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RACHEL SILVER horn

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Sextet in E flat major, Op.71 (1795)

i. Adagio – Allegro

ii. Adagio

iii. Minuet: Quasi allegretto – Trio

iv. Rondo: Allegro

MÁTYÁS SEIBER (1905–1960)

Serenade for Six Wind Players (1925)

i. Allegro moderato

ii. Lento

iii. Allegro vivace

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

Serenade in E flat, K375 (1781)

i. Allegro maestoso

ii. Menuetto

iii. Adagio

iv. Menuetto II

v. Allegro

ESTIMATED DURATION

Beethoven – 20 minutes

Seiber – 14 minutes

Mozart – 24 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately one hour

COVER IMAGE

Christopher Tingay

Photo by Jaimi Joy

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

The wind ensemble in late 18th century Austria

Late 18th-century Habsburg nobles were huge fans of the wind ensemble, or *Harmonie*. Mozart, like many of his contemporaries, wrote numerous serenades and *notturmi*, cassations and *divertimenti* – all more or less interchangeable titles for multi-movement works for large bands of wind instruments (sometimes stiffened with an added double bass) to be played in the evening and, often, outdoors. Typically such a piece would start and finish with a march, sometimes requiring the players (though presumably not the double bass) to march on and off stage, while the inner movements would include something like an overture, dances (usually two minuets, gracious dances in triple time) and at least one slower lyrical movement.

It would be fair to assume that such pieces didn't always command the audience's undivided attention – the occasions for which they were written were large social gatherings, after all. A more intimate subset of works was composed for at least two of the children of the Empress Maria Theresa: both Joseph, whose reign as Emperor coincided with Mozart's decade in Vienna, and his brother Maximilian Franz seem to have believed that wind music was good for the digestion (make of that what you will) and retained a smaller ensemble (such as the three pairs of instruments we hear tonight) to play while they dined. Mozart had some fun with this in the climactic scene of his opera *Don Giovanni*, where the Don has a stage band playing hits from current operas – including Mozart's own *The Marriage of Figaro* – as he gorges his final meal.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The Archduke Maximilian Franz would in 1784 become the Elector of Cologne, and, therefore, employer of Johann van Beethoven and his young son, Ludwig, at the Electoral court in nearby Bonn. It was in this context that Ludwig learned to write for wind ensemble. Naturally enough his model was often the wind music of Mozart, whom he may have met during a brief trip to Vienna in 1787 (cut short by his mother's becoming gravely ill) and – in one of the great what-ifs of music history – with whom he had hoped to study. In the event, Beethoven did of course move to Vienna in 1792 to study with Haydn, a relationship that was somewhat uneasy.

Beethoven's Sextet

It was, however, in Vienna that Beethoven composed his Sextet for winds, pretty much on the model of works to accompany Max Franz's *dégustation*. Scholars agree that it was composed in 1796, though there is, oddly, no record of the piece having been performed at the time. Indeed it is only in 1805 that the work premiered, at a benefit concert (that is, a money spinner) for the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, who is closely associated with Beethoven's quartets. And it is a further four years (hence the high opus number) before Beethoven offered the piece to his publisher, Breitkopf & Härtel, writing: 'The sextet is one of my earlier things and, moreover, was written in a single night— nothing can really be said of it beyond that it was written by an author who at least has produced a few better works; yet for many people such works are the best.' As Beethoven biographer Thayer notes, the existence of sketches for parts of the piece make the 'written in a single night' implausible.



Beethoven in 1802

ABOUT THE MUSIC

A review of the premiere praised its ‘lively melodies, unconstrained harmonies, and a wealth of new and surprising ideas’, but in fact the effect of the piece derives from its clear acceptance of classical form and manners, and the composer’s evident love of Mozart’s wind music. That said, the first movement behaves more like a work of Haydn’s, starting with a stately slow introduction that is full of the rhetoric of ceremonial music: unison arpeggios (broken chords) and ‘dotted’ rhythms create the sense of a fanfare, though any solemnity is pushed aside by the light, fast, triple metre allegro, with its short-short-short-long rhythm that will recur in Beethoven’s later work.

Arpeggio figures, which are comfortable to play on instruments like the horn, feature throughout the work, as in the Adagio, which also uses the short-short-short-long motif in its accompaniment as the bassoon unfurls a lovely tune that is passed to other instruments in turn. The Minuet, as British musicologist Denis Matthews once observed, begins with the same motif that kicks off Mozart’s String Quintet K614 – an act of homage whether deliberate or not – and is replete with lively melodies and Beethoven’s dramatic use of accents and silence. Its central trio (which the horns sit out) is deceptively simple in its rustic flavour. The finale brings back the dotted rhythms, now in a fast and highly Mozartian rondo movement.

In Maynard Solomon’s words, Beethoven’s wind music ‘did not survive the century that adored such combinations’, and, of course, Beethoven soon rode the wave of fashion that produced more intimate ensembles such as the string quartet and piano trio. Wind music itself did survive, of course, and in the 20th century enjoyed a revival, especially in the work of Stravinsky and among French composers.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Seiber and 20th-century wind repertoire

Mátyás Seiber studied under Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók in his native Hungary until 1925, when he moved to Germany and took a job as a musician on transatlantic liners which exposed him to American jazz. From 1927 he taught at Dr Hoch's Konservatorium-Musikakademie in Frankfurt, presenting one of the first ever conservatorium courses in jazz while exploring the 12-note compositional technique developed by Arnold Schoenberg. Being Jewish, teaching jazz and writing serial music effectively ended Seiber's career in Nazi Germany, and he moved to London in 1935 where he became a major figure in British music.

His *Serenade for Six Wind Players* dates from 1925, so shows no influence of jazz or serialism but, unsurprisingly, does reflect the tutelage of Kodály and Bartók and the pervasive sound of Hungarian folk music, notably in the clarinet writing, the use of short repeated motifs, and motoric rhythm. It also indicates that Seiber was aware of Stravinsky's often witty subversion of classical harmony in his works for winds. Effectively a sonata for the ensemble, it is in three movements, following a standard fast-slow-fast pattern, and tends to lean on the first clarinet and bassoon to carry the thematic material.

Musicologist Beth Snyder notes that Seiber 'submitted this piece to a composition contest in Budapest shortly after its completion. When the piece did not win, despite jury member Bela Bartók's insistence in its superiority to its competition, the famous composer left the jury in protest.'



Mátyás Seiber self-portrait

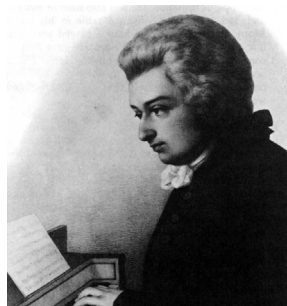
ABOUT THE MUSIC

Mozart by night

Mozart's Serenades and other wind pieces were mostly background music for garden parties held by the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. But it is interesting that once ensconced in Vienna, Mozart continued writing music for winds, and famously wrote to his father that his Quintet for Piano and Winds was 'the best thing I've ever done.'

Mozart wrote this Serenade in 1781, at a time when he was composing his German opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and preparing for his marriage to Constanze Weber. In a letter to his father, Leopold, he describes how he was surprised by a performance of it when he visited the Baroness von Waldstädten, or as he puts it, 'At eleven o'clock I was treated to a Nacht Musick performed by two clarinets, two horns and two bassoons – and that too of my own composition.' Note the term 'Nacht Musick'; yet another variation on the idea of a night piece. It was 11pm, and the band '(poor beggars who, however, play quite well together, particularly the first clarinet and the two horns)' was situated under Mozart's window.

This work hasn't the scale of some of the other serenades. Scored for a modest ensemble of six instruments, it dispenses with the opening and closing march, but the first movement still cultivates a certain grandeur and amplitude despite its allegro marking. There are plenty of solemn, fully-scored chords and dotted rhythms as well as brilliant writing for the clarinets, an instrument of which Mozart was an early adopter and for which he wrote consummately. There are the two standard minuets, the first of which uses the open sound of unison arpeggios that give way to florid scale passages, and which has a genuinely funny central trio. The adagio is effectively an operatic duet for clarinet and bassoon with gently pulsing accompaniment, before a second minuet, this time with fewer pretensions to the ceremonial in its outer sections, but a memory of the dotted rhythms in the trio.



Mozart in 1782

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The finale is a highly characteristic of Mozart, with a fast paced rondo based on a deceptively simple, almost four square tune that could easily be sung by a character such as Papageno in *The Magic Flute* but which offers the pretext for bravura playing for all members of the ensemble.

Early the following year Mozart revisited the piece, adding two oboes and making some revisions to the music itself. His correspondence with Leopold explains why he wrote the piece, and why in due course he revised it: it was composed for the sister-in-law of the court painter Joseph Heckel in the hope that the Emperor's valet, Johann von Strack, who visited every day, would hear it and recommend it to the Emperor. As for the revisions, Mozart discovered that the Emperor was founding his own *Harmonie* and that it would be an octet rather than a sextet. The new band no doubt aided the imperial digestion, but sadly did not take up Mozart's work.

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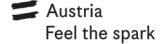
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