

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 23 February 2024
7.30pm

Alina Ibragimova violin
Nils Mönkemeyer viola
Kristian Bezuidenhout fortepiano, director
Basel Chamber Orchestra

Baptiste Lopez violin,
concertmaster
Mirjam Steymans-Brenner violin
Matthias Müller violin
Irmgard Zavelberg violin
Antonio Viñuales violin
Tamás Vásárhelyi violin

Valentina Giusti violin
Katya Polin viola
Bodo Friedrich viola
Christoph Dangel cello
Hristo Kouzmanov cello
Stefan Preyer double bass

Shai Kribus oboe
Francesco Capraro oboe
Carles Cristobal Ferran
bassoon
Melissa Sandel bassoon
Konstantin Thimokhine horn
Mark Gebhart horn

Johann Baptist Vanhal (1739-1813)

Symphony in G minor Bryan g2 (c.1767)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Menuetto •
IV. Finale. Allegro*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Sinfonia concertante in E flat K364 (1779-80)
I. Allegro maestoso • II. Andante • III. Presto

Interval

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Symphony No. 33 in B flat K319 (1779)
*I. Allegro assai • II. Andante moderato •
III. Menuetto • IV. Finale. Allegro assai*



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In the decade before Mozart's arrival in Vienna in 1781, the Bohemian **Johann Baptist Vanhal** (or Wanhal, as he spelt it) was the city's most successful freelance composer, with a reputation to rival Joseph Haydn's. The son of a bonded peasant, he showed precocious talent as a violinist and organist, studied with Karl von Dittersdorf in Vienna and rapidly made his reputation as a composer and teacher to the wives and daughters of the nobility. Haydn directed performances of symphonies at Esterházy; and if we can believe the notoriously unreliable memoirs of tenor Michael Kelly, the first Basilio in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Vanhal played the cello (another of his skills) in a string quartet with Dittersdorf and Haydn on violins and Mozart on viola.

During the 1760s and 1770s Vanhal composed at least 70 symphonies, of which an unusually high proportion are in minor keys. Originally scored with four horns (reduced to two in tonight's performance), this G minor Symphony of c.1767 mines the same agitated *Sturm und Drang* ('storm and stress') vein as Haydn's recent G minor Symphony, No. 39 (also with four horns), and Symphony No. 49 'La passione'. But it has its own individuality. As in many of Vanhal's minor-keyed symphonies, the first movement, in triple time, leavens storm and stress with a vein of melancholy lyricism. Built on a three-note sighing motif, the charming *Adagio* sounds as if it had strayed from an oboe concerto. A solo oboe also stars in the trio, a playful major-keyed interlude amid the minuet's G minor sternness. The driving *Finale* is the epitome of *Sturm und Drang*, from the suppressed tension of its opening, through the truculent imitative counterpoint of the development, to its remorseless close.

In January 1779 **Mozart** arrived back in Salzburg chastened, after a protracted journey to Mannheim and Paris had brought him little profit, rejection by his first love Aloisia Weber, and personal tragedy in the death of his mother. The next 20 months he spent in his native city were outwardly monotonous as he knuckled down to his duties as court organist. But his music from his period reveals a new maturity and emotional depth, not least in the magnificent *Sinfonia concertante* for violin and viola, probably composed (the autograph is lost) in the summer or autumn of 1779.

While we should beware of reading Mozart's music as emotional autobiography, it is tempting to relate the *Sinfonia concertante*'s darker undercurrents, rising to the surface in the C minor *Andante*, to his smouldering discontent with his Salzburg servitude. Less speculatively, the sonorous richness of the orchestral writing, with violas divided throughout, reflects Mozart's contact with the crack Mannheim orchestra – though needless to say, the power and technical mastery of the *Sinfonia concertante* surpass any possible models. Mozart gives the viola added penetration by writing the part in D major, with the strings tuned up a semitone to E flat – a practice known as *scordatura*. This increases the string tension, and takes advantage of the resonant open strings, unavailable to the violinist.

The work's special soundworld is determined by the husky timbre of the viola, Mozart's own favourite string

instrument. As the pianist and writer Charles Rosen observed in *The Classical Style*: 'The very first chord gives the characteristic sound, which is like the sonority of the viola translated into the language of the full orchestra.' There is a breadth and sonorous depth to this opening *Allegro maestoso* ('maestoso' = 'majestically'), together with a quintessentially Mozartian expressive ambivalence. The initial entry of the soloists, suspended high above the orchestra's cadential phrases, is one of the most magical moments in any Mozart concerto. Yet the music's poetry, grandeur, poetry and almost erotic yearning coexist with a frisky playfulness reminiscent of Mozart's violin concertos.

The *Andante* second movement is a transfigured love duet *triste* that touches depths of desolation found elsewhere only in the *Andantino* of Mozart's so-called 'Jeunehomme' Concerto K271 and the *Adagio* of the A major Piano Concerto K488. The composer's own cadenza then pushes the music to a new pitch of chromatic pathos. After the bereft, disconsolate close, the contredanse finale, full of quickfire repartee for the soloists, bounds in with a glorious sense of physical relief.

During 1779 and 1780, when Mozart was itching to escape the cloying atmosphere of Salzburg, he composed three sharply contrasted symphonies: the single-movement G major, K318, and two three-movement works, K319, dated 9 July 1779 (and thus virtually contemporary with the *Sinfonia concertante*) and K338, composed a year later. If the C major symphony draws on the famed 'Mannheim' style, the B flat, K319, lightly scored for oboes, bassoons, horns (which ring brightly in the key of B flat) and strings, belongs to the tradition of the Austrian chamber symphony. When Mozart later revived the symphony in Vienna he added a minuet, in keeping with Viennese taste.

One unusual feature of K319 is that the three original movements, all in sonata form, devote their entire development sections to new material. In the dancing, triple-time opening *Allegro assai* one of the new ideas is the ancient four-note tag that Mozart would put to more momentous use in the finale of the 'Jupiter' symphony. The *Andante moderato*, in the warm key of E flat, infuses pastoral innocence with Mozart's own brand of sensuousness. The wistful new theme introduced halfway through the movement is worked in a beautiful passage of canonic imitation, first in the strings and then in the wind.

After the compact, sprightly minuet and *Ländler* trio, the *Finale* opens as a typical carefree jig – the kind of send-off found in many early Mozart symphonies. But Mozart soon sets up a friction between the jig's triplets and a crisp march rhythm. In the development a new, more lyrical idea (audibly related to the wistful theme in the slow movement) is worked in polyphony that, while never in more than two parts, gives the cunning illusion of a rich contrapuntal weave.

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