

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Mitsuko Uchida & Mahler Chamber Orchestra: Mozart

Saturday 1 February 2025, 7.30pm

Royal Festival Hall

Classical music has always had reinvention at its core. Throughout our programme, we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – capture that trailblazing spirit with works that broke the mould across the ages and brand-new approaches to timeless classics.

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Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Mozart Piano Concerto No.18 in B flat, K.456

Janáček Mládí (Youth) for wind sextet

Interval

Mozart Piano Concerto No.21 in C, K.467

Performers

Mitsuko Uchida *piano and director*

José Maria Blumenschein *concertmaster*

Mahler Chamber Orchestra

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

Piano Concerto No.18 in B flat, K.456

30'

18'

I. Allegro vivace

II. Andante un poco sostenuto

III. Allegro vivace

28'

Under the sunlit surface of the sea, currents stir.

In Mozart's piano concertos, joy, exuberance and comedy, in major keys, are sustained or held in relief by touches of minor harmony bringing expressive depth. The concerto in B flat with which this concert opens, registered by Mozart in his catalogue as finished on the last day of September 1784, is a case in point. It opens firmly in the main key, in the style of a military march. Then come emphatic minor chords to introduce music featuring woodwind groups. Answering one another, these suggest characters in amorous conversation: a woman (oboes) and a man (bassoon with flute). Before long, and then for the rest of the piece, the woodwind players will be engaging in dialogue with the soloist, who enters for the expected repeat of everything we have heard so far. Then comes a development, which begins with a new piano melody closing with a seductive turn. Soon, though, the march takes over. The final recapitulation includes the customary cadenza, which is Mozart's own.

Several aspects of this movement look forward to the opera Mozart was to write a year and a half later, *The Marriage of Figaro*: the march could conjure up the image of Cherubino, about to be forced into the army; the woodwind dialogues might call to mind Susanna and Figaro. A further reason to call this Mozart's 'Figaro Concerto' comes with the slow movement, which presages, in terms of key (plaintive G minor) and melodic shape, the opening of the last act, where a servant girl is looking for something she should not have lost. The melody in the concerto is followed by five variations, of which the first is for the soloist almost unaccompanied. Led at first by

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 50 minutes including an interval.

the flute, the second variation entwines the soloist with the woodwind and string ensembles. The third is more vociferous, precipitating a shift to the major for the fourth variation. After this comes what is essentially a reprise.

Both the first movement and the second start on bouncing reiterations of a note, and so does the finale. This is, as usual, in rondo form, with a refrain whirling back after each of several episodes. Here the piano leads the first episode and prepares, with a short cadenza, for the return of the refrain. The second episode strides in with a startling turn to a foreign minor key and a change of meter. Normality is restored by the re-entry of the first episode, a longer solo cadenza, again by Mozart, and a farewell from the refrain.

Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)

Mládí (Youth) for wind sextet

I. Allegro

II. Andante sostenuto

III. Vivace

IV. Allegro animato

Mozart was in his late 20s when he composed the two concertos of tonight's concert; Janáček was just past 70 when, in July 1924, he wrote a piece for six wind players and called it *Mládí*, or 'Youth'. By adding a bass clarinet to the regular quintet of wind chamber music (flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon) he improved the ensemble's blend. At the same time, though, the music is constantly reconfiguring the instruments, just as it is constantly switching and overlapping fragments of melody. Those fragments might suggest little patters of words that someone is insistently repeating, bird calls or the rhymes and riddles of a children's song-game. Wind colours give them all the fresh green of bursting spring.

We might think also of schoolyard pranks and play. In the third movement, an image of marching boys, Janáček looks back to his schooldays. Within a more conventional four-movement form, this would be the scherzo, but everywhere the music moves in fits and starts of its own, ingeniously interlocking and recollecting. 'My world was built exclusively by myself', Janáček wrote of his youth that same year. 'Everything fell into it.'

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Piano Concerto No.21 in C, K.467

I. Allegro maestoso

II. Andante

III. Allegro vivace assai

Mozart, much in demand through the years 1784–86, was often busy with a piano concerto, which gave him the means to advertise to a sizeable audience his talents as pianist and composer – and as teacher, if he put one of his pupils on the stage. We do not know who gave the first performance of this evening's opening concerto in B flat, but the closing C major was introduced by Mozart himself in Vienna on 10 March 1785, the day after he finished the score. Though the two concertos were separated by only a few months, two others had come in between.

Like the B flat concerto, the C major opens in march time, but now the march comes creeping in before being made more emphatic by a fuller orchestra, adding trumpets and timpani to the complement of the earlier work. This time, in another difference, the wind ensemble is used much more as a block – though soloists emerge in turn to call the piano into action. The reprise here is a feint, for the real game is a search for the secondary key, G major. Soon the piano breaks out in G minor, more agitated than it was in the slow movement of the B flat concerto. Then at last G major is found, in falling figures that sound like a chandelier's crystal teardrops. These hang around as the march returns, to lead the music into a development section with, once again, a new piano melody. Then comes the concluding recapitulation. Mozart's cadenzas for this concerto have not come down to us, so the soloist must find or invent substitutes.

The trumpets and timpani stay silent to listen to the slow movement: a song over gentle pulsations that is introduced by the orchestra and taken on two wandering excursions with the piano in the lead.

We know now what to expect of a rondo finale in a Mozart piano concerto: the unexpected, whether funny or coming as a shock.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2025

Find out more

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Mahler Chamber Orchestra

Violin I

José Maria Blumenschein (Germany)
May Kunstovny (Austria)
Hildegard Niebuhr (Germany)
Alexandra Preucil (USA)
Elvira van Groningen (Netherlands)
Annette zu Castell (Germany)
Nicola Bruzzo (Italy)
Hwa-Won Rimmer (Germany)

Violin II

Johannes Lörstad (Sweden)
Michiel Commandeur (Netherlands)
Christian Heubes (Germany)
Mette Tjaerby Korneliusen (Denmark)
Katarzyna Wozniakowska (Poland)
Nanni Malm (Austria)
Fjodor Selzer (Germany)

Viola

Béatrice Muthélet (France)
Yannick Dondelinger (Great Britain)
Anna Maria Wünsch (Germany)
Sofie Van der Schalie (Netherlands)
Alexandre Razera (Brazil)

Cello

Philipp von Steinaecker (Germany)
Stefan Faludi (Germany)
Jakob Stepp (Germany)
Moritz Weigert (Germany)

Double bass

Rodrigo Moro Martín (Spain)
Johane Gonzalez Seijas (Spain)
Alexander Önce (Germany)

Flute

Chiara Tonelli (Italy)

Oboe

Louis Baumann (France)
Jesús Pinillos Rivera (Spain)

Clarinet

Vicente Alberola (Spain)
Jaan Bossier (Belgium)

Bassoon

Mathis Stier (Germany)
Chiara Santi (Italy)

Horn

Felix Dervaux (France)
Pablo Cadenas (Spain)

Trumpet

Christopher Dicken (Great Britain)
Florian Kirner (Germany)

Timpani

Martin Piechotta (Germany)

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