

## PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

### Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

### Oboe Concerto in C Major, K. 314

Mozart composed his oboe concerto between April and September 1777; the following winter he made an arrangement of it as the Flute Concerto in D major. The orchestra consists of pairs of oboes and horns, with strings. Performance time is approximately twenty minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first performance of Mozart's Oboe Concerto was given at the Ravinia Festival on July 21, 1964, with Ray Still as soloist and Seiji Ozawa conducting. Our first subscription concert performances of this concerto were given at Orchestra Hall on March 2, 3, and 4, 1967, with Still as soloist and Carlo Maria Giulini conducting.

Giuseppe Ferlendis, the most celebrated member of a large Italian family filled with musicians, most of them oboists, joined the archbishop's orchestra in Salzburg in April 1777. At the time, local composer Wolfgang Mozart, twenty-one years old, had just started writing the first of the many concertos—both for himself and his friends—that would count among his greatest achievements. Only weeks after Ferlendis moved to town, Mozart began to compose an oboe concerto for him. It isn't clear how good a player Ferlendis actually was; Mozart's father Leopold called him a "favorite in the orchestra," which might have referred more to his personality than his musicianship, but Haydn, who heard him perform in London in 1795, said he was quite mediocre. In any event, Ferlendis inspired Mozart to write the only oboe concerto of his career.

In September 1777, the month he finished the concerto, Mozart quit his job as concertmaster to the archbishop of Salzburg and set out to see more of the world, with his mother in tow, and to make some serious money. In Mannheim that winter, he gave the score of the new oboe concerto to Friedrich Ramm, the oboist of the Mannheim orchestra, who seemed "quite crazy with delight." By February, Ramm had already performed it five times, and Mozart reported that it was "making a great sensation" there. "It is now Ramm's *cheval de bataille* [war horse]," he wrote home. But after Mozart returned to Salzburg in January 1779, alone (his mother had died in Paris) and unemployed (job prospects in Munich, Mannheim, Paris, and Versailles fizzled), we hear about the oboe concerto just one more time. In 1783, Anton Meyer, the oboist in the Esterháza orchestra, offered Mozart three ducats for the piece, and a new set of parts was sent to him. And then, the concerto vanished. Eventually, musicians reluctantly began to include it in the list of major pieces by Mozart that were lost.

In 1920, Mozart scholar and conductor Bernhard Paumgartner, who was director of the Salzburg Mozarteum archives, discovered a package of old orchestral parts. The bass part was marked "Concerto in C/Oboe Principale" followed by Mozart's name. When Paumgartner recognized the music, however, as the familiar flute concerto in D major—the one flutists had long counted as the second of Mozart's two concertos—a 137-year-old mystery began to unravel. Apparently, sometime during the winter of 1777-78, Mozart had made an arrangement of the oboe concerto in order to make fast work of a commission for the amateur flutist Ferdinand de Jean, probably passing the recycled work off as brand new. By exposing Mozart's fraud, Paumgartner's find simultaneously cut Mozart's flute concerto output in two and handed oboists a concerto they had never expected to play.

As an oboe concerto, this music is not only expressive and melodious, but also perfectly idiomatic (flutists had long wondered why, for example, Mozart gave them so few high notes). There are three movements in the traditional arrangement (fast-slow-fast), each distinguished not so much by design as by the kind of gift for natural, memorable melody that few composers ever possess. The first movement is headed

Allegro aperto (open allegro), an unconventional marking that Mozart favored at the time—he used it to open the *Turkish* violin concerto written in 1775—that seems to connote big-boned, generously paced fast music. The slow movement, like many of Mozart’s finest, suggests an expansive, eloquent opera aria. The orchestral accompaniment, discreet throughout the concerto, is particularly restrained here; the spotlight never strays from the oboe soloist at center stage. The finale is actually a preview of an opera still five years in the future, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. There, in her act 2 aria “Welche Wonne, welche Lust,” Blonde sings of bliss and delight. Here the oboe is less explicit, but its message is clearly one of unbounded joy.

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

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