

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

By the time Mozart was writing the three works featured in our 'all Mozart' programme, life in Salzburg was already changing. The works come fairly close together, all written between 1775 (Violin Concerto) and 1779 (Sinfonia Concertante) with the Piano Concerto in the middle in 1777. All three have Mozart's unmistakable style, and do not display any indications that life for the composer might have become difficult, if not unbearable. In 1771 Hieronymus Colloredo was elected Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, defeating the widely popular dean of Salzburg, and thenceforward treated as an outsider with a coolness and reserve that only Salzburg can show. He was the last to hold the position, until 1803 when Salzburg was secularized under the advancement of the Napoleonic ideals that had swept Europe.

Colloredo's predecessor, Prince Archbishop Sigmund of Schrattenbach was a different figure altogether. The Catholic church held an unassailable position under this lavishly projected, doctrinally conservative, old fashioned churchman, who believed in things as they should be, without being worried about trifles like practicality or finances. Under him, Leopold Mozart was able to finance tours, on which he took the young Wolfgang, gaining fame, enrichment, and supporting a network of musical patronage for those who played for the archbishop's household. Schrattenbach was not a musician, but was determined that lavish things should attend his exalted position – a policy from which the Mozart's benefitted.

Colloredo, on the other hand, although he was an amateur violinist, was a deeply religious churchman intent on political, financial and religious reform. The Mass was shortened in favour of a simplified purer usage, (not good for musicians who set it to music). The finances fell off completely, and retiring court musicians were not replaced. Consequently, the music making at court fell into shambles, well chronicled in the official complaints of Leopold Mozart, and Wolfgang's position at court was the source of enmity and struggle, since he could not support his artistic needs and was noticeably and frequently absent. The finest early symphonies and concerti come from this period, with an unlikely spike in religious music in 1779, perhaps prompted by a scolding.

So we might owe these marvelous works to their historical background and the fact that Mozart was more moved to hone his instrumental style than to write in service of the church. The Violin Concerto in G (*Strassburg* – named for the lively tune in the last rondeau) is one of the more often played Mozart concerti. The Piano Concerto No. 9 (*Jeunehomme*) as well as the *Sinfonia Concertante* are both marvelous revelations in E-flat major, a key in which Mozart consistently conveyed extraordinary drama and beauty. His first and three other symphonies, horn concerti, divertimenti and the *Magic Flute* all reveal themselves in E-flat. Albert Einstein called the piano concerto Mozart's *Eroica*, perhaps because of the key the two pieces share, or perhaps because of the early and unusual entrance of the piano, innovative and daring – or perhaps because Mozart was 21 years old at the time. At any rate, the title *Jeunehomme* is a misspelling of the last name Jenamy. Victoire Jenamy was a young girl Mozart had met in 1773.

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