

## PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

### Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

### Concerto for Two Pianos in E-flat Major, K. 365

Composed: 1779

First performance: date unknown

Instrumentation: two pianos, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, strings; two clarinets, two trumpets, and timpani added in 1781

Approximate performance time: 26 minutes

The most famous picture of the Mozart family, painted in the winter of 1780 in Salzburg by Johann Nepomuk della Croce, shows Wolfgang and his sister Nannerl seated side by side at the keyboard. (Papa Leopold, violin in hand, looks on from the side; his wife, Anna Maria, who died in Paris two years earlier, is included in a picture on the wall.) The music the Mozart siblings are shown performing is most likely the C major sonata for piano, four hands that Wolfgang composed at the age of nine, given that his right and her left hands are crossed, as that score demands at one point in the rondo.

Music for more than one pianist was rare in Mozart's day, and, in fact, Leopold claimed, at the time his son wrote the C major sonata, that it was the first of its kind. As young children, Wolfgang and Nannerl made a name for themselves playing the piano together when they toured Europe like a family of acrobats in the mid-1760s. (Leopold, always the crafty manager, regularly lopped a year off each child's age on posters and theatrical announcements.) By the end of the century, music for piano, four hands had become a favorite domestic social convention, thrusting good friends, family members, and young lovers into unusually close quarters as they crossed hands, bumped knees, and fought over the middle octave. But music composed for more than one piano has always been a novelty (and something of a spectacle) designed for public events like this concert.

In Mozart's day, homes and even concert halls boasting more than one piano were uncommon. When Mozart moved from Salzburg to Vienna in 1781, he was overjoyed to stay for a while with the Weber family, who placed two pianos at his disposal. (Two Weber daughters had already caught his eye: by 1781, Aloisia had rejected Mozart's advances and married Joseph Lange, but Constanze would become Mozart's wife within the year.) During his first months in Vienna—"the land of the clavier," as he called it—Mozart had little income and could not even afford to rent a piano. But by late August or early September, when he moved to his first bachelor quarters, he apparently had scraped together some money, since he commented that he had just enough room for a table, wardrobe, bed, and piano.

Around the time Mozart lived, keyboard instruments developed almost beyond recognition from the harpsichord and clavichord, with their gently expressive and discreet tone, to the fortepiano that foreshadowed the appropriately named grand pianos of our time. During Mozart's ten years in Vienna, he and Constanze lived in eleven different apartments, and each time they somehow managed to make room for a piano, along with a growing number of growing children and a constant flow of friends, house guests, and pupils. Eventually Mozart earned enough money to buy his own piano (in addition to a horse and a billiard table big enough to fill an entire room). When Leopold visited the Mozarts during the spring of 1785, he wrote home to Nannerl, "It is impossible to describe the rush and bustle. Since my arrival your brother's piano has been taken at least a dozen times to the theater or to some other house." Obviously, Mozart had found a piano he liked and wanted to use it for all his public appearances.

Although the music that Mozart wrote for more than one pianist was usually designed for himself and the company of a wealthy patron or a star pupil, it was probably inevitable that he would compose a concerto

expressly to perform with his sister. The *Double Concerto* in E-flat major, written in the late 1770s, was conceived for the famous sibling act that was now grown up and had long ago stopped going on the road. It is one of his most engaging concertos. Throughout the work, Mozart delights in the almost operatic interplay of the two instruments, not to mention the wondrous racket of racing scales, rumbling Alberti bass lines, and clangorous trills—all in duplicate. The piece, however, is no mere stunt. It is a work of maturity, significance, and—particularly in the glorious slow movement—truly personal expression, but the sheer joy of sociability—of sharing music and friendship across two keyboards—is never absent.

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

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