

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Symphony No. 38 in D Major, 'Prague'

Readers will need little reminder that Mozart was at the top of his game as he wrote his 38th symphony, named for the city of 'Prague'. One can hear it in every note. It is worth examining why this was so. We are continually aware that Mozart's music represents a sort of unworldly perfection. Even the earliest compositions show true merit. So it is hard to pinpoint one or other piece, or moment in Mozart's all too short life that might represent an apotheosis. For Beethoven, the writing of the *Eroica* represented the connection between his many different strengths, all coming together for the first time. His ability to create a melodic idea from the smallest cellular construct and then transform it into building blocks of a scale much larger or grander than had been seen before. All the while, there is a technique driven virtuosity in the writing, a full romanticism in the moments of pathos and a gargantuan vision that forces its realisation at every performance. All that is present in the *Eroica*, his great third symphony, his historical 'eureka'. For Mozart it is the 38th symphony.

His style had become masterful. He had decided that symphonic works could be judged on their own musical merit, and no longer needed a dance. The minuet is gone, replaced by a completely perfect middle movement of such sonority, depth, size and structure that one might believe that the minuet or scherzo never existed. The first, second and final movements are all in a spectacular A.B.A form, standing like Greek temples. And then comes the fun. Mozart was also the consummate master of operatic form. There is nothing he didn't know about the voice, and nothing he didn't know about how to set an orchestra to accompany it. Also around this time, his legendary relationship with the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte was to deliver three gems, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*. All three share in the audacious style of da Ponte's text mirrored in near perfect music. *Figaro* was a hit in Vienna, but when it came to Prague, it was a box office smash as had never been seen before. The city was abuzz with the tunes, which were completely popularized in taverns and on the streets. The success of *Figaro* led to the writing and show stopping performances of *Don Giovanni* and gave Mozart a much needed financial boost. The extraordinary Symphony No. 38 is a dedication of thankfulness to the people of Prague for their glorious support of his work. The first movement has a grandeur that evokes the opening of *Don Giovanni* the germination of for which had already begun. As if that wasn't enough, he quotes in the finale of the symphony from the already beloved *Figaro* in a way so recognizable and playful that the audience must have gone wild.