



Mozart

Piano Concertos K. 459 and K. 488

Alfred Brendel

Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields

Neville Marriner



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

Side 1:

Piano Concerto in F, K. 459

1. Allegro vivace
2. Allegretto
3. Allegro assai

Side 2:

Piano Concerto in A, K. 488

1. Allegro
2. Adagio
3. Allegro assai

Alfred Brendel, piano
Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields
Directed by Neville Marriner

Concerto in F, K. 459

Mozart wrote this gracious concerto in December 1784, about two years before its fellow concerto on this disc. It is sometimes referred to (like the D major Concerto, K. 537) as a "Coronation" concerto because the composer is said to have played it during the coronation festivities of the Emperor Leopold II, at Frankfurt-am-Main, in 1790. But he probably played it long before then at his own subscription concerts in Vienna, when he used to delight the sometimes rather fickle Viennese public with his astonishing piano-playing. At the time of the work's composition, in 1784, he seemed to be at the beginning of a really brilliant and successful career as a performer, concert-giver, and eventually, he no doubt hoped, as the holder of one of the eminent and lucrative musical posts at court. Somehow, it never quite worked out that way. Perhaps his music was considered too elaborate and difficult for courtly use — "Too many notes, my dear Mozart!" exclaimed one of his imperial masters, after a performance of "Il Seraglio." Yet in 1784, life must have seemed full of promise to the exuberant young genius, who had just been married to an attractive little wife whom he adored.

His music of that time is full of light-hearted gaiety and this F major concerto is no exception. It is scored for the usual concerto orchestra of flute, oboes, bassoons, horns, and strings, handled in Mozart's customary masterly fashion, while the piano part is well calculated to show off the composer's own brilliant virtuosity. The first movement is dominated by the march-like theme announced at the very beginning of the opening orchestral *tutti*. The movement is not mono-thematic, but the other themes are much overshadowed by the martial rhythms of that vigorous opening subject. Towards the end of the movement there is a written-out cadenza: Mozart sometimes preferred to do this, rather than leave it to the chance inspiration of the moment in performance.

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The central movement is an exquisite *Allegretto* in pastorale 6/8 time. Here the chosen key is the most innocently open of all, C major, and the mood is one of quiet serenity, only just tinged with a gentle melancholy. But, in many ways, it is the finale which is the truly memorable movement in this concerto, with its gay tunes in that liveliest of all rhythms, a quick 2/4. Again, melody after melody tumbles from Mozart's fertile brain; and once again, there is a written-out cadenza, to be played just before the whole concerto sweeps on to its irresistible and high-spirited close.

Concerto in A, K. 488

Creative artists often like to be engaged on two or more works simultaneously, and of no one is this more true than of Mozart. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that while he was engaged in composing that supreme *opera buffa*, "The Marriage of Figaro," he was also writing various instrumental works, among them the outstanding A major piano concerto, K. 488, finished like "Figaro" in the early months of 1786. Nor is it surprising that something of the same enchantment pervades them both. There is a special warmth about this concerto, just as there is about the opera, and yet in both, behind the outward high spirits, there is a feeling of sadness — as indeed there is in most great music. In the case of the A major concerto, some of the outward warmth may come from the fact that clarinets are substituted in this score for the more usual oboes. Mozart loved the key of A major for clarinets — remember the quintet and concerto, both written for A major clarinet — and their presence always seemed to induce in him a special kind of smooth-sounding melody, which yet has its darker side.

So, even the apparently untroubled first movement of this concerto has a rather wistful second subject, and the brief codetta theme which rounds off the orchestral *tutti* is a sort of musical question mark. When the soloist enters, he repeats and elaborates this material, while the orchestra brings in a new melody in E, played softly by the strings. There is a brief but intensely dramatic "development" section, after which the music returns to its smiling opening mood and an almost "textbook" recapitulation follows, including even a written-out cadenza. Yet what textbook analysis could ever explain away the sheer enchantment of this wonderful movement, with its delightful themes and brilliant keyboard writing? Here is perfection indeed — why spoil it by dissection? For the slow movement which follows, Mozart moves into the sombre key of F sharp minor and, again, 6/8 time. But how tragic this pastorello is — one of the most poignant, as well as one of the most beautiful of all Mozart's slow movements. The piano gives out the grief-stricken opening subject, an odd 11 bars long, which is then extended, first by the orchestra, then by the piano, with much added chromaticism, thus emphasising the poignancy of the mood. So the movement proceeds, heart-searching in the beauty of its themes, and with little to allay its overall mood of infinite sadness. A strikingly dramatic moment comes at bar 60, when there is an abrupt upward leap of over two octaves in the piano part. And there is a passage of almost unbelievable magic towards the end, when the strings suddenly play in breathless and agitated *pizzicato*, before the soloist closes the movement with some short but telling fragments of melody.

Then, suddenly, the serious mood is broken and we are hustled into one of the liveliest, gayest finales imaginable, a helter-skelter riot of a rondo, packed with delectable tunes. Melody succeeds melody, tossed into the musical fray, until one begins to wonder if even Mozart's inexhaustible flow of melodic invention may not dry up; it never does, of course. The music never flags, but carries us breathlessly along with it. The whole movement is irresistibly reminiscent of a comic opera finale, of just the kind we find in "Figaro"; it has the same high spirits, the same comically wry situations, peremptorily resolved — until the next crisis appears, only to be resolved in its turn, and finally all live happily ever after...

Charles Cudworth

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ALFRED BRENDEL

Alfred Brendel, universally recognised as one of the most sensitive and gifted pianists of his generation, was born in 1931 into a family of Austrian, German, Italian, and Czech descendants. He studied piano and composition in Zagreb and Graz till the age of 16. Thereafter he had occasional lessons with Paul Baumgartner and attended master classes of Edwin Fischer and Edward Steuermann. In spite of his keen interest in literature and printing he decided on a pianistic career, encouraged by a prize at the Busoni Competition in 1949. He has played with many of the leading orchestras in Europe and the United States and has also toured South America, Australia, and New Zealand. His festival appearances include Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, Athens, Granada, Warsaw, Prague, Puerto Rico, Vienna, and Salzburg, and in 1971 the "Mostly Mozart" Festival in New York.

Brendel's repertory ranges from Haydn to Schoenberg, with particular emphasis on the piano works of Beethoven, Schubert, and Liszt, and Mozart's piano concertos. He has conducted master classes in Vienna, where he makes his home with his wife, a professional potter, and writes on musical subjects. In his spare time he looks for undeliberate humour, reads, and explores the Baroque architecture of central Europe.

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