

PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

Divertimento in F Major, K. 138

Mozart composed this divertimento for strings in Salzburg early in 1772. Performance time is approximately eleven minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's only previous subscription concert performances of Mozart's F major divertimento were given at Orchestra Hall on January 20, 21, 22, 23, and 25, 1994, with Daniele Gatti conducting. The Orchestra has performed this work at the Ravinia Festival on two occasions: July 16, 1979, and July 13, 1988, both with Vladimir Spivakov conducting.

After returning to Salzburg from his extraordinarily successful, career-changing first tour of Italy, the young Mozart was barely home for five months before he and his father set off for Milan late in the summer of 1771. Italy had a wonderful effect on Wolfgang. He was introduced to new musical styles and exposed to new ideas—and, in the manner of a prodigy destined to fulfill his youthful promise, he absorbed them and made them his own. He received much of his musical education abroad and many of his early works were written on the road. By the time Mozart arrived back in Salzburg in December 1771, after his second Italian adventure, he had already begun to make his mark in the fields of opera, oratorio, symphony, and sonata, and he was poised to transform the piano concerto. And he was just fifteen years old. Within a few weeks of his return to Salzburg, which seemed more provincial each time he came home, Mozart composed three works for stringed instruments. The autographs are titled divertimentos, but the handwriting isn't Mozart's. It is possible that Mozart was thinking of just one player to a part, which would make these delightful scores early efforts at writing string quartets. (Mozart's first "official" string quartets were composed a few months later, as a cycle of six works.) Nevertheless, because of their divertimento designation and their scoring for violins, violas, and basses, rather than the cellos of conventional string quartet makeup, they have most often been played by string orchestras, as they are this week.

The Divertimento in F major—the third in the set—has the traditional three movements, with a lovely Andante at the center. In both rapid outer movements, the first violins have a starring role. A typically Italian grace and charm pervade the entire piece, suggesting that the ideas for this music came to Mozart—if they weren't in fact written down—while he was still in Milan.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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