

## TONIGHT'S REPERTOIRE

# WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

**HAYDN** (1732–1809)

**Symphony No 52 in C minor** (1771)

*Allegro assai con brio*

*Andante*

*Menuetto e trio*

*Finale – Presto*

**BEETHOVEN** (1770–1827)

**Triple Concerto** (1803)

*Allegro*

*Largo*

*Rondo alla polacca*

**MOZART** (1756–1791)

**Symphony No 38 'Prague'** (1786)

*Adagio – Allegro*

*Andante*

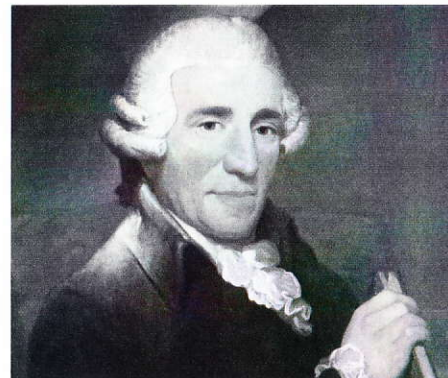
*Finale*

Haydn the jovial, ever-smiling wit; Mozart the bad-boy prodigy, from whom music flowed effortlessly; Beethoven the rugged, dogged, heroic pioneer. Okay, those curt characterisations might seem rather reductive, certainly to a discerning member of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's audience. But, as you'll surely agree, there's an element of truth to them, or at least in the way those three composers and their music are often characterised.

Which makes tonight's concert all the more fascinating. Because this evening's music goes against the flow, either – depending on your point of view – bucking the trend and revealing works that serve to disprove those admittedly lazy descriptions, or simply recognising the richness and breadth in what those three men produced.

Haydn wrote plenty of music that was powerful and dramatic, of course. Just think of his so-called 'Sturm und Drang' symphonies of the 1760s and 1770s for a start, with their turbulent passions, their agitated emotion, their abrupt contrasts. The last of them, No 52 in C minor, is something else entirely, however. Just try predicting where the first movement's opening melody is planning to go. Or even how long its phrases are intending to carry on for. It's one of the stormiest, most unpredictable openings that Haydn ever produced, and it's followed by a graceful second subject that sounds like it's from another piece of music entirely. It's as if the supposedly good-natured, avuncular figure is intentionally out to disconcert us.

No wonder the great Haydn scholar HC Robbins Landon described the Symphony as 'the grandfather of Beethoven's Fifth'.

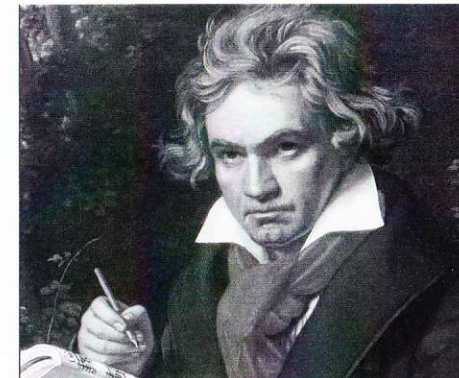


Joseph Haydn

Not only does it share that work's key of C minor – and all the musical symbolism of struggle, tragedy and high drama that that tonality has accrued over the centuries – but also its tension, its power and its audacious ambition.

After the bold restlessness of his opening movement, Haydn brings in deceptive tranquillity in a slow movement that shifts, meanders and grows increasingly unsettled, then a minuet with such erratic accents that it would be quite a challenge to dance to, and finally the relentless bustle of a finale with a main theme so full of off-beats it's virtually unhumable. Nevertheless, experiencing Haydn's Symphony No 52 is a remarkably powerful experience, and a reminder of just how innovative and provocative his music can be.

"Did he who wrote the Ninth write thee?" asked Harvey Grace, rather rudely, in his 1927 biography of Beethoven, referring to a collection of supposedly 'weak' pieces including the Triple Concerto. And sadly, that rather withering enquiry is not untypical of the disparaging remarks that the Concerto has gathered down the decades. For serious-minded musicologists, at least,



Ludwig van Beethoven

it seems to lack the pioneering punch, the dogged, obstinate heroism of works such as the 'Eroica' Symphony, or the 'Waldstein' or 'Appassionata' sonatas, all of which Beethoven was creating at roughly the same time.

But Beethoven nonetheless answered significant compositional challenges with the Triple Concerto. For a start, it's the very first work of its kind: Beethoven was the first composer to make concerto soloists out of a piano trio, and, though more recent composers have written works for the same forces, none has found a regular place in the repertoire.

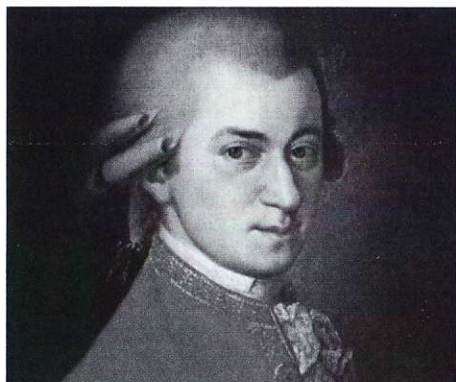
In addition, Beethoven was writing for some wildly mismatched soloists. His intended pianist was none other than Archduke Rudolf of Austria, who became Beethoven's pupil in 1803 at the age of fifteen and continued to study with him for the following two decades. And though Archduke Rudolf had good keyboard skills, he was no match for the Triple Concerto's seasoned professional string soloists: violinist Carl August Siedler, and cellist Anton Kraft, who had been in Haydn's orchestra at Eszterháza.



So, although the Triple Concerto shows Beethoven placing lyrical elegance and thematic elaboration ahead of the uncompromising explorations and intense transformations he was exploring elsewhere in his music, it's a delightful example of his lighter side, from the overwhelming wealth of melodic material in its opening movement to the uncomplicated lyricism of its brief slow movement, and then the boisterous energy of its foot-tapping finale in the form of a polonaise – a dance form perhaps familiar to us today thanks to Chopin, but shockingly innovative in Beethoven's time.

Mozart, by reputation, and indeed by quite a bit of evidence, was able to produce music with remarkable ease, fluency and speed. His 'Prague' Symphony, however, is one of the few pieces for which sketches survive of the composer working through themes, tweaking them so that they'd combine together or be transformed across a movement. He clearly invested a lot of energy and creativity in the work. And when you look at the circumstances of its premiere, you can understand why.

His opera *The Marriage of Figaro* opened at Vienna's Burgtheater on 1 May 1786 to critical acclaim, but a rather lukewarm reaction from the general public, marking the start of the Imperial capital falling a bit out of love with Mozart. At its staging in Prague in December that year, however, *Figaro* was an immediate and triumphant success, and the city's musical bigwigs begged the composer to visit in person, to experience the acclaim and direct some of his own music. He duly obliged in January 1787, and by all accounts, Mozart's trip was a non-stop round of banquets, parties and balls.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Prague loved Mozart, and the feelings were reciprocated. In honour of the occasion, Mozart unveiled one of his richest, most complex works in a concert on 19 January. The 'Prague' Symphony contains some of the grandest, most sophisticated music written up to that time, and it went down a storm with Prague listeners. So successful was Mozart's visit, in fact, that off its back he received another Prague commission: for an opera on the exploits of Don Juan, which became a certain *Don Giovanni*.

It's ironic, then, that Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony can't possibly have been written specifically for his overwhelmingly successful trip. In fact, he'd completed the work before he'd even been invited to the city. Mozart's letters show that he was planning a trip to England at the time he was composing his Symphony No 38, a visit that never happened when his father Leopold refused to look after the composer's two children. Had Leopold been happy to babysit, what we now know as the 'Prague' Symphony might well have been dubbed the 'London' Symphony instead.

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