

## **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**

(1756-1791)

*French horn Concerto No. 3 in E-flat Major, K. 447*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, as is seemingly universally known, was one of the world's most amazing prodigies. He was composing at the age of five and the following year performed as pianist before the royal court in Vienna. At age 13, he entered the employment of the Archbishop of Salzburg as concertmaster of the orchestra and court organist. The young Mozart and his father often quarreled with the Archbishop because of their frequent requests for leave to perform in other cities or to apply for situations more in keeping with the younger Mozart's abilities. The requests angered the Archbishop so much that he was finally dismissed in 1781 with the now-famous kick in the backside from the Archbishop's secretary.

Mozart left Salzburg happily, hoping to find his fortune in Vienna. No longer a child prodigy, he was still in demand as a performer and was very active as a composer. He wrote mostly in the prevailing *stile gallant* (*gallant style*) with its emphasis on elegance, grace, and charm. Save for a few outstanding exceptions, his compositions were essentially designed to please the nobles and church officials who were the principal patrons of his music. As he matured and musical tastes changed, Mozart began composing works of great expressivity, drama, and significant emotional content. He lived during an era when composers traditionally produced large numbers of works, which he accomplished despite his tragically short life. His output included 41 symphonies, 27 piano concertos, and 5 violin concertos. Many of these orchestral masterpieces, along with most of his outstanding operas, church works, and chamber music, were created during the decade between the time he left the Archbishop's employment and his death in 1791.

During 1790, Mozart's health was poor, and his compositional output declined. In 1791, however, his productivity rose astonishingly, and exhaustion may have contributed to his premature death on December 5, 1791. Despite popular stories to the contrary, he died of natural causes, probably rheumatic fever, and was given a simple burial in accordance with the law (not a pauper's funeral).

Mozart wrote all of his horn concertos for one extraordinary player, Joseph Leutgeb (1732 – 1811), who became first horn in the orchestra of the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1770. Leutgeb was about twenty-five then, and was already remarkable for his technical skill on the instrument. In 1777, Leutgeb moved to Vienna, apparently because he had inherited a cheese shop there, and it was there that he and Mozart continued their close friendship. The jocular and, at times, insulting comments that litter the autograph parts of the horn concertos bear witness to the close nature of the friendship between Mozart and Leutgeb.

The Third Concerto, K. 447, was composed sometime between 1783 and 1791. Oddly enough, we know nothing about first performances of any of the concerti, which is surprising in view of Leutgeb's renown and the fact that Mozart was also enjoying substantial success during the period in which they were composed.

### OF NOTE:

Scholarly dating of Mozart's music for horn reveals an interesting picture of how Leutgeb's technique apparently changed over the years: the fragments (K 370b, K 371, and K 494) are in E Major, three of the four completed concertos are written a semitone lower in E-flat Major, and the final concerto (K 412) is a semitone lower still in D Major. Apparently, Leutgeb - who was in his mid-fifties in the 1780s - had begun to lose his "chops" and when Leutgeb was approaching 60 in 1791, Mozart's writing became much less taxing in both range and technique. The dedication of K 417 reads, "Wolfgang Amadé Mozart takes pity on Leutgeb, ass, ox and simpleton, Vienna, March 27, 1783."

### ALSO OF NOTE:

Since Mozart did not assign opus numbers to his 600-plus compositions, scholars often found it difficult to place his works in chronological order. In 1862, the Austrian musician and naturalist Dr. Ludwig Köchel prepared his *Chronologisch-thematisches Verzeichnis* ("Chronological Thematic Catalog"), which listed all of Mozart's music in order of composition. Today, the title of each piece is followed by a "K." number from Köchel's catalog.

