

VIOLIN CONCERTO NO.3 IN G MAJOR 'STRASSBURG' – K.216

- W.A. MOZART -

Whilst many of Mozart's summers have been shown as a time in which he created a huge number of works, and often some of his best, that of 1775 is not seen to have been extraordinary. A church sonata (K.212), divertimento (K.213) a serenade (K.204) and a march (K.214) – this is the level of work Mozart was producing. Additionally, there is no really significant personal or educational experience that should explain an elevation of his style – and yet, whilst the first two violin concerti are truly fine works, it is the third that stands out as the first of the more developed and mature concerti. Once again, Mozart has outfoxed history and musicologists. Once again, his genius must go unexplained, but surely never unrecognised.

As he so often does, Mozart borrows from himself, opening the first movement with a ritornello that had previously been used though in a new form and key. The original work was an aria in the serenata *Il rè pastore* K.208 – first performed in an unstaged, concert version in Salzburg, likely on 23rd April, 1775. It is fitting that this work is the ground upon which the concerto is built – the two protagonists, violin and orchestra, engaged in a drama of their own. This feeling is heightened by the increasingly articulate orchestral participation in solo passages.

The Adagio differs from not only the first movement, but also the middle movements of the first and second concerti. Firstly, flutes replace the oboes, and the horns move to a lower key whilst the violins use mutes and celli/bassi use the plucked pizzicato effect. However, there is a further element of change and development. The contrast between 'straight' rhythms of twos and fours and the orchestral triplet rhythms, as well as the return of the opening of the movement towards its end all lend it an air of excitement and near-nonchalance in its construction.

Whilst it is often the fourth violin concerto which is dubbed 'The Strassburg', Hungarian musicologist Dénes Bartha makes a convincing argument that it is rather the third. The Rondo Finale develops in the expectance pattern, with an A-B-A-C-A-D form, before the D section can conclude, it abruptly diverges with three tutti chords and a pause. An andante section continues, with the soloist rendering an elegant gavotte in G minor. Next comes an Allegretto in G major, and it is this tune that Batha's research shows was known under the title 'The Strassburger' – though no words remain, leading to the concept that perhaps this was a popular dance theme at the time. Following a final brief pause, we return to the jig and then the Rondo refrain. One more episode remains, the winds having the last word.

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