wq 182**, commissioned by Van Swieten during a visit to Hamburg in 1773. Before the symphonies were handed over to van Swieten they were played through at the house of Professor Büsch in Hamburg. The violinist J.F.

Reichardt led the ensemble on this occasion and wrote: "the original, bold concepts, the wide variety of forms and modulations, as well as their novel treatment, were received with enthusiasm." He also noted that they were very difficult to play, but that the Baron had expressly requested that Bach put technical considerations aside when composing the works.

MOZART SYMPHONY NO. 29 IN A MAJOR



Mozart's earliest symphonic writing shows the clear influence of Johann Christian Bach, and of his sojourns in Italy. In 1773, at the age of seventeen, he travelled to Vienna and must have heard some symphonies while he was there, for he returned to Salzburg and penned two decidedly Viennese works: the so-called "Little G-Minor" Symphony, K.183, and the **Symphony in A Major, K.201** that we are performing this week. The symphonies clearly show the influence of Haydn, both in form and style. The A-Major Symphony was written with a relatively small orchestra in mind, with a wind section consisting of only oboes and horns. Evidently Mozart himself was pleased with the work, and he revived it several times after settling in Vienna without substantial revision.

MOZART RONDO IN A MINOR FOR SOLO PIANO, K.511

The Rondo in A Minor was composed in March of 1787, in a relatively quiet period in terms of output. The previous year, Mozart had enjoyed tremendous success with *Marriage of Figaro*, first in Vienna, and then in Prague. It had also been a busy year in terms of instrumental compositions, with several concertos, chamber pieces, piano works, and the "Prague" Symphony. By October of 1787 he was back in Prague with a new opera, *Don Giovanni*, but in the interim penned only a handful of instrumental works, the Rondo among them. It stands out amongst Mozart's solo piano music as exceptionally intimate, with an air of

melancholy and mystery. It was not written on commission, nor is there any dedication, and its elusive nature has led to conjecture that he wrote it for himself. It has been suggested that it may have been written in response to the death of a close friend: the aristocrat Count August Hatzfeld was a gifted violinist who had participated in many performances of Mozart string quartets. Mozart wrote to his father of the “sad death of my dearest and best friend, the Count von Hatzfeld. He was just 31, like me; I do not feel sorry for *him*, but pity both myself and all who knew him as well as I did.” Scholars have noted that the influence of C.P.E. Bach’s piano music can be felt in the Rondo, and pianists have remarked that it looks forward to Schumann and Chopin in its deeply personal expression.

MOZART CONCERTO FOR PIANO NO. 12 IN A MAJOR, K.414

The A-Major Piano Concerto is one of three concertos performed at Mozart’s Lenten concerts of 1783. Composed a year after Mozart’s move to Vienna, it is also the first of the great series of fifteen piano concertos he composed in the capital in the 1780s. On December 28, 1782, he wrote to his father:

I must write in the greatest haste, as it is already half past five and I have asked some people to come here at six to play a little music. I have so much to do these days that often I do not know whether I am on my head or my heels. The whole morning, until two o’clock, is spent giving lessons. Then we eat. After this meal I must give my poor stomach a short hour for digestion. The evening is therefore the only time I have for composing and of that I can never be sure, as I am often asked to perform at concerts. There are still two concertos wanting to make up the series of subscription concerts. These concertos are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being vapid. There are also passages here and there from which connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less discriminating cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why.

Despite the busy schedule, Mozart had completed the remaining two concertos (K.413 and 415) a few weeks later. In January he placed a notice in the *Wiener Zeitung* advertising carefully copied manuscript copies of all three concertos, to be sold by subscription only from his apartment on the Hohe Brücke. His father suggested that the price of four ducats was too high, but Mozart responded, “I believe that I should earn at least one ducat for each concerto, and I can’t imagine that anyone could get it copied for one ducat!” His father may have been right, for sales were low, but the concerts were successful, and Mozart’s reputation as both composer and pianist greatly enhanced. Two years later the three concertos were engraved and published by the Viennese publishing firm Artaria as Opus 4.

Noteworthy in the A-Major Concerto is the middle movement, based on a theme from the Overture to *La calamita de cuori* by Johann Christian Bach. Bach had died a few months before the concerto was written, and the beautiful *Andante* is a touching musical epitaph to Mozart’s mentor.