

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

THE PIANO CONCERTOS, VOLUME 3

Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat major, K. 482 (34:02)

1 I. Allegro (13:12)

2 II. Andante (9:04)

3 III. Allegro (11:32)

(cadenzas by Camille Saint-Saëns)

Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major, K. 453 (31:47)

4 I. Allegro (11:37)

5 II. Andante (12:15)

6 III. Allegretto - Presto (7:45)

(cadenzas by W.A. Mozart)

Vassily Primakov, piano
Odense Symphony Orchestra
Scott Yoo, conductor

MOZART: Piano Concertos K. 453, 482

The concertos of Mozart so dominate our present-day mainstream concert repertoire, and have crowded out so completely the concertante works of his immediate contemporaries, that it's all too easy for us to think that they constitute some sort of norm. They must, we unconsciously assume, perfectly typify the generally-accepted Classical concerto form of the late 18th century, simply raised to the highest power of genius; the purest and most masterly representatives of a common genre.

Yet Mozart's personal adaptation and exploitation of the concerto genre was highly idiosyncratic. Yes, his concertos inhabit the tonal design that we call sonata form, which was the Classical era's greatest achievement in musical architecture. But they do so in a way that constantly draws upon his experience and ambitions in the genre of opera. It is in Mozart's concertos, and above all the piano concertos, that the concept of the concerto as a *drama* – practically a commonplace to all succeeding generations – first arises. The

'operatic' elements are not confined to the aria-like character of so many of his slow movements, the *buffo* antics and rejoicings of his finales, the contests, arguments, duets or dialogues between the soloist and the orchestra or a chosen group of instruments. They extend to the thematic material itself. Mozart's concertos typically begin with a very large-scale orchestral exposition that may introduce as many as seven salient themes, or even more. Not even Beethoven emulated Mozart in this, perhaps because the sheer profusion of themes might have militated against his instinct for close-knit motivic development. Yet Mozart's first movements are not (as those of his lesser contemporaries, working with fewer themes, frequently are) merely episodic. Rather every theme has its proper place and function in the workings of the sonata design, like a character in a drama: it may be used for a particular juncture, for a turn in the argument, to introduce a new emotional colouring, and so on.

This highly original approach to concerto form, in which theatrical impulses are seamlessly blended with the demands of working-out the material, manifested

itself very early in Mozart's career, and became his established strategy whenever he worked with the genre. What developed over the years was the subtlety, richness and expressive profundity of that strategy, which found its finest flowering in the concertos of his last years, such as those we hear on this disc.

A word about the cadenzas used for these works. When he performed them Mozart of course played his own cadenzas, sometimes no doubt improvising them on the spot. For some of the concertos no original written cadenzas exist, but for many of them we do have Mozart's cadenzas, or sketchy skeletons of them, which he almost wrote not in the score but on separate sheets. Though these are authentic, they are not necessarily the last word in suitability, or an accurate record of what Mozart actually played. The British scholar Sir Donald Tovey wrote about them: *'It is doubtful whether he would have regarded any of his written cadenzas to first movements as adequately representing his way of extemporizing'* though Tovey also said that each of the written-out cadenzas *'conveys at least one useful hint'*. A general

acceptance of that situation has led many other composers and virtuosi, including the very greatest, to compose cadenzas for the Mozart piano concertos.

1784 found the 28-year-old Mozart at the peak of his popularity in Vienna, if we can judge by the fact that he composed no less than six piano concertos during that year. **Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major, K. 453** was written in the early spring. Mozart completed it, according to the date he noted on the score and his recently-begun work-catalogue, on 12 April – this although two days before, in a letter to his father, he wrote that he had “just finished another new concerto for Fräulein Ployer”, obviously this one. Barbara Ployer (known as Babette) was the daughter of Gottfried Ignaz von Ployer, agent in Vienna of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. She was one of Mozart's most talented piano pupils. He had already composed the E flat Concerto, K. 449 for her in February (she paid handsomely, according to Mozart), and it was she who played the solo part of K. 453 in a concert held in her father's country house in Döbling near Vienna on 13 June 1784. It was to this concert

that Mozart invited the distinguished composer Giovanni Paisiello in order to hear both Ployer and some of his latest compositions, including the Quintet in E flat for piano and wind instruments. At this concert Mozart and Ployer together played the Sonata for 2 Pianos, K. 448. It is not certain, however, that this was the premiere of K. 453; there is also a possibility that Mozart himself gave the first performance, at a concert at Vienna's Kärntnertheater on 29 April.

Scored for a small orchestra without clarinets, trumpets, or drums, K. 453 is one of the most graceful of all Mozart's concertos, typically mingling a sense of gaiety with melancholic undertones. The first movement, *Allegro*, is bold in outline and delicate in details, and opens with an orchestral exposition that displays Mozart's generous extravagance with his thematic material. Where a traditional classical concerto typically has two contrasting themes, this exposition offers no less than six, each one growing out of the one previously heard. One of these, occurring after the wistful and harmonically restless second subject, is a dramatic, thrusting

motif, veering into E flat, that has implications for later development. The whole movement might be described as a sublimation of a military march, for there is definitely a marching pace and impetus behind the music, yet it is never less than civilized, in the highest style. (Charles Rosen has called it 'the most graceful and colourful of all Mozart's military allegros'.) When the piano first enters it is with the opening theme, but it soon announces yet another, lyrical idea before moving on to the second subject. The development, making use of the thrusting motif, sounds episodic, but delightfully so. After the recapitulation the menacing motif is used to introduce the cadenza. (Mozart wrote two sets of cadenzas for the first and second movements of this concerto – or rather, two separate sets exist, both apparently written out with care, but the authenticity of one of them remains in doubt.)

The first movement's wealth of melodic ideas is mirrored in the nature of the sublime C major slow movement, a highly developed sonata form that appears to be a serene dialogue between orchestra and piano, and which introduces no less than

five separate ideas. The orchestra seems to pose the questions, the piano to suggest answers, each time more involved. Several powerful modulations and chromatic transitions add intensity to music of great transparency and expressiveness. Even the opening statement moves uneasily from major to minor, and from the effect of simple declamation to passionate arioso. The passionate melancholy of the movement persists to its elegiac close.

Whereas the mood of the concerto so far has been on the serious side of elegant, the finale displays a welcome sense of fun. The movement is cast as a theme and variations (a form Mozart rarely used for concerto finales), the theme in question being a perky bourrée that has something of a birdsong quality about it. Mozart had a pet starling, of which he was extremely fond, that learned to sing this particular 17-note tune pretty accurately, though it always got one of the notes too sharp. Some commentators will tell you instead that Mozart based his theme on something that the starling sang, but the chronology gives the lie to this form of the tale, for we know from Mozart's expenses book that

he purchased the bird (for 34 Kreuzer) on 27 May 1784, more than a month after the concerto was finished. (The starling was a much-loved family pet for three years; when it died, on 4 June 1787, it was buried in the garden with full honours, and Mozart wrote a touching poem bidding it farewell.) Mozart puts the theme through a series of five variations, with the brilliance and ingenuity of the piano part increasing each time (and the theme becoming less and less obvious) until the fourth variation, a mysterious chromatica and contrapuntal piece which plunges into the minor mode and almost sounds like a development section. The fifth variation, full of striking contrasts, is so virtuosic it could be considered as a cadenza, and it has its own little coda, which leads straight into the coda proper coda – one of Mozart's longest. Here new themes strike in, initiating what sounds for all the world like an *opera buffa* finale, an effervescent display of wit that creates a satisfying sense of fulfilment, with the starling's theme joining in irrepressibly before the end.

A year and a half after the Döbling performance of Concerto No. 17, Mozart

completed **Piano Concerto No. 22 in E flat, K. 482**, which he entered as completed into his work-catalogue on 16 December 1785. Mozart seems to have intended the work to feature in the Advent concert series that he gave following the wild success of the Lenten season of subscription concerts that he had given earlier in the year. Nevertheless there is some doubt about the actual date of the first performance, and one possibility is that Mozart premiered the concerto on 22 or 23 December as an entr'acte between the two parts of the oratorio *Esther* by his good friend and quartet-partner Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf, during the Society of Musicians' annual benefit concert for widows and orphans of musicians. The *Wiener Zeitung*, reporting on these concerts, averred that there was no need to mention the concerto's favourable reception, 'since our praise is superfluous in view of the deserved fame of this master'. Mozart seems to have repeated it at one of his own Advent concerts before 28 December, when he wrote to his father Leopold, discussing the performance in a letter that is now lost but whose contents Leopold reported in a letter to his daughter dated 13 January 1786.

He was indeed at the height of his popularity with the Viennese public, and the E flat concerto was an expression of the confidence he felt in life. Urbane and aristocratic in character, it gains a regal warmth of sound from the orchestra's inclusion of clarinets instead of oboes – the first time Mozart had done so in a concerto. Indeed, the woodwind instruments play a more considerable role than in any other Mozart concerto. Cuthbert Girdlestone, in his study of Mozart's concertos, referred to it as the Queen among them. No doubt he was affected by the grandeur of the first movement.

The work is a striking illustration of the way that Mozart was developing the kinds of gestures, formal guidelines and orchestral effects he had established in earlier concertos. The very opening, a strong unison theme like a fanfare that is immediately mocked by a bassoon, is similar to the initial gambits of many of his works in E flat. There is a wealth of themes, some of which – like the one with which the piano makes its first entry – appear only once. The development is eventful, and the recapitulation is unusually rich in the way

it combines and recalls elements from both the orchestral and the solo expositions. No original cadenzas for this work survive. Vassily Primakov has chosen to play cadenzas by Camille Saint-Saëns.

The heart of the concerto is the second movement, a C minor *Andante*. This is essentially a theme with variations, but it hints also at a rondo form with the incursion of two episodes, in E flat and in C major, where the piano is silent and the woodwind feature as soloists. The strings play muted throughout, emphasizing the elegiac qualities of this noble if somewhat theatrical movement. The theme has something of the character of an operatic aria movement in C minor and is progressively varied in the piano's exquisite *floriture*. The wind instruments are silent throughout the theme and first variation, but then take over for the first episode in the manner of a wind serenade, where the strings are absent. In the second episode flute and bassoon have a lyrical duet with string accompaniment. After the final climactic variation the movement ends with a gentle coda for piano and woodwinds alone, where a theme from

the first of the orchestral episodes is transformed into the minor for a moment of delicate pathos. Mozart reported to his father that at the first performance the audience were so taken with this movement that they called for it to be repeated – an unusual occurrence when usually it was the fast and brilliant concerto finales that were asked to be repeated.

The final movement is a sophisticated Rondo in a 'hunting' 6/8 rhythm – Mozart's grandest in this vein – which parades a succession of delightful tunes. Its most striking event is an *Andantino cantabile* section in the manner of a slow minuet in A flat major, whose evocative woodwind writing is reminiscent of parts of *Così fan tutte*. (Mozart had introduced a minuet into the finale of his earlier concerto in E flat, K. 271 of 1777.) The Rondo theme returns in high good humour, and works round at length to the cadenza and an unusually extended coda.

Notes by Malcolm MacDonald

Since the release of his recording of the Chopin Piano Concertos in 2008, Vassily Primakov has been hailed as a pianist of world class importance. *Gramophone* wrote "Primakov's empathy with Chopin's spirit could hardly be more complete," and the *American Record Guide* stated: "In every piece his touch is perfect. Since Gilels, how many pianists have the right touch? In Chopin, no one currently playing and recording sounds as good as this! This is a great Chopin pianist." *Music Web-International* called Primakov's Chopin Concertos CD "one of the great Chopin recordings of recent times. These are performances of extraordinary power and beauty." In 1999, as a teen-aged prizewinner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition, Primakov was praised by Donald Rosenberg of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*: "How many pianists can make a line sing as the 19-year-old Moscow native did on this occasion? Every poignant phrase took ethereal wing. Elsewhere the music soared with all of the turbulence and poetic vibrancy it possesses. We will be hearing much from this remarkable musician."

Vassily Primakov was born in Moscow in 1979. His first piano studies were with his mother. He entered Moscow's Central Special Music School at the age of eleven as a pupil of Vera Gornostaeva. At seventeen, after a summer at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, he came to New York to pursue studies at the Juilliard School with the noted pianist, Jerome Lowenthal. At Juilliard Mr. Primakov won the William Petschek Piano Recital Award, which presented his debut recital at Alice Tully Hall. While a student at Juilliard, aided by a Susan W. Rose Career Grant, he won both the Silver Medal and the Audience Prize in the 2002 Gina Bachauer International Artists Piano Competition. Later that year Primakov won First Prize in the 2002 Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Auditions, an award which presented him in solo and concerto performances throughout the USA. In 2007 he was named the Classical Recording Foundation's "Young Artist of the Year."

Scott Yoo is Music Director and Principal Conductor of the 38-year old Festival Mozaic in San Luis Obispo, California. The festival presents orchestral, choral and chamber music concerts on California's Central Coast. He has also served as Music Director of the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, an ensemble he co-founded in 1993. Highlights of his work with Metamorphosen include an annual series in Jordan Hall, a 26-city U.S. tour, and numerous recordings of contemporary works. Scott Yoo is also the Resident Conductor for the Colorado College Summer Music Festival, which he has headed for the past four seasons.

As a guest-conductor, Mr. Yoo has led the Colorado, Dallas, Indianapolis, San Francisco and Utah Symphonies, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. He has also conducted the New World Symphony, the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and the orchestras of Charlotte, Columbus, Hong Kong, Honolulu, Kansas City, Louisville, Winnipeg, Mexico City, Nashville, Oregon, Phoenix, the Yomiuri-Nippon Symphony Orchestra Tokyo, the City of London Sinfonia, the English Chamber Orchestra,

the Estonian National Symphony, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the San Antonio Symphony and the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia. He has recently made return engagements with the Seoul Philharmonic, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the New World Symphony in Miami, the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, the Toledo Symphony, and the Mexico City Philharmonic. Scott Yoo has also made guest appearances with chamber music festivals throughout the United States, including Bargemusic, Boston Chamber Music Society, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Las Vegas Music Festival, Laurel Music Festival, New Hampshire Music Festival, Seattle Chamber Music Festival and Strings in the Mountains.

Scott Yoo began his musical studies at the age of three and performed the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with the Boston Symphony at age twelve. After winning first prize in the 1988 Josef Gingold International Violin Competition, he won the 1989 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. In 1994, he was a recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant,

and a year later was named Young Artist-in-Residence of National Public Radio's Performance Today. He has studied violin with Roman Totenberg, Albert Markov, Paul Kantor and Dorothy DeLay, and conducting with Michael Gilbert and Michael Tilson-Thomas. In 1993 Mr. Yoo graduated with honors and a B.A. in Physics from Harvard University.

The Odense Symphony Orchestra was formally established in 1946, but its roots go back to 1800. The orchestra gives approximately 100 concerts per season, most of them in the acoustically superb Carl Nielsen Hall, the hall where the present recording was made. The Odense Symphony frequently tours abroad, including tours to the USA, China, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Holland, the Baltic countries, Russia, Spain and Sweden. The Odense Symphony's ongoing recording series for Bridge Records includes music by:

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Concertmaster: Kazimierz Skowronek

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THE PIANO CONCERTOS



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Vassily Primakov, piano
Odense Symphony Orchestra
Scott Yoo, conductor

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Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466
Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467
Vassily Primakov, piano
Odense Symphony Orchestra
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