

Rhode Island Chamber Music
Providence, Rhode Island

Wednesday, 22 March 2006

New York Chamber Soloists

Melvin Kaplan, oboe
Marc Schachman, oboe
Allen Blustine, clarinet
Guy Chadash, clarinet
Andrew Schwartz, bassoon
Erik Holtje, bassoon
Sharon Moe, French horn
Amber Lane, French horn

Program

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Divertimento in Bb for Two Oboes, Two Horns and Two Bassoons, K 270 (1777)

Allegro molto

Andantino

Menuetto (Moderato)

Presto

Divertimento in Bb for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon, K 439b (c. 1781-1785)

Allegro

Larghetto

Menuetto

Adagio

Rondo: Allegro

Mozart (Arranged by Johann Nepomuk Wendt) — Selections from Mozart Operas
arranged for Wind Octet

Overture to Marriage of Figaro

Introduction to Marriage of Figaro

Giovinette, che fate all' amore (Don Giovanni)

Se vuol ballare, signor Contino (Marriage of Figaro)

Non più andrai farfallone amoroso (Marriage of Figaro)

Papageno! Bist du mir nun ganz gegeben (The Magic Flute)

Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen wünscht Papageno sich! (The Magic Flute)

INTERMISSION

**Serenade in Eb for Two clarinets, Two bassoons and Two French Horns, K 375
(October 1781, Vienna)**

Allegro maestoso

Menuetto

Adagio

Menuetto

Finale (Allegro)

Serenade in C Minor for Wind Octet, K 388 (K 384a) (1782)

Allegro

Andante

Menuetto en canone

Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES

Divertimento in Bb for Two Oboes, Two Horns and Two Bassoons, K 270 (1777)

The year was 1777, a year of rebellion. Mozart was 21. The 13 American colonies were fighting against the British. The French were sending money and men to help the Americans. Crowned kings were looking nervously over their shoulders. The stage, the opera house, the printing press were all under scrutiny. And those artists, better keep an eye on them!

In that year's cold January, Mozart, stuck in Salzburg under the thumb of a music-despising employer, created two masterpieces: this seemingly innocuous Divertimento (K 270) and his exquisite Piano Concerto No. 9 in Eb (K 271), whose slow movement is one of his most passionate, tragic utterances. A concerto whose opening flourish — piano speaking out of turn right in the first phrase of the music — announces that the old rules were no longer operant, the little man shaking his fist at the state.

Is this modest Divertimento a subversive work, too, or is it just, as the name implies, a “diversion” for an aristocrat's dinner party? This is indeed, dinner music, but not composed for a king. It was commissioned by Archbishop Colloredo, employer of the Mozart family, a man remembered today solely because he made the world's greatest natural musical genius so miserable. The opening *Allegro molto* includes vigorous unison passages, clever echo effects between the oboes and horns, and a rhetorical feel that is almost symphonic. The middle movements are slighter, but the final Presto is tightly wrapped around itself, ending with an abrupt and emphatic flourish of the horns. It's so abrupt it seems to say, “Well, this has gone on for almost two minutes and enough is enough!”

Mozart wrote five wind divertimenti for his stingy Salzburg boss in the 1770s, and in them the young composer subtly altered the existing *Harmoniemusik* vehicle of six winds, liberating the bass lines and letting the paired instruments range apart instead of playing in the more traditional close parallel — in effect creating “busier,” more complex and potentially more intellectually engaging music. The kind of music that would *stop* dinner conversation! Musicologist Roger Hellyer observes, “[Mozart] has in particular transformed the first bassoon part from contributing to the bass line as a first priority to performing its more natural role as a tenor instrument. This became essentially a new voice to the ensemble.”

So, while you won’t hear any American muskets going off in this music, you’ll hear six wind players declaring their relative independence, striving for variety, counterpoint, and deeper *affect* that what was ever heard before. And in the ears of the prickly Archbishop Colleredo, that was almost heresy. A few months later, Colleredo fired Mozart, and the delighted young composer high-tailed it out of Salzburg.

Divertimento in Bb for Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon, K 439b (c. 1781-1785)

This is an odd work, culled from a manuscript collection of 25 pieces, all but one in Bb Major. The movements were composed as early as 1781 or 1782, or possibly as late as 1785, in Vienna. The original manuscript is lost. The movements may have been written as basset-horn trios, but the first published arrangements specified two clarinets and bassoon; or two clarinets, two horns and bassoon; or two basset-horns and bassoon. (The basset horn is not a horn but a member of the clarinet family.) The set of pieces may have been composed for the private enjoyment of Mozart’s clarinet-playing friends, the Stadler brothers. The set is nominally divided into five divertimenti, but the players could probably mix-and-match them since all but the finale share the same genial Bb tonality. This music, engaging but not profound, can be seen as a kind of workshop for Mozart’s later masterpieces for the clarinet.

Mozart (Arranged by Johann Nepomuk Wendt) — Selections from Mozart Operas arranged for Wind Octet

Frowned upon by purists for most of the 20th century, arrangements of popular opera melodies for wind ensembles were a minor industry up till the end of the wind band era. Up through the American Civil War it was practically the only wind music one heard in public concerts in this country. Mozart arrangements have always been among the most popular in this genre. No need to understand what the soprano is screeching about in Italian or German! Enjoy, enjoy.

Serenade in Eb for Two Clarinets, Two Bassoons and Two French Horns, K 375 (October 1781, Vienna)

This beautiful serenade, a work of genius, exists in two versions, one for wind sextet (pairs of clarinets, horns and bassoons) and one for wind octet (pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons). Therefore, count the number of players onstage to determine which version we are hearing tonight. If you count *seven* or *nine* players, however, one of them is Antonio Salieri, who intends to sabotage the performance by playing wrong notes.

The sextet version was composed in 1781 for a soiree at the home of Joseph von Hickel,

Viennese court painter. A year later, Mozart added the two oboe parts so that the Emperor's *Harmoniemusik* ensemble, now enlarged to eight players, could play it. As you will hear from the very first notes, Mozart has turned the "dinner music" ensemble into a wind symphony orchestra. The stakes have been raised; this is absolute music, with tension, contrast, timbral effects, and dramatic rests — music that cannot be thrust into the background.

Serenade in C Minor for Wind Octet, K 388 (1782)

This majestic serenade, perhaps the most famous of all wind octets, is scored for pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons. Mozart composed this work simultaneously with the expansion of the Eb Serenade to include oboes. This double-labor permitted Mozart to present two full-scale works for eight players in fairly short order, in the hopes of obtaining more commissions from the court *Harmoniemusik* ensemble.

Since minor keys were not typically associated with wind music (except in ceremonial music for funerals or church services), the choice of C Minor as a tonality was a striking one. From the outset of the first movement, it is clear that this is not to be jaunty background music. The intensity is symphonic, and the work creates an emotional space around itself that says, more than any preceding wind serenade, "Listen to this!" The canon form of the Menuetto and the sombre variations of the finale keep this music on an Olympian plane, a kind of "Jupiter" symphony for winds only.

These two serenades expand the scope and emotional gamut of wind music, laying the groundwork for the later masterpieces of Beethoven and Schubert, and, indeed changing the whole nature of what is meant by the term "serenade."

Mozart later returned to this music and scored it for a string quintet (K 406). Since the string quintets of Mozart are among the most treasured of all chamber works, some listeners may recognize in this serenade music they have long associated with string timbres. Your *deja vu* is correct.

— Program Notes by Brett Rutherford