

MOZART 40

Program Notes

By Charlotte Nediger

Salzburg 1774/75

Mozart's childhood travels had left him with a hunger for making his mark in more cosmopolitan circles than offered in his native city of Salzburg. His father's ambitions for him played no small part in this. We therefore tend to associate his time in Salzburg with a general discontentment, but some of this association is arguably misplaced. He formally entered the employment of the Archbishop of Salzburg, Count Colloredo, in 1773, at the age of seventeen. He was appointed Konzertmeister, and the post allowed him time and space to hone his craft as a composer. The next few years saw an outpouring of compositions, including a range of chamber and orchestral works. His first "mature" symphonies date from this time (including the first of the two G-Minor symphonies, no. 25, which we will be performing later this season [*The Hunt: Mozart and Haydn*, April 25–30, 2019]). His very first piano concertos appeared, as did his first concerto for a wind instrument, the delightful **Concerto for bassoon in B-flat Major**, presumed to have been written for one of the bassoonists at the Salzburg court. Many have noted that the young Mozart perfectly captured the instrument's inherent qualities, an early example of his tremendous skill at writing for winds as witnessed in his later symphonies and operas.

All five of Mozart's **violin concertos** were written in Salzburg in a six-month period in 1775. He undoubtedly would have performed them himself (he was an accomplished violinist, and leader of the orchestra), though in what context is not known: possibly at church, possibly at informal public events. In the concertos he eschews the pyrotechnics championed by many violinists at the time in favour of a more natural, elegant, and often witty style. After hearing a performance of a violin concerto by Ignaz Fränzl, Mozart wrote to his father, "I like his playing very much. You know I am no great lover of difficulties. He plays difficult things, but his listeners are not aware that they are difficult; they think that they could at once do the same themselves. That is real playing."

The cadenzas performed by Elisa Citterio this week have been written by her brother, the composer Carlo Citterio.

We precede the concerto performances with a short Symphony written at the same time. The first two movements formed the Overture to the Italian comic opera *La finta giardiniera*, commissioned for the Munich Opera and premiered in January 1775. Shortly after returning to Salzburg, Mozart added a Finale to create a stand-alone work, and it is a spirited little piece, befitting the comedy of disguise and mistaken identity which inspired it.

Vienna 1788

By the end of the 1770s, Mozart's need to expand his horizons beyond Salzburg reached the breaking point. He found his opportunity in 1781, when Archbishop Colloredo included Mozart in his retinue while in residence in Vienna for celebrations of the accession of Emperor Joseph II. Mozart was increasingly resentful of his position as a servant (considered lower in station than the valets, though above the cooks!), and also increasingly enthusiastic about the prospect of earning his own living in Vienna. When his request to be released from service was refused, his behavior was such that in a few short weeks he was summarily dismissed. Count Arco, the Archbishop's steward, was given the task of sending him packing, and admonished Mozart: "here [in Vienna] a man's success is of short duration — at the outset one reaps all possible praises and earns a great deal of money as well. That is true, but for how long? — after a few months the Viennese want something new again."

If Mozart's fortunes looked bright during his first years in Vienna, they indeed soon turned. By 1788 Mozart was in serious debt, as attested by a series of heartrending letters to his fellow Mason, Michael Puchberg, pleading for money. In all, Puchberg lent Mozart 1,415 gulden, a significant sum. His wife Constanze's health was suffering from the strain of repeated pregnancies, and on June 29 the Mozarts' fourth child, Theresia, died at the age of six months. Three days earlier Mozart had completed Symphony no. 39 in E-Flat Major. **Symphony no. 40 in G Minor** followed four weeks later, and Symphony no. 41 in C Major two weeks after that. They were to be his last three symphonies, and were apparently composed neither on commission, nor with any concrete plans for performance. It is possible that Mozart directed performances of the works during his travels to Prague, Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin, undertaken in search of renewed fame and fortune outside the confines of fickle Vienna.

The three symphonies are remarkable works, widely contrasting, and together a comprehensive summary of the classical symphony. Of the three, the one that has drawn the most attention is the arresting Symphony no. 40. In 1793, two years after Mozart's death, it was advertised by the Viennese music dealer Johann Traeg as "one of the last and most beautiful of this master." The work was widely known and performed, and was very influential. The Mozart scholar Neal Zaslaw suggests that its essence can be heard again in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, and Bruckner symphonies. The slow movement is quoted by Haydn in his oratorio *The Seasons*. The quotation appears in the aria where winter is compared to old age, following the words "exhausted is the summer's strength" — Haydn's gesture a commemoration of the loss of his younger colleague as well as a reflection of the approaching end of his own career. Schubert made a copy of the Minuet and used it as a model for the G-Minor Minuet of his Fifth Symphony.

Early nineteenth-century critics already described the symphony as "romantic," and although it is a near-perfect exemplar of the classical style, it is also a deeply personal, original, and intense work. Much has been written about its significance as a link between musical classicism and romanticism. Zaslaw describes it as "perhaps even a mournful hint at what Mozart might have composed had he lived a normal lifespan."

"One must hear Mozart's deep, artful, and emotion-filled Symphony in G Minor [no. 40] several times to be able to completely understand and enjoy it."

Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung, 1804

Tafelmusik first performed Symphony 40 in 2001 at the Klang und Raum Festival in Irsee, Germany, conducted by Bruno Weil, and again on tours of the US and Europe the following season. This season makes our third performances of the symphony here in Toronto.