

scottish ensemble

Re-defining the string orchestra

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Divertimento in D, K136 (1772)

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Andante
- 3 Presto

If there's one thing everyone knows about Mozart, it's that he was a child prodigy. He wrote this Divertimento in D in Salzburg in the winter of 1772 when he was just 15 – and by then he'd already been composing for a decade. And despite its non-specific title – which probably indicates that it was originally intended as light entertainment music for a musical soirée in the home of one of Salzburg's eminent residents – it's something of a miniature masterpiece that includes (almost) everything Mozart would put into his later, longer symphonies, just on a smaller scale.

The sparkling opening Allegro begins with a memorable theme that contrasts long, sustained notes with scampering, faster figurations, moving into a darker central section that takes us into a succession of minor keys before a return to the bright music of the beginning. After the effortlessly flowing Andante, elegant and lyrical, the young Mozart shows his mischievous side with the spirited final Presto. It opens with some witty, clipped chords before erupting into a breathless, dashing tune – listen carefully and you might even notice that its opening few notes are exactly the same as those that kicked off the first movement.

Arvo Pärt (Born 1935–)

Mozart-Adagio (1992)

Contemporary Estonian composer Arvo Pärt provides a moving commentary on Mozart in this 1992 tribute to Russian violinist Oleg Kagan, a close friend who had died two years previously, written for violin, cello and piano. Asked by the Helsinki Festival to compose a piece for the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, Pärt remembered Kagan's particular love for Mozart's music and took the slow movement from an early Mozart keyboard sonata (K280 in F) as his starting point, leaving the original almost intact but adding a miniature introduction, interlude and coda, as well as an on-going musical 'commentary' from the two stringed instruments. The result feels like an encounter between the 17th and 20th centuries, where Mozart's elegant classicism and Pärt's distinctive pared-back tintinnabuli style exist side by side, separate yet complementary. Significantly, Pärt's musical additions tend to fall around the jarringly dissonant interval of a minor 2nd – almost as if he's expanding what Mozart used to such sparing emotional effect to mourn the loss of his colleague.

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Concerto for Violin and Piano No.6 in F major

- 1 Allegro moderato
- 2 Largo
- 3 Presto

From Mozart to his contemporary Haydn – and although the elder composer is less well known as a writer of concertos than his younger colleague, Haydn clearly held his youthful concertos in fond regard, requesting his publishers Breitkopf und Härtel, near the end of his life, to reissue two from his 20s, including this Double Concerto for violin and piano.

There's a highly personal connection with this piece, though: Haydn wrote it for a concert in 1756 to mark his sister-in-law, Josepha Kellér, becoming a nun. The young composer had had a love affair with Josepha earlier in his life, and its unhappy ending had indirectly led to her taking the veil – Haydn ended up with her sister, Maria Anna Keller, but the marriage was seldom truly happy.

To mark what was clearly an important event for him, Haydn composed this concerto on a grand scale – he wrote about it being played on violin and organ, but it would almost certainly have been originally performed on harpsichord or even fortepiano. The string orchestra announces the first movement's energetic themes before they're taken up by the two soloists, who join together in elegant duets and butt in on each other's phrases. After a darker middle section, with fiery figurations for the piano, the pair join in a sparkling duet cadenza before a brief return of the opening music.

Throbbing, slowly moving chords open the thoughtful second movement, and the solo violin introduces an elegant melody against pizzicato accompaniment, followed closely by the heavily ornamented piano. The short closing Presto is a lively dance that manages to be both light-footed and a bit of a stomp, with the violin sent up to stratospheric virtuosic heights twice near the end of the movement.

Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998)

Moz-Art à la Haydn (1977)

And so to the piece – funny, unsettling and provocative – that gives this concert part of its name – and even the 'Moz-Art' bit of Schnittke's title is a play on words, meaning something like 'sort of' in German, but also leaving nobody in any doubt as to where the Soviet composer was drawing his inspiration from. Schnittke strained against the strictures of the Soviet system throughout his life, at times rebelling against it with unforgivingly modernist music, at others toeing the party line in scores for state-sponsored films, for example. It's no surprise that he adopted a consciously polystylistic style – equally at ease in academic serialism, spiritual church music, popular songs or high Romanticism.

Or in the elegance of the Classical period, which he gently parodies in this comedic piece for two violin soloists and string ensemble. It's based on Mozart's 1783 *Musik zu einer Faschingspantomime* ('Music to a Carnival Pantomime'), of which only a violin part survives, but Schnittke weaves in plenty of other Mozartian references, some obvious, others more hidden. There are theatrical elements – to say more would spoil the surprise – and as for where Haydn comes in, well, Schnittke's surprise ending puts a darkly modern spin on one of that older composer's most famous symphonies.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Piano Concerto No. 12 in A, K414

- 1 Allegro
- 2 Andante
- 3 Allegretto

We end where we began – with Mozart, but now a maturer composer. He was 26 when he wrote the Piano Concerto in A, K414, in Vienna in 1782, and it's one of three he composed for that winter's concert season, for himself to perform, and with flexible instrumentation in mind (it can be performed with either full orchestra or just a string quartet) to appeal to the broadest range of publishers and performers. A letter to his father reveals his determination to please a broad public, too, with the three works: 'These concertos are a happy medium between being too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasant to the ear, and natural, without being vapid. There are particular passages from which connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction, but still the less learned cannot, I believe, fail to be pleased, even without knowing why. To gain applause, one must write things so inane that they might be played on barrel-organs, or so unintelligible that no rational being can comprehend them, though on that very account they are likely to please.'

It took three years, though, for a publisher to pick up the concertos – and by that time Mozart had already achieved fame and a steady income in Vienna, chiefly through his performances of his own music. He went on to write 16 further piano concertos for the city. The A major Concerto stresses lyricism and serenity above turmoil and drama. The soloist makes a somewhat self-effacing though nonetheless elegant entry after the first movement's orchestral introduction, and goes on to share the limelight graciously with the ensemble in tasteful melodies and figurations. The second movement is a memorial to JC Bach, Mozart's former mentor, who died early in 1782; Mozart quotes a theme from the Overture to the older composer's opera *La calamita de' cuori*, and the piano has a beautifully decorated, elaborate melody. Although perky and sparkling, Mozart's last movement is graceful rather than energetic – although the piano's flamboyant cadenza (written out by Mozart) puts it firmly in the spotlight.

David Kettle



Alasdair Beatson, pianist

Highly regarded as a distinctive and vibrant musician, Alasdair is one of the most established chamber pianists of his generation, with a wide and varied repertoire. Often attracted to less familiar works, Alasdair's approach to programming has been described as 'canny and uncompromising' (Classical Source). His debut solo CD – the Opus 1s of Schumann, Brahms, Grieg and Berg – was released on SOMM Recordings in 2009 to critical acclaim. Other uncommon works explored throughout his career include Debussy's own arrangement for solo piano of his ballet *Jeux*, Fauré's rarely performed *Fantaisie for piano and orchestra*, Hindemith's *Four Temperaments*, the complete solo piano music of Ludwig Thuille, and piano trio arrangements of Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and Janacek's *Kreutzer Sonata*. Keen to collaborate directly with living composers, Alasdair has worked closely with George Benjamin, Harrison Birtwistle, Cheryl Frances-Hoad and Heinz Holliger.

Highlights of 2014 include a sixth solo Wigmore Recital on July 13th, performances of the complete Beethoven cello sonatas with Pieter Wispelwey, and chamber collaborations with such artists as Adrian Brendel, Philippe Graffin, Erich Höbarth, Henning Kraggerud, and Pekka Kuusisto. His recent CD of Mendelssohn piano music with SOMM Recordings received praise for 'highly sensitive playing of rare insight' (Classic FM Magazine) and was awarded the Outstanding accolade of International Record Review.

MOZART & MOZ-ART