

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 27 January 2025
7.30pm

Llŷr Williams piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in C K330 (1781-3)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante cantabile •
III. Allegretto*

Piano Sonata in B flat K333 (1783-4)

*I. Allegro • II. Andante cantabile •
III. Allegretto grazioso*

Interval

Rondo in A minor K511 (1787)

Fantasia in C minor K475 (1785)

Piano Sonata in C minor K457 (1784)

I. Molto allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai



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After **Mozart** settled permanently in Vienna in the summer of 1781 he was soon in demand as a keyboard teacher to the daughters of the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie. As he reported to his father, he prided himself on charging top fees, non-refundable in the event of cancellation! Although he doubtless played the Sonata in C major, K330, himself in private salons, Mozart may have initially intended it for one of his pupils. Like the sonatas K331-333, it was composed either in Vienna between 1781 and 1783, or during his stay in Salzburg in the summer and autumn of 1783.

The Sonata infuses the galant refinement of Johann Christian Bach, a crucial early influence on the composer, with a Mozartian subtlety and expressive warmth. Its leisurely first movement is a virtually unbroken flow of limpid lyricism, with minimal contrasts between themes and bouts of brilliant figuration which flatter the amateur's technique by sounding harder than they really are. At the centre of the soulful Andante cantabile is a mysterious minor-keyed episode in F minor, initially underpinned by a repeated bass pedal. The opening of the episode, now resolved into the major key, reappears in the coda – an inspired afterthought on Mozart's part. The perky Allegretto finale trades on concerto-like contrasts of 'solo' and 'tutti'. It also shares the first movement's lyrical profusion, with a homely new tune in the development that would not be out of place in *Die Zauberflöte*.

The last sonata of the 1781-83 group, the Sonata in B flat, K333, recalls K330 in its smiling homogeneity of mood. Yet for all the music's urbane galanterie, Mozart has plenty of surprises up his sleeve. The euphonious flow of the opening Allegro is disturbed in the development, first with an intensification of the upward leap in bar one, then in a turbulent F minor outburst.

Still more arresting is the start of the development in the E flat Andante cantabile, where tortuous chromaticism twists the main theme into remote new keys. Even more than the finale of K330, the sonata-rondo finale reminds us of the proximity of Mozart's great piano concertos. Its *grazioso* theme is built on vivid alternations of 'solo' and orchestral 'tutti'; and the *concerto* associations are later reinforced by an extended written-out cadenza (marked 'in tempo') that mingles bravura display with further thematic development.

Although Mozart had recently triumphed with *Figaro* in Prague, prompting the commission for *Don Giovanni*, the spring of 1787 was a troubled period for the composer. His glory days as virtuoso-impresario were over; and his 'best and dearest friend' Count August von Hatzfeld, a fine amateur violinist, had recently died at the age of 31. With a Classical artist, especially, it is always dangerous to hear music as autobiography. Yet it is perhaps not being over-fanciful to link the depressive, almost morbid tone of the A minor Rondo, K511, dated 11 March 1787, to Mozart's emotional state that spring.

With its yearning *appoggiaturas* and rhapsodic ornamentation, the *siciliano*-style main theme sounds

more prophetic of Chopin than anything else in Mozart (its nearest equivalent is the Adagio in the A major Piano Concerto, K488). Even the two assuaging major-keyed episodes are increasingly tainted by chromaticism. When the opening theme returns for the last time, Mozart intensifies its melancholy fatalism with desultory two-part counterpoint and a final fragmentation of the texture.

Three years earlier, in 1784, Mozart was at the zenith of his fame and fortune in Vienna. He was earning a handsome living from teaching, publications and a series of lucrative subscription concerts. That year alone he performed no fewer than six new piano concertos. In the autumn, between the concertos K456 and K459, Mozart composed the Sonata in C minor, K457, for his pupil Therese von Trattner. When the Sonata was published the following year, with a dedication to Therese, Mozart prefaced it with an elaborate C minor Fantasy, K475, which he entered into his thematic catalogue on 20 May 1785.

From the expressive range of the Fantasy and Sonata we can infer that Therese was both technically adroit and an uncommonly sensitive musician. The Fantasy welds extreme contrasts of key (the opening bars slip from C minor, via D flat, to a remote B minor), texture and tempo into a cohesive whole. After a frenzied, toccata-like outburst, the work comes full circle with a return of the sombre opening, now wholly in the shadow of C minor. Despite pools of repose, everything is surprising in the Fantasy: music that brings us as close as we can get to Mozart the inspired improviser.

Following the Fantasy's abrupt ending, the Sonata opens with a striding unison *arpeggio*, followed by a beseeching piano phrase: a pianistic recreation of an impassioned operatic duet. Operatic, too, are the treble-bass dialogues in the more relaxed second group of themes. But the *arpeggio* motif is never absent for long, stalking its way through the combative development and finally spawning a sequence of gruff canonic imitations in the coda.

The Adagio, a rondo in E flat with two episodes, brings necessary balm. Each time it recurs the rondo theme is enhanced by delicately expressive ornamentation – another taste here of Mozart the improviser. The harmonically searching second episode was surely in Beethoven's mind when he composed the Adagio of the *Pathétique* Sonata.

The sonata-rondo finale, in triple time, like a minuet on speed, combines turbulence with intense pathos, and makes a feature of startling silences. As in the first movement, the music's scale and emotional reach demand a momentous coda. Mozart duly creates one of his darkest, most dramatic perorations, involving hand-crossing, huge leaps and a mining of the keyboard's depths. Beethoven can already be glimpsed louring on the horizon.

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