MUSIC IN THE VILLAGE

ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
WALTHAMSTOW
4TH OCTOBER 2007

Three Mozart Piano Concertos

Geoffrey Govier, fortepiano
Catherine Martin and Iona Davies, violins
Malgosia Ziemkiewicz Artabe, viola
Poppy Walshaw, cello
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Piano concerto no. 11 in F, K413 — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)
Allegro - Larghetto - Tempo di menuetto

Piano concerto no. 12 in A, K414 — Mozart
Allegro - Andante - Allegretto

INTERVAL****************************

Piano concerto no. 13 in C, K415 — Mozart
Allegro - Andante - Rondeau:allegro

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These three concertos were the first of the great concertos Mozart wrote for Vienna and were the first to be published in a printed edition (in 1785) but initially advertised as follows to subscribers for manuscript copies in January 1783: "These three concertos, which can be performed with full orchestra including wind instruments, or only a quattro, that is with 2 violins, 1 viola and violoncello, will be available at the beginning of April to those who have subscribed for them (beautifully copied, and supervised by the composer himself)."

Geoffrey Govier's piano is a copy of an instrument by Anton Walter (from about 1792) made by Christopher Clarke in Cluny in 1988. It is transported and tuned by Edmund Pickering.

Music in the Village thanks
Copycats of Hoe St. E17 for help with printing,
WalthamSoft.com for donating webspace and a lot of time to create our website: **www.WalthamSoft.com/VillageMusic**
and the **John Lewis Partnership** for its generous assistance.

John Lewis Partnership

Geoffrey Govier graduated from the Royal College of Music with first-class honours in 1983, before concentrating on the fortepiano. He returned to the college to specialize in early piano, taking a Masters' degree the in 1987/8 and completed his doctorate at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York in 2003. His teachers have included Melvyn Tan in London, Stanley Hoogland in Amsterdam and Malcom Bilson in the United States. He has performed widely internationally, recorded eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century music as fortepianist on CD (Olympia, EMI and Hyperion), and his introduction to Hummel's Ausführliche theoretisch-praktische Asweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel (1828) was published in 1998 (Tokyo: Sinfonia).

Catherine Martin read music at Oxford University, and was a post-graduate on the Advanced Solo Studies course at the Guildhall School in London. While a student, she was awarded scholarships for further study in London, chamber music at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada and the Britten Pears School in Aldeburgh. Catherine is leader of the Gabrieli Consort and Players and the Early Opera Company orchestra, and has appeared as guest leader with The English Concert, Florilegium, I Fagiolini and many other orchestras. She has recently joined the Salomon String Quartet, exploring the Classical period from Haydn to Brahms.

Iona Davies was born in Wales and began playing the violin at the age of nine. Following a music degree at York University she studied Baroque Violin at the Royal Academy of Music with Simon Standage, and then with Catherine Mackintosh. She was a member of the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra for four years and is well established as a freelance player in London performing with all of Britain's important period instrument ensembles.

Malgosia Zeimkiewicz Artabe attended Arriaga Conservatorio in Bilbao and completed her studies in modern viola with Professor Marek Marczyk at the Chopin Academy in Warsaw, where she won a full scholarship. An increasing interest in early music, inspired by a course with Simon Standage in Poland, brought Malgosia to the Royal Academy in London to study the baroque viola with Katherine McGillivray. She now plays violin and viola with many orchestras and chamber groups and also organises concerts in the UK and Europe. She was principal viola with the European Union Baroque Orchestra for the last two seasons.

Poppy Walshaw was a Continuo Scholar at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, studying with Alison McGillivray and Louise Hopkins. She read Music and Natural Sciences at Cambridge University then studied with Alexander Baillie at the Hochschule für Künste Bremen, gaining her postgraduate diploma with the highest possible mark. Poppy has worked with the Gabrieli Consort and Players, Early Opera Company, La Serenissima, St James' Baroque, and the Classical Opera Company, and is a member of Al Ayre Español. In early 2008 she will be recording Classical flute quartets with Hajo Wienroth and Simon Standage.

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OUR NEXT CONCERT: **November 15th 2007:** **Music for flute, harp and viola** *Sarah Newbold, flute with Angela Moore, harp and Fiona Bonds, viola* Debussy's enchanting trio, the bewitching flute solo Syrinx, music by Takemitsu, Piazzolla, Mathais and Telemann, as well as Hasslemans beautiful and evocative solo for harp, "La Source".

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By the early 1780s, the piano was sweeping Europe, gradually ousting the harpsichord as the most favoured keyboard instrument. Mozart played an important role in this change of fashion, by writing music ideally suited to the new instrument, and by revealing its capabilities in his own playing.

Mozart particularly valued some of the latest improvements in what came to be known as the 'Viennese' piano. In 1777 he had visited one of the best piano-makers, Johann Andreas Stein, in Augsburg. He was most impressed by Stein's fortepianos, admiring their even tone, the efficiency of their dampers, and the escapement mechanism which ensured that the hammers fell back after hitting the strings. These features gave the instruments an exceptional precision and expressive flexibility. While he was in Augsburg, Mozart took part in a concert featuring three of Stein's fortepianos. According to a local report: 'Everything was extraordinary, tasteful and admirable … the rendering on the fortepiano so neat, so clean, so full of expression, and yet at the same time extraordinarily rapid, that one hardly knew what to give attention to first, and all the hearers were enraptured.'

This happy coming together of Stein's pianos and Mozart's playing was to prove crucial to Mozart's success when he settled in Vienna in 1781. Having finally broken free from his burdensome post with the Archbishop of Salzburg, and from the immediate supervision of his father Leopold, he was faced with the task of establishing his name and income as a mature composer and keyboard virtuoso. Shortly after arriving in the city, Mozart spent some months as a lodger in the house of the Weber family (one of whom, Constanze, he was to marry the following year). As he did not yet own a piano, he had to make do with the family's harpsichord. The fashion for pianos, which was already well established in England and France, was developing more slowly in Vienna. By the end of the eighteenth century, Vienna was to be full of pianos (and piano-makers), but in the early 1780s they were rare luxuries, owned only by a few households.

For concerts, Mozart was able to borrow on several occasions a Stein fortepiano belonging to Countess Maria Wilhelmine Thun, a highly cultivated woman and a gifted musician, who presided over one of the most important artistic salons in Vienna. Not that borrowing a piano can have been a straightforward matter. For many of the occasions on which Mozart played to public or semi-public audiences – in theatres, restaurants, palaces and private houses – we must imagine a fortepiano being manhandled up and down stairs and carted round the streets of Vienna. When Mozart's father Leopold visited in 1785, by which time Mozart had acquired his own fortepiano (by Anton Walter), he reported that the instrument had been moved out of the second-

floor apartment at least a dozen times in the space of a month. It must have been very difficult to make sure that a piano was well tuned and adjusted. Mozart describes one occasion in 1782 when he was obliged to play to the Emperor on a piano which was out of tune, and had three notes sticking – 'Never mind', said the Emperor, and Mozart had to make the best of it.

Such incidents must have been particularly frustrating for Mozart, because his playing was, in the words of that Augsburg report, 'full of expression', and it is clear that his exploitation of the expressive possibilities of the new pianos was the essence of his style as a performer. A biography published after his death similarly described his exceptional 'quickness, neatness and delicacy', and went on to praise 'the most beautiful, most eloquent expression, and a sensitivity that went straight to the heart'.

Mozart the pianist and Mozart the composer of piano concertos are two sides of the same coin. It is precisely the subtle and brilliant qualities of his playing, as described by contemporaries, that are most characteristic of his concerto-writing, and these three concertos K413–415 were designed to demonstrate that to Viennese audiences. They formed an important milestone in his career, being the first in the series of great concertos that he wrote for Vienna, and the first to be published in a printed edition. Initially, however, he followed the usual practice of making them available in manuscript copies. Mozart advertised for subscribers in January 1783: 'These three concertos, which can be performed with full orchestra including wind instruments, or only a quattro, that is with 2 violins, 1 viola and violoncello, will be available at the beginning of April to those who have subscribed for them (beautifully copied, and supervised by the composer himself).' Six months later, Mozart complained that it was taking a long time to secure enough subscribers. This was despite the fact that he had meanwhile scored a great success on two fronts: his opera Die Entführung aus dem Serail was a triumph, and he had firmly established his reputation in Vienna as a performer and composer of concert works. The climax came in March 1783, when he held his own benefit concert at the Burgtheater. In a long programme, including the recently composed 'Haffner' Symphony, he played the third of his three new piano concertos, in C major. The theatre was full, the Emperor was present, applauded enthusiastically, and 'against his habit', stayed for the whole of the concert. When the concertos were published in printed form, two years later in 1785, they sold very well. Perhaps Mozart had set the price of his earlier manuscript issue too high (as his father warned him).

In these three concertos, as in his own playing, Mozart showed himself to be the first major composer to understand the expressive potential of the piano, and particularly its possibilities in dialogue with an orchestra.

There are instances throughout the concertos where the quality of thought simply demands the resources of a piano.
To take only two examples: in the slow movement of the A major concerto, the piano's statement of the opening theme, with octaves in the left hand, could hardly be played satisfactorily without the piano's sustaining pedal (which Mozart praised on Stein's instruments); in the opening of the F major concerto, the piano first enters with a high, quiet answer to the violins – drifting in unobtrusively, in a manner that could not be achieved on a harpsichord.
By offering concertos that could be played either with orchestra or with chamber group, Mozart was trying out the Viennese audience and hoping to attract as wide a circle of music-lovers as possible. And in the style of writing he was also aiming for a broad appeal, as he made clear when describing the concertos in a letter to his father: 'The concertos are in fact midway between too difficult and too easy – they are very brilliant, fall agreeably on the ear, though of course without becoming trivial. Here and there only connoisseurs can derive satisfaction, but in such a way that the non-connoisseur will be pleased without knowing why.' Compared with some of his later concertos – the dramatic D minor, or the tragic C minor – these three concertos are, on the surface at least, easy-going. But they are easy-going in the most elegant and beautifully poised manner.
And what passages did Mozart have in mind for the 'connoisseurs'? They might well have spotted that the opening of the Andante of the A major concerto is a quote from an overture by Johann Christian Bach. Mozart surely meant this as an affectionate tribute to an old friend; at the age of eight, he had sat on Bach's lap, improvising piano duets with him before King George III of England. Bach had died in January 1782, and Mozart wrote to his father, 'What a loss to the musical world!' A more indirect influence of J C Bach is apparent in the finale of the F major Concerto – the minuet-rondo was a form and style in which Bach excelled.
Connoisseurs would also have savoured the passages in which Mozart, with a sudden turn of seriousness, shows himself a master of counterpoint, lucidly combining the different strands of his instrumental textures. The F major finale starts almost like a piece of ecclesiastical counterpoint, only beginning to dance like a minuet after a few bars. And a little way into the opening march of the C major concerto, there is an unexpected moment when the three upper lines weave darkly around each other over a long, held G in the bass (a 'dominant pedal'). In a more general way, connoisseurs would surely have appreciated the manner – sometimes subtle, sometimes direct – in which Mozart manipulates and develops his material. In the slow movement of the A major concerto, the second half of the opening theme (after the quote from J C Bach) is a slowed down version of the theme that begins the

concerto. In the F major concerto, the first piano entry refers obliquely to the very opening bars, and to the second theme, but refashioned so as to sound like something quite new. Similarly in the opening of the C major concerto the orchestra sets out enough material for the building of a whole movement, but then the soloist enters with what seems like a completely new thought. Such moments occur frequently in his later concertos, and they call to mind a description of Mozart by his sister-in-law: ‘He answered everything carefully, whether the subject was merry or sad, and yet he seemed to be thinking deeply about something entirely different.’

Connoisseurs must have relished the opportunity to play these concertos in their chamber-music versions. There are no contemporary accounts of such performances, by Mozart or anyone else, but this is not surprising. Performances of particular works in the eighteenth century are reported because the event was important and public, or because someone happens to refer to them in a letter or journal. For every performance mentioned, there must have been dozens that took place without being recorded in writing. The form in which Mozart wrote and advertised these three concertos is itself evidence of wider music-making, and the subscribers who acquired Mozart’s manuscript copies, and later the printed edition, would most often have played the concertos at home (or wherever there was a piano), with a few friends. They might have used just a string quartet, as Mozart specifies, or have added a double bass (as in this recording), or perhaps have included wind instruments together with the single strings when they did not have space for a large orchestra. Music-making in the eighteenth century was essentially pragmatic: nobody had rigid ideas about what combination of instruments was right, let alone ‘authentic’. Music-lovers were happy to hear any performance that was pleasing. And playing these concertos in chamber form brings positive advantages, revealing aspects of the music that are often obscured in larger-scale performances. The interventions of the wind and (in the C major concerto) drums are lost, but there is a compensating gain in transparency of texture and buoyancy of rhythm. Most important, the players can respond to each other with the immediacy and sensitivity of chamber-musicians – rare in orchestral performances, and a great advantage in these works in which the subtle interaction between soloist and the other instruments is at the heart of the music’s style and argument.

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