

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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

Concerto No. 21 for Piano and Orchestra in C major, K. 467 (1785)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, 9 March 1785; National Court Theater; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, soloist

PSO PREMIER: 28 February 1932; Syria Mosque; Antonio Modarelli, conductor; Walter Giesekeing, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 29 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani, and strings

"We never go to bed before one o'clock and I never get up before nine.... Every day there are concerts; and the whole time is given up to teaching, music, composing and so forth. I feel rather out of it all." Father Leopold Mozart had reached a rather brittle 66th year when he sent these lines off to his daughter, Maria Anna, from Vienna on March 12, 1785, just two days after Wolfgang had premiered his C major Piano Concerto (K. 467) at the Court Theater. Leopold had ventured from Salzburg to the busy Austrian capital city to visit Wolfgang and his wife, and to check on their growing brood, including the most recent addition — Karl Thomas, born the preceding September. (Mozart had six children in the nine years of his marriage; only two survived him.)

Leopold wrote to Maria Anna that the new C major Concerto had an excellent reception at its first performance on March 10th. The applause, he allowed, was "deafening," and the audience was even moved to tears. Amid the acclaim, however, the sensitive, professional musician in Leopold sensed a disturbing element in much of his son's recent music. He felt that this Concerto was not only "astonishingly difficult," but that it also held an expressive undercurrent which would not continue to please the Viennese public. The deeply felt emotionalism of the D minor Concerto (K. 466), completed only three weeks earlier, was proving to be not simply an experiment or a temporary aberration, but an integral element in Mozart's mature style. The Viennese, like Leopold, were bewildered by this music and its incipient Romanticism, and the success of 1785 soon faded. Mozart composed three more piano concertos the following year, but then his subscribers melted away. No longer able to secure support for his own concerts, the need for concertos evaporated, and he wrote only two more during his last five years. By 1785 Mozart was composing his most important works to please only his own Muse. That he did so proved to be a tragedy for him but a treasure for us.

The orchestral introduction of the C major Concerto opens with a soft, martial strain for unison strings answered by the winds. Other themes follow in abundance before the entry of the soloist. A brief excursion into the shadowy key of G minor by the pianist leads to the second theme in a brighter key of G major. The *Andante* is one of Mozart's most sensually beautiful creations. The muted strings, pulsating accompaniment, exquisite scoring and rich harmonic palette give this movement a dreamlike quality. The sparkling rondo-finale joins the rollicking spirit of the *opera buffa* and the intensity and wealth of expression of the symphony with the virtuosic elements of the concerto.