

Notes on the Program

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ALL-MOZART PROGRAM

Generations of listeners have found special poignancy in the music Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed in 1791, the year in which he celebrated his 35th birthday and, ten and a half months later, was buried in an unmarked grave. The pathos is all but irresistible, and in retrospect one finds it tempting to imagine that his music of that year foretells the tragedy that lay around the bend. However, until his very last weeks Mozart had no reason to imagine that he would be dying anytime soon. Many of his works from that year are not at all melancholy, including some charming songs, a pleasant set of keyboard variations, a couple of pieces for mechanical musical clock, the String Quintet in E-flat major, and no fewer than 35 genial minuets, German dances, contradances, and *Ländler*.

His wife had some health issues — that was a cause for worry — but they had two healthy sons. He was not good at mon-

ey management — in recent years he had turned to friends to help him weather dry spells in his cash flow — but he was in no way impoverished, and his family was living a generally comfortable middle-class life. He had good reason to feel positively about the direction his career was taking. Since late 1787 he had enjoyed a salaried appointment (with few obligations) as composer to the Imperial-Royal Chamber Music of Emperor Joseph II. What's more, in May 1791 he was appointed assistant music director of St. Stephen's Cathedral, the major church in Vienna. That brought him no immediate income, but it set him up to take over the music directorship should the position open up — which seemed imminent given the age and poor health of the man who held the post.

For a composer in Vienna, the most likely route to serious financial success was through the opera house. In 1791 Mozart had two

Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat major, K.595



Mozart, in a 1789 silverpoint portrait by Doris Stock

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Work composed: apparently begun as early as 1788, though considerable work waited until the end of 1790 and the first days of 1791; completed January 5, 1791

World premiere: March 4, 1791, in Vienna, with the composer as soloist

New York Philharmonic premiere: February 20, 1936, Arturo Toscanini, conductor, Rudolf Serkin, soloist

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: March 31, 2007, Colin Davis, conductor, Radu Lupu, soloist

Estimated duration: ca. 31 minutes

successful operas premiered — *La clemenza di Tito* in Prague and *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) in Vienna — and both gained considerable popularity in the course of their runs. On the whole, it was a very good year for Mozart ... until suddenly it wasn't.

The first piece Mozart completed in the fateful year of 1791 was his **Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat major (K.595)**, which he entered in his *Verzeichnüss aller meiner Werke* (*Catalogue of all my works*) on January 5. One further concerto would make its way into that notebook: the Clarinet Concerto in A major (K.622), which Mozart entered on September 28. Both of those concertos display a kinship in their nostalgic introspection and

their avoidance of flashy brilliance, characteristics that may signal a direction he might have continued to develop had he lived longer.

In fact, neither of those last two concertos really date from his last year, at least not entirely, or even at heart. The Clarinet Concerto traces its ancestry to a basset-horn concerto sketched four years earlier, in 1787, and much of the composition of the B-flat major Piano Concerto almost certainly dated from a year after that. The latter fact was revealed by the musicologist Alan Tyson, who reached his conclusions following detailed examination of the physical characteristics of the paper on which Mozart inscribed his music. For that matter, Tyson's inquiries also revealed that yet a third concerto dates from 1791 — the cheerful

Toward a Correct Edition

These performances employ an edition of Mozart's **Piano Concerto No. 27, K.595**, that may startle some listeners who know the work intimately. Prepared by Wolfgang Rehm for the Neue Mozart-Ausgabe [the modern collected edition of the composer's works] and initially published by Bärenreiter in 1960, it restores seven measures that had long since dropped out of the first movement (measures 47–53 in that score). Early publishers had failed to pick up a correction Mozart himself provided to emend a mistake he made when copying out the final version of his score.

This omission was perpetuated through generations of ensuing editions, and just when modern musicology started to really dig into Mozart, in the middle of the 20th century, the composer's autograph disappeared. It had resided in the Prussian State Library, Berlin, but, as the critical commentary attached to the Bärenreiter edition delicately disclosed in 1960, "today it must be deemed to have dropped from view as a result of the disorder of the Second World War."

Its fate was not as grave as that statement implied; it still exists, in the Jagellonian Library of Cracow, but that library neither publicized the fact nor allowed access to Mozart's autograph until much later.

A correct version of Mozart's text, with the "extra" seven measures, actually had appeared in 1919, published by Edition Steingrüber of Leipzig; the editor had obviously consulted Mozart's manuscript at the Prussian State Library. But that edition went out of print and was promptly forgotten not long after it was released.

Title page of the first edition of Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 27, published by Artaria, in Vienna



D-major Horn Concerto (K.412), which earlier scholars, for no very compelling reason, had long assigned to 1782. It didn't make it into Mozart's *Verzeichnüss* for the same reason his Requiem didn't: the composer left both unfinished at his death.

It is not known why Mozart set aside this Piano Concerto in B-flat major after he worked on it in 1788. That was the year of his penultimate piano concerto, the *Coronation* Concerto in D major (K.537), and one might well suppose that the *Coronation* met his current needs as a performer, that perhaps a concert opportunity he had envisioned, which would have required yet another new work, failed to materialize. Such an opportunity did arise in early 1791, and that would seem to explain why Mozart scurried to finish this piece when he did. The event took place on March 4, 1791, at a ballroom in the home of the court caterer Ignaz Jahn on the Himmelpfortgasse in Vienna — a concert put on by the clarinetist Joseph Bähr (or Beer) for his own benefit.

The *Wiener Zeitung* reported a week later:

Herr Bähr, Chamber Musician in actual service of H. Imperial Russian Maj., held a grand musical concert on 4 March in the hall at Herr Jahn's, and won the unani-

mous approbation of an audience consisting for the most part of connoisseurs, by his extraordinary skill on the clarinet. — Herr Kapellmeister Mozart played a Concerto on the forte piano, and every one admired his art, in composition as well as in performance, while Madame Lange also completed the perfection of the proceedings with some arias.

Madame Lange was the married name of Aloysia Weber, the soprano who had been the object of Mozart's late-adolescent affection, although he ended up marrying her sister Constanze instead. Given the participation of these two, it seems likely that family friends probably were part of the audience that day. One hopes so, at least, since it would turn out to be Mozart's last public performance as a pianist.

Although Mozart's **Masonic Funeral Music** was not a creation of his final year, it does reflect the somber tone that will further inhabit this concert. On December 14, 1784, Mozart was accepted as an Apprentice in the Viennese Masonic chapter known as the *Loge zur Wohltätigkeit* (*Lodge of Beneficence*). He apparently became quite active in

Masonic Funeral Music, K.477 / 479a



Depiction of a Masonic lodge in Vienna, ca. 1789

Work composed: July 1785

World premiere: probably in 1785 in Vienna

New York Philharmonic premiere: December 12, 1891, Anton Seidl, conductor

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: December 10, 1991, Erich Leinsdorf, conductor

Estimated duration: ca. 7 minutes