

WIGMORE HALL 125

Monday 12 January 2026
7.30pm

Kit Armstrong piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Adagio in B minor K540 (1788)

Minuet in D K355 (?1786-7)

Gigue in G K574 (1789)

Piano Sonata in D K576 (1789)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Interval

Piano Sonata in F K533/494 (1786-8)

I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Rondo. Allegretto

Fantasia in F minor for mechanical organ K608 (1791)
transcribed for piano



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Mozart completed his **Adagio in B minor K540** on 19 March 1788. There is no evidence of any external circumstance that led him to compose this intriguing piece, which adopts the distinctive *Empfindsamer Stil* (sentimental style) closely associated with CPE Bach, a style that has often been regarded as a precursor to Romanticism. The processive discontinuities, abrupt changes of dynamics and register, sighing appoggiaturas and unorthodox chromatic harmonies are all characteristic features of this *Empfindsamer Stil*, but here they are harnessed to a taut formal design, closer to a pre- or early-classical rounded binary form than to a full-scale sonata form. Given its intensely expressive qualities, it is perhaps not surprising that Alfred Einstein considered this Adagio 'one of the most perfect, most deeply felt, and most despairing of all [Mozart's] works'.

There is no consensus about the composition date of the **Minuet in D K355**. The autograph is not extant, and the piece was first published posthumously in 1801, with the title 'Menuetto avec Trio pour le Pianoforte par W. A. Mozart, et M. Stadler'. Maximilian Stadler did indeed add a trio in B minor, though modern editions often do not include it. There are several schools of thought about the date, with some authorities arguing that the chromaticism and motivic saturation point to the final years of Mozart's life (c.1790), while others link the minuet to a group of consciously experimental works Mozart composed around 1782. The worklist in Grove settles for '1786-7'. What is in any case striking is that the chromatic voice leading – present right from the opening bars – results in harmonies that were far from conventional in the late eighteenth century, in some cases because of their dissonance quotient and in others their tonal ambiguity.

No such doubts about chronology beset another short dance piece, the **Gigue in G K574** (it was later given the title *Eine Kleine Gigue*). This was written directly into the album of the Leipzig court organist, with the date given as 16 May 1789. Mozart had just undertaken a concert tour of Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin, and while in Leipzig he renewed his acquaintance with the music of Bach. This rebounded on several of his own late works, and for several commentators this little piece is among them. It is often published, performed and recorded alongside the Minuet.

In his **Piano Sonata in D K576**, Mozart offered us a lively, indeed a buoyant, first movement, whose 'hunting' theme is subject to some ingenious imitative treatments (the sonata is sometimes nicknamed 'The Hunt'), before offsetting this with an elegantly embellished *bel canto* melody in the slow movement. This was Mozart's last piano sonata. It was composed in 1789, and was originally intended as one of six sonatas he promised to the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II for his daughter Princess Friederike Luise (the other five did not materialise). The commission apparently specified 'easy' sonatas, a directive Mozart conspicuously ignored, and especially so in the

challenging rondo finale, with its technical wizardry and playful contrapuntal exchanges.

That there are two Köchel numbers attached to the **Piano Sonata in F** is down to the unusual composition history of this work. The third movement *Rondo* was composed as a separate piece in 1786, two years before the *Allegro* and *Andante*. The movements were then joined up prior to the publication of the sonata in 1790, at which point Mozart added a short section towards the end of the already existing *Rondo*. The first movement *Allegro* is one of Mozart's more ambitious, not to say commanding, sonata forms, with its thematic material shared equally between the two hands in intricately worked contrapuntal textures. Such textures are common in Mozart's later music, and they often reveal new and unexpected aspects of the initial thematic material. In this *Allegro*, the ascending octave leap in the first theme, inconspicuous in its early appearances, emerges centre stage to prove its worth as a distinctive fugato 'point', not just in the development section but in the extended coda. The expressive heart of the sonata lies in its extended slow movement in B flat major. The harmony here is decidedly unpredictable, with plangent unprepared dissonances, tonally ambiguous progressions, and descending chromatic sequences of a kind that would in due course become common currency in Chopin. Compared to these two movements, the *Rondo* finale is lighter in tone, no doubt reflecting its pre-history as an independent piece.

The title '**Fantasia**' attached to Mozart's K608 was not supplied by the composer, but was introduced more than a century later when Ferruccio Busoni made an arrangement for piano four hands. The piece was originally composed in 1791 (the year of Mozart's death) to a commission from Count Joseph Deym, an ex-soldier who was also an enthusiast for mechanical organs and musical clocks. Deym invited Mozart to compose a piece for an automated organ/clock, somewhat akin to a barrel organ (Mozart labelled it 'an organ piece for a clock'), and specifically for an exhibition in Deym's waxwork museum in Vienna. Mozart declared himself dissatisfied with the high-pitched sound of the instrument, but this did not prevent him from producing what is generally considered a masterpiece. Like other works in this evening's programme, it registers very clearly his engagement with Bach, and with Baroque musical idioms more generally. Thus, the opening of the work is clearly in the manner of a French overture, closely followed by an elaborately worked fugal section. The middle section has the character of a 'slow movement' with variations, while the reprise of the opening material is enriched by yet more complex contrapuntal detail. There is no autograph manuscript for the work (it comes down to us in several early copies of different provenance, with the music laid out on four staves), and several arrangements have been made, notably for organ, piano and piano four hands.