WOLFGANG AMADÉ MOZART

Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg; died December 5, 1791 in Vienna.

Concerto No. 25 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 503 (1786)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, December 4, 1786
Trattner Casino
Wolfgang Amadé Mozart, conductor
Wolfgang Amadé Mozart, soloist
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 30 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings

By the end of 1786, the time of the majestic C major Concerto (K. 503), Mozart had begun the decline into illness, debt and overwork that would cut his life short at the age of 35. He was beginning to dread the knock on the door for fear of finding a bill collector there; he was having difficulty meeting the rental cost of his apartment in the Schulerstrasse; his family medical bills were piling up; a new son, Johann Thomas Leopold, was born on October 18th and died less than a month later; and the revenues from *The Marriage of Figaro*, on which he had pinned such great hope, were disappointing, his opera virtually driven from the Viennese stage by the popularity of Martin y Soler's *Una cosa rara* (which he quoted, perhaps ironically, in *Don Giovanni* the following year.) Mozart considered moving to England to try to better his fortunes, but he was frustrated in that venture by his tattered financial situation and the refusal of his father to take care of his son Karl in Salzburg. (Papa Leopold was still miffed at Wolfgang's choice of a marriage partner, besides which he, a widower, was already in charge at that time of another grandchild, his daughter Nannerl's son Leopold.) Having made a sensation when he moved to Vienna only five years before, Mozart saw much of his public slip away during the months of 1786, confused and put off by the disturbing depth of expression in his recent works. Still, Mozart persisted in writing as he wanted, perhaps escaping from the difficulties of his personal life and the demands of the fickle crowd through his compositions. Some of his greatest works date from that year: *Figaro*, *The Impresario*, the K. 496 and K. 502 Piano Trios, the Clarinet Trio (K. 498), the Symphony No. 38 ("Prague"), and three surpassing piano concertos: K. 488, 491 and 503.

Mozart entered the Concerto No. 25 (K. 503) into his list of compositions on December 4, 1786, only two days before he completed the "Prague" Symphony. The Concerto was apparently written for his own use at one of the Advent concerts he had scheduled at the Trattner Casino in Vienna. The Concerto opens with a sense of spaciousness and grandeur unsurpassed in late-18th-century music. The bright nobility of the prevailing C major tonality is frequently clouded, however, by brief excursions into darker harmonic areas as the thematic material is presented. A succinct motive of four short repeated notes appears in the violins soon after the beginning, and serves as the thematic kernel from which much of the movement grows. The soloist's entrance bridges to the repeat of the principal themes from the orchestral introduction with elaborations from the piano. (Many performers rank this among Mozart's most difficult concertos to play.) The richly textured development section is built largely from the repeated-note motive presented in the Concerto's opening measures. The movement's themes are further elaborated in the recapitulation in the suave, unerring manner that vivifies Mozart's finest works.

The graceful opening theme sets the mood for the *Andante*, a fully worked-out sonata-concerto form in moderately slow tempo, with the soloist providing precisely the right amount of decorative embellishment as the music unfolds.

The theme of the finale is an almost literal copy of a gavotte in the ballet music of Mozart's 1781 opera, *Idomeneo*, which he was considering revising in 1786. The movement retains the sparkling quality usually associated with its rondo form, while adding to it a certain seriousness of thought that was such an integral component of Mozart's compositional language in the works of his later years.