

## **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)**

Clarinet Concerto in A major, K.622

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Rondo: Allegro

Mozart composed this Clarinet Concerto for his friend and fellow Freemason Anton Stadler, who played in the imperial court orchestra in Vienna and whose playing was admired far and wide. Stadler was especially known for his expressive playing in the “chalumeau” or lower register of the clarinet and had a special clarinet made for him by Theodor Lotz, another Freemason, that extended the lower range of the normal clarinet in A. Though Mozart’s original manuscripts for both the Clarinet Concerto and the Quintet no longer survive, it was discovered that both were written for this extended range instrument.

The Clarinet Concerto actually began as a Concerto in G major for basset horn. Mozart completed 199 measures of the first movement before deciding that it should really be written for the higher clarinet in A and started over in A major. Completed in October 1791, just two months before his death, the Clarinet Concerto stands as one of the true gems of the clarinet repertoire, exploring every range of the instrument, from high to low and from poignant lyricism to agile merriment.

The first movement shows the abundance of melodic ideas that we have come to expect from Mozart, here with a kind of luminous lyricism rather than impassioned energy. The tone quality is colored by Mozart’s light orchestration that includes no oboes and naturally no clarinets, but in which the flutes impart a limpid beauty. The dialogue between the clarinet and orchestra is masterful—often harmonious, occasionally competitive. Of particular note is the imitative play between the strings, joined by the clarinet, in elaborating the first theme even before the main solo entrance of the clarinet. Another fascinating passage has the clarinet playing an Alberti bass in its lowest register in accompaniment to witty repartee between the first and second violins. Mozart’s recapitulation is a model of concision after the more expansive exposition and development.

Words cannot possibly do justice to Mozart’s sublime slow movement, one of his simplest yet most profound utterances. The clarinet “sings” the melody to a tranquil rocking accompaniment and the whole is repeated by the combined ensemble. The clarinet then climbs with almost unbearable grace to a peak in its second phrase, again repeated by all. This entire opening section returns, ingeniously varied, after a middle section that shows off the clarinet’s ability to leap and decorate expressively.

The final Rondo unfolds in five distinct sections, with its playful refrain appearing three times and alternating with two contrasting episodes. Here, Mozart showcases the soloist’s brilliance without ever compromising artistic refinement—the clarinet dances, soars, glides, and leaps with expressive grace. Particularly moving is the haunting minor-key episode, marked by

breath-catching pauses and moments of hesitation. The cheerful return of the refrain dispels the somber mood, leading to a radiant coda filled with elegance and exuberance.