

G Minor, C Minor, and a Posthorn

Saturday, January 30, 2027 · 19:30 · Großes Festspielhaus
Philippe Jordan, conductor · Víkingur Ólafsson, piano

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Symphony No. 25 in G minor, K. 183</i>	22'
2	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491</i>	30'
3	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Serenade No. 9 in D major, K. 320, 'Posthorn'</i>	45'
TOTAL MUSIC		97'

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

1756–1791

Symphony No. 25 in G minor, K. 183

22 minutes

THE COMPOSER

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart needs little introduction. Born in Salzburg in 1756, he was a prodigy whose talents were cultivated and exhibited across Europe by his father Leopold. By the time he composed this concerto in 1779, the twenty-three-year-old Mozart was restless in provincial Salzburg, dreaming of Vienna and larger stages. Within two years he would make the move that defined his mature career.

Less well known is his sister Maria Anna, called “Nannerl,” five years his senior. She was an equally brilliant pianist as a child, and the siblings toured together as wonders of nature until Nannerl’s touring career ended when she was about seventeen. Following the customs of the time, she stayed at home while Wolfgang continued traveling with their father. The brother and sister remained close, and this concerto was written for the two of them to play.

ABOUT THE WORK

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was seventeen when he finished this symphony in Salzburg on 5 October 1773. He wrote dozens of symphonies, and only two of them are in a minor key, both in G minor: this one, and the famous No. 40 of 1788. To tell them apart, musicians call the earlier work the ‘little’ G minor.

Its manner belongs to a fashion of the years around 1770 that later took the name Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) from German literature: symphonies in minor keys with agitated rhythms, wide leaps in the melody and abrupt contrasts. Haydn's Symphony No. 39 is the likely model here. It too is in G minor, and it too asks for four horns where the orchestras of the day normally had two. The extra pair was a practical trick as much as a luxury. Horns then had no valves and could play only the notes natural to their length of tube, so by using two pairs pitched in different keys a composer could keep horn tone going through passages where a single pair would have had to fall silent.

Many people who have never been to a concert know how this symphony starts: its first movement was used over the opening of the 1984 film *Amadeus*.

The scoring is for two oboes, two bassoons, four horns and strings. The symphony lasts between twenty and twenty-five minutes.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro con brio. The strings begin with urgent repeated notes pushed off the beat (syncopations), and the melody drops through a wide, dissonant interval, a diminished seventh. There are sudden pauses. The bass line is unusually active throughout, carrying themes of its own.

II. Andante. A short slow movement in E-flat major, built like an opera aria. Muted violins and the two bassoons trade sighing phrases as if in conversation.

III. Menuetto and Trio. The minuet is in G minor, stern, and begins with the whole orchestra in bare octaves. The trio in G major is for the wind instruments alone, a piece of village-band music that lets some air into the room.

IV. Allegro. The finale returns to G minor and to the drive of the opening, more compressed, with sudden changes between soft and loud. It ends in the minor.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

1756–1791

Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491

THE COMPOSER

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ABOUT THE WORK

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart entered this concerto in his catalogue on 24 March 1786 and played it for the first time at the Burgtheater in Vienna early the following month, probably on 7 April. He was working on *The Marriage of Figaro* at the same time, and the opera opened a few weeks later. The two pieces could hardly be less alike. *Figaro* lives almost entirely in major keys. The concerto is one of only two that Mozart wrote in the minor.

It is also the most richly scored. This is the only one of his piano concertos to use both oboes and clarinets, with trumpets and timpani as well, and the woodwind are treated almost as a second group of soloists. The manuscript, now at the Royal College of Music in London, shows the pressure he was under. It is full of crossings-out and second thoughts. The solo part was written in last, often in shorthand, and in places spills on to staves ruled for other instruments. He wrote down no cadenza for the first movement, so every pianist has to supply one.

The piece left a mark on Beethoven. A much-repeated story has him listening to it with his friend Cramer and exclaiming that they would never be able to do anything like it. Whether or not he said so, his own Third Piano Concerto, in the same key, is often thought to owe something to it.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro. The opening is in three-time, which is rare for a Mozart concerto, and begins quietly with strings and bassoons in unison. The theme twists through all twelve notes of the chromatic scale before it finds its way home, and for a moment the key itself seems in doubt. When the piano enters, it does not take up this theme but offers a plaintive new idea of its own. At the very end, after the cadenza, the soloist keeps playing, accompanying the orchestra with soft rippling figures as the music sinks to a pianissimo close.

II. Larghetto. A rondo in E-flat major on a tune of nursery-rhyme simplicity, stated by the piano alone. Between its returns the woodwind take over with two episodes of their own, one in C minor and one in A-flat major, which the piano and strings then decorate.

III. Allegretto. Instead of the usual cheerful rondo, Mozart writes a theme and eight variations in C minor. Listen for the march-like third variation, for the two turns to the major (the fourth variation in A-flat, the sixth in a sunny C major), and for the last variation, where the metre changes to a swaying 6/8. A major-key ending seems possible until the final page. It does not come.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

45 minutes

1756–1791

Serenade No. 9 in D major, K. 320, 'Posthorn'

THE COMPOSER

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ABOUT THE WORK

The University of Salzburg closed its academic year each summer with graduation ceremonies, and part of the tradition was a *Fi-nalmusik*, a serenade for orchestra. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, then twenty-three and employed at the Salzburg court, wrote the one for 1779. His manuscript is dated 3 August of that year.

A serenade was occasional music, and it was built more loosely than a symphony. Mozart's has seven movements. A substantial opening movement and a quick finale frame the whole. Between them come two minuets, a slow movement and, in the middle of the work, two movements that amount to a small concerto for the woodwind section.

The orchestra is big for the purpose: pairs of flutes, oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets, with timpani and strings, plus two visitors who appear only in the second minuet. One is a piccolo. The other is a posthorn, the valveless horn that signalled the arrival and departure of the mail coach. It plays in a single trio and has given the whole work its nickname. It is tempting to hear it as a wave to the students who were about to leave town for the summer, though nothing from Mozart's hand says so.

A complete performance takes about three quarters of an hour.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Adagio maestoso. Allegro con spirito. A few bars of slow, ceremonial introduction, then a quick, energetic Allegro.

II. Minuetto. The first of the two minuets, sturdy and formal.

III. Concertante: Andante grazioso. The strings step back and the principal flutes, oboes and bassoons come forward as soloists, in G major, over a light accompaniment that includes plucked strings. Near the end the wind players have a cadenza to themselves.

IV. Rondeau: Allegro ma non troppo. The concertante idea continues, with the tune carried mostly by a solo flute and a solo oboe.

V. Andantino. The surprise of the work: a slow movement in D minor, beginning low in the violins over murmuring basses. For a few minutes the party music is set aside for something inward and troubled.

VI. Minuetto, with two Trios. The mood lifts again. The first trio is a solo for piccolo over the strings. The second brings the posthorn, with its handful of open-air notes.

VII. Finale: Presto. A fast, brilliant close in D major for the full orchestra.

Tonight's artists

Víkingur Ólafsson *piano*

Ólafsson is the soloist in the C minor Concerto. Mozart left no cadenza for its first movement, so the choice of what to play there is the pianist's own.

Víkingur Ólafsson, born in Reykjavík in 1984, is one of the most sought-after pianists of his generation. He had his first lessons from his mother, a piano teacher, and studied at the Juilliard School in New York before returning to Iceland, where he founded his own record label, Dirrindí, and the Reykjavík Midsummer Music festival. Since signing with Deutsche Grammophon he has released a series of thoughtfully conceived albums (Philip Glass, Johann Sebastian Bach, Debussy and Rameau, Mozart and his contemporaries) which have won him a wide international following. His recording of Bach's Goldberg Variations, which he performed around the world throughout the 2023/24 season, won the Grammy Award for Best Classical Instrumental Solo in 2025. Admired for the clarity, rhythmic precision and imaginative programming of his playing, he joins the Berliner Philharmoniker this season.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Mozart: A Life**

Maynard Solomon, Harper Perennial 2005

Solomon's biography gives close attention to the Salzburg years and Mozart's restlessness there, the background to the 'little' G minor Symphony and the Posthorn Serenade.

ACCESSIBLE **Mozart: The Reign of Love**

Jan Swafford, Harper Perennial 2021

Swafford follows Mozart from the Salzburg serenades to the Vienna of 1786, with plain-spoken descriptions of the music, the C minor Concerto among it.

DEEPER **The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven**

Charles Rosen, W. W. Norton 1998

Rosen's study of the Classical language has a long section on Mozart's piano concertos, the ground on which the C minor Concerto stands.

SOURCES

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2. Vienna Philharmonic / Jordan & Ólafsson, Bachtrack. <https://bachtrack.com/22/291/view/447402>
3. Mozart Week 2027: Mozart & 'Mozarts', Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum. https://mozarteum.at/en/press_release/mozart-week-2027-mozart-mozarts
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6. Symphony No. 25 (Mozart), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._25_\(Mozart\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._25_(Mozart))
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13. Mozart: The Reign of Love, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780062433619>
14. The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393317121>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2027-01-30-jordan>

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